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HOME NEWS

FEDERAL.

Why should one trouble about the U.S.S.R.? They were not going to invade Switzerland. But one had to remember that it represented one sixth of the entire land surface of the world with a population of 175 million. What was very important was that although Russia had always been as big as that, it had never hitherto had a government which organised it from end to end right into the desert and the Arctic Circle. What was more was the fact that Russia was not troubled with the anomaly so common to all Western Europe and all the Dominions, that the next generation was falling off. The U.S.S.R. had the largest birth rate. The annual increase of population was 3½ million a year, as much as the whole of Europe put together. One might expect, of course, a very unhealthy population. Under the Czar the death rate had been a very large one. It was still large but had been reduced by at least one third in the last twenty years since the Revolution. The infant death rate which was the best test had been halved. They had got rid practically altogether of cholera and typhus and had greatly reduced enteric fever. There was still a lot of malaria but generally speaking great strides had been made for health and greater strides still, in education. Before the war the vast masses outside the cities had been illiterate and with something like 150 separate races, some of whom were cannibals in an actual savage state, many had not even an alphabet. But now they all were got to school and in all 25 million children were attending school, even those that had had no alphabet. In about 40 cases an alphabet was actually found, a Latin alphabet and not a Slavonic alphabet..

Books in those languages were written and the children were got to school to learn reading and writing.

All schools of seven years' duration had to teach one foreign language apart from Russian, and the vernacular throughout the U.S.S.R. At the end of 1937 children in all schools would have to attend for seven years and would be taught either English or German. In all England, the lecturer said, there was not one village school where a foreign language was taught. The learning of a foreign language, was not in the lecturer's opinion, the whole of education! But it had great advantages in learning one's own history for when he went abroad himself he discovered battles in which the English had been defeated and of which he had never known!

One could imagine what a population of 175 million of a thoroughly organised country with an up-to-date standard of higher education meant in its impact upon Western Europe. One could not shut them out, one could not escape the influence of their ideas and their industries.

A very astonishing fact of the greatest importance was that a country with 175 million people had had no unemployment for five or six years. Everybody received a holiday. Furthermore there was a frightful scarcity of skilled labour. The unemployment which perplexed the statesmen of Europe was unknown. The great thing that had happened was the agricultural mechanisation. It was the romantic story of the Russian peasant. Formerly he had had no plough, no reaping machinery, he reaped with the sickle and thrashed with the flail.

The Russian had had no agricultural knowledge. Every second or third year was a bad one, a real famine. All was miserable, there was not enough food produced to feed cities; and the higher command, the chief executive committee, the Cabinet as one should say in this country, determined on mechanisation, to teach them how to use the oil driven tractor instead of the iron plough, how to use a combine harvester, so that wheat was cut and stacked and thrashed in one operation. Of course, with all the mechanisation one would expect a great surplus of labour but as a matter of fact there was positively a demand for more labour. They had gone in for it more intensively, vastly increased the output, but it was not so much an increase in wheat. They now grew cotton, they clothed all their people with cotton garments made from Russian cotton. They no longer imported any cotton from America. One half to three quarters of the tea required they produced themselves. They produced almost everything except coffee. He was not sure whether they were able to grow bananas but they grew oranges. They could not grow rubber and said that that would not do, they would have to have rubber. So they sent botanists into the forests of Siberia who found not genuine rubber, but two or three plants something like rubber trees. They were therefore cultivating those plants, substituting rubber with something else.

They were making synthetic rubber, from which they made great tyres for lorries and the tyres stood all tests. It would not be a commercial proposition as compared with imported rubber. They did not mind, as rubber or a substitute was necessary. Perhaps they would soon be prepared to do without any imported rubber. Their lecturer explained that great transformation how they had managed to do away with unemployment, at least since 1931. Since that time the system had worked sufficiently satisfactorily. It was done by the rule of average Marxism by the system of cutting out, or extirpating profit-making. The practice of making profit as an incentive had become a criminal offence. One literally could not do it with impunity. The lecturer then amused the audience with a story of a Scotchman who went out to Russia and when visiting a school asked the children if he bought a dozen oranges for a shilling and sold them at 1½d. each what he would get. "Six months in prison," was the answer.

