

LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 1236
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

Peasant Life in Soviet Russia

Anna Louise Strong



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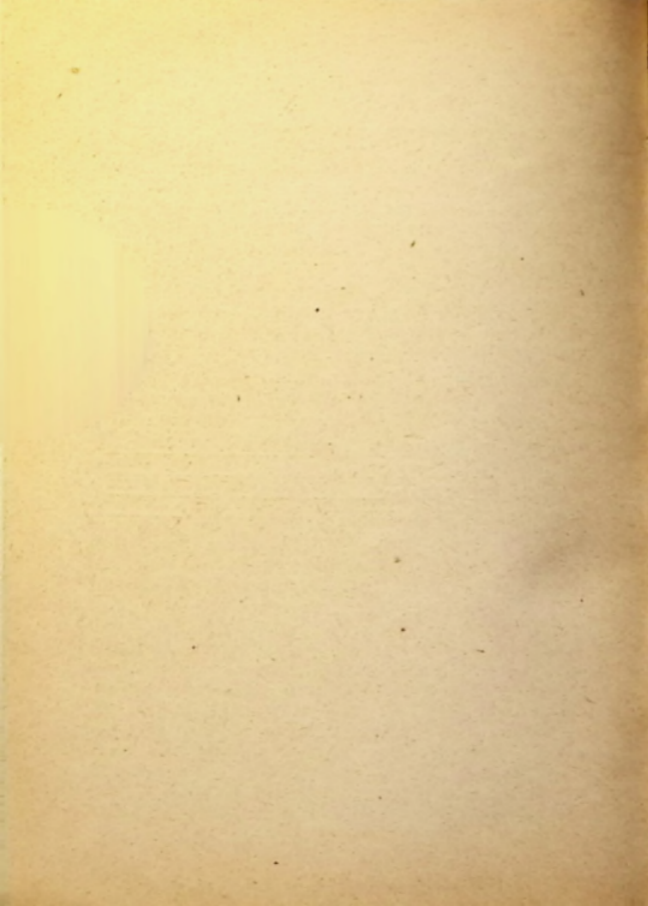
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PEASANT LIFE IN SOVIET RUSSIA

THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

In speaking of the Soviet Union one turns naturally to superlatives. The largest Republic in the world; the largest stretch of territory under one flag in the world; the largest sown area; the largest forests; the largest iron deposits. We are dealing with a country which has in its size the power to make world history—if mere size counts.

In the past, however, its mere size has not counted; the stream of world progress has gone on outside its boundaries, and its contributions have been negligible. Across its mighty plains have indeed swept the forces which created Greece and Rome and overthrew them, and built again on their ruins modern Europe—race after race from the heart of Asia or the north of China driving along that easy highway to fertilize and be absorbed in the culture of Europe. But Russia herself played in this the part merely of highway, a negative, not a positive, contribution to modern civilization. It was the tribes who left her and swept beyond that made history, not the remnants of all the tribes of Asia that remained behind. These remnants stagnated, settling in straggling villages across the rich black earth of her plains or along the easy waterways of her forests, becoming slavish and helpless under the bondage of landlords, preserving in their dark, untaught lives all that

was backward and ignorant, all that Europe outgrew with the ages. So in the end mankind forgot to count on the chance that anything great or new could arise out of the vast plains of the Slavic peoples. Then came the Russian Revolution, and from it a new peasant emerged, proving to the world that no inherent defects, but long economic slavery, had kept him in darkness.

What the newly awakened peasant, in his great numbers, with the vast collective undeveloped wealth at his disposal, may mean in future world history is something to stimulate the imagination. Certainly he will not play the passive part that has been his in the past. Already the Russian Revolution is the major fact in the history of our generation in its direct effect on all the backward peoples of Asia and its indirect reverberations throughout the world. And yet this great peasant mass has only begun to awake and stretch its limbs, and make up its mind about its future.

The background of peasant Russia, now breaking up, preserves still the effect of its past. There was no Reformation; the ancient church kept to modern days the confused superstitions of the Middle Ages. There was no land reform; the feudal era with serfdom survived until sixty years ago. Modern factories came only with the past generation, and imposed largely by foreign or absentee capital upon a still patriarchal population, created the barracks system of industrial existence. In the villages families remained subject to the

Old Man, and under his direction kept up the three-field system of agriculture, discarded by Europe a century ago—one field for winter sowing, one for spring planting, and one to lie fallow and rest. The division of land, the tools for its use, remained unbelievably primitive. Throughout the central part of Russia in the days just before the war, there were still three home-made wooden plows to every metal plow. This was in the more advanced parts of the land.

On the more backward fringes, the northern tundras and the central Asian plains, life was still more primitive. I have traveled for three days by rail across a continuous stretch of northern country where, before the revolution, of two hundred thousand farming families only one in seven used a metal-tipped plow. The government factory, opened four years ago to make farm implements, did not make plows; it contented itself with making the metal blade of the plow in large quantities, since this was all the local peasants could afford to buy, and was in itself a great step forward. The women throughout this district (Karelia, running a thousand miles northeast of Leningrad) were farther back than the days of the spinning-wheel and tread-loom. They spun with a distaff in a single hand; they wove with a small hand-loom, pulling the levers down with one hand and thrusting through with the other. A traveler of my acquaintance found in one of their villages an ancient saw, which they had received as a present and which had gone dull to the sorrow of the entire village, which knew

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nothing of sharpening it. In the southern half of the same district the ancient monastery of Solovietz acted as an industrial school and taught the peasants simple handicrafts, such as weaving and tool-repairing—artisan work only, as advanced as Europe was two centuries ago.

At the other extreme of the Soviet Union, on the burning plains and deserts of Asia, live nomad races that have never yet settled down to agriculture, whose source of life is found in the cattle with which they rove northward and southward in search of grass. In the far north and east of Siberia, a journey of months by sleigh from the railroads, live still other races not unlike our Alaskan Indians, subsisting on herds of reindeer and the hunting of furs. All of these peoples—over half a hundred races, languages and nations—are now equal citizens of the Soviet Republic. Unlike our treatment of the earlier Indians, they are taken into partnership; they have the Soviet Power in their own villages; their representatives sit in the Central Congress in Moscow, sometimes not even speaking Russian—broad-cheeked Yakutsk and Mongol types from the northeast; white-bearded, turbaned sages from Central Asia; dashing Georgian mountaineers from the Caucasus. All of these are equal citizens in the Soviet Republic, which has accepted the responsibility of creating for all an equal education, equal chances in government, industry, cultural development.

The great inequality of their present develop-

ment presents the first problem. In the use of land alone there are all stages side by side, from the nomad or hunting folks to the tractor. First stage above the peoples living on pasture lands come the villages throughout much of Siberia, where land is so plentiful that a method has developed of planting a single crop on it to exhaustion and then moving on to newer land. Next after this comes the three-field system of the greater part of Russia; and, last of all, in a few but increasing number of places, modern agriculture on large scale, with machinery and scientific knowledge.

It is often thought that the old estates of the nobility had at least the advantage of large scale modern farming and that the revolution, by destroying them, seriously injured the future of farming in Russia. But of the hundred million acres owned directly by landlords before the revolution, only one-fifth was worked by them or their overseers as large scale farms. The rest was rented in small pieces to the peasants, who reproduced on it their own primitive methods, the landlord exploiting merely his bare ownership of land and the cheapness of peasant labor. Even in those days of great estates, when 35 percent of the land belonged to the peasants, 26 percent to the landlords and 39 percent to the crown, the actual land cultivation was done in small peasant manner.

The rural landscape of the Soviet Union is of a simple pattern. To the north the great belt of tundras fringing the Arctic, with their

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populations of hunters and fishers; then the great belt of forests, comprising one-third of all earth's forests, two billion acres of primitive woods. This merges slowly and with much mixed country into the treeless plains and deserts of the south, lands rich and fertile when water falls, but subject to drought. The peasant huts of the far north are of logs built in two stories, that the cattle may stay downstairs and the people upstairs during the frozen winters; the huts of the south are of mud and straw, sometimes whitewashed or painted bright colors. But save for difference of wood supply, the pattern of the Russian village is the same.

