

CHAPTER IX

Compulsory Labour for Seasonal Industries

Local organisation of compulsory labour for timber preparation—The inevitable allotted task—Another self-financing institution—Conscription of labour for timber-floating—Detailed regulations—Conscription for seasonal industries—Women and young persons included—Collective farms to despatch labour—Conscription for loading and unloading grain.

IN the months which followed, compulsory labour was made applicable to ever-widening circles. One of the earliest evidences of its extension was in regard to timber. This industry, it has been mentioned, was to occupy the first place in exports. Thousands of *kulaks* were being deported to work in the forests of the extreme north, but less than half the minimum timber-felling planned for January had been carried out,¹ and it was necessary also to press into this work the ordinary peasant or villager, wherever there were forests.

A decree dated February 13th, 1930,² therefore empowered rural Soviets to undertake 'as a self-imposed task of the village as a whole, a definite task in preparing and hauling timber (by this is understood the employment of their own means of haulage) in those districts where a resolution has

¹ *Pravda*, February 8th, 1930.

² Cmd. 3775, pp. 146-7.

been passed by a general meeting (a rural assembly) of citizens, and where, in connection with this undertaking, the self-imposed task has been allotted amongst the separate economic units' (i.e. individual workers). In cases in which the allotted task was refused the Soviet could inflict 'summary fines' on defaulters 'not exceeding five times the value of the work allotted to them.' If the fines so inflicted were not paid, the rural assembly could sell by public auction the property of the persons fined.

Means of haulage belonging to *kulaks* who did not carry out their allotted tasks were liable to confiscation for the needs of the timber programme.

Any person 'resisting the fulfilment of the allotted task in the preparation and haulage of timber'—presumably, offering opposition to the scheme as a whole—or anyone refusing to carry out his allotted task, could be proceeded against by the rural assembly under Article 61 of the Criminal Code.¹

Fines imposed on recalcitrant workers were to be allocated as follows: 25 per cent. to the funds of the 'collectivisation' movement, and 75 per cent. to the 'local budget'—presumably the expenses of the local Soviet.

Apparently service as part of the 'definite task' might be unpaid, for Article 4 of the Decree authorised Central Executive Committees of the Autonomous Republics and Provincial Committees, in regions where the 'preparation and haulage of

¹ This allowed, besides the penalties stated in the text, the imposition of imprisonment or compulsory labour up to two years with confiscation of property in whole or in part, and with or without banishment from the locality (Birmingham University Memorandum, p. 13).

timber was carried out, and all other means of providing an adequate supply of timber and means of haulage had been exhausted, to institute compulsory paid labour and/or haulage in order to 'fulfil the needs of timber preparation and transport.' *Kulaks* were to be engaged, 'having regard to local conditions,' at a lower rate of pay.

In this Decree we see yet another device for driving the unhappy *kulak* into a position in which a sentence of compulsory labour, with or without detention under guard, would be his fate. As one of the *lishentzi* he was excluded from the public meeting, and one-quarter of the villagers constituted a quorum. If less than half those present abstained from raising their hands to object,¹ the task was recorded as 'voluntarily undertaken.'² The task could therefore be 'self-imposed' by a small minority. The Decree thus imposed an insidious form of compulsory labour. It pressed men and women into enslaving each other. And Article 4 frankly discarded the pretence of 'self-imposition.'

As the end of the lumbering season was not far off, the Decree was put into force by telegraph. That it was acted upon that winter was shown by the sworn statement of the forest engineer, already referred to, made before Finnish authorities in Helsingfors. He described the system inaugurated by the Decree, and related how his brother in the previous winter, being

¹ i.e. the voting had to be open. Communist rule has abolished voting by ballot, not only at meetings but in public elections. This has meant the effective domination of meetings and elections by extreme opinion.

² *The Russian Conscripts*, p. 1.

unable from fatigue to complete the work allotted to him, had been fined 100 roubles.¹

But conscription of labour was not to be merely local. On the day on which the Decree sanctioning 'self-imposed tasks' was published, a Circular of the People's Commissariat of Labour of the R.S.F.S.R. and of the Directorate of Timber Floating of the Supreme Council of the National Economy of the U.S.S.R. was issued, calling up workers for timber-floating.² This it was said was to be regarded, during the 1930 season, as an especially important part of the 'politico-economic' campaign, a statement fully intelligible in view of the further announcement that a general increase of more than 80 per cent. in the floating of timber was being planned for as compared with the previous year. This gives an idea of the extension of timber-felling in 1929.

