



The Five-Year Plan—A Menace to Whom?

By ISAAC DON LEVINE

The Bolshevik dictatorship, instead of being ahead of the times, is four generations behind them, declares the author of "Stalin." Its philosophy is that of the rebellious weavers of Manchester at the beginning of the industrial era. Its menacing possibilities depend upon several factors which Mr. Levine examines in this article.

THE Five-Year Plan, in its simplest definition, is a means of attaining the millennium with the aid of the machine. Lenin, the leader of a backward peasant country in revolution, beheld the marvellous machine and hastened to adopt it as the savior of society. In the environment of Russia the machine acquired almost divine powers in the eyes of the masses. It opened the high road to abundance, universal prosperity, and happiness. How was one to convert a primitive agricultural population into a modern industrial nation? How was poverty to be replaced by wealth? How was a new world to be evolved from one in a primeval state? By means of the machine, of course! Let one million machines be installed, let one hundred million mechanical horse-power be called into being, and they will yield magic crops of goods, they will shower blessings upon famine-ridden humanity. A grand vision, calculated to capture the hearts of any populace; a vision as blinding as that of Moses, Christ, and Mohammed; a vision sufficient to imbue a large block of mankind with a new religious frenzy, but how does one trans-

form it into reality? What are the precise methods of accomplishing the various synonyms of the Five-Year Plan, such as electrification, tractorization, mechanization, industrialization?

The ingredients needed for the magical transformation of society would inevitably be as simple as the conception itself. Given a monolithic state power, modern machinery, a supply of labor, a source of capital, a certain output of trained technicians—and you have all the elements for the creation of a new and happy industrial society. Such is the rudimentary theory of the Five-Year Plan. Government, it is held, is effective only when it is a dictatorship, when it is single-tracked, when it avowedly represents a particular class. Government is then divorced from human failings, it is purged of politics, of jealousies, of rivalries. A dictatorship is the perfect instrument for the rebuilding of the world.

As to the machine, it is a complete and sharp weapon, a definite fortress. It stands in social science for the means of production. All that is required is to capture it, to harness it to the right arm.

The machine can be controlled, can be operated without regard to location, to environment, to age, so long as the operating hands are there. Labor is a well-defined article. Labor has to be told that it has the power, it has to be fed, sheltered, provided with entertainment, and, above all, organized. Capital is a well-known quantity. Capital is independent of labor. Capital is not wealth, but money. Its value is commensurate to its size. Produce tons of gold, mine carloads of diamonds, and you have capital. As to technical knowledge, it is nothing but the engineering profession. This profession is so far nothing but a by-product of capitalism, contaminated with its decayed culture. How does one master technical knowledge? Simply by impressing into service the engineering profession. The engineers must be terrorized, watched, strapped to the plants, and commanded to perform certain tasks for which they are indispensable.

Given all these elements, the economics of a new world order become a matter of forceful mechanical mixing and driving. Such is the chemistry of the Five-Year Plan. You throw all the ingredients into a melting-pot. You supervise the brew with a keen eye, you stir it every now and then with a mighty stick, and in time there will spring upon the scene a new society, a new civilization, lusty, fat, victorious.

Trotsky has illustrated this view of the Five-Year Plan in his description of one of its prime phases—the industrialization of agriculture—when he wrote: "From peasant nags and wooden plows, however combined, you cannot create large-scale farming any more than a combination of fishermen's rowboats can make a steamer. . . . The socialist reconstruction of farming we view as a matter of decades." This applies to the entire Bolshevik experiment in economics. You cannot create a new world with

a dictatorial whip by importing American machinery, American engineers, by exporting below cost the capital resources of the country, such as grain and oil, that are badly needed at home. No life will spring into being under a dead hand, however rigorous its grip may be.

Dictatorship is essentially a primitive form of government. It was Stalin who proclaimed that the premises, the foundations of the Bolshevik revolution, are located in the dictatorship. Yet it is one of the earliest stages of the development of human society. Dictatorship is an outgrowth of and is adapted for backward countries and peoples. Its processes of thought and action are absurdly simple. It is a sledge hammer made by domestic means. Its application to modern civilization is like the application of a tool of the Stone Age to a finely constructed watch.