The peasant lives not on isolated farms, but in villages—huts huddled together without sanitation or order, along wide chaotic roads which in spring and autumn are chiefly seas of mud. At such times life and movement ceases between villages, for the primitive wooden bridges rot or are borne away by spring floods, and the roads themselves are full of holes in which horses may become permanently mired. In the summer the unimproved dirt road, made by the passing of carts; in the winter the snow road, made by passing of sleighs, constitute almost the sole communication except for the rivers. Russia has only half a kilometer of surfaced road and one kilometer of railroad to every hundred square kilometers of her vast land.

. The village houses themselves turn their backs to the road, facing a courtyard sur-

rounded by stables and barns. The whole village presents a disordered mingling of much wood, straw and hay stacks, thatched roofs, ready to burn down with facility. Above the huddled huts rises but one great structure, the lofty domed church, visible for miles, symbol once of the equally distant God and czar, before whom the peasants were as grass.

Out from this village the peasants go to their land, lying in strips of various sizes in many places. Sixty years ago, when serfdom was ended by the sale of land to the peasants on 55 year payments, the landlords kept the best and central pieces, and the peasants received ragged odd lots in all directions. These were still further divided in order that each family might have its just share of good and bad lands alike. In the northwest, one-fifth of all families have as many as 60 separate pieces of land, though their total possession is well under twenty acres. Some of the pieces are five or ten miles away and the harvest on them does not repay the labor of securing it. This mixing of lands occurs not only within villages, but even between villages and townships, where boundaries are largely unsurveyed, uncertain and contested. A single island in the north, of 10,000 acres and 30 villages, is divided into 700 different pieces, an average of 23 pieces to each village; some of these are twenty miles from the village owning them, separated from it by possessions of various other villages. Not only is such land hard to reach, but the infinite subdivision into tiny strips often makes it difficult for a man to

use a harrow on his strip without infringing upon his neighbor; while the boundary ridges waste a fair proportion of the soil and are continuous sources of peats and weeds.

These impossible conditions of land distribution would of themselves have been enough to keep the Russian peasant in poverty, wasting long days in trudging back and forth between his many tiny pieces of earth, which could never be properly guarded, fertilized or cultivated because of their distance. But in addition to lack of land and bad distribution of land, there was incredible poverty of equipment and livestock. Plows were largely home-made, requiring much horsepower to drag them through the heavy soil; threshing was often done by trampling the grain on the earth. I have myself seen a large circle of trampled grain in the center of a village street with a small boy sleeping on it through the night to guard against possible thieves. In the morning the slow, wearisome method of beating the kernels from the stocks began again. While these primitive methods required more horsepower than more advanced lands, the actual number of horses was far below the European standard. France and England had three times as many horses per hundred acres of cultivated land as had pre-war Russia.

Another serious hindrance to efficient farming was the patriarchal family. Not only was the peasant illiterate, and hence removed from the chance of easily absorbing new ideas, but even if a new idea by chance penetrated the

village it made no headway against the will of the Old Ones who ruled life and custom. The Russian Revolution has indeed, as often charged, destroyed the "family," and this is one of its greatest contributions to progress. For the family it destroyed was not the Anglo-Saxon family of man, wife and minor children, but the patriarchal family of several grown sons, married and with children, yet all living together under the common rule of the grandparents.

I have told in another booklet, *Changed Lives in the Soviet Union*, the story of a typical peasant, Ivan, as he himself related it to me. He was born in a one-roomed cottage in which lived sixteen people—all members of one "family." There was Grandpa and Grandma, Uncle and Aunt, Father and Mother, the six children of Uncle and the four children of Father. It was Grandpa, the Old One, who was boss in that home. He hired out Father to work as coachman for the lord, and sent Uncle to a distant factory in the winter, receiving all their wages to spend for the common household. Under his orders the two grown women worked in the fields, while Grandma looked after the children at home.

Such was the typical organization of the peasant family. Under it the standards of Grandpa ruled in agriculture, and the standards of Grandma in family life. It was a system devised to perpetuate old traditions and prevent the emergence of new ideas. Furthermore, Grandpa himself could not change the distribu-

tion of his land, or the rotation of crops upon it; this could only be done by common voice of the village, since each man's strips were part of the communal village fields. The village "mir," or council, which made such decisions has been thought by many writers to be the origin of the present Soviet system of government. But the old mir was never a mass meeting of all village citizens, as the custom is today in deciding village matters. It was an assembly of the heads of households—the council of the Old Ones, perpetuating old traditions.

Under such control, there came little variety into the farm methods or products of Russia. Grain was the chief product, almost the only one; primarily rye and wheat, following each other continuously until the land was exhausted. Conditions of weather which injured these basic crops left the peasant starving, with no subsidiary crops to turn to for help. In the entire area of Russia were only a million acres of vegetable gardens, some 250 square yards per peasant family, which could easily have consumed for its own needs the vegetables from three times as great an area. Fruit also was so little raised that Russia imported yearly tens of millions of rubles' worth of fruit from abroad, although there is no land better suited than that of large parts of Russia for this valuable product.

The average peasant holding, even of such badly distributed and badly worked land, was less than twenty acres. When to this is added

the conditions of land distribution, the lack of livestock and implements, the prevailing ignorance, it is not surprising that the Russian peasant produced less per acre than any peasant of Europe. His production of wheat per acre was half that of France, one-third that of England and Belgium, one-fourth that of Holland.

Yet, because of the great size of the land, the Russian peasant was collectively the richest in the world, while individually one of the poorest. His sown area, 240 million acres, was the largest in the world, the United States of America coming second. He was the greatest wheat, rye and barley producer in the world. In number of cattle he was second only to the United States. In sugar beets, flax, hemp and many other cultures he ranked among the first in production, but among the last in productivity per acre. The labor of twenty million peasant families in these intolerably broken fields, carting produce over scores of miles of dirt roads, supported a whole hierarchy of nobles and the most gorgeous court of Europe, too luxuriously inefficient even to organize these peasant beasts of burden into efficient production. Russian grain went out to feed the industrial regions of Europe, buying in return for privileged upper groups all the luxury that pre-war Europe could produce. But the peasant producers remained illiterate, superstitious, dark.

THE COMING OF THE REVOLUTION

The rapid growth of Russian peasant fami-

lies, pushing against the barriers of the land system, produced more than one revolt before the final revolution. In 1905 were upheavals in many parts of the land, all following a common instinctive pattern—a seizing of lands and cattle from landlords and its division among the landless by locally elected land committees. These uprisings were suppressed in blood; they occurred similarly after the fall of the czar and the various provisional governments tried to suppress them, creating only disorder. It remained for the Bolsheviks to give legal form to the demands and acts of the peasants, thus satisfying the rural masses and creating their own basis of power.

The first Land Decree of the Bolsheviks, passed on the second day of the Revolution, was by no means their own idea; they did not even approve of it. It was the expression of the will of the peasants; the landlord's land, livestock, implements went over without pay to the peasants, under control of local land committees. The Bolsheviks were aware that the immediate effect of this was to divide the land into still more pieces, increasing the un-economic system of farming. Their own preference was for large scale farming, under state or co-operative management—a "grain factory," they called it. But, said Lenin: "The law is not ours; we do not agree with its formula; but we pass it, because it is the demand of the mass of the peasants, and the demands of the mass of any working population can only be outlived by themselves."

