

## CHAPTER VI

### *The Kulaks and the Timber Camps—a First Step*

Disabilities of the *kulak*—Renewed difficulties of grain collection in 1928—Forcible collection decreed June 1929—‘Purge’ of ‘deprived’ persons from social insurance and of State officials—Campaign against the *kulaks*—Forced labour without detention to be utilised on Forestry and Improvement Work—The Instruction of June 1st, 1929, detailed—The allotted task.

WE have seen that ‘collectivisation’ meant for the poorer peasant forced labour and uncertain pay. But so long as he remained in the *artel* at least he retained his home. Such limited advantages, however, as the collective system offered were denied to the *kulak*. He was the branded man, with the stigma of supposed wealth arbitrarily imposed on him by Soviet officials in order to foster ‘class war’ in the villages.<sup>1</sup> The stigma deprived him of electoral rights, might require him to pay 30 per cent. of his income in taxes,<sup>2</sup> and took from him any hope of seeing his children

<sup>1</sup> Hoover (p. 74). He says that for this reason in every village peasants had to be registered either as *bednyaki*, *serednyaki*, or *kulaki*, and that officials often had difficulty in discovering any who could properly be described as the latter.

<sup>2</sup> Professor Haensel (p. 74) says 30 or more per cent. for the wealthier *kulaks* in 1929. Their taxation has been much heavier since then. See *note*, p. 175.

enter high school, university, or even factory.<sup>1</sup> Yet the 'wealth' which brought on him these disabilities might not be more than a couple of cows and horses, or past ownership of a tea-house or village inn,<sup>2</sup> or even, the possession of a sewing-machine,<sup>3</sup> or of metal, rather than wooden, spoons.<sup>4</sup> A few *kulaks* succeeded in hiding their identity, and became members of collective farms. When discovered they were driven out. Most, however, resisted the movement.

The first purchases of grain made by the Government after the harvest of 1928 were from the poorer peasants. *Kulaks*, therefore, made money for a time by selling their crops to private traders at higher prices.<sup>5</sup> Later, steps taken by the authorities to purchase *kulak* grain led to murders of Communists and active Soviet agents, and to attempts to burn collective farms.<sup>6</sup> The Government replied with summary executions. The general result was a 'catastrophically low grain collection,'<sup>7</sup> which made exports negligible, reduced the supply in the hands of the Government far below that of previous years, and by the spring of 1929 made necessary the rationing of bread.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Maurice Hindus, *Humanity Uprooted*, p. 171.      <sup>2</sup> Hoover, p. 76.

<sup>3</sup> Mr. Henry Wales, correspondent of the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 1931. Hindus (*Red Bread*, p. 242) gives a parallel instance.

<sup>4</sup> Speech by Rykov, quoted by Mr. Chamberlin, p. 201.

<sup>5</sup> A. Thomas, *Report to International Labour Office*, 1930, p. 15. Early buying from poorer peasants was usual. The extent of State robbery was seen lately at Samara, when the 'free' price of 35 lbs. wheat flour was 100 roubles (=£33 1s. per cwt.). Government paid only 95 kopeks for 36 lbs. wheat (=6s. 4d. per cwt.). *Dni*, Sept. 27th, 1931.

<sup>6</sup> Chamberlin, *Soviet Russia* (1930), p. 209.

<sup>7</sup> Hoover, p. 83.

<sup>8</sup> *Pravda*, March 16th, 1920.

Ration cards were issued entitling the eleven and a half million members of trade unions<sup>1</sup> to purchase limited supplies of bread and flour at fixed prices at State-controlled shops and co-operative stores. The allowance for manual workers was more generous than that sanctioned for intellectual ones. Non-unionists had to purchase what they could at uncontrolled prices. These, owing to scarcity, might soar to any height.<sup>2</sup> In the autumn rationing was extended to meat, groats, and some manufactured goods. By the spring of 1930 it included sugar, butter, and tea.

There was also a big decline in live-stock. This was partly due to a shortage of fodder in the autumn of 1928,<sup>3</sup> and partly to a desire on the part of many *kulaks* to escape the appearance of prosperity, but mainly, as we have seen, to the destruction of their animals by peasants reluctantly submitting to collectivisation.

The campaign against the unhappy *kulaks* doubled in intensity from the summer of 1929 onwards. On June 25th a Decree of the Central Executive Committee of the Council of People's Commissars of the R.S.F.S.R. authorised the enforcement in grain areas, when necessary, of the compulsory cartage of grain, for payment, to railway stations and steamers. This power was to hold good from July 1st to September 15th, 1929.<sup>5</sup> Three days later followed

<sup>1</sup> Late in 1929, 80,000 non-unionists in Moscow had no ration cards. (F. A. Mackenzie, *The Russian Crucifixion*, 1930, p. 123).