The Bolshevik dictatorship is steeped in the heritage of the antediluvian period of the machine age. Its philosophy is that of the school of thought which grew out of the Manchester textile factories of four generations ago. Its intellectual baggage is that of the rebellious weavers on the threshold of the industrial era. Its social doctrine has remained static for a century while the machine grew too fast for its newer significance to be fully analyzed and realized. The machine has brought in its train an infinite series of social values which call for new definitions, new appraisals. The Bolshevik dictatorship is oblivious of these; its mind is closed to any revision of views; the blade of its theoretical weapon is old and rusty.

The Bolsheviks are famous for their courage, their dauntlessness. "There is nothing we Bolsheviks cannot achieve," Stalin has declared, only paraphrasing what Lenin had said many times before. How fitting such words are on the lips of a dictatorship, and how primitive!

All that is necessary is to have a concentrated political power imbued with super-confidence, impatient of any contrary opinion, inspired with zeal, infused with driving power. Such a force is sufficient, to be sure, to give a start to almost anything, even as a straining of the muscle will drive a ball high in the air or far toward the horizon. But planning presupposes not only an objective, not only a gun that is capable of reaching the objective, but also certain knowledge of higher mathematics. The dictatorship gave Russia an immense push with its Five-Year Plan, but where Russia has been pushed, where the projectile will land, where it will explode, is another matter.

For three years now the merchant vessels plying from the American shores to the Russian waters have been transporting precious cargoes of machinery. Emissaries from Moscow have been "studying" the marvels of Ford's empires, selecting the choicest and most expensive wares, and carrying them back home to the steppes along the Volga and the slopes of the Ural Mountains. Nothing was too modern, nothing was too good, for these backwoodsmen. That grand vision seemed to become a reality upon the inspection of a Detroit or Akron industrial giant by the Kremlin buyers. They would assemble the wonderful machinery, erect it in their pauperized land, and riches would flow automatically into the eager hands of the waiting hordes. They would seize the machine, they would hitch it to their political system and brawny arms, and they would be in possession of the golden calf. For the machine would function indefinitely, indefatigably, regardless of the number of shifts handling it, and a new calendar that gave it no day of rest. Labor seemed plentiful, machines were costly and relatively few.

But the modern machine is not to be

identified with that of the days of the weavers. The modern machine lives off ten thousand hidden arteries which feed it in a manner beyond the conception of a Volga peasant or a Chinese coolie. It took a century of the most intensive cultural development, of the most bewildering social growth, to produce the "belt" or conveyor system, with its superhuman precision, its complicated and insatiable demands. The conveyor, as every expert knows, is the highest expression, the climax of the most complex civilization man has ever produced. Take that conveyor away from Michigan or Ohio, move it to the Amazon River, and it will balk. It will go on strike and upset all calculations. The modern machine is an organic growth, it belongs to its surroundings, like the soil on which it is planted. The machine has grown with the man in charge of it and the man has grown with the machine that he tends. A human being can drive another human being to incredible lengths. No one yet knows the endurance possibilities of man; endurance records are being broken from day to day. But a human being is powerless to drive a machine the way he drives himself or a fellow man. The modern machine knows how to rebel effectively and better than man does.

"Who said that mathematics is an exact science?" inquires a Soviet writer in the Moscow *Industrialization*, the official organ of the Five-Year Plan campaign, and proceeds to give a few homely examples of the rebellion of the machine: "It is nothing of the sort. For instance: The Kharkov Locomotive Works have turned out, let us say, one hundred, or two hundred, or even one thousand tractors; the administration of the factory then puts on its books that so many of their tractors are now plowing Soviet fields. Actually, however, at that moment collective farmers have

gathered around one of these machines and sadly nod their heads, for the tractor refuses to move an inch; in fact, it appears rooted to the spot. The mechanic is crawling under the steel horse trying to find out the reason for the unexpected rest. So what is the use of the mathematics of the Kharkov Locomotive Works? The fact that it turned out one thousand tractors does not mean that the inventory of the country was increased by the same number.