From the beginning, however, through "in-

structions" and "advice" to local land committees, the Bolsheviks tried to secure the maintenance of a certain number of well furnished farms as state possessions, gathering on them the best of the cattle for breeding purposes, aiming to establish eventually demonstration farms. In February, 1919, they passed their second Land Law, the law of "nationalization," whereby ultimate title to all land was vested in the "government of the toilers," with its use given out to individual peasant households through local land committees. At the same time, to prevent the growth of rich peasantry who might ultimately become themselves landlords, the land committees were instructed not only to seize the landlord's land, but to equalize land distribution within the village. Organized efforts were made to establish throughout the land "Committees of Poverty," consisting of the poorer and landless peasants, and these received much political weight in preventing the land from being grabbed by some locally influential well-to-do peasant. Frequently the landlord's estate, instead of being divided entirely into small pieces, was taken over by a collective of the landless ones, who farmed it in common. Today 4 percent of the sown area of Russia is farmed by collectives or government farms; the rest is still in the hands of small scale peasantry.

Across the lands of the peasant, civil war raged for more than three years. His cattle, already reduced by the exactions of the World War, were further reduced by the demands of contending armies. His implements could not

be replenished, for Russian factories were making only munitions and foreign factories were behind a blockade. The new Soviet Government, fighting for existence, found only one source of income—the peasant's grain. This it took, all of it, sometimes leaving enough for the peasant's own food and seed, but frequently, through over-zealous local officials, not even leaving that. Theoretically, the government expected to give the peasant implements and manufactured articles in return for his grain; but practically there were none to give. The workers starved, the peasants went without tools, clothing, seed; the war devoured all.

For three years this continued, growing steadily worse. The peasant began to cease plowing, partly from want of plows and horses and partly because he got no good of his grain. Local uprisings grew frequent; a common method was to kill the grain collectors and stuff their disemboweled bodies with the grain they came for. Such was the grim background of life and struggle against which the Soviet power still managed to survive, to beat back its foreign foes, and to turn at last to a consideration of the internal peasant situation. The New Economic Policy, passed in the spring of 1921, was in essence the guarantee to the peasant of the right to keep his grain and sell it in a free market. From this right to a free grain market spring all the other features of the present form of state controlled capitalism in Russia.

Just as the peasant at last was free to sow his fields for his own use, the drought of 1920

followed by the greatest recorded drought of history in 1921, brought on the famine, reducing rural Russia to its lowest ebb. Millions died of starvation, other millions roamed the land in search of grass and leaves for food. The planted acreage sank from 235 million acres in 1916 to 150 million acres in 1921; from this point it has since climbed steadily to reach in 1925 220 million acres. That it has not already surpassed pre-war records is due not to the will of the peasant, but to his poverty in equipment and animals. Not so quickly can a land recover the ravages of eight years of war. Germany and France, also, which suffered half as long a war as Russia, lost during those years 40 percent of their productivity.

THE SOVIET VILLAGE

The cost of war and revolution was heavy, but its gains are proportionately great. The future of the Russian peasant lies now in his own hands. More than any farmer on earth, he has perpetual right of access to land, which he cannot lose even by bad crops or on mortgage. He manages his local government directly, and sends peasants like himself to sit in the Central Congress of Soviets. His taxes grow steadily less; they are now one-fourth those of czarism, and he knows that the government hopes eventually to abolish them altogether, living on its income from railroads and industries and other government properties.

Yet the standard of living of the Russian peasant is still at a low point which could

hardly be imagined in America except by some of the poorest tenant farmers of the south. Ninety percent of peasant families have still less than twenty acres. The tax board of the Soviet Government estimates the net income from farm land as \$7 an acre, and from a horse as \$10 a year. On this basis, the peasant's income is less than \$150 a year in products. His tax, averaging \$1.50 per head of the rural population, or \$7.50 for an average peasant household, is admittedly "one of his notable and serious expenditures." After the famine it was estimated that 37 percent of all peasant families had no horse at all, and 45 percent had only one horse, leaving only 18 percent with two horses or over.

Yet the road to plenty and power and a rich, full life, while long, lies straight ahead, and the tools are in his own hands. There are no landlords to hamper him; the banks are organized not to exploit him, but through his own co-operatives; his marketing facilities are publicly owned and managed, and if he does not like, as to some extent he doesn't, the way they are managed, he is urged and encouraged to expand his own co-operatives for marketing his goods. Education and co-operation are all that he needs—and time, for there are many fundamental changes he must make, requiring time and steady growth. In all of these, he has the government to help him.

His first need is a redistribution of land to eliminate the great distances and scattered strips. This is now proceeding with increasing rapidity, the cost of ten to thirty cents per

acre being assessed on the land-users benefited, with special government grants to district the lands of the poorest. Thirty-five million acres were districted in 1925-26. Yet so slow is this process that twenty-seven million of these acres were only districted to the extent of establishing fixed and convenient boundaries between villages; only eight million reached the stage of convenient land distribution within the village group itself.

In many districts there is not land enough for the needs of the population. Migrations to new lands are in these cases assisted by the government which has already set aside for distribution some forty million acres in easily accessible districts to be given out during the coming year, and holds as reserve for the year following another sixty-five million acres in more distant parts of Siberia and twenty-five million in the Caucasus. The migrations are taking place faster than the government can handle them; five million souls are on the move towards these new lands, and only one-fifth of these are properly planned and organized. The rest are volunteer squatters, taking advantage of the law which allows them to settle anywhere in the free land districts, and claim title after five years work. Migrating groups properly organized under government direction are given many special privileges—exemption for three years from taxes and military service, nominal rates on the railroads to their new home, the right to retain their former land for three years and to receive rent for it.

Many organizations, voluntary and governmental, enter and influence the peasant's life in the village. Most of these are entirely new since the revolution, others are old forms into which new content has been poured. The peasant's chief contact with government is through his village Soviet, the land laws, the taxes, the state insurance, the schools, the reading huts, the system of farm credits. The chief voluntary organizations are the Peasant Mutual Help Societies, the Co-operatives, the Young People's Communist League, which is especially active in forming dramatic clubs, organizing lectures and holiday demonstrations, initiating movements for day nurseries, exhibitions and other cultural activities. The Communist Party itself is extremely small in rural districts, many villages having not a single adult communist, but in practically all, the communist organization of youth is influential in the life and ideals of the young people.

The voluntary and government bodies overlap and work together, since central government banks act through local co-operatives in granting credits, and the various voluntary organizations agitate and assist in the establishment of schools and nurseries. A rapid survey of all these forces will indicate what elements the peasant has to work with in building his new future.

Land Laws. Under the czar 35 percent of the land of European Russia belonged to the peasants, 26 percent to the landlord, and 39 percent to the crown or church. Today all

land is in perpetuity the property of the "toilers' government," but "every citizen, without regard to sex, creed or race, has the right to demand land suitable for farming from the government, and may secure it up to a certain norm without any purchase or rent price." He may secure it (1) through his village as member of a land community, (2) from the land departments of the government, (3) by squatter's rights, going to empty free land in certain districts and working it for a period of five years.

The land thus obtained belongs to him by right of use and is lost if he ceases to work it. He can neither mortgage nor sell it, but under conditions of poverty and lack of equipment he can rent it for a limited period of time. The land rightly belongs not to the individual peasant, but to all members of his household jointly; if he divorces his wife, she takes her share of land with her; if he dies, the land is not "inherited," since it already belongs, without formal inheritance, to his entire remaining family. If the family is blotted out by death, the land reverts to the village.

A striking provision of the law declares that all the implements and livestock used for working the land are similarly common household property, and cannot be mortgaged for the debts of any individual. Thus the father of the family no longer has the right to squander the family property for drink or personal pleasures; it may only be mortgaged for purchases of joint need and benefit.

The Forest Laws again remind the peasant that the land is only conditionally his. Two billion acres of forest land cover 40 percent of the entire surface of the Soviet Union and form one-third of the world's forests. Before the revolution the peasant had 36 million acres of forest land at his disposal; now he has been granted the use of 62 million acres, more than the total forest area of Germany. But these woods are his only under the forest laws of the land which have three aims: (1) continuous permanent use of forests; (2) supplying the working population with sufficient wood free or at low cost; (3) getting the largest possible government income.

