

What Is Happening in the Soviet Union Today?

AT THE END OF AUGUST

I will inform you briefly and fleetingly—so as not to lose the freshness—of the impressions of my journey, my observations and encounters. I shall not speak of the successes. They are indisputable and are expressed in figures, even though not always exact ones. I will only speak of the misuses, because they are passed over in silence. In the meantime, they are accumulating into an ever greater danger. It is the duty of a revolutionist today not to play the official tune but—against the stream—to speak the truth, and not only speak it but shout it aloud.

. . . The approaching shut-down of many big machinery plants is being spoken of because of the lack of raw materials. This information was also confirmed by N. N. who, as you know, works in this sphere. The chaos in transportation is beyond description.

The situation in the Donetz basin is very critical. You must have noticed it by the way, through the reflections in *Pravda*. The miners are throwing up their jobs en masse. They now are called "loafers". There is nothing surprising in this situation. A friend of mine, a technician working in the Donetz Basin, an honest non-party worker, and completely pro-Soviet, told me that the situation was catastrophic, and that if the material conditions of the workers' existence were not improved, the realization of the production program would have no chance of realization. As things stand now—according to this same friend—half of the miners receive an average wage of fifty rubles a month. . . The cooperatives naturally, have nothing in stock and the prices of commodities in the free market are extraordinarily high.

A situation similar to the "Don-bas" has also been noticed in other places. Under these conditions, to speak about "productive enthusiasm", is, to put it mildly, an exaggeration. "When you speak to the miners about increasing production", the technician told me, "they unanimously reply that they must first be fed." The production meetings, as well as the trade union meetings, are almost unattended. In the textile industry, the situation is no better. I do not know if you are informed that in the summer the paper mills were nearly all closed down for a period of almost two months as a consequence of the same reason: lack of raw material. Once again, the adventurism of the leadership was vividly proved. They had established the uninterrupted working week and the system of three shifts without a preliminary inventory of the raw materials at hand. As usual, responsibility was shifted to the administrators. I can very well imagine the fate of the administrators had they said, at the height of the uninterrupted working week, that there was insufficient raw material. We have a similar situation in the leather and tobacco industries. In the cooperatives, there was not until recently the possibility of buying even a single cigarette or a pinch of tobacco. Allotted cigarettes are sold only in factories and institutions. On the private market, at fantastic prices.

Queues at the stores have been standing for meat (women wait at the doors of the cooperatives from 8 to 9 o'clock in the evening until the following morning) for biscuits, for caramels and . . . for shoe repairs. For some of the other commodities the question of "queues" was solved very simply: they simply did not exist.

Textile, paper and silk products were not to be obtained even on the free market. In the cooperatives, there are absolutely no shoes. Their distribution has now been begun at the factories, but in a completely insufficient quantity. On the market, shoes sold at fabulous prices: 70 rubles as a minimum, 200 as a maximum.

The crisis in small currency has assumed catastrophic dimensions. There was no possibility of changing money. You ought to see the incidents this produced! People were buying absolutely unnecessary things only in order to run up the bill to one ruble or to three. Lately even the paper ruble has been missing. Excitement runs high. At the top, they close their eyes to the general reason for this very well known phenomenon, produced by inflation.

At the factories, the campaign for the "Five Year Plan in Four Years"—loan was executed with great difficulty. In many factories, especially in the textile factories, it was very difficult to organize meetings for the loan. In some places, they utilized the noon hour for these meetings, but the workers did not want to listen. Generally, the textile workers are the most dissatisfied: because of the extremely low wage and the intensification of labor. One woman comrade, a very good textile worker, a member of the party, told me that the Com-

munist in the factory where she works (one of the factories of the "Moskvoshei") can no longer bring in any proposals to the factory meetings and whenever anything has to be proposed, they seek out a non-party worker, because the workers will not listen to them.

Because of the lack of foodstuffs there is a serious crisis in the personnel of the Leningrad port.

The workers I had occasion to interview on the lack of products, told me that they consider the present situation worse than that of 1919. This opinion struck me forcibly. To my doubts, they replied that in that epoch they were assured of rations—this is not the case now. They also said that personally, they are fed more or less decently at the factory dining rooms, but that this does not solve the problem of feeding the family. Besides that, at the factory they eat only once a day when to be satiated at least three meals a day are needed, and as for the remaining two meals it is impossible to find any, or almost any provisions.

Some workers to whom I spoke told me a very interesting story about the "shock brigades". These famous brigades do not always include the best elements. In every factory, they try to create a group of privileged workers who are better paid than the rest, a sort of an aristocracy, upon which the Centrist bureaucracy can support itself. Excellent workers, actually capable of productive enthusiasm, are often forced to stand idle because the materials are given to the brigade first. In addition, this creates an antagonism inside the factories and the "shock brigades" often become the object of a growing antagonism on the part of the workers.