<sup>2</sup> For samples of prices, both controlled and uncontrolled, see p. 168.

<sup>3</sup> See table, p. 164.

<sup>4</sup> Chamberlin, p. 209.

<sup>5</sup> Cmd. 3775, p. 144. The period was subsequently extended to January 1st, 1930 (p. 144, note).

another Decree which 'practically restored the extortion by force of cereals from the better-off peasants.'<sup>1</sup> With trade unionist and Young Communist 'shock brigades' working in the villages to make it effective, this became a deadly weapon. No private selling was allowed. If the quota of grain required by the Government were not forthcoming, a man might be fined and his home sold up.<sup>2</sup> In this event he was marked down as a *kulak*.

Other means of persecution were adopted, not only against the *kulaki* but those in general who had been deprived of electoral rights.

In July 1929 the Commissar of Labour ordered an investigation to be made by all employment exchanges into the qualifications of persons benefiting by the State system of social insurance. This, as we have seen, had been originally intended to apply to all workers, but had been restricted to permanently employed trade unionists. Apparently unemployed 'deprived' persons ('*lishentzi*') had crept on to the registers of the labour exchanges, and had been benefiting by the system. Such persons and their families were henceforth to be permanently excluded from the registers unless they had been for at least five years engaged in productive labour and 'had effectively shown their loyalty to the Soviet Government.'

Another group to be permanently excluded included persons who, though entitled to vote, were 'employing paid labour for the purpose of profit,

<sup>1</sup> Thomas, *Report*, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Hoover, p. 94.

or who live by commerce, or are otherwise in receipt of an income which cannot be considered a wage.<sup>1</sup>

Other unemployed persons were to be excluded for six months. Instances of these were petty traders (including hawkers), 'workless persons' of independent income (presumably a small group), and those who had committed breaches of the regulations of the exchanges.

Lists of the persons struck off the register were to be supplied to the administration of the social insurance, so that no further benefit might be granted them.<sup>2</sup>

This 'purge' of the system of social insurance was followed by similar action in regard to officials and employees in State and local administration. The main object of the purge was bluntly stated to be the elimination of 'all elements which are unmindful of Soviet legislation, or which have affinity with the rich peasants, merchants, etc., and which form an obstacle to the combat against the bureaucratic spirit, and neglect the real needs of the workers.'

At the same time, 'persons guilty of embezzlement, sabotage, criminal actions, or taking bribes' were also to be cast out. It was ingenuously added that the purge must in the first place 'be based on the quality of the work, and not merely on the social origin of the person undergoing examination.' 'Proletarian origin and membership of the Communist Party' were not to exempt an employee from examination.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Industrial and Labour Information*, September 30th, 1929, pp. 445-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 446-7.

The first measure isolated the *lishentzi* and robbed them of the benefits of social insurance; and neither *lishentzi* nor many of those 'purged' could have any hope of securing work in State industry. Those who lost employment would in many cases forfeit civic rights.

A little later, the unhappy *lishentzi*, and those dependent on them, were actually forbidden to reside temporarily or permanently in any nationalised houses.<sup>1</sup> As these included most houses in the towns, many *lishentzi* must have become homeless.

To return now to the *kulaks*. The fact that quotas fixed for the harvest of 1929 were collected to the extent of 102 per cent.<sup>2</sup> is a measure of the ruthlessness of the methods employed. *Kulaks* sold their goods, killed their cattle, and fled to the cities or the mines, but there was no place in State industry for those who could not join a trade union, and some *kulaks* actually became bandits in order to escape starvation.<sup>3</sup> Again there were murders of Communists and officials,<sup>4</sup> and again these were followed by executions. Some thousands of *kulaks*, it is said, were shot.<sup>5</sup>

But for every person executed many more were sent to work in the forests. Stalin's victory over the trade union leaders coincided with the issue of an Instruction of the People's Commissariat of Agriculture of the R.S.F.S.R. which sanctioned a 'first

<sup>1</sup> Colton, p. 35, quoting *Pravda*, January 3rd, 1930.

<sup>2</sup> Hoover, p. 97.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106, quoting *Izvestia*, February 8th, 1930.

<sup>4</sup> *Industrial and Labour Information*, December 9th, 1930, p. 367.