Forests are divided into two groups—those of local significance and those of national significance. These last—the greater forests, are worked for profit by great government timber companies, selling timber for building purposes and exporting it abroad. The local forests are given to the peasants, but their use must conform to regulations laid down by the local forester for preserving the woods permanently. Woods may be cleared for farms on permit from the land departments but if they form wind-breaks or water-retainers of common benefit this permission is not given. The devastation of the forests which has followed their private exploitations in China and America is something the Soviet Union intends to avoid.

Taxes. In the early days of revolution and civil war, the Soviet Government took in place of taxes, levies of the entire production of

grain. This policy was the result of war emergency and led to peasant discontents expressing themselves in actual uprising, and in the still more serious falling off in the planting of grain. In 1921 the grain levies ceased, and their place was taken by the grain tax, based on the amount of land owned by the peasant and the general harvest situation of the region. "This tax also has never been considered by the Soviet Government as a desirable method of raising state funds, but as an emergency for the period of reconstruction after the war. It is the avowed intention of the government to lessen all taxes with the ultimate aim of abolishing them altogether, securing the state revenue from the income of profitable state properties—mills, factories, forests, mines.

"As fast as government income rises, it will be possible to lower the tax on the peasants"—this is the first principle adopted by resolution of the communist party. In the years since the New Economic Policy was adopted the peasant taxes have been steadily lowered, until they amounted in 1925-26 to \$120,000,000, an average of \$1.20 per head of rural population. This sum included local as well as central government taxes, but did not include the sums for compulsory state insurance against fire and loss of cattle. For 1926-27 the taxes have again been raised to \$150,000,000, or \$1.50 per person; but 60 percent of these are to be spent on local needs, roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, so that the amount received by the central government has actually fallen again. This is in line with the second principle adopted by the communist

party regarding peasant taxes, "to spend the taxes in such a way that the peasant will grow richer from them and not poorer." The need of passable roads and bridges and agricultural instruction is sufficient to justify much higher taxes, as soon as agriculture can bear them; for only through these facilities can peasant wealth increase.

The form of the tax has changed slightly from year to year. Its present form (1926-27) resembles that of the graduated income tax, in that the poorer peasants are exempt, while the well-to-do pay amounts as their income increases. While the tax itself seems exceedingly small, yet the standard of Russian peasant living is still so low that the maximum income, beyond which a peasant is considered extremely well-to-do and subject to the highest taxation, is only \$50 per year per member of his family. All amounts above this sum are taxed 25 percent. In estimating income, land is estimated to yield about \$7 per acre, and horses and cows some \$10 to \$12 per year—a modest enough estimate. Taxes under the czar were, together with land rents, \$6.25 per person. At present the peasant pays no land rent other than his tax for his average "norm" of land, though he may rent additional land if any is available, either from the government, or from other peasants unable to work their land.

Local Government. The village "Soviet," or council, is the local governing body in the village. If you enter a Russian village and ask a small boy a question of importance, he will

direct you at once to the "soviet house" as the center of all information and authority. The Soviet is elected at open village mass meeting in the proportion of one to every hundred inhabitants. Immediately after the village elections, the township "Congress of Soviets" elects a township Executive Committee, which has power to pass local ordinances involving penalties up to \$1.50 fine or 5 days' hard labor. From these local governing bodies elections take place in an ascending scale up to the All Union Congress of Soviets, the supreme authority of the land, to which large numbers of peasants are sent as delegates directly from their farms.

Two new features of the soviet organization in the village indicate a remarkable attempt to bring government close to the masses. Various important laws proposed by the Central Government are from time to time sent out "to the country" for discussion. The recently proposed "Marriage Code" for instance, met with opposition in the Central Congress. It could easily have been passed by a substantial majority, but that is not the way they do things in the Soviet Union, where laws are expected to be discussed until they pass with practically unanimous agreement. Finding a strong minority opposition, the framers of the bill withdrew it and sent it for discussion "to the country" in factory and village meetings. This discussion will pass no majority votes and call no rolls; it will merely keep on discussing until the matter becomes so clear that a new bill can be drawn which will meet with practically

no opposition. This form of law-making is something new in the history of governments, and illustrates the soviet theory of its own government, as not a "parliament" or debating organization, but an "executive committee" carrying out the joint and common will of the toiling masses, which is assumed to be, after education and discussion, reasonably unanimous.

The other remarkable feature of village politics is the attempt to "draw into soviet work" as large a part of the population as is willing to serve. Anyone willing to work in the local government is urged and encouraged to do so; to go on tax commissions, commissions on finance, on co-operation and trade, on education, on local improvements. Many local jealousies prevent the full functioning of this ideal, but villages are encouraged to brag about the number of citizens they have "drawn into soviet work." Beyond this, say the remarkable instructions sent out by the central government, "the work of the village soviet must not limit itself to its own labors and that of its commissions, or it will not be fulfilling the ideal of the soviet power to draw *all* the population into the deciding of questions. Peasant meetings must be held; projected laws, both central and local, should be discussed not only in soviet sessions but in widest meetings." . . . It is, of course, the ultimate soviet ideal, that these various governmental forms shall become so spontaneously a part of the entire population that the State, in the sense of compulsion im-

posed by one group upon another (even by a majority upon a minority) shall disappear.

Mutual Help Committees. Closely in line with this purpose of voluntary communal activity in place of government, are the Mutual Help Committees and the Co-operatives. The Peasant Mutual Help Committees, though entirely voluntary, comprise now 90 percent of the rural population, organized in 57,802 societies. They assume powers of self-taxation which are almost governmental; some basing their collections on land, some on livestock, some on taxable property, but all taxing their members in proportion to some of their possessions, and using the funds chiefly for those in need or suffering special misfortune, death, fire or loss of animals. They have a wide range of activities; they cultivate land for widows and families without horses; during the famines they organized the feeding kitchens; sometimes they initiate Reading Huts, or run "Red Tea-Houses," as a fight against the saloon! They run mills and creameries, differing from the co-operatives which also run mills and creameries, and threshers and tractors, in that they are entirely non-commercial, and their aid is given, not equally to all members, but especially to the unfortunate. They will buy threshers and charge a fair rate for the service to all ordinary peasants, giving service free to the poorest. They aim, however, to avoid the stigma of being a "philanthropic" organization, regarding themselves as a mutual help organization with a communist spirit, to which each contributes according to his means and from

which each draws according to his needs. Half a million families each year get either financial or labor help from them—that is, one peasant family in forty.

State Insurance. In connection with help in misfortune must be mentioned the system of state insurance, which for five years has been compulsory, and which now insures (October, 1926) 19,378,000 peasant cottages against fire, 170 million acres against hail, 25,171,000 cattle and 8,864,000 horses against death. Insuring on such an enormous scale, without need to accumulate reserves or pay dividends, the government has been able to reduce payments to the absurd amount of 40 cents a year for a house, while in case of fire the damages paid amount to \$100. Horses are insured for \$1.50 a year and cows for 40 cents, the payments in case of death being \$25 and \$15 respectively. Insurance for higher amounts is voluntary and is being increasingly used by the peasants to protect themselves completely against loss. The State Insurance also carries on constructive propaganda for fire prevention, and disease prevention among animals.

Co-operatives. As commercial and producing organizations the co-operatives are more fully discussed in the booklet "How Soviet Russia Does Business." There are several kinds of them; pure consumers' co-operatives conducting retail trade in the villages; agricultural co-operatives buying tractors or machinery jointly, or arranging jointly for the sale or further manufacture of their produce; credit co-operatives, handling loans to peasants.

Five million peasant families belong to these co-operatives, one-fourth of the entire population. This is, however, only half the number that belonged to co-operatives before the war. A glimpse into their manifold activities shows that they employ 1,500 agricultural experts, manage 4,000 seed-sorting points, 2,500 service points for breeding, run 7,000 local creameries, 500 flour mills, 200 vegetable oil factories. The credit societies average one to a township, with funds for local loans of about \$20,000, some of it from local depositors, but more of it from the large sums set aside by the government for peasant credits.

