

RUSSIAN SCIENTISTS IN QUEST OF AMERICAN EFFICIENCY

By S. SLONIM¹

THERE recently appeared in several newspapers of the United States a cable dispatch from Europe as follows:

Special Cable Dispatch

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Berlin, Aug. 22.—The Soviets are introducing the Taylor Efficiency System in Moscow factories. The Central Workers' Institute located at Gastew employs sixty professors to teach instructors how to introduce the system into factories and the Soviets are underwriting the Institute.

In addition to the efficiency methods borrowed from the United States, psychological and physiological workers tests, based on the French and German plans have been introduced.

The Soviets, however, are encountering the same difficulties of the American capitalists who found the workers unwilling to be "efficiencyized" although members of the school maintain the higher class of workers support them.

A considerable part of the funds for founding the efficiency system were raised in America and Herbert Hoover, through the head of the Russian department, M. Slonim, expressed interest in the plan. The school has applied to him asking for assistance to purchase instruments.

Believing that the members of the Taylor Society would be interested in an authoritative statement concerning the facts alleged in this dispatch, the editor consulted Mr. S. Slonim, at present with the American Relief Administration, and Mr. Slonim kindly prepared the statement printed below.

It appears that there is as yet no general introduction of Taylor methods in the factories of Russia, but that a central institute has been organized for the purpose of experiment, in general with respect to scientific methods in industry, and in particular with respect to Taylor methods. This institute, located in Moscow and with

branches elsewhere, is not merely a research organization; it has interested factories where production operations are actually carried on, and where Taylor methods are applied in accordance with Russian interpretation of them and to the extent that limited available equipment makes experimental operations possible.

These efforts are at present crude—for want of proper equipment some experimental machines are being made of wood! But the mental attitude seems to be sound; it is scientific and its motive is the regeneration of Russian industry.

Many appeals for equipment have come to the American Relief Administration, but the nature of the assistance requested does not properly fall within the field of its operations. Mr. Slonim suggests that members of the Taylor Society may find in this situation the opportunity for a practical international cooperation; one member may have a machine he can spare, another, a stop watch, another a piece of photographic apparatus, others, precision tools of one sort and another, others organization charts, sets of standing orders and forms; and so on. The value of a moderate contribution from each of a hundred firms or individuals in the United States to this fundamentally sound movement in Russia, he states, cannot be estimated. It might eventually prove to be one of these imponderables so influential in determining the course of international commercial relations. (Editor.)

looking for guidance—for the word of wisdom and hope.

What tragic trials the Russian men of science went through is already well known to the world and need not be repeated here.

The first indication that the creative forces of Russian scientific thought are beginning to assert themselves was when at the offices of the American Relief Administration in New York, a memorandum prepared by the "Presidium" of the Central Institute of Labor of Mos-

cow arrived by mail from Moscow. In that somewhat lengthy document, the most characteristic parts of which are quoted below, the executive committee, or the "Presidium" of the Institute, as they call themselves, after stating their aims and aspirations, seek to engage the good offices of the A. R. A. to present the case of the Institute before the American patrons of science, in expectation that the patrons will make a "gesture worthy of the builders of the New World." (In Russia the words America and the New World are synonymous.)

According to the memorandum, the idea of establishing an Institute of Labor in Russia is quite an old one. The first attempts in that direction were made in the year 1889, when the so-called "Social Museum" was opened in Moscow, as a result of the resolution passed at the International Exhibition in Paris in 1889. But under the old czarist regime, the words *social* and *political* were synonymous, and that was sufficient for the authorities to look with suspicion upon the "Museum" as an institution with political aims.

It was natural that the Russian Revolution, by pushing the laboring class to the forefront of the social arena, by making labor the centre of social gravitation, should give also an impetus to questions of efficiency—of greater production, of social engineering. After the Revolution, during the years 1917-1920, a number of engineering and labor organizations repeatedly raised the question of the necessity or organizing an institution devoted to the study of labor in all aspects.

Only in 1920 a small group under the patronage of the "All-Russian Central Council of Professional Unions" succeeded in forming an organization, not only for the scientific study of the processes of production, but for the immediate introduction of the most efficient methods into the industries as well. The organization which undertook this thankful, but enormous and responsible task, is known in Russia as the "Central Institute of Labor." Its goal, as the leaders of the Institute express it in their memorandum, is "to implant into the character of the peoples of Eastern Europe and Siberia, the searching, daring, persisting American energy."

According to the program, as outlined by the Presidium, the work of the Institute runs along four main lines: Technical, Biological, Economical and Pedagogical. The pre-eminent line of research is technical. In this the Institute sounds a note of triumph for the instrument of precision, the machine; the victory of the strictly defined "mechanical gesture." By these means,

by "mechanical onrush and relentless mechanical energy" the Institute expects to rejuvenate industrial Russia.

The Institute does not intend to confine its activities within the limits of purely research work; it wants to get into the thick of life. The Institute has already shown its influence in the biggest Russian industrial plants, in the large economic organization. In a word the Institute wants to become the standard bearer of the "culture of efficiency" in Russia; it wants to create the psychological atmosphere of stern colonizers, fighters for a healthy, able-bodied efficient generation.

The personnel of the Institute consists of men who are imbued with the ideal of European and American methods of production. They would become the proclaimers to the Russian masses of a new era of productive and remunerative labor, but—

And here we come face to face with that fateful "but," which has always played a tragical part in Russian life, whether czarist or bolshevik. The only difference between the "but" of today and the "but" of the czarist times, is that in czarist Russia they could but they wouldn't, and in bolshevik Russia they would, but they couldn't.

Czarist Russia had all the opportunities to organize institutions and laboratories and equip them with the latest devices for the study of labor productivity from both material and human points of view. But not only was the czarist Russia not interested itself in the establishment of such institutions, it looked with great suspicion upon any initiative in that direction.

On the other hand, the bolshevik government is frantically trying to raise the productivity of the country which industrially is literally devastated, but lacks the means. An institute of the calibre and aims of the Central Institute of Labor needs large means for its efficient development.¹

Hence the cry for help addressed to America through the medium of the American Relief Administration. "We need," writes the Presidium of the Institute, "laboratories, shops, machinery and apparatus, but to our regret, we have not got them."

"We appeal to you," runs the same memorandum, "your capital can create monuments of culture. We know that the best American institutions, laboratories, bureaus of research, universities, the best institutions of learning, have been created by your millionaires. We know that the Chicago University is the pet child of

¹ See Appendix I, a letter which states that machines now have to be made of wood!

FROM the wreck and ruin of the old order left by the disastrous war and revolution, a crippled and much-battered Russia is gradually emerging with a new viewpoint.

First to arise from among the ruins of old Russia, as it was natural to expect, were the scientists and engineers. It was to them that the by this time sobered-up bolshevik politician and sadly-awakened proletariat are

¹ Late Editor *Russian-American Journal of Commerce*; with the American Relief Administration.