

workers with their children. At the best it will hardly approach half its pre-war output, and if the army continues to absorb (as it has hitherto done) the whole of the cloth it produces, there remains no margin whatever to pay for the workers' food.

A clever new cartoon caught my eye in Petrograd as I was leaving Russia. On the left of the drawing a big giant of a peasant stood pouring, with lavish hands, a sack of corn into the hopper of a mill. On the right another peasant smilingly received an armful of cloth and boots which came pouring out of the mill. "How to get cloth from corn," ran a legend under the drawing. That in one phrase is the whole of Russia's problem today. The foreign investigator is curious about many things. He wants to assess the gain and loss in the Soviet system. He is curious about the rival politics of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. He is critical of the dictatorship of the Communist party. He soon learns, however, if he is sensitive to the mental atmosphere around him, that these things are today the concern only of the small minority which is still politically-minded. The politics of Russia turn on only one question, how to break the vicious circle of industry and food. Every expedient has been tried. Somehow to drill or galvanize or bribe the half-fed workers into producing for the peasants more textiles and boots is one possible way, but as soon as the goods are ready, the army claims them. Somehow to persuade or coerce the peasant into lending corn in the hope that better-fed workers will repay the debt in cloth, is another possible way, but again when success is near, it is the army that eats the grain. The problem cannot be solved without peace, nor without the lifting of the blockade. It is mainly a question of external policy. It was one of the ablest of the few leading Communists who said to me: "What can our foreign policy be, but to secure as many railway engines and agricultural machines as possible?"

If it was true this year that food is the question of questions, one fears that next year anxiety may become tragedy. Hitherto, since the revolution, Nature had been Bolshevik, for all Russia had a series of good harvests. This summer came the drought, such a drought as Russia has not known since the famine of 1891. The yield of all crops in Central Russia is about forty per cent of the normal. In the Eastern Ukraine, the standing corn was literally burned by the sun. The survival of the towns depends on the few regions, all distant, and all inclined to be disaffected, where the harvest has been good—the Kuban Cossack District, the West Ukraine, and further Siberia. These catas-

trophes need not occur, if agriculture were even moderately scientific.

I saw one experimental farm belonging to the Vladimir Soviet, which from the usual sandy soil under the same rainless skies, had reaped the best harvest for seven years, thanks mainly to deep ploughing. The Bolsheviks have turned all the tremendous resources of their machinery of agitation and education to the task of teaching the peasant some of the first elements of good cultivation. But the distance to be travelled is immense. Arthur Young, at the end of the eighteenth century, was horrified at the prevalence of the three-field system in England and France. Round Vladimir I found that the usual scheme of cultivation was a two-field system. Half the soil lay fallow every year, and the fallow field was not even weeded. Beans and turnips, lucerne, and even clover, were almost unknown. Potatoes and cabbages were the only common crops, besides the staple grain and flax. The sandy soil was only scratched upon the surface, and when drought came the crops were starved. It came in the tropical heat of this rainless summer like a scourge. I saw ripe flax that stood little more than a foot above the ground, and over the dry forest there hung an endless pall of smoke. Even the cut turf would sometimes catch fire. Of one fact let me remind the reader who thinks of Russia as a grain-exporting country. The surplus came solely from the Ukraine, the Volga valley, the Caucasus and Siberia. Central and Northern Russia were never at the best of times self-supporting, and it is only over these regions, which always have, and always had, a food deficit, that Bolshevik rule has been uninterrupted. Their problem was to feed a country which never in Tsarist days had come near to feeding itself.

It is hard to give an accurate and objective account of the degree in which the Soviet government has succeeded in spite of war, civil war, and blockade, in feeding Central Russia. My own view of this, and indeed of the whole economic problem, is more favorable than that of most English visitors. It happens that I am used to black bread, and like it, and I found the Russian workman's staple dish, "kasha" (any porridge of buckwheat, millet, oats or barley) both nourishing and palatable. But I have heard a kindly English labor leader describing "kasha" as food fit only for animals. There is some truth in a retort which Radek made in my hearing, "You Englishmen think that you are starved unless you have fish to breakfast." By English standards the condition of Russia is certainly appalling, but so it always was, if one takes the lot of the working-class into account. My own rule was to ignore English standards entirely, and

to compare Russia with blockaded Central Europe as I saw it last year. Allowing for the fact that Russia was always less orderly, less civilized and vastly poorer, the comparison was on the whole to the advantage of Russia.