Last summer a strike of the Odessa dock workers took place. To take the place of the strikers, Communist Youth were sent in. They were beaten up by the workers who, at the same time, insulted them, calling them strike-breakers, etc. In Novorossisk, as a consequence of the lack of products, serious disturbances occurred. Demonstrations of women marched through the streets. Stones were thrown into the building of the local Soviet.

I also wish to communicate to you the impressions of a comrade who was in Siberia for party work at the beginning of April, where he remained until the end of July. I must tell you that this was a comrade whom I know as a "one hundred percent", who never risked a criticism and who had no sympathies for us. Neither was he a Right winger. When I met him I hesitated for a few minutes even to greet him, because I assumed that he would not even wish to undergo the risk of a conversation with me. But to my astonishment, he himself came to meet me. Here is approximately our conversation:

"How are you?" I asked him. "You look very bad. You look tired."

"Why not? You would look bad too if you had been where I was for a number of months, in the village. . . I will tell you right off: if the bourgeoisie had sent us as wreckers, it could not have done any better than Stalin. One is inclined to believe that we are under a colossal provocation. . ."

And he proceeded to tell me about the adventures carried out during the famous period of "dizziness". I shall not repeat it, because the picture was the same everywhere. . . Stalin put up against the party not only the middle peasants but also the poor peasant Communists, the former partisan fighters.

The same comrade told me, by the way, that he could not find a single pound of butter during his journey, which included the whole of Siberia.

At the end of July, I spoke to a Ukrainian worker who spent his vacation in his native village. He is a member of the party since 1918, a participant in the civil war, an excellent comrade, sympathetic to us a certain extent. His village is near B. Into some of the collective farms the worst elements of the village entered, the least conscious. . . In some collective farms he knows, there is no labor discipline; there is a food crisis. In order to silence the members of the collectives, flour was distributed among them, to a quantity that would be sufficient for two to three days. A trainload of grain for the workers of Kiev was attacked by a group of collectivized farmers.

All the comrades who have been in the village confirm the presence of great dissatisfaction, but at the same time they assure us categorically that the peasants remain with the Soviets, that is, deeply bound up with the régime. It is interesting that in many places, particularly in the Ukraine, the peasants, even at the acutest moments, did not reveal any bad feelings towards the

local representatives of the party. They look upon them as victims of the policies higher up. One must assume, therefore, that the members of the party themselves do everything possible to represent themselves as simple executors of the decrees of the Central Committee. A situation like this, as you understand, is full of dangers.

All those who have been in the village confirm the great progress in the consciousness of the peasants. They speak in a firmer voice. They see clearer than before. "We," a peasant told me, "see clearly that the collective is better. But we want collectives for ourselves and not according to the decrees from above." This is also indicative.

BEGINNING OF SEPTEMBER

Lately, in some places, a very sharp character was assumed by the antagonism between the Russian and the foreign workers. The latter, as is known, have much more favorable conditions, to be precise, they receive a special ration that assures them a living minimum, which the cooperatives cannot give to the Russian workers.

In spite of this, the foreign workers are also not always satisfied. Even though their material position is considerably superior to that of the Russian workers, it is nevertheless considerably inferior to the position which the Communists press represented depicting the U. S. S. R. as a country in which socialism has been completed at least ninety percent. The ridiculous official exaggerations produce an unavoidable reaction. Over-zealousness to the point of absurdity produces as always, not good but harm.

The inevitability of a break between Stalin and . . . Molotov is being spoken of very persistently. It is reported that Stalin threw the responsibility for the "turns" in party policy for the village upon the latter, and that even though against his own will, Molotov finds himself compelled to go over into opposition. This would be a spectacle for the gods. The fact, at any rate, is such that in the honorary presidiums and other lists, Molotov no longer figures in the second, but in the third and fourth place, the Red professors have completely stopped quoting Molotov, but for

that they have begun to quote the complete works of Kaganovitch.

NOVEMBER

In the apparatus, in connection with the "double-handedness" of Syrzov and Lominadze, etc., there is a great confusion. Circles close to Ordjonikidze were informed that "double-handedness" has made a special impression on him. He complains that nobody can any longer be trusted, even friends and assistants, and he expresses great helplessness.

Syrzov was trusted by Stalin until the last minute and was supported by him. Lominadze and Sten (?) issued an appeal in the Caucasus. They were called to Moscow. In their negotiations with Stalin they declared that this was a "mistake" on their part. (Repentance is cheap nowadays). But right after this they went to Syrzov for a meeting. When Syrzov's house was raided, they found there minutes of meetings through which they succeeded in exposing the bloc. Syrzov is presumably under "house-arrest". It is also reported that Zinoviev is playing at Opposition, after having been refused the floor at the Congress to make the most sincere and the final repentance.

