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Agriculture

AND THE SOCIAL REVOLUTION—

(The following article is the first of a short series, which will replace G.V.'s usual "Land Notes" for the next few issues of "Freedom".)

KROPOTKIN, with that practical sense which characterizes his writings, once remarked that in the final report the success or failure of a revolution depends on its success or failure to provide the revolutionary workers and peasants with food. Significantly, he called his book on the social revolution *The Conquest of Bread*. On the face of it, this might appear merely to state the obvious. But it is not so obvious, apparently, for the question of revolutionary agriculture has been neglected by theoreticians of the social revolution to a quite startling extent. The result has been utterly disastrous, and has cost millions of lives.

Kropotkin doubtless was thinking of the Paris Commune. Food certainly reached the beleaguered city, for the reactionary government of Versailles never succeeded in completely investing it. But the Commune made no serious attempt to link up its own revolution with the social revolt of the French peasants, and so provide indefinitely for the feeding of Paris. But since 1871, Kropotkin's remark has received added point and confirmation from three revolutions.

Revolutions Of The Past

In Russia the food shortage of the period of "War Communism" culminated in the great famine of 1921, in which five million people died of starvation. The situation was only relieved by the economic retreat known as the NEP (New Economic Policy). The German Revolution of 1918 occurred in the midst of general starvation brought on by the war, and it had no time to relieve this situation before it was overwhelmed by the

machine guns of the Social Democrat, Gustav Noske. Most interesting of all, the Spanish Revolution in 1936 alone succeeded in increasing the output of food, at least for a time. But it remains only a partial exception, for with the triumph of the counter-revolution in the setting up of the Socialist-Stalinist government of Dr. Neorin, the food situation deteriorated to starvation point during the winter of 1938-39. It was a prime cause of the ultimate defeat at the hands of Franco. But we shall return to the examples of Russia and Spain in later articles.

Thus, with one partial exception, the revolutions of the past have failed to guarantee the material subsistence of their populations and so have inevitably failed in their object. For the abolition of economic misery and the raising of man's activity beyond the continual search and labour for the bare necessities of life is clearly an essential prerequisite for the building of a life and a society of freedom. The question of agriculture is therefore one of the very first problems which must engage the attention of practical people who seek to prevent the social revolution in this country from stumbling into the totalitarian counter-revolution which has been its fate elsewhere.

Menace Of Blockade

In England this problem is especially acute for two reasons which are mutually interlocking. First, this country is, of all countries of the world, the most dependent *at present* on outside sources of food imports. (Whether this position is an inevitable and changeless one will be considered at some length later.) Secondly, revolutions of any magnitude, have always been the object either of an armed intervention on

the part of a coalition of capitalist powers, or of an economic blockade, or both together. Our island geography makes us particularly vulnerable in this respect. Hence the social revolution in this country will have to surmount this formidable obstacle right from the start, and the food problem, the conquest of bread, will bulk larger here even than it has done in the great revolutions of the past.

This prospect of blockade is so grave that many people are unwilling to face it squarely, and allow themselves to doubt the reality of its menace. A glance at history will make the question clear. Pitt's government led a coalition of reactionary powers in an attempt to destroy the French Revolution. They even went to the length of seeking to disorganize the finances of the revolution by printing French currency in England with a view to flooding France with it. This device was denounced in Parliament by the playwright Sheridan in 1794 (Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution*, p. 444). In 1871, Thiers joined with his enemies of yesterday, the Prussians, to blockade and subsequently massacre the Commune of Paris. In 1918 and 1919 the rulers of Britain and Germany, Japan and America joined hands in refusing to allow the passage of any material, even medical supplies (including anaesthetics), to the revolutionary workers and peasants of Russia. In addition they engaged in active armed intervention against them. Non-intervention in Spain was a polite word for economic blockade. Many readers will remember that popular blockade runners like 'Potato' Jones were refused insurance on their ships and cargo, at a time when the Spanish

workers were appealing for food and for the evacuation of refugees in the north. The Italian workers who overthrew Mussolini in 1943 were immediately subjected to the terror raids of the R.A.F. on the cities of N. Italy.

The lesson of past history is therefore inescapable; if the workers of this country succeed in overturning existing property relations and the institutional means whereby they are maintained, they must be prepared for intervention from without. The only small ray of consolation discernible is that since the British ruling class have been the main interventionists of the past, the British revolution will only have their accomplices to deal with! But America's increasing interference in foreign affairs indicates that considerable intervention is likely to come from them.