The present system of peasant credits was opened by the Soviet Government in 1924 by the founding of the Central Agricultural Bank with a capital of \$23,000,000 which was tripled the following year and is still increasing. In their official announcement of policy, they stated that the chief economic needs of the rural population are: (1) proper distribution of land; (2) sufficient seeds, implements, livestock; (3) the best agricultural knowledge.

The system of peasant credits is designed to furnish the second of these needs, and to a certain extent to help even in encouraging proper methods. There are now 52 provincial branches of the Agricultural Bank. The actual local granting of credits, however, is carried on through 8,000 co-operative credit societies, which secure funds from the Agricultural Bank and loan them again to their members.

In the giving of loans, efforts are made to

encourage and develop the more profitable forms of agriculture. The instructions issued by the central government to credit co-operatives state that each local society must make a careful study of the farming peculiarities of its district, and use the power of credit to encourage development in the most profitable direction. Thus in a northern province, where conditions are excellent for dairying, and flax, but poor for wheat and rye, no loans will be made for seed to plant rye or wheat, but loans will be made to bring improved flax seed into the district or to buy a pure bred bull for the service of the community. In this way the power of credit as well as that of education, is used to direct peasant husbandry in improved channels.

Cultural Life. The new forms of cultural life coming into the rural districts of the Soviet Union are discussed more at length in "Education in the Soviet Union." Most striking is the rapid expansion of "Reading Huts" and "Liquidation Points" for the liquidation of illiteracy. Village schools also are steadily increasing but slowly as yet, for schools are expensive and the country is still poor. The significant feature about the present schools is not their number, which is still quite inadequate, but their new courses of study dealing with farming and actual village life, and later relating the child through actual excursions, with the life of the city. They train him to be a conscious citizen as the old schools never did. Furthermore, an intelligent peasant boy or girl, showing aptitude for some branch of

study, has now the chance to go further to technical schools and universities on a scanty government stipend. This is a chance he never had before and the energizing effect of the young people of the rural districts is very great.

While schools expand slowly but steadily, various less expensive cultural activities depending more on zeal than money grow rapidly. Within the past few years have been organized 5,000 township libraries, serving 30,000 "Reading Huts" and "Reading Corners." "Lik-Points" for the liquidation of illiteracy are within the reach of practically every adult willing to take the trouble to learn. Newspapers are read aloud by zealous "young communists" to those who cannot read. Day nurseries to the number of thousands are carried on in summer when the women work in the fields, and modern ideas of sanitation and child care make their way thus into the village. A tremendous movement of amateur dramatics, unprecedented in the history of any nation, has swept the village young people, until practically no village is complete without one or more dramatic societies. Radio also has arrived and the back country peasants hear concerts in Berlin and Moscow.

One of the really notable movements in the Soviet Republic today is the "Smichka," or "Get-Together" of city workers and rural peasants. Throughout Europe the aims of these groups of the population continually clash, leading to rival political parties representing

the two groups in frequent government conflicts. Constant efforts are made to prevent this in the Soviet Republic by every method which can encourage mutual understanding. In pursuance of this, every factory or group of city workers adopts some village or township, and becomes a "shel" or "big brother" to this rural district. The factory workers go down to the country on Sundays and holidays, often rebuild broken schools, equip peasant dramatic clubs, or send periodicals and books to the peasant Reading Hut. Occasionally they organize a "Day of the Red Peasant" in which propaganda on new methods of farming is the order of the day.

The newspaper is coming into the village at last. Relatively few villages as yet receive them regularly, for distances are great and transportation difficult. A postoffice near Leningrad is making a special experiment of opening 23 rural stations for the purpose of newspaper delivery within a day from the date of issue.

Besides the movement which comes from the city to the village, there are many movements starting among the peasants themselves. Independent peasant congresses to discuss better farming are organized by local soviets. In a typical district, 1500 peasants attended for four days congress; half of them were women.

The outer form of all this new culture is still poverty-stricken and crude. Dramatic clubs struggle to make scenery without materials;

the volumes in the "Reading Hut" are paper-covered and quickly torn. Growth in all directions is harsh and uneven; one village, with an energetic young chairman of its soviet makes progress, while its neighboring village remains strangled by graft and incompetence. Stark poverty in the sour northern lands chokes even the energetic and aspiring, while in the fertile regions progress comes more easily. In all the villages the economic basis must come first; the government rightly attaches first importance to the proper redistricting of land, then to the buying of machinery and selected seed through peasant credits, to education through agricultural experts and agricultural exhibitions which are now becoming a fact in thousands of villages.

Already the Russian peasant is showing that the darkness and ignorance of generations was no inherent lack in nature, but the result of the oppressions under which he labored. He is still far worse off materially than the peasant of England, France and Germany, or the farmer of America, worse off materially even than he was in the old days before long wars exhausted tools and cattle. But the lands and opportunities open to him are as great, perhaps greater than those open to any farming population in the world.

For more than a hundred years we Americans have glimpsed fortune and progress in terms of the great free lands of our West. Venturesome pioneers from worn out farms of older states sought there a homestead and independence; great capitalists sought there mil-

lion-acre timber holdings and railway empires. Aspiring progressives sought there the last chance of man to create in unspoiled land a society nearer his heart's desire, saying that here was the last free land, the last open opportunity to make a different world. . . . And now that our homesteads are taken, our lands possessed for good or ill by definite owners, and the final dream of man is not yet created, — behold, we find we have not used up the last free earth after all. On the other side of the world is a land yet greater, where a third of earth's forests are yet uncut, where many hundred million acres of open prairie have not felt the touch of the plow.

Russia, Siberia, the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, one-sixth of earth's surface still thinly populated. A mighty treasure house of coal and oil and iron still barely explored. In extent from north to south like the United States, Canada and Alaska taken together, and from east to west more than double our American distance. Here is a new chance for mankind to try again the experiment of fashioning a just and happy human society,—and a newly awakened people, fresh from the soil, bent on making that experiment succeed. Determined this time to keep the earth and its riches from private control, in the hands of all the people, under laws which will preserve its forests, safeguard its mineral wealth against waste, and give every child yet unborn common share in the common treasure. Here again is the hope and challenge of free land and new purpose,—the last, greatest West of the world!

THE PEASANTS THEMSELVES SPEAK OUT*

The collective voice of the peasant is by no means an easy thing to obtain. Scattered across the mighty stretch of the largest Republic on earth, with varying conditions of climate, soil, transport, market conditions and culture, the fruits of the Revolution have been by no means identical in all regions. There are sections of rich black soil where the overthrow of landlords has meant immediate enrichment; there are wooded sections of poor soil where development will be long and slow and where no landlord's earth enriched the peasants. There are sections in Siberia where land was always plentiful and sections in White Russia where no Revolution can make it adequate for population. Added to all these varieties of economic background, there is a profound difference between the older generation of peasants, clinging to the old ways and customs under which they ruled village life, and the younger generation enthusiastically organizing reading huts, dramatic clubs, agricultural exhibitions.

In no single place, perhaps, can as great a variety of peasants, from as many sections of the land be found, as in the Peasants' Sana-

*The complete tale of the life of a peasant formerly and now, will be found in the booklet *Changed Lives in the Soviet Republic*; under the heading "John, the Son of John."

torium of Livadia, in the former summer palace of the czar. Peasant Congresses are colored naturally by the peculiar political questions that led to their calling. But the inmates of the Peasants' Sanatorium are chosen for reasons of health, representing a random cross section of peasant life. Women from beyond the northern woods on the edge of the Siberian Arctic, men from the hot deserts of Central Asia, scores of peasants from all the central regions of Russia are here gathered at a time when they are free to talk, since no duties call them.

Yet this sanatorium, unlike the many others now opening for peasants, has a political aim as well as a health purpose. Located as it is in the gorgeous halls of former czardom, it is desired that peasants from all parts of the land shall come to it, irrespective of the cost of transportation. In other sanatoriums, conditions of distance, cost and convenience govern the assignment of patients. But for Sanatorium No. 1, beds are distributed equally to every province and county of the Soviet Union. So that they may come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and meet together in joint discussion and a joint comprehension, saying together: "We, it is we ourselves who sit in the halls of Nicholas."