The communication is addressed to the People's Commissariats of Labour of the Autonomous Re-

¹ *The Report on Russian Timber Camps* interprets this decree, published as it was, late in the lumbering season, as 'intended to meet the temporary emergency of transporting the felled timber to the rivers before that became impossible, owing to the melting of the snow' (p. 27, note). But timber felling normally continues until the end of March, and Article 4 of a Decree of March 4th (see p. 100) shows that workers for State timber trusts would be felling until then. Nor was this form of compulsory labour merely temporary. It was being enforced, though 'badly,' in the Archangel district in January 1931 (*Izvestia*, January 8th, quoted in *The Russian Conscriptions*, p. 3), and the writer has seen the sworn statements of several Ingrian peasant refugees who were forced to work in this way in the winter of 1930-1. One states that all men and women from eighteen upwards were liable, and that his sister had to work for four months without pay for missing one day's work. He was only paid 30 roubles for the whole winter. Another man who failed in his task one day in four months was fined nearly 48 roubles.

² Cmd. 3775, pp. 47-51.

publics, and recommends the following measures. On receiving information from 'economic organisations'¹ as to the need of labour for wood and timber preparation and timber floating during the 1929-30 season, regional provincial and area labour departments were to hasten the preparation of plans for providing labour for timber-floating.

Plans for the supply of labour for timber-floating must be drawn up on the basis of 'actually attainable standards of output, and with a view to increase the productivity of labour.'

Through the collective farm groups surplus labour must be discovered, and agreements must be concluded with these groups regarding the procedure for obtaining collective farm workers for timber-floating. All trusts were at once to detail for timber-floating work in 1930 those workers then engaged in preparing timber, but who were willing to do timber-floating work.

The following was to be in the main the general procedure for the allotment of labour:

(1) Strict attention was to be paid to the 'class life.'

(2) Allotment was to be carried out with the aid of representatives of the agricultural and forest workers' trade unions.

(3) The 'summoning' of workers detailed for timber-floating operations ('in those cases where it is impossible to effect a transfer of workers from

¹ i.e. the timber-floating trusts or 'combines', through which the Government controls the industry, in that it owns all shares and appoints all directors. All State industry is controlled in this manner. Similar organisations known as 'syndicates' exist for trading purposes.

timber-preparation to timber-floating without causing a stoppage of work') was to be undertaken direct by the trusts.

In every hamlet or village where timber-floating 'recruits' were living, a delegate was to be appointed from amongst them by the 'recruiter,' 'in agreement with the village workers' committee.' The duty of the delegate would be to organise the assembly of workers for travel to the place of work. If these had to be transported a long distance the labour organisations must arrange 'in good time' that the workers received their food regularly on the journey, and were provided with articles of food of which there was a shortage. Every workers' delegate must be informed where and when the workers were due to arrive.

Provision was made for the future by an article requiring timber organisations to 'prepare to create cadres of permanent workers for timber-floating' by trying to utilise these 'selected cadres of workers' for other work, such as loading and unloading, in the period between timber-floating campaigns. The meaning of this was made clearer by a sentence requiring timber-floating organisations, at the end of the timber-floating season of 1930, to 'allot' for their work in 1930-1 not less than 50 per cent. of the timber-floating workers engaged with them during the present season.

All trained workers, such as pilots, 'shoot construction specialist', the personnel of steam-tugs, etc., were to be registered and sent to work in

timber-floating organisations 'in an organised manner.'

The responsibility was laid on timber organisations for providing dwellings for timber-floating workers with the necessary fittings, and for controlling the sanitation of these dwellings; for providing each place of work and rafting unit with the necessary quantity of standard medicine chests; for organising with the assistance of health detachments the training of persons in charge of medical supplies and 'sanitary educational work amongst the timber-floating workers'; and for carrying out the maximum of rationalisation in timber-floating with a view to increase the productivity of labour.

It was further emphasised that the recruitment of workers for timber-floating must be carried out with the maximum utilisation of local reserves of labour, and that it was therefore necessary to start extensive recruiting operations in the villages.

It will be seen that the Circular has one or two phrases suggesting that recruitment, in the first instance at least, was to be voluntary. Its wording as a whole shows clearly that its authors had little hope of securing the necessary large numbers of workers without compulsion, and that the circular was intended to authorise the 'labour organisations'—presumably the labour exchanges and the trade unions—to conscript labour if it should prove necessary. The mere fact that agreements were to be concluded within twelve days for the despatch of surplus labour from collective farms made it hopeless to expect that all or most of the labour re-

recruited would be voluntary.¹ Once secured, at least fifty per cent. of the labour was to be retained for next season, and an endeavour was to be made to retain the whole. The Circular, therefore, carried the encroachment on personal liberty one, if not two, steps further than the Decree of the previous October, which only sanctioned compulsory labour for grain-loading until a definite date, and made no provision for deporting workers from their homes.