"Here is another case: Rationing of the distribution of clothing has been started in Russia. Yet, can that be well administered, if Soviet clothing factories turn out trousers with legs of different sizes?

"Here is still another example: A normal man sits at a Bolshevik calculating machine and wants to find out, with the help of this machine, the sum of two items, 6 and 7. He gets 24. He is surprised; it is not necessary to graduate from an accounting school to realize the absurdity of this result. However, this is a calculating machine. . . . The man recollects that in childhood he was taught that addition can be checked by subtraction, so he goes through the reverse procedure: from 24 he subtracts 7 in the hope of getting proof that the previous addition was correct. The result is 22. The same happens in the case of multiplication. Three times seven is not 21 but 39. The last number cannot by any means be divided by 7, so how in the world can he check whether the result is the correct product of seven times three? He decides not to yield to a momentary doubt as to the reliability of precision mechanics and boldly puts down the figures resulting from the energetic swinging of the machine-handle, but the organizations which are supplied with these figures naturally are, to say the least, rather surprised.

"The Precision Mechanics Trust has

quite a collection of such documents. Of a shipment of 105 calculating machines of 'Felix' make, sent to the 'International Book,' 51 were returned as defective, and of 20 'Soyuz' calculators the same organization sent back 11. The Leningrad office of that organization reported that of 37 machines sent to them, 17 were fit only for the junk pile. The buyers of calculating machines have become familiar with the intimate details of this production and no longer discard single calculating machines, but turn down the entire series, because they know that all machines in that series have certain defects."

Labor, too, has its defined as well as undefined laws. To old-fashioned capitalism labor was nothing but a commodity. Marxism was built on this. Yet Bolshevism in practice applies that very viewpoint toward labor. True, labor is proclaimed as the keystone of the future society. It is told again and again that the government functions for the ultimate good of the toilers. But labor has immediate interests as well as remote ones. It finds itself on the string of a ruling class, the objectives of which may be promising indeed, but the functions of which are like those of any other government. Consequently labor in Soviet Russia, all theory notwithstanding, finds itself treated as a commodity. One state organ, known as a certain trust or syndicate, makes a contract for wages and working hours with another state organ which happens to be known as a trade union. For the Soviet trade unions are admittedly "stateized." Workers are not permitted to strike, on the theory that they work for a workers' government. Labor is in effect a disciplined army. Every now and then there are mobilizations, every now and then labor contingents are shifted from one front to the other.

The Bolshevik dictatorship never an-

anticipated a labor shortage when it launched its Five-Year Plan. Was there not an ample supply on hand? Did not the birthrate yield a natural population increase of three to four million annually? Yet to-day the labor question is confounding the dictatorial minds. Labor is human, and its control by a political oligarchy should presumably be far easier than that of the machine. But even humanity is inventive. Hence, the extreme fluidity of labor in the Soviet Union, the constant drifting of workers from one plant to another. Hence, the problem of the appalling labor "turn-over" in the major industries where during a period of six months this mobility has been reaching 40 to 50 per cent. You can drive labor to the machine, you can lure the worker to the job, but you cannot make him produce according to your plans unless the surrounding conditions stimulate him to such production. Hence, the employment of five men where one German or American worker would do. Hence, the insufficiency of ten million industrial workers in a country which, with all its plants and projects, will stand no comparison with the industrial status of the State of Pennsylvania alone.