It is a glorious setting, never to be forgotten by those who have the privilege of seeing it. On the most beautiful heights of the south Crimean shores is a hundred acre park, exquisitely landscaped, sweeping down to the deep blue waters of the sea. The building it-

self gleams with marble; its many sculptured courtyards blaze with scarlet flowers. In and out move peasant men and women, in their hospital suits of linen, sunning themselves on the terraces, strolling along the beautiful paths, sent here by county health departments from the great plains and deserts, from the northern timber regions, from even the farthest tundra.

There are club rooms with games; there are concerts, motion pictures, lectures; there is a large reading room with a good library. It was here that I went often, gathering together a small group of peasants taken at random and asking them what difference the Revolution has brought in their lives. It was a question which never failed to start interested discussion, drawing around it an ever-widening group. In the end they would always counter with questions about American farmers, for the Russian peasants are gaining through their revolution and their present reading an international interest.

Here, for instance is a man from Siberia, another from the Maritski district near Kazan where a tribe of Finnish origin has since the revolution been granted autonomy in the very heart of Russia, another from Archangel in the far north, another from the south-eastern steppe near Tsaritsin, and two from the Minsk district of White Russia, near the borders of Poland. "All corners of the land" they say smiling, when I have called the roll of their origins. I ask my usual question—what difference has the revolution brought them?

The younger peasant from Minsk speaks

up; he is the youngest and most energetic of the group, a clean-shaven man in his early twenties. "A very big difference. First, the taxes are lower. The poor don't pay them at all. The well-to-do pay more in proportion, but even for them it is less than formerly."

The man from Tsaritsin disputes this. "In our district the rich pay more than formerly. Near me lives a very rich peasant with sixteen cows and eight horses; he has three steel plows working for him in the spring. He pays more taxes than formerly because he employs labor for profit. But there are only four such families among our 300 households."

"Such exploiters of labor do not exist in our village," replies Young Minsk. "No doubt they would be highly taxed if we had them. With us there are some well to do peasants with many horses, but their sons drive the plow; they hire labor only at harvest."

The man from Maritski district speaks: "I will tell you about our region. The poor got free lumber. I myself got six cubes of lumber and built with it a cottage and a storehouse. If I must buy such wood it would cost thirty roubles."*

Young Minsk exclaims: "With us such wood costs sixty roubles."

"And with us, comrade," says the man from Tsaritsin, smiling, "it would cost three hun-

*Words used in actual discussion will not be changed into their American equivalent. A rouble is fifty cents; a *verst* is three-fifths of a mile; a *desiatin* is 2.6 acres.

dred roubles. We do not use wood at all to build houses."

The man from Maritski looks appalled at the cost of wood, and continues: "Well, since the Revolution we have schools in our own language. Not everywhere yet; one cannot build so many schools quickly. But wherever there is no school there is a Lik-Point;* these are easy to organize in a soviet house or a peasant's house."

"Are schools or Lik-Points in reach of everyone in your district?" I ask.

"Well, it is hard to say what is 'in reach.' Certainly children without shoes and sheepskins cannot go even two versts to school in winter. But a youth or man has winter clothing and goes even further. . . . In the old days it was not a matter of two versts but of ten or twenty, which not even a man could do in winter. . . . Schools or Lik-Points can be reached now in our district by all who have energy and winter clothes."

Tsaritsin speaks: "Our Mutual Help gave shoes to many poor children so that they could go to school."

"We have not got so far," says the man from Maritski. "The famine was bad with us. But then also the government helped us. Seed they gave enough for half our land. And when the

*Lik-Point, i.e., point for Liquidation of Illiteracy, adult classes in reading.

harvest came in 1923 they did not tax us and did not even ask for the seed back again. . . . Another thing is better now. The government is nearer. Once we went 20 versts to the township and 120 versts to the county; no peasant ever went, it was so far. But now they have these new 'region' divisions, and the region is 20 versts from us, while the township is right in our village."

Young Minsk speaks up: "With us it is the opposite. The regions are larger than the former counties and farther away. But all the same government is nearer. For we do everything now in our Village Soviet, get permits, licenses, settle our affairs."

"Would you all say in general that government is easier to reach now?" I asked.

"Certainly, government is easy to reach now. That is understood everywhere."

The man from Maritski takes up the land question again: "In our district is little farm land, it is mostly forest. After we got all the government land, it was not enough to give us a desiatin and a half to every eater. So the government gave us state forest land which we are clearing."

Young Minsk: "Everywhere the poor got land. With us it was the landlord's land."

The Siberian peasant now enters the discussion: "With us was always plenty of land. But for all that the poor had none, since one

must buy land with money. Now land is free; we do not pay money; we took all the land in our village and evened it up, and the Mutual Help gives aid to the poor. It loans seed and gives easy tariff for threshing and reaping. It sorts the seed for the poor free of charge. It gives wood also and if there is a death in the family, it gives sometimes money."

Remembering, as I do, the general American view that the poor remain poor through their own shiftlessness, I ask now: "Does this help really put the poor peasants on their feet?" . . . They look at me in surprise: "How should a man not get on his feet if he has land and a horse and seed?"

"But are not many poor through their own stupidity or drunkenness?"

Young Minsk answers for them all: "Of course there are many drunken peasants. But when the Mutual Help gives money for a horse, do you think they do not look closely to see how the money is used? Sometimes it might happen that a peasant used the money wastefully, but it could not easily happen. The committee would be blamed by all the peasants if they were so careless with the funds. We would soon choose another Mutual Help Committee."

"All peasants in our district," says the man from Tsaritsin, "are members now of Mutual Help. Each gives five pounds of grain from every desiatin. Now even the poor can learn,

since Mutual Help buys pencils and books for their children."

By questions I learn that membership in Mutual Help is voluntary, but that the benefits of free books, free seed, loans without interest, go only to the poor. I ask whether there is not a tendency on the part of the richer peasants to stay out of the Mutual Help, which taxes them more and gives them less. All the peasants smile and the man from Tsaritsin answers: "Let them stay out if they wish. Who is guaranteed against fire or death? If a man gets sick and orders medicine, he gets it free if he is a member of Mutual Help. Many other things a man must pay high for unless he belongs to Mutual Help. It is very strong, it has mills from the government and reapers and threshers. It is useful for everyone to belong even if he does not get free school-books."

The question shifts to education. Young Minsk maintains: "There are more schools than formerly. That also is good. Our district used to have two primary schools of four years; now we have four of these and one seven-year school. One of the lower schools is Jewish in their own language."

The older man from Minsk now for the first time enters the discussion with a sour look. "Where schools were before, there they remain. There are no new ones. Our school burned down four years ago, and we ask and ask the government for a new one, but nothing comes."

It is the first break in the universal boost-

ing. The rest look annoyed. The cudgels are taken up by an energetic youth in his early twenties, one of three Tartars from Kazan who have been listening for some time. "What does the government say to your request?" he asks. Do they refuse you wood or a teacher?"

"No," admits Old Minsk, "They gave us wood, but they asked us to haul it ourselves. It is twenty versts away; what do they expect of us?"

Pointed inquiry from the young Tartar shows that the government offered free lumber, nails, glass, and a certain sum of money for labor, besides the pay of the teacher, but expected the local peasants to furnish transportation with their own horses and do a certain amount of the unskilled labor of building. Young Kazan scoffs openly: "The families in our village are not so lazy as yours, comrade. I myself am president of the village soviet there, so I know. We organized a special week after harvest for the school. We cut the wood, hauled it, cleaned it. Now we have a fine school."

Tsaritsin with a kindly smile, comes to the rescue of Old Minsk. "Now, comrades, maybe that village is hard up. The Poles invaded there. How many horses have you?"