Again, though the clauses dealing with housing and hygienic measures gave some appearance of humane intentions, it was obvious that time was needed to enable them to materialise. In the meantime workers might well be without shelter or medical aid.

Finally, the Circular revealed the class bias which would go far to ensure that the workers recruited would in the first instance be those least well-disposed to the Government. The opportunities offered to the 'recruiter' for paying off personal scores were also evident.

Timber-floating, however, was not the only industry for which workers were to be called up in the spring of 1930. On March 3rd a Circular issued from the Commissariat of Labour of the U.S.S.R. to the Commissars of Labour and Agriculture of the Allied Republics, and to all collective farm unions,² peremptorily called for the despatch of labour from collective farms to 'seasonal branches of the national economy,' in other words, to building construction,

¹ A decree of March 4th showed the circular to be compulsory.

² Cmd. 3775, pp. 15 *et seq.*

agriculture, loading and unloading grain, and floating timber, the mention of which, in a second circular, emphasised the urgent need of workers for this industry. Plans for the release of the necessary labour from individual collective farms were to be drawn up within a week by area labour organisations in conjunction with collective farm unions for the area. As soon as the plans were ready, agreements were to be concluded with the administrations of the actual farms for the despatch of the labour required. All work in connection with agreements was to be concluded by April 1st.

This Circular marked yet another extension of the conscription of labour, in that it made not only men but women and young persons under eighteen years of age liable to despatch. The Circular placed no limit whatever on their work, though presumably women in the last stages of pregnancy would be exempted under the Labour Code of 1922.

The numbers planned for were apparently not all to be sent at once. Lists were to be kept and those whose names were listed were to be despatched as required.

The circular significantly concludes with the admonition to the Commissariats of Labour of the other republics, and provincial and area labour departments, to send 'their own employees' without delay to all the principal districts in which there is an exodus of labour from collective farms, in order to assist the area departments of labour in preparing the 'organised drafting' of seasonal labour from these farms. Stalin's article announcing the slowing

down of the collectivising policy had appeared two days before, and the break-up of the collective farms was beginning. At all costs the labour which was seeking to free itself must be forced to contribute to the national economic development.¹

A Decree issued the next day by the Economic Council² called for the 'complete and immediate execution' of the orders of the People's Commissariat of Labour and of the local labour offices for the recruiting and transfer of labour and haulage for floating timber. Protests against the 'orders' issued by the labour organisations for the recruiting and distribution of labour might be lodged only with the superior labour organisations, and it was declared that the lodging of protests was not to suspend the execution of the orders.

All local executive committees and village councils were, therefore, charged to exercise the rights conferred on them by the decree of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of February 13th, 1930, regarding measures for increasing the work on timber preparation and timber-floating.

All organisations carrying out both timber preparation and floating were 'to secure definitely' for floating work not later than March 20th, 1930, the maximum contingent of workmen engaged in

¹ From Article 4 of the Circular it appears that a Decree of July 16th, 1929, had made some members of collective farms liable to a summons to work outside their farms. The administrators of collective farms were strictly charged not to hinder the despatch of any members so summoned.

² Decree of the Economic Council of the R.S.F.S.R., March 4th, 1930. Cmd. 3775, pp. 155-7.

timber preparation, but suitable also for 'utilisation' on timber-floating.

This decree makes clear that the circular of February 13th was intended to provide for compulsory recruitment. Evidently it had been found difficult, even with compulsory powers, to despatch workers far from their homes, and the Decree, therefore, required the People's Commissariat of Labour to take steps for the maximum utilisation of local labour, especially of persons who had been already engaged on timber preparation in 1929-30. Labour and haulage were to be transferred from other 'regions' only in the event of the absolute impossibility of meeting the demand locally.

As the Central Collective Farm Administration was charged to afford every assistance to the labour organisations in recruiting the desired labour and haulage, no doubt many of the peasants seeking to leave these farms were conscripted under this Decree.

The People's Commissariat of Labour was also directed to carry out, in conjunction with the timber-floating administration, an investigation in the principal floating regions into the extent of the preparedness for timber-floating and the capacity for providing living-quarters for workers, food supplies and tools. The result of the investigations was to be reported not later than April.

This solicitude for the welfare of the workers to be conscripted would have been more impressive had it preceded the orders for their recruitment.

The Circular calling for seasonal labour, like the

timber-floating Circular, at first evidently proved difficult to enforce. Managers of collective farms, pledged to extend and develop cultivation by every possible means, may well have hesitated to part with labour, and members were presumably even less willing to leave homes and families to go wherever needed for work which might be entirely new to them.