The machine will balk, but it cannot escape. Man will escape. Labor is after all an aggregation of human beings, and even a strong-arm dictatorship is not strong enough to cope successfully with the human urge to flee from the difficult present, to go in search for a better life elsewhere, to exchange the monotony of the conveyor for the familiar rhythm of the shovel and the axe, to strain against the yoke of statutes and commands, even if these be devised for the ultimate welfare of the victims themselves. Hence, the drastic measures promulgated by the Soviet Government for the stoppage of labor mobility, for the attachment of the worker to his

lathe. Hence, punitive measures on the one hand and attempts at generosity in distributing food rations, on the other. But labor, especially Russian labor, fresh from the fields, just come from the plow and the horse, continues to play havoc with charts, blueprints, manifestoes and schedules. It takes an accumulated tradition of generations to produce a modern industrial worker, one in whose veins courses the rhythm of the machine. The muscle of the Russian peasant is like that of a dray-horse led into racing grounds and made to run alongside the finest thoroughbreds of the turf. No statistician, no Marxist planner, can calculate the pace of raw muscle under strain, and no dictatorship can budget such a rate of production.

The industrial worker of the West is a meat-eating being. The Russian workers live on soggy bread and cucumbers. The human energy introduced into the modern machine is largely beef energy. It is inconceivable that a population that had for centuries absorbed vodka, thrived on buttermilk and cottage cheese, could have the stamina, the endurance, to build and develop an intensive industrial civilization. Of course, the Russian worker would gladly turn to the consumption of beef. But he gets less of it to-day than two decades ago. The calories consumed by the average Russian are sufficient for one who drives a horse and performs similar manual labor, always at a slow pace over an extended work-day punctuated by frequent periods of rest, but is altogether inadequate for the industrial tempo of Detroit. Hence, the "shortage" of labor in Russia to-day, an ominous shortage.

Capital is not a dogmatic norm of intrinsic value which can be controlled from beginning to end in any given place. It is wealth accruing from labor and savings. Capital is not static, but living; it is cumulative and constantly

changing in its value which is in proportion to its position, its marketability, and many factors that cannot be computed. A crop in the interior of China varies in its capital value from a crop in Nebraska. Capital is measured in relation to the demand for the goods which it can purchase. You may calculate the value of one hundred million bushels of grain on hand, and plan its exchange into industrial machinery. But you cannot calculate the price of grain far enough ahead.

The capital resources of Russia are largely the production of grain, oil, and timber. The yield of grain depends upon such uncontrollable factors as the weather. One serious drought in Russia would upset irreparably any Five-Year Plan. On the other hand, a fair harvest in Russia and a superlative harvest in the Argentine would have a similarly disastrous effect upon such a plan, for it would reduce the exportable capital to an unknown figure. The appearance of a series of gushers in Texas will cut the capital value of the Russian oil into half, even as the discovery of a large diamond field in South Africa recently, at a time when the financial depression engulfed the Western world, has rendered almost valueless the great Romanoff jewel collection in the Kremlin, a collection cherished as a treasure of emergency capital. The economic crisis in America, the collapse of world wheat prices, have gravely embarrassed the execution of the Five-Year Plan and drained the Soviet treasury, straining at the same time its credit abroad and home to a dangerous point, as evidenced by the depreciation of the Soviet currency.

The Stalin theory of building socialism in the country strikes a rock in this field alone. When the Amtorg, its leading commercial agency abroad, is forced to resort to short-term notes for amounts as low as \$250 in payments for goods

purchased, it is a telling commentary upon the capital resources of the Soviet Union to-day. Unless Moscow found itself in possession of gigantic supplies of stable and exchangeable money, its future is bound to remain uncertain. But the capital reserves of Russia are exhausted, its savings are non-existent, and its labor does not produce, but consumes, wealth.

Primitive is the conception of the Bolshevik dictatorship that technical knowledge can either be acquired under high pressure or purchased abroad and mustered into service by a strong political régime. It is true that kings and grand dukes have for thousands of years hired architects and engineers to build castles and palaces to carry out their whimsies. History has known of rulers who employed experts to build hanging gardens, canals, and even such civilizing projects as great irrigation works. The Stalin dictatorship, with a different objective in mind, approaches its great building programme with the same attitude toward knowledge.

