

This Unique Soviet Democracy

By Joshua Kunitz

DECEMBER 6 marked the first anniversary of the adoption of the new Soviet constitution, and under it, on December 12, the first all-Union elections are being held. The constitution has been characterized by Soviet spokesmen, without reservation, as the most democratic in the world. What do they mean by that sweeping assertion?

The new, the really unique thing about the Soviet constitution is that it places its entire emphasis on creating the *material base* for the full and multiform exercise of all those democratic rights which bourgeois democracy often proclaims but never realizes. As Molotov summarized it at the Congress of Soviets, whoever wants to convince himself of the democracy of the Soviet system should always bear in mind the main thing; and, in the final analysis, the main thing is the people's ownership and democratic management of all the means of production, distribution, and exchange—the lands, the factories, the shops, the forests, the rivers, the banks, the means of communication, etc.

The bourgeoisie once fought under the slogans "liberty, equality, fraternity" and "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." But those remained mere slogans, beautiful words. What the masses of the working population actually won was, at the very best, not real, but nominal equality. As to the pursuit of happiness, it has always remained a pursuit of a will-o'-the wisp.

In the conception of the bourgeois ideologists, democracy still means that each individual is deemed equal to every other individual in the eyes of the law and the state. The landlord is equal to the tenant, the capitalist to the worker, the parasite to the producer—they are all equally at liberty to luxuriate in palaces or crouch in hovels, to go yachting in the South Seas or toil in sweatshops, to gorge themselves into a stupor or starve to death. "The law in its majestic equality," was Anatole France's sardonic comment, "forbids rich and poor alike—to sleep under arches; to beg in the streets; and to steal bread."

And Stalin, in his conversation with Roy Howard in March 1936 had similar words to say about the "personal liberties" enjoyed by the poor in capitalist countries. "It is difficult for me to imagine," Stalin said, "what 'personal liberty' is enjoyed by an unemployed person who goes about hungry and cannot find employment. Real liberty can exist only where exploitation has been abolished, where there is no oppression of some by others, where a man is not haunted by the fear of being tomorrow deprived of work, of home, and of bread. Only in such a society is real, and not paper, personal and every other liberty possible." In

the light of these words one can appreciate the full democratic import of the new Soviet constitution and the fundamental difference between bourgeois and socialist democracy.

The new constitution registers the all-significant fact that in the Soviet Union all capitalists, landlords, kulaks, speculators—all classes that fatten on the labor of others, have been eliminated as factors in the economic life of the country. "Work is the honorable duty of every able-bodied citizen, according to the principle: He who does not work, neither shall he eat." Add to this the provisions which balance the *duty* to work by guaranteeing the precious *right* to work, as well as the rights to rest, leisure, education, maintenance in old age and in case of sickness or loss of capacity to work, and you have a combination of laws and guarantees which no bourgeois constitution, however liberal, democratic, and progressive, can even remotely approach.

And these, it should be emphasized, are no empty boasts, no futile vaporings about liberty, equality, and fraternity. They are real rights

which are supported by tangible guarantees.

Thus Article 118 of the constitution reads: "The right to work is ensured by the socialist organization of the national economy, the steady growth of the productive forces of Soviet society, the absence of economic crises, and the abolition of unemployment. . . ."

Does this square with the facts? A cursory glance at the following data will, I hope, suggest the answer:

1. *Socialist organization of national economy.* This year fully 99 percent of the total income of the Soviet population was derived from socialist forms of economy, and the income grew from 24.4 billion rubles in 1928 to an indicated figure of 94.7 billions in 1937.

2. *Growth of productive forces.* Since the beginning of the crisis in the capitalist world, the Soviet Union has risen to the first place in Europe in industrial production, rising above the 1929 (pre-crisis) level of all European countries in the production of electrical energy, oil, iron and magnesium ore, cast iron, steel, rolled iron, superphosphates, automobile



BARNEY TOBEY

Barney Tobey

"This Soviet equality is a bare-faced fraud, Jeffries. Where would you and I figure if (God forbid) we lived in Russia?"

trucks, tractors, combine harvesters, agricultural implements, railroad cars, lathes, etc. Productivity of industrial labor increased by 41 percent during the First Five-Year Plan and by 36 percent more during the first three years of the Second Five-Year Plan. The first half of 1936 in comparison with the first half of 1935 showed a further increase of 26.1 percent—the result of the spread of the Stakhanov movement.

3. *No economic crises or unemployment.* Since 1928, the number of workers and employees in the Soviet Union has risen from 11.6 million to 26.3 million in 1937. And still there is a distinct shortage of labor in Soviet industry. The wage fund this year exceeded 78,000 million rubles, an increase of 9.5 times compared to 1928.