Old Minsk admits to one hundred households and two hundred horses. A gasp of indignation goes around the group at the wealthy village which has not energy enough to haul wood for a school. Old Minsk protests: "Half the horses are no good." But even one hundred

horses seems adequate wealth to the others. I catch the undertones: "Lazy lot." The Kazan youth grins michievously: "What taxes did you pay, comrade?"

"Eighteen roubles," says Old Minsk.

"And for eighteen roubles the government should not only pay a Red Army to protect you from the Poles, and mend your bridges and pay your teacher, but should also haul your wood for you." Everyone laughs. Siberia breaks into the discussion.

"In our village are 160 households. Formerly there was a school three versts away in the township center, but none in our village. We took the church and made a school of four classes. Now they have to go to the township center to church."

Tsaritsin nods, grinning: "Praying got harder now, but schooling got easier."

Remembering as I do the habits of western prairie towns in America I ask: "But couldn't they use it on Sundays for a church?"—All stare at me in total non-comprehension and the Siberian exclaims: "How could it be a church? They took out all the ikons!"

The man from Tsaritsin now starts a long discussion on schools: "We had two three-year schools before in our districts; now we have four four-year schools. Girls now go to school also, together with the boys. There were two teachers; now there are six. But most impor-

tant is the difference in lessons. They used to learn to read and write and the laws of God. Now they have drawing, and sculpture in clay, and cutting colored papers, and little workshops and a garden. They also make excursions and collect leaves and plants.

"My two daughters last summer—one of them all summer collected everything, leaves, twigs, grasses, flowers, and pasted them on paper and wrote about them. The other girl collected nothing at all, it didn't interest her. That is what schools are for now,—to find out every child's special interest. Then the clever ones can go to town to special schools for the things they like."

"Also they learn government. They visit the village soviet and the Mutual Help. They learn who gets help and why. They went to town and saw a factory and electricity and a telephone and a motion picture. The school has its own management elected from the children, with a president and a sanitary committee and a court. If a boy comes to school with dirty hands, the sanitary committee points him out in general assembly. Formerly if a child didn't learn his lesson the teacher whipped him, or stood him in a corner or sent him home; but now the children's committee takes him and explains that he is only hurting himself. It is forbidden now to slap faces or pull ears."

The peasant from Archangel, a medium-sized sandy-haired man, enters the discussion a little

proudly. "We are a cultured folk where I live, on the northern waterways from Leningrad to the White Sea. Always we prized learning. We are not backward people, but original Great Russians. Yet all my father's striving could not put me beyond the seventh grade in the town school. I finished three years in our village and four in the town; my father sacrificed much; my family went on little food in winter so that I might have learning. Then I graduated first in my class and hoped for a government scholarship to go to Petersburg. But they gave the scholarship to the priest's son who graduated second. Never will I forget that day. His father had a good house and could buy him plenty of books. Yet he got help because he was the son of a priest. Only after the Revolution could I get more schooling; now I have finished the Agricultral University and gone back to teach better farming among my people."

He went on to tell of the uncultured, backward tribes in the extreme north, hundreds of miles even beyond his village. "There on the tundra they do not sow and reap. They live on thousands of reindeer; these give them food and transport and clothing of fur and leather. They live fat, but dark. They have no hygiene and are very unhealthy. Much trachoma is there and they do not know what to do about it. But now since the Revolution whole medical expeditions go there and establish health centers. Very many of the youth have been brought from there and given university training and sent back to their people to bring

education and health. I myself do not come from there, but I have met their young people."

"It seems," I said, "that even before the Revolution your village had school and a desire for learning. How many of the children used to get some form of schooling?"

"Half the boys learned to read and write, going to school for a year or two, perhaps three. But the girls went hardly at all. Now all the children in our district go. If they don't go, there is neighborhood talk against the parents. Those who have no warm clothing get excused in the coldest part of winter."

The young peasants from Kazan now claimed the floor: "We had always culture in our midst, in the famous Kazan University. But now we have also schools in our own Tartar language in the villages. The University also saves a certain number of places for us Tartars, since we are more backward than Russians, for want of training, and if we must compete freely with them, we could not get many places in the university."

The bell was ringing for dinner—the ancient bell about which the almost equally ancient porter said to me: "Once I rang it for Nicholas to pray to God, now I ring it for peasants to drink tea." The group in the Reading-Room broke up. Outside on the terrace I found next day after lunch a peasant of an entirely different type, an elderly woman, with white kerchief on her head, sitting under the arbor of the czar, knitting. Her life was centered in

us there were no landlords; our land is so poor that no one wanted it. I live ninety versts from the railroad, and it is all swamps and woods. We cannot raise our own bread even. Yet it is a little better now. We had the land redivision and it is easier now to work. Besides we have cleared some woods, and we hear we are going to get some more government woods."

Sandy-haired White Russian spoke sourly: "The land is no better now than before. Some had ten desiatins, some had one, it is still the same. For three years we ask for the land division; they promise and promise and never do. There are many war invalids; I myself am one. I fought as a volunteer against the Poles. All the pension they give me is five roubles a month. What is five roubles? Is it money? I have only one desiatin and a half. I ask you, can a man live on that with a wife and child? As for the landlords' estates, they took the best of these for a collective and we peasants got nothing."

The Tambov peasant has been ill at ease during this complaint. He now fires up. "Who then was in the collective?"

"Those that had no land," answers the White Russian.

"Ah, so—peasants also . . . And why did you not join? Surely they did not forbid you because of your little desiatin."

"Why should I give up my desiatin to take

a chance with a collective?" growls the White Russian. "They fight always. Who knows if they will succeed?" . . . But a combined grunt from the rest of the peasants dismisses his complaint; he had his chance and refused it, and now he grumbles at the special privilege of the collective. The others have no further use for him. Then a young peasant speaks:

"I also come from White Russia. It is true that the land there is little. I have five eaters in my family and used to have two and a quarter desiatins. Now I have more than five and this is not yet the norm for our district. When the boundaries are fixed between us and the next village I shall have more. Also the landlord's estate—it is true the center of it was not given to us but was made a demonstration farm which is useful to all."

"Is the work there done better than among the peasants?" I ask him. . . . "Without a doubt," he answers.

"Do you live better now or formerly?" "Now, of course," he says firmly.

"I myself am a member of one of these collectives," spoke up a tall sandy-haired man whom I was to mistake frequently for the man from Tambov. "We have thirty men, ten women and eight children in our group and are farming 300 desiatins, here in the Crimea. We have a tractor and other machines; the government sold them to us on credit for three years. We live in the buildings of a former

landlord; we do not badly. We have ten cows and seven working horses and five foals." Not much, I thought, for forty adult workers, but it seemed to him riches.

"Before the war," he continued, "I was a landless farm laborer. For a year's work I got my food and thirty roubles. They also gave me my outer clothes, but I myself must supply underwear and shoes. Consequently I had no underwear; what can one buy with thirty roubles? For food they gave us cabbage soup without meat; the meat they sold. Also black bread, as much as we wanted. . . . Our collective now is a regular international; we have Poles, Ukrainians, Germans, Russians, even some Americans, but we get on quite well together."

The Crimean district having been introduced, a young Crimean Tartar with smooth brown face next took the floor. "Long ago," he said, "all the land of the Crimea belonged to the great Tartar chiefs, but after the Russians conquered Crimea, the Russian nobles bought it. So our peasants had no land at all. In the district where I lived there was a vast estate of 18,000 desiatins covering all the region. It belonged to one landlord. The richer peasants rented land from him. But the poorer peasants were too small for the landlord to bother with, so they rented land in turn from the richer peasants. One-third of the harvest went to the landlord, and if there was a middleman he also got his share. Now we have in our village since the Revolution 6 desiatins of land for every soul, without rent to pay. That

is much land, but it is very dry and we need much."

Several women had gradually joined the group and appeared ready to speak. At last a firm, decided-looking woman in her middle twenties, spoke energetically: "I am from Minsk Government, Minsk County, Slepanski village soviet."