<sup>5</sup> Hoover, p. 103.

attempt' to utilise on forestry and 'improvement work' the labour of persons sentenced to forced labour without detention under guard.<sup>1</sup> This instruction, appearing as it did at this time, obviously seems to have been intended to ensure that the labour of *kulaks* and other '*lishentzi*' should be utilised for the benefit of an industry the development of which was essential to the success of the Five Years' Plan. Little or no grain had been exported from the harvest of 1928. Food was getting scarce, and grain exports from the 1929 harvest were as yet uncertain. The construction of factories and workers' houses was already making heavy demands on timber, but machinery was urgently needed for factories and collective farms, and could only be paid for with exports. Under these circumstances the development of the timber industry, more especially for export, became a vital matter.

The Instruction issued on June 1st clearly indicates this. 'Considering this experiment of exceptionally great importance,' it directs all agricultural organisations forthwith 'to explore all existing possibilities' of utilising the labour of sentenced persons for 'forestry and improvement work of a mass character' and to establish for this purpose permanent relations with the Bureau of Forced Labour.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It was dated June 1st, 1929. Cmd. 3775, pp. 141 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> *The Report on Russian Timber Camps*, 1931, p. 37, suggests that this Order refers 'to ordinary forestry' (i.e. planting, drainage, etc.) and not to lumbering, but reliable authority states that the word used for forestry denotes timber work of every kind, and the mention in Article 4 of axe and

The first part of the Instruction dealt with the provision of work within ten kilometres of the sentenced person's place of residence. Neither living-quarters nor food need be supplied if the work were situated, within that limit. Special service clothing was to be given 'where such is prescribed for seasonal work.'

'In case of necessity, according to the nature of the work, the person sentenced must present himself for work with his own turn-out for carting . . . (a horse fit for work, pair of oxen, etc.) and with other equipment (saw, spade, axe, etc.).' No payment was to be made for these except in the case of poor and 'middle' peasants, who, 'at their request,' might be reimbursed for forage consumed by their live-stock at low rates' or might be paid in cash at local prices.<sup>1</sup>

This article suggests that *kulaki* were likely to figure prominently among the persons sentenced to forced labour on timber.

The Instruction, like the Correctional Labour Code, required 'standards of labour output' to be fixed for 'each type of work carried out by forced labour.' Such labour, as a rule, was to be utilised for unskilled work. The standards of output were to be the average ones prescribed for such work by decrees of the Departments of Labour, or customarily accepted by State organisations where such

saw obviously points to felling. Moreover, as the Instruction referred only to Russia proper, forestry work would be chiefly in the North. In this area felled timber replaces itself by seeding, so little or no planting has been customary.

<sup>1</sup> Article 4, pp. 141 *et seq.*

work is their principal work. In the event of the completion of work prior to the time fixed therefor, the person sentenced might, with the sanction of the person superintending him, be released from work prior to the end of the working day.

Work was to be calculated, however, as a rule, 'not by time, but on a piece-work basis, and not only the amount but also the quality of the work are to be taken into account.'<sup>1</sup> If the quality of the work should fall below the average there could be no cessation of work before the end of the day. 'Disciplinary punishment for unconscientious work' was to be applied by the manager of the bureau of forced labour, on notification by the superintendent of the work.

For failure to report for work, non-observance of fixed rules, damage, 'whether intentional or through carelessness, to materials or tools supplied to the worker, also for bad quality of work,' a sentenced person could be punished either: (a) by transfer to other work; (b) by excluding from his term of sentence, the period of bad work or any period of absence without leave; (c) by summary arrest for a period not exceeding fourteen days; or (d) by a petition to the court to increase 'the measures of social protection.'<sup>2</sup>

The last would presumably enable the manager of a labour bureau to procure a lengthening of the sentence. In addition to the above-mentioned punishments, a sentenced person might be charged with the cost of damaged or lost articles.

<sup>1</sup> Article 6.

<sup>2</sup> Article 7.

The second part of the Instruction was clearly intended to provide for the transportation of sentenced persons. It directed regional, agricultural, and forestry departments to submit within a fortnight to the regional bureau of forced labour, or to its local branch, statements giving details of 'forestry, forestry improvement, or improvement work' that might be carried out in the region. Statements were to include definite information regarding place, character, date of commencement, and duration, of the work, and also the possible number of sentenced persons that could be employed.

The work selected was preferably to be suitable 'for mass application of unskilled labour.' It should also be work whereon 'without large expenditure' it would be possible to organise the feeding of the persons serving sentence, and their living-quarters.

The whole Instruction offered the prospect of a wide extension of the use of forced labour of sentenced persons, inasmuch as it directed the stream of their labour into one of the largest channels available. It was no doubt mainly responsible for the large increase in 'forestal exploitations' already mentioned as having taken place between September 1st, 1929, and the summer of 1930.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See p. 32.