To be sure, Petrograd looks at a first glance like a dead city. Grass grows literally in the streets, and I even saw a wild flower here and there. Hamburg quays in the latter years of the war were in the same condition. Petrograd was in the industrial sense always an artificial creation. It depended on sea-borne English coal and American cotton. Its decay began long before the revolution, and it is lucky that only about 600,000 remain of its former two million inhabitants. The mortality must have been heavy, but on the whole, most of the vanished population has returned to its native villages. The city looked unspeakably dreary with its closed shops, and its deserted streets, while the pitiless northern light revealed the crumbling stucco and faded paint of its grandiose Italian palaces. Its fate, I imagine, is to be a northern Ghent, a superb architectural monument to a vanished past. It will begin to recover, as the chief port of the North, only when trade is resumed. Its harbor has been renovated this summer, but no ship has entered it.

None the less, Petrograd, stricken first by the German and then by the Allied blockade, is less pitiable than Vienna, though it has lived solely by "self-help." It has a capable and rigidly honest food administration. Speculation in food has been wholly suppressed, which means that the whole available supply can be bought at the nominal Soviet prices. A "Soviet" loaf costs two roubles, which is nothing at all, with wages ranging from 2,000 to 8,000 roubles a month. The "speculative" loaf of black bread costs 400 roubles in Moscow, which has a much less efficient local administration. In both cities there is a free dinner available for every citizen, man and woman. The menu may be scanty and the cooking to my notions was usually bad, but there were millions last year in Poland, Austria and even Germany, who would have rejoiced at a diet of cabbage soup, barley "kasha," a roast apple and a glass of tea, even once a day. I had grown familiar with the drooping gait, the lagging steps, the gray skin and the white lips of the crowds in Vienna streets. I noticed nothing of the kind in Moscow, or even in Petrograd. Men and women walked immense distances in both these scattered cities, for the electric "tram" cars were overcrowded and infrequent, but they tramped for the most part sturdily enough. Nor was that only my own impression. I met both Germans and Austrians in Moscow who all remarked on the obviously better physical condition of the Russian

workers as compared with their own. Above all, the children in Russia are on the whole happy, and even relatively well-fed. Of the great constructive achievements of the Bolsheviks in education, I shall write in a later article. Let me say here that in Russia there is no parallel, nor even a distant approach, to the tragedy of child life which is the worst of all the plagues of Central Europe.

Nor was it only in the matter of health and food that Russia seemed to me more fortunate than Central Europe. Transport is still the gravest of Russian problems. There might, with the best management, be just enough locomotives in Russia to deal with the indispensable civilian traffic. There are not nearly enough to conduct a war on two fronts, and to serve the cities as well. There is indeed a steady if slow improvement. There was in February only one "healthy" locomotive for every twelve versts of the railway system. Thanks to the tremendous efforts of the repairing shops, there was, in August, one sound engine to every eight versts. The pre-war standard, however, was one engine to three versts. This problem then is still far from its solution, and no great change is likely until the Allies so far raise the financial blockade, as to permit Russia to purchase spare parts for locomotives. None the less, it seemed to me that this nation, which has spontaneously so little conception of order and punctuality, had been drilled, first by Krassin and then by Sverdloff, on the railways into a very creditable measure of system. I found the ordinary Russian passenger trains, even when wood was the fuel, quicker, more punctual and more comfortable than most of those in which I travelled in Central Europe last year. The time-table was always observed, and the amount of time spent at each stopping place was, through better organization, a mere fraction of what is usual even now in Esthonia. There is a regular train which reaches Irkutsk in far Siberia from Moscow in seven days, while an express runs twice a week from Moscow to the Caucasus in sixty hours. Troop trains move on an average faster than was usual in the Great War. Two years ago the railways were a chaos. They are today a creditable achievement in the art of making the most of limited materials.