Dealing where one bought stock at one price and sold it one by one at profit was a crime called speculation. It was a crime to hire labour in order to gain, an exploitation. It did not matter what wages one offered to pay. The private owner, joint stock owner, they all had been liquidated. Everything was held by the government. One could not invest any money. One could save it and one could give it away but one could not put it into business. One could not start a business or a factory on one's own. One could, however, lend money to the government at interest. Consequently one might have all the joy of accumulating money but the government did not allow one to leave it to collateral enterprise.

A curious thing was that the people with the largest incomes were the authors, specially the dramatic authors. They were paid royalty for every performance. The theatres were full every night. The lecturer said that he thought they did not quite foresee that 175 million people had started reading. They read frantically. Every person was reading; men were going to work

reading in trains, peasants as well as factory workers. On account of that fabulous reading, editions of books were stupendous. Gorki, the favourite author, was top with 19½ million copies since the revolution, or more than one million a year copies had gone like wild-fire. Pushkin, another chief author, was next with 10 million copies. The reading in short was terrific and consequently authors made very big incomes. But not very much could be done with money except eat and drink. They could not buy pictures because dwelling space was scarce. One could have a motor car and a chauffeur, one could have several servants, members of trade unions, and had to treat them very respectfully. Did the audience realize, the lecturer said, that the whole of the operation of individualism and the joint stock capitalist had been done away with? The whole of business was done by the government or through industrial co-operative societies. Every kind of commodity from clothes, wood, to silver, etc., was provided by the government. On the other hand, the agricultural work, the co-operative farming, etc., needed very elaborate arrangements. It was certainly not Stalin who saw to all that in the Kremlin, it was not he who ran all the shops in the country and still less in the city. It needed a governmental organisation, an extremely complicated one. One great note of multifariousness ran through the whole of the U.S.S.R., twenty different organisations for doing similar things. How did they manage to know how much to produce?

It was done by planned economy. A very large government department, several thousand strong, hundreds of statisticians, extremely competent people in every branch. Every year every enterprise in the U.S.S.R. had to make a return stating what it had been doing, what it expected to do, what labour, what materials it wanted, how much power, fuel, etc., were required. All had then to be worked out in an elaborate way, how many people of a given age were wanted, the plans of occupation and production of what they needed had to be settled by that very complicated arrangement. How were they to make things balance? This department had to send provisional plans to every enterprise which laid it before its workmen, not only the directors. Then the balance was worked out what each enterprise, agricultural and industrial had to do. It did not compel anybody to work, there was no compulsory labour! All they cared about was a sufficient number of places in which all people could get employment. They said that so long as they could keep that system in operation unemployment was thoroughly solved.

The lecturer then dealt with the question of currency. He said that it was often mentioned that in his great book of 1,200 pages he had not dealt with currency. He said that one was often told that unemployment came from slumps, bankers' ramps, over issue and under issue of currency. Inflation did not exist in Russia. No Soviet currency could cross the frontier. There was no rate of exchange quoted and prices were fixed. According to the Gosplan everything was fixed, prices, commodities, wages, etc., so as to cover all expenses. There was no such thing as a surplus. No amount of currency flooding in the U.S.S.R. had any effect on prices or on production. They had no problems of currency to solve. The collective farms were very successful, they had much more to divide, with a higher standard of living and greater amenities. The retail trade had increased by leaps and bounds and ¾ of the population were on the land. All this happened by planning and not leaving things to chance. In Russia there was no enemy party. Everybody had the same right to the whole of production and therefore everyone was eager for more production, work as hard as they could. They knew that it did not only depend on their individual effort but on the whole of the enterprise in which they were engaged and on all others and business dividends depended upon the whole of the U.S.S.R.

The lecturer concluded by saying that the U.S.S.R. was the most fascinating country in the whole world and it was most interesting to watch this great change which had come about in Russia during the 19 years since the Revolution. Many things had to be regretted and deplored but the fact remained that the country was going on increasing at a tremendous rate and they could not build fast enough to cope with the rapid increase of the cities.

A most interesting discussion ensued on such widely controversial subjects as the Gosplan, Russian imports and exports, the recent Russian trials and questions on moral as well as ethical issues were raised. Mr. J. J. Boos, Vice-President of the Society, very ably put the Swiss point of view for severing diplomatic relations with Soviet Russia, and in conclusion moved a hearty vote of thanks to the lecturer for his most interesting address. This was vociferously received by the audience, and thus closed a most interesting and instructive evening.

W.B.

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