"The Bolsheviks must master technic," declares Stalin. His cry is echoed by his Prime Minister, Molotov, in these words: "The slogan of the mastery of technic is the central slogan." Such was the battle cry in the spring of 1931. But how does the dictatorship proceed to master technic? Ivan the Terrible imported architects from Venice and erected the famous and bizarre Cathedral of St. Basil in the heart of Moscow. But did he master technic? Stalin has imported specialists from Detroit and has erected a number of industrial pyramids. That part of it is easy in the modern world. Cables and tempting offers will bring to Moscow the finest engineering minds in the world. There is a vast gulf between a building programme and a *production* programme. The world is dotted with non-producing monumental edi-

fices, from the Chinese Wall to the Maya temples.

In our industrial civilization the construction of an enterprise forms its most elementary part. If it is not to remain an isolated castle on a mountain top, if it is not to be doomed to eventual ruin, such an enterprise must be a living outgrowth of the fabulously rich life of our contemporary world; it must subsist on the hundreds of cultural, economic, and purely human elements that are woven into the pattern of the newest society; it must inevitably depend upon a fine communication system, upon a highly organized network of distribution, upon an almost infallible method of accounting, upon a stable currency, an ample supply of nourishment, a certain standard of education, a set rate of productivity, a well-developed system of relaxation and entertainment, a minimum of domestic comforts and conveniences, and, above all, upon free expression of that indefinable something which makes human individuality—regardless of the fact whether the task in which one is engaged is dedicated to the welfare of all rather than to the welfare of a single person.

Technic is not a static commodity. It is a nerve of the human brain, it is a form of human intellect. Technic cannot be pumped into a machine by political device. The peasant who knows how to operate a windmill or how to set a fox-trap is not necessarily possessed of technical knowledge which makes him fit to operate a modern machine. Between the two stages lies an abyss of accumulated intellect, generations and generations of development. When the Stalin dictatorship fitfully attempts to harness technic in a peasant country, it attempts to snatch the lightning and convert its single flash into myriads of sealed bulbs. The dictatorship would harness the human mind, insofar as it is

represented by the engineering profession; it would limit it, confine it, prescribe its daily runs and make it . . . create! But not even a dictatorship can fetter, saddle and ride the human mind.

The problems of the Five-Year Plan, the problems of capital and of labor, of the machine and of technic, are only now beginning to emerge. They are the problems of production, and production is the acid and ultimate test of the Five-Year Plan. A dim realization of the import of these problems was conveyed by the spokesman of the Kremlin, Premier Molotov, in March, 1931, when he declared: "It has been shown that we are better able to build new great works than to organize their production afterward."

Yet the roots of the problems of the Five-Year Plan, of the colossal task of organizing production, lie beyond the range of reforms, of efficiency measures. They are inherent in a philosophy which is out-of-date, inherent in the difference between an antiquated social theory and a luxuriant civilization. The fungi of this civilization are now unquestioned. But its luxuriant development seems equally unquestioned, and dictates further study, open-minded analysis and revision of views. It is useless to judge the Five-Year Plan upon the basis of the reports of field workers; it has to be judged upon its own evidence, its deeper sources which tap the universal processes of the society that it is intended to affect profoundly. Yet its effect cannot be studied without inquiring into the nature of the social structure of to-day. How misleading the observations of eyewitnesses can be is revealed by the fact that the first definite loud word which the outside world public had from Russia as to the problems of the Five-Year Plan came in July when Stalin published his speech which virtually amounted to an announcement of

a "New Economic Plan." Dictators do not wake up in the morning with the bright idea of presenting their country and the world with a magnanimous manifesto. There were strong forces which dictated the Stalin move. Under a system where all vital information is centred in the hands of a small group such as Stalin's Political Bureau and is issued to the world in occasional fragments and only in accordance with the expediency of the moment, it is not surprising that for over two years the Five-Year Plan has been advertised as a challenge, a menace, a promise of a new social order, and has already been hailed both by its enemies and its champions as a success.