In exile, under surveillance, and in the jails, etc., there are over 7,000 Bolshevik-Leninists (Left Opposition). Their number grows because the arrests and exiles are continued.

At the same time, the Soviet press, day in and day out, talks about the renewed activities of the "Trotskyists"—the very same, it is understood, remnants and chips.

In the factories with every shake-up, "Trotskyists and semi-Trotskyists" appear, who demand more correct bonds and more systematic work. They are undoubtedly correct. The Opposition will recover from the continued organizational pogroms only on the basis of the factory nuclei, even though they may consist of two or three workers each.

The official slanders against the Left Opposition are not credited by anybody. Everybody knows—they are lies. But some think it is "useful", and others think they are hideous. Here lies the whole difference. —N. N.

Olgin: Now and Then

It has been a long time since the Stainless Knight of Bolshevism, Moissaye J. Olgin, last entered the lists, scarred lance in hand, to defend his liege lord from the assaults of the pagan Trotskyists. We hasten to add that we have no special cause to regret his absence, because every time he appeared in the past he brought with him an unmistakable odor not calculated to improve the appetite: the odor of the incurable Menshevik so similar to that of uncured ham. All the more distasteful is it, therefore, to comment upon his most recent appearance in the columns of the *Daily Worker* (12-29-1930) and the *Freiheit* with an offensive against the so-called Right-Left bloc of Syrzov, Lominadze and Co., during which he pulls out of the old bag of tricks the customary "revelations" against the "Trotskyists". So long as Olgin maintained what could graciously be called a penitent sledge, we were willing to do likewise, hoping that even if he could not learn the wisdom of Bolshevism he could at least learn the wisdom of discretion. But it appears that hopes for Olgin learning anything are doomed to disappointment.

We have no need to elaborate here upon the characterization of Lominadze and his colleagues as "desperate Centrists" which we established in a past issue of the *Militant*. The bloc between them and the equally desperate Right wingers should be characterized not as a "Left-Right" bloc, but far more precisely as a bloc between the Right wing and a section of the Stalinists, than whom there had been for years no more fiercely loyal a supporter than Lominadze himself. Is it necessary to add that Olgin does not even intimate this? On the contrary, he seeks to leave the impression that the Lominadze tendency is a direct reflection of the Left Opposition.

"You listen to Syrzov and you seem to hear Abramovitch; Lominadze speaks and his voice sounds strangely like that of Kautsky," says the notorious foe of Abramovitch, Olgin. We will not speak of the members of the American party, nor even of the Soviet party; but where did Olgin "listen to Syrzov" or hear "Lominadze speak"? What documents containing their views has he ever read, and where were they ever printed? We don't know, and Olgin is no wiser than we. But Olgin fulfills a special function, that of executing blindly and willingly the orders of his superiors who say: Write this way, and then: Write exactly the other way, and Olgin does that, too.

In consideration of the scientifically established fact that environment is so decisive in shaping the human being, Olgin, like the poor working girl who went wrong, is more to be pitied than censured. For years he worked in the miasmatic environment of the respectable business men's paper, the *Jewish Forward*. When Abe Cahan ordered an article saying that the Sisson documents—"proving" that Lenin and Trotsky were German spies—were valid, Olgin wrote about the Bolshevik-Kaiser (the Left-Right!) bloc of those days. Now Stalin orders an article to say that the Left wing of the Party is in a bloc with the Thermidorian Right, and Olgin, out of sheer deep-seated habit, complies again. Cahan used to order half a dozen articles to prove that the Bolsheviks were speculating on the ruin of the country in 1913, and Olgin promptly filled the order, as the records of the *Forward* still show. Now Stalin orders a few articles saying that Trotsky is speculating on the ruin of the Five Year Plan, and Olgin is his man. Who will in the future take the place in Olgin's life occupied the day before yesterday by Cahan, yesterday by Lovestone and today by Stalin—we do not venture to foretell, although the prediction would not present insurmountable obstacles: there is something in the nature of the man—in the nature of the type of man—that facilitates such a prediction with the same assuredness that it guarantees the change in master.

In his exhaustive and authoritative study, "Treatise on the Natural Evolution of Woman" (Vienna, 1903), Dr. Friedrich Adalbert Von Eckenberger remarks: "These wretched creatures are divided into two principal categories. The one adopts its vocation under the pressure of economic need; the other, drawn from all the walks of life, engages in its reprehensible work because it feels the need of thrilling experience." Those who know Olgin at all, know that his fairly comfortable economic position puts him under no compulsion to do what he does because of the want of a little change in the pocket. He commits his indecencies, according to the only other alternative, because he gets a kick out of it. Really, there are such people!

We do not live merely in a state but in a system of states and the existence of the Soviet republic side by side with imperialist states for any length of time is inconceivable. In the end, one or the other must triumph.