All laughed: "Now you have her full address and can write to her from America." Nothing daunted, the woman went on: "I want to say that the revolution made a great difference to us women. We take part in meetings. Some of us work in children's nurseries. We are organizing one of these in our village. There are many dark ones still but since the men know we have equal rights, they behave better." Amused and embarrassed grins went round the table.

"If a man ill-treats his wife, it is now easy for her to get a divorce," she ruthlessly continued. "She goes to the president of the soviet and tells him about it. He sends the husband a paper, 'If we don't hear from you by such a date, you are divorced.' And if they do hear from him, all the same, he is divorced anyway."

The pale, sad Nijni man looks startled. "No, no, we don't have that in our village." But a chorus answers him: "Of course you do. Maybe your women haven't heard of it. Only it is not the president of the soviet that does it, but Zaks." (Abbreviation for Registry of Vital Statistics.)

The Minsk woman speaks firmly: "With us the president is the same as Zaks. We also had cases, I won't say many, where a man beat his wife and she complained to the authorities and they came round and warned him that if he didn't stop he would probably be divorced. After that he behaved better."

The Tambov man confirms this. "Formerly if a man beat his wife, she could complain nowhere." The woman continues: "And if a woman has a child at the breast, she is called 'unfit for toil' and that makes your taxes smaller."

Then the Nijni man checks this flow of enthusiasm. "Not always," he says. "My wife had a baby and I myself was sick. I asked for exemption from taxes; and they told me to get a doctor's certificate."

"Why not?" called a voice from the group. The Nijni man turned on the speaker. "But the dispensary was ninety versts away and couldn't everyone see the baby!"

"All the same," conciliates the Tambov peasant, "they must have certificates to put the stamps on."

The Minsk woman, however, once started, will not so easily yield the floor. She continues: "Formerly the peasants fell like flies from the diseases; now they send you here to the czar's palace. . . . The old family was terrible. For the daughter-in-law it was very hard. They did not even consider her preg-

nancy; they worked her to death always. Now if a man drives his wife out, or if his parents make her life a burden till she flees from the house, she can sue for her share of the property. The soviet law is kinder to woman than her own husband."

She had said enough and reached her climax; now she leaned back and left the floor to the Tambov peasant who began to grow eloquent over the many blessings of the Revolution. "Formerly we never saw newspapers; now we have all kinds, even women's. The agronom comes and gives lectures on farming. We have a Reading Hut in our village and a library in the township. We have a People's House with a theater and dramatic club. Not long since we opened a radio and we can hear Berlin. We have a telephone in the Soviet House and can do business with the county without going to town.

"The Old Ones," he laughed cheerfully, "thought the radio was the work of unclean spirits. You should have seen them. We told them Moscow was speaking, but they said 'No, it is someone through the wall.' Then they said it was the devil."

"You, comrades, can do all things, you of the black earth region," said the Nijni man wistfully. "But we live in the farthest dark of the woods with no Reading Hut and the same old school as before, and our only dispensary is ninety versts away at the railroad. There are rivers between and the bridges are broken."

But Tambov is not to be checked in his enthusiasm. "We used to have no dispensary even in the provincial city, but now we have a Roentgen in the county and a laboratory for venereal diseases in the provincial city."

The talk turned on religion. All agreed that the young folks didn't go to church any more, but that often when they came to be married or to have a child, the insistence of the Old Ones secured a church marriage and a christening. The Crimean Tartar said that the young Mohammedans in his village hardly ever indulged in the prayer five times daily which is the duty of every good Mussulman. "But on our two great yearly festivals, more than half of them go, for the old folks make demands and weep."

A peasant from Smolensk explained the situation thus: "More than half our people don't recognize the priest. When the government said, 'We will not pay the priest any more; let the collective of believers pay him if they wish,'—then we began to consider if it was worth the money. You must give him first three pounds of bread for every soul in your family, then you must pay extra for weddings and christenings and funerals. Also to give bootleg booze is necessary—you needn't smile, comrades, you know as well as I that one must give booze to the priest if he is to be friendly. For a funeral it costs two roubles for the priest and one to his helper. So now many of us say: 'He is already cold, and it makes no difference to him.' And they have a meeting

of the relatives and bury him without the priest. If it is a Young Communist the comrades have a procession. Only one-third of our wealthiest recognize the priest."

For some time the chair at my right had been taken by a brown-skinned oval-faced woman, looking not unlike an Alaskan Indian. I turned to her now to get her story. She was a Yakutka, from the northeast corner of Siberia; she had come three thousand miles by boat and horse to reach even the railway. She began her tale with the steamer, but later remarked: "Well, from my own village it is first ninety versts to the river. I didn't count that."

The tall sad Nijni man looked startled, "And I thought ninety versts from the railroad was the farthest dark of the woods! This woman forgets to count it!"

The Yakutka told how her people live in the north, moving in the brief hot summer to a little clearing where ten or twelve families plant and reap their grain, and then moving back for winter to their isolated huts. When I expressed my wonder that they should choose isolation in the winter, she informed me that each must live near his own hay, and there is no place with enough hay for more than one family. Her nearest neighbors were two versts away. I remarked that she could hardly have any schools

But she surprised me. "Certainly we have

schools," she said. "Ever since the Revolution. Our north was full of political prisoners, sent there by the tsar. Many famous men were there for many years. When the Revolution came, they gathered all the intellectuals together and organized schools in our language. Our school has a dormitory and dining-room and bath-house; everything you need for living. The children stay there from Monday to Saturday. At week-ends the parents drive over from thirty versts around to get them, unless there is a blizzard."

The Yakutka told me proudly that they had had "Soviet Power" without interruption since the Revolution. Too far in the north to be molested by the civil war under Kolchak, they kept in touch with Moscow by the northern telegraph and maintained their soviet organization and their schools without a break.

Another woman whom I also took to be a Yakutka, though her face was rounder and flatter, now insisted on speaking. She lived, she said, still farther away than the other. The crowd gasped; the Soviet Republic is a land of incredible distances. Forty-two days on steamer, horses, and on foot over the mountains she had traveled to reach the railroad.

"I am not a Yakutka," she said, "but a Tongushka. We live further north beyond the Arctic Circle. The Yakutkas live on herds and props but we live only by hunting and fishing. Our furs go everywhere to all the world.

"Eh, but it was poor in the old days! Since

I was ten years old I have hated bourgeois. They cheated us and despised us. We were afraid of officials; even little officials made themselves big men with us. . . . But when the Soviet Power came to Yakutsk City, they sent a delegate into the woods six hundred versts to call us together and ask what kind of government we wanted. We said: 'Have what government you wish in Yakutsk, if it does not insult us and despise us.' He said: 'Choose, therefore, your own delegate to come to Yakutsk and tell us the needs of your people and sit in our government.' So we chose delegates in the meeting. Afterwards I myself was once a delegate.

"They have schools and Reading Huts in Yakutsk City. Our children are sent there for the winter to study. Our language now has books which never were before the Revolution. Also we get more for our furs; tea and sugar and many things. Before they always cheated us."

"How do you know they don't cheat you now?" I asked her. "Do you know the prices of your furs in America?" She disdained my suggestion with pride.

"Certainly they make big profits from our furs," she said. "How else have they money for our schools and reading huts? But if the government wished to cheat us, would it give us schools and books and cooperatives? For when we read and write and manage our own cooperatives, we can send our furs abroad ourselves or know all we wish to know about the

sending. This also is our right, for we are soviet citizens."

Such was the composite voice of the peasants of the Soviet Republic, gathered from the farthest north and farthest south into the halls of the former czar, which now they own as a sanatorium. Had there been more old men and women there would have been more complaints and less enthusiasm. For the soviet villages are by no means universally contented; there are many among the older generations who dislike and distrust the new ways. But the Peasants' Sanatorium in Livadia, while it has patients of all ages, has chiefly the age of twenty-five to thirty-five. "These are those who bore the brunt of civil war," said the chief doctor to me, "and whose lungs and nerves need most repairing." And those who bore the brunt of war and revolution are the ones who hope all things from the new land they have created.

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