Instructions were therefore issued by the Council of People's Commissars on March 16th, forbidding local administrations and collective farms to hinder peasants from going to seasonal work such as building or 'timber collecting.' The execution of this order was to be strictly supervised by District and Provincial Executive Committees, who were to bring obstructive persons to justice as criminals.¹

The last of the spring Decrees recorded in the 'Blue Book' is a circular of the People's Commissariat of Labour of the U.S.S.R. of March 22nd. This called for workers for the loading and unloading of grain.² But they were no longer needed merely in order to obtain an adequate supply for the cities. The 102 per cent. collection of the previous year's quota had replenished the reserves. Rationing was keeping home demands within moderate limits, and export of grain could therefore be resumed.

The Circular, after references to a Decree and Circulars of the previous month on the subject, opened with the statement that before any loading

¹ *Izvestia*, March 17th, 1930.

² Cmd. 3775, pp. 157 *et seq.*

or unloading operations were undertaken, 'such as the transshipment of grain cargoes, timber, export work, etc.,' suitable notice should be given and contracts entered into with the organisations undertaking the said work, for the adequate supply of labour. Contracts must state the numbers of workers, their trades, and the time at which they would be required.

In view of the 'inadequacy of the urban cadres of porters, the circular proceeded, labour organisations were to sign on beforehand poor peasants and farm-labourers who were to be called upon to work 'in an organised manner' (presumably in gangs), as porters, as need arose. The signing on and 'recruitment' were to be carried on in accordance with a circular of February 18th, 1930.

If there should prove to be an insufficient supply of trained and specially skilled porters, short-term courses of training were to be organised at the expense of the economic organisations interested and of the unemployment benefit fund.

• Any demand for labour for the following tasks was to be considered 'a matter of extreme urgency' and was 'to be satisfied immediately and completely': the loading and unloading of grain on railway and water transport; all enterprises connected with transport work (grain dumps, flour mills, groat mills, elevators, grain warehouses, grain drying plants, etc.); the loading and unloading of import and export goods in all ports and stations (timber export, etc.).'

In order to ensure the supply of labour for loading

and unloading, cadres of porters were to be prepared in advance, the members of which were to be drawn 'by selection of physically fit and suitable persons for this type of work,' from unemployed who were registered at labour exchanges. The first to be called to the work would be the unemployed from stagnant trades of any kind, 'whether they be physical or intellectual workers.'

Refusal to do loading and unloading 'without adequate excuse, by any unemployed person who has been passed as suitable for such work, entails his being struck off the register, and the loss of unemployment benefit.'

Unemployed persons, however, whose habitual occupation was not loading or unloading, were, while employed on such work, to remain on the registers under their own vocational headings, and were not to 'lose the right to be sent to employment, when their turn comes, in their own trades or professions.'

Workers set to loading and unloading were to be supplied with the necessary safety devices such as back pads, pads, and mitts.

The circular also regarded it as 'essential to see that all economic organisations provide shelter for porters employed under contract, recruitment or summons from other districts. In cases where it is found impossible, to furnish permanent shelter, every effort must be made to secure from economic organisations the erection of temporary shelters for the summer season.' It was further declared that it was 'essential to improve the sanitary technical

supervision over conditions in loading and unloading work.'

Reports were to be made by April 1st as to the steps taken to carry out the circular.

In spite of references to 'recruitment,' the scale on which labour was required, and the short time allowed in which to secure it, again made recourse to compulsion inevitable, if the demands of the trusts were to be complied with.

Moreover, the pressure to be applied to the unemployed person was bound to be inexorable. To be struck off the register would mean not only loss of any chance of work or unemployment benefit, but probably expulsion from a privileged trade union, and, in that event, loss of the ration card which enabled him to purchase his bread and at least some other foodstuffs at fixed prices. The circular, therefore, spoke of compulsion, not alone for the peasant, conscripted from a collective farm, but to the intellectual worker, who, by any labour exchange that considered him 'suitable,' might be despatched to work for which his physique and whole life made him unfit.

Finally, the reference to the housing of the workers is illuminating. Though some effort was evidently to be made to avoid the disorganisation of grain transport that had obtained during the previous autumn, the transport industry was obviously unequal to the demands, which the greatly increased production of 1929 was likely to make on it. The lag, if it was to be overtaken, must be made up by driving men compulsorily to heavy work,

irrespective of their former tasks, and disregarding whether there had been time to prepare even temporary shelter for them.

With these far-reaching arrangements made for the supply of labour during the summer of 1930 for the main outdoor industries and for handling exports of grain, timber and other products, Russia's rulers no doubt faced the summer in the expectation that it would fulfil the requirements of the Plan.