To compare the food supply of Russia with that of Central Europe is, however, to take a very low standard. Everyone knows, or ought to know, that the maximum legal allowance of food by ration cards in Germany and Austria is less than half the physiological minimum necessary for health. Even this minimum is far above the unskilled worker's wage. The chief difficulty in judging Russian conditions is to strike some mean among their bewildering variety. The peasants, to begin with, are

certainly better off in most respects than they were before. I talked with many peasant delegates in the Vladimir Soviet, as well as with chance peasants in the villages. All agreed that they had enough to eat, and even that everyone in the village had enough. I have seen statistics collected last year by a group of Russian economists which put the fact beyond a doubt. The peasant, even the poorest peasant of the sterile central regions, is living better and eating more than ever before. I was a guest several times in peasant houses, and in communal or "Soviet" farms. The abundance and good quality of the food was in some of them surprising, even if one assumes that the generous hospitality traditional in Russia had spread an unusually lavish table. One saw at some of these peasant tables the things which the townsman can obtain only at extravagant speculative prices—butter and honey, poultry and fish. A glance at the outside of a village tells its own tale. The peasants are building, and building rather extensively. Everywhere one saw new houses, and they were usually bigger and better constructed than the old. Again, the official statistics of the livestock in the Vladimir Province, which happens to be a relatively poor district, showed that its total possessions both in horned cattle and sheep had approximately doubled since the year of the revolution. Industrial Russia has passed, and is still passing through a painful crisis of adaptation. Rural Russia, save in the more savagely devastated districts, is obviously and certainly more prosperous than ever before. This green Russia, be it remembered, outnumbers industrial Russia in population by more than ten to one.

There are, however, certain drawbacks to this relative prosperity of the countryside. There are some necessary or usual articles of food which the farmer cannot supply. In many parts of Russia salt was almost unobtainable throughout this summer. I saw one village market in a western province at which most of the peasant women who had poultry, eggs, milk and fruit to dispose of, refused to part with anything for money. I tried hard to buy, only to receive the monotonous answer "For salt." A sucking pig could be had for two pounds of salt. Vladimir had just received a year's supply of salt as I left it, but the distribution had not yet begun.

Sugar, again, of which Russians habitually consume an enormous amount with their continual glasses of weak tea, almost disappeared while the Ukraine was in Denikin's occupation. "Last year," as one Soviet official put it, "we simply forgot the taste of it." The Vladimir Soviet did much for apiculture this summer by distributing hives and

bees, but not yet on a sufficient scale. An inventor, himself a Petrograd working-man, discovered a process by which sugar can be extracted from sawdust—preferably from birchwood. The product was satisfactory, but was never available in sufficient quantities. It is roughly true to say that sugar re-appeared in the official ration only for some four months after the recovery of the Ukraine, and then all but disappeared again, save for children, as the Polish war disorganized transport.

Even more serious from the peasants' standpoint was the total lack of lamp oil during last winter. The reason was, of course, that Denikin's army held the roads to Baku, and a small British force controlled the oil-field. The dreary months of darkness had somehow to be passed without artificial light. The more enterprising peasants usually carry on a handicraft during winter, and more especially in the evenings. Some are half-time carpenters, some bootmakers, others potters. The Soviets have done much to encourage these home industries, and an exhibition at Vladimir showed, besides the familiar Russian carved toys, some admirable hand-made furniture, solid, tasteful and well-finished—an entirely new departure. Some of these village craftsmen talked bitterly of their experiences last winter, when the working day ended indoors in darkness towards three or four o'clock. This privation, however, will not recur, for oil is once more coming steadily up the Volga from Baku, and in the Vladimir province a stock had arrived, which will allow a generous supply (216 pounds) to each peasant house.

The dire need of clothing and boots affects the entire Russian population, rural as well as urban. The peasants usually have their sheepskin coats, and in some villages the art of growing, spinning and weaving flax is still practised. None the less, it was always of the lack of clothes that the peasants complained most bitterly. Everything was short, from sewing cotton, needles and buttons, to the top boots which the peasant specially affects. As usual in Russia, the children fared best. A supply of 30 yards of textiles is given to the mother for each new-born child. Every child in the schools of Vladimir province received 6 yards of textiles for one year. Industrial workers in Vladimir received 20 yards for one year, with 12 yards for the members of their families. The peasants received much less—7½ yards for each man, woman and child. The word "textiles" means, however, only cotton or linen. No heavier cloth and no wool or flannel was distributed. The case with boots was even worse. There are sixteen teachers, for example, in the "middle" schools of Vladimir. They received among them two pairs of boots and two pairs of