Obviously, Article 118 deals not with fiction but with fact. Now read Articles 119 and 120 and 122: "The right to rest and leisure . . . the right to maintenance in old age, as well as in case of sickness or loss of capacity to work . . . are ensured by the reduction of the working day to seven hours for the overwhelming majority of the workers, the institution of annual vacations with pay for workers and other employees, the provision of a wide network of sanatoria, rest homes, and clubs serving the needs of the toilers, the wide development of social insurance of workers and other employees at state expense, free medical service. . . ." Taking cognizance of the special problem of women, the constitution, in addition to guaranteeing women all the rights enjoyed by men, also provides for "state protection of the interests of mother and child," for "pregnancy leave with pay," and for a wide and expanding "network of maternity homes, nurseries, and kindergartens."

Do these articles square with the facts? Let us glance at some data again:

1. *Rest homes and sanatoria.* By 1937 all Soviet workers and employees had between two and four weeks of paid vacations. Those who were in need of special rest or treatment were sent, free of charge, to rest homes or sanatoria. Four million workers and collective farmers were treated in 1937 alone. This does not include the thousands of summer camps organized by the Pioneer and Young Communist organizations. Nor does it include, of course, the millions of Soviet workers who spend their vacations—for which they are paid—on their own, taking long trips through the country, alone or in groups organized by the Soviet Tourist Bureau.

2. *Maternity hospitals.* In 1914 old Russia had only 6824 maternity hospitals. By 1937 the number had grown to 18,342.

3. *Pregnancy leave with pay.* In 1927-8, the money paid to women on pregnancy leave amounted to a little over 29 million rubles; in 1932 to almost 59 million rubles, and in 1935 to over 200 million rubles!

4. *Nurseries.* In 1913 the nurseries in old Russia accommodated 11,500 children. In 1937 the nurseries accommodated 4.7 million children. By 1939, according to plan, the number of children in Soviet nurseries will more

than double—over ten million children in nurseries!

5. *Kindergartens.* In 1934-5 over five million children were in kindergartens. By 1939, according to plan, the number will be trebled!

Obviously, the above articles, too, deal not with fiction but with fact. Let us finally turn to Article 121: ". . . The right to education is ensured by universal, compulsory, elementary education, by the fact that education, including higher (university) education, is free of charge, by the system of state scholarships for the overwhelming majority of students in the higher schools, by instruction in the schools being conducted in the native language, and by the organization of free vocational, technical, and agronomic training for the toilers in the factories, state farms, machine and tractor stations, and collective farms."

Does this article square with the facts? In order not to overburden the discussion with too many details, I will cite only a few suggestive figures:

1. *Elementary and secondary education.* In 1914-5, from 48 to 50 percent of the children in the Russian empire were in elementary schools. By 1936, all children in the Soviet Union received elementary education—altogether 30 million Soviet children are now being educated in elementary and secondary schools.

2. *Higher education.* The number of students in universities grew from 191,000 in 1930 to 522,000 in 1935; in technical colleges from 327,000 in 1930 to 705,000 in 1935.

3. *General and vocational adult education.* One third of the Soviet population is at present receiving formal education, either in schools or through special courses in factories, shops, collective farms, etc. Many more are being educated in clubs, circles, and through

correspondence courses. In 1936, three million adult workers were studying for the so-called technical minimum tests. The plan is that within the next couple of years all Soviet workers will be holders of certificates establishing their passing of the technical minimum examination. Literacy in the Soviet Union has risen to 90 percent. Textbooks are being published in ninety-four languages. During the First Five-Year Plan the Soviet Union spent 15.5 billion rubles on education; during the Second Five-Year Plan the expenditures jumped to 67.1 rubles.

Obviously, Article 121, too, deals not with fiction but with staggering fact. For the first time the "pursuit of happiness" has ceased to be a mockery, has ceased to be a fatuous chase after the unattainable. With his rights to work, to rest, to education, and to security in sickness and old age guaranteed, the Soviet citizen is the first citizen in the world to have been placed in a position where he can at least fairly test the reality and attainability of happiness.

Molotov's challenge at the Eighth All-Union Extraordinary Congress of Soviets, which adopted the Constitution last December, was not unjustified:

"Let similar measures be adopted by any other state," he said to the loud applause and laughter of the delegates, "and we shall then acknowledge the democracy of such a state to be just as genuine a democracy of the whole people as the democracy in the U.S.S.R. . . . We should like to see some bourgeois state hand over to the peasants, well, not 150 million, as in our case, but just 15 million hectares of the landlords' and other lands. We should then be ready to admit that such a state was beginning to approach in earnest genuine democracy, democracy of the toilers."

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Young People Born Too Late

O young people born too late or born too soon,
Time does not want you building in this land.
Earth has no place for you, save in her breast.

Be submonished and die. Life is insane.
No wages for you. Three-balls will not lend
a dime to hopes so foully double-crossed.

All nursed upon war's stingy paps are doomed,
thin-boned, and must by arrogant brisker youth
be crowded out. Your moment is not, nor was,

nor will be. Supernumerary, damned
by silver fists which suavely break your mouths,
receive emasculation and, grown wise,

curse with dark silence the sun's procreation.
Run away and grovel in night's garbage-heap.
Your maintenance starves our crickets and dickiebirds.

You have outstayed your time and eaten your rations.
No salvaging your lives. Resign to sleep.
Rust in the pied font of superfluous words.

C. F. MACINTYRE.