The problems of the Five-Year Plan, and all the succeeding Five-Year Plans for which it stands, the problems of building a planned and rational modern economic order in an inchoate and poor and primitive peasant land, arise out of the blind alley into which the dictatorship has led Russia. Just as the success of the Five-Year Plan would be a triumph for the idea of dictatorship, so its failure would be the exposure of its fallacy. That the dictatorship finds itself already in a blind alley, is evidenced by the frantic quest for easy remedies and solutions. Three months after Stalin's cry, "The Bolsheviks must themselves become specialists," he came out with a reversal of his policy, with concessions to the terrorized engineering class, with prizes to technicians under arrest! It is evidenced further by the fact that the equality in the labor wages has been abolished, that the piece system has been introduced, that a number of disciplinary measures have been adopted to stop

the migration of labor and to increase efficiency.

That dictatorship is seeking a way out—that is the meaning of the new Stalin course. It is resorting to palliatives for its radical problems. It is vainly striving to find simple cures for the revolt of the American machine on the Volga. Boldly it manipulates its meager credit resources, and playing its political trump cards now in New York, now in Paris, now in Berlin and now in London, it strives to secure sorely needed funds, not to carry forward the Five-Year Plan, but to meet the bills for the equipment already purchased abroad.

But the dictatorship cannot locate the real and fundamental cause of its troubles, its zigzags, its futile assaults now upon one front, now upon another, because that cause is the dictatorship itself, because all the problems of the industrialization of Russia, because all the aspects of the true progress of Russia, are hopelessly entangled in the noose of the dictatorship. Because only by cutting the Gordian knot of dictatorial political power could a possible solution be indicated. But no dictatorship has ever surrendered its power voluntarily. And the Stalin dictatorship shows no signs of becoming an exception. It will find plenty of scapegoats yet, it will stage many manœuvres, retreats and advances, it will blame the world bourgeoisie, the backwardness of the Western proletariat, the delay in the coming of world revolution, and all the other now familiar enemies, for its own failures, but it will not abdicate except under pressure of a Titanic force cradled by its own blind policies in the depths of Russia.

This is one of a group of articles on Russia to which already have contributed W. J. Austin, W. A. RuKeyser, William C. White, John Carter.



Home

By EVELYN SCOTT

*A new story by the author of "The Wave"
and "A Calendar of Sin"*

THE REVEREND GEORGE ARTHBUTT closed behind him, shakily, the familiar front door of the mission house; and the icy key, as he slipped it into the broadcloth pocket of his Sunday trousers, seemed to him an important thing, so much his own that it was almost wrong to yield it, as he soon must, to another. Agnes was to meet him at the railway-station down below at Santa Luiza. He realized, with embarrassment, that there had been no need for haste when he had sent her on ahead. Somehow, he had longed to have these fleeting moments private, had longed to consecrate them with a last prayer. Also, he admitted, he had wished very much for a final look around the place, as it was probable that he would never again see it. He was certainly grateful that the influence of friends was recalling him and his family to the United States. This would allow proper opportunities for the education of the children. It would give devoted Agnes time for a long-needed rest. But it was not vanity, surely, to recognize all the signs about, which would show others that the fifteen years spent here in Brazil had not been wasted. He had done God's work, and with a will. And Agnes, though a woman, had done nearly as much.

Staring over the hedge of hibiscus that

set off the inner plot around the large, whitewashed plaster house, he looked up regretfully into the great gloom of the mango grove beyond, and saw the glowing fruit, in the dark, thin bunches of the leaves, as the more tempting because it was ripening for another. Nothing like the cool, turpentine pungency of mangoes on a hot day! This glance brought him to a musing wonder, as he recalled the astonishing fact that, during the first period of his residence here, he had disliked that taste, had been revolted by that fibrous pulp. Well, habit sometimes meant appreciation. You get used to anything. Fine, juicy winesaps, now—you couldn't grow a winesap in this climate. And he supposed that—when those flavors of his boyhood were revived (peaches, now—no decent peaches north of Rio) the mamãos he had set out, and had thought so luscious, the jacas that were as big as watermelons—they would seem nothing at all. And the wild imbú from which his wife made jelly would be rated low indeed by the people back home who grew damson plums. It *was* a pity about the banana plants—six hundred. He had supervised all the work himself when João Ferreira had brought in the slips. As for the coffee—in a year or two the fazenda of the mission would be self-supporting. That was really something he could tell the