It follows therefore that (confining our attention to the food aspect of the blockade problem) there are two alternatives: either the British workers will have to wait on the world revolution which will *prevent* the possibility of intervention; or they will have to seek a solution which will provide the bread for the revolution while at the same time facing the problems of blockade from without, *and therefore no food imports from without*. The first alternative is too pusillanimous, too reliant on an unlikely good fortune, so in these articles only the second problem will be considered. We shall begin by considering some general points of capitalist economy in food, together with the factors which have made British agriculture what it is to-day. Then proceed to consider some of the revolutionary experiments in order to learn from the past.

J. H.

IN the last article the revolutions of the past were reviewed, and the necessity of facing the problem of a food blockade of revolutionary Britain stressed. And since the success of the revolution demands success in feeding the population, it is necessary to consider this most important problem very closely.

In 1939, the last year of "peace", this country imported two-thirds of its food supplies, and grew only one-third at home. It is consequently assumed very often that this low proportion reflects the agricultural potential of this country; that Britain cannot produce enough food to serve the needs of its people

But this assumption will not bear examination. Anyone who knows a country like Italy, has seen the extent to which the land can be cultivated. The Italian peasant plants his crop in every patch of soil he can find, from the steepest slopes of the mountains to the cliff faces right down to the sea-shore. No such determined effort to get the last ounce out of the soil is seen in England. Kent is fairly well cultivated; but a railway journey through the country generally, even at the height of the wartime "Dig for Victory" campaign, showed an observant person whole tracts of derelict land, abandoned to thistles. The extent of such patches shows quite clearly that the agricultural potential of this country is not being anything like fully employed. As has been often demonstrated in the "Land Notes" which this series is temporarily replacing, the cause of this land neglect is to be found in the needs of the dominant interests of the industrial exporters. British economy depends (under capitalism, of course) on exporting industrial goods to under-industrialised countries. These, necessarily, base *their* economy on agricultural exports. Hence, if British exports are to be paid for, Britain must import agricultural goods from her industrial customers. Because costs are low (especially rents, and, in some countries, wages, etc.) in such agricultural countries, such food imports are able to undercut the market of the indigenous British farmer, despite the cost of transport from abroad.

In short, the present condition of

British agriculture reflects not the ability of the soil to produce food, but the nature of capitalist economy. This conclusion finds ample support from a brief examination of the recent history of British farming.

Decline Of British Agriculture

Up till about 1800, the amount of food imported into Britain was negligible, such imports being mainly spices, tea, etc., and not staple articles of diet. (During the 17th century, British agriculture was an exporting industry.) But during the nineteenth century all that was changed. The development of industry expanded the exports of industrial markets to an enormous degree, and hence necessitated an equivalent return in food from abroad. The rapid increase in the population to some extent kept alive a market for the British farmer for a time; but by the latter half of the century, food imports were beginning to undercut his market. As an inevitable result arable land was turned over to grassland, while pasturages became rough grazings or were allowed to become derelict. The following table shows this quite clearly.

	1866	1901
Arable Land	18,000,000	15,600,000
Permanent Grass		{16,850,000}
Rough Grazing		{ }
	1910	1938
Arable Land	14,650,000	8,780,000
Perm. Grass	{17,470,000}	15,830,000
Rough Grazing	{ }	{ 5,615,000

(Figures in acres)

Thus, by 1938, the arable acreage had fallen to less than half its 1866 area.

During the seven years 1853—1860, three-quarters of the wheat consumed in this country was home grown. Twenty-five years later, in 1879—1886, only one-third of the total consumption was grown at home. (J. B. Lawes: quoted by Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories, and Workshops*.) Put in another way, this decline of arable farming meant that whereas, in 1870, the land fed 26,000,000 people, by 1914, it only fed 16,000,000. (Lord Ernle: *The Land and its People*. Ernle was Minister of Agriculture during the 1914 war.)

In 1850, agricultural science hardly existed, modern plant genetics being undreamed of. Yet it is clear that if the land could support 26 millions then, it could do so now also, even on the farming methods of a century ago. With the aid of the crop yields made possible by scientific advances, a much larger population could be fed from British soil.

The Rural Exodus

Meanwhile, the expansion of industry during the nineteenth century created a shortage of labour in the towns, and a consequent rise in urban wages. The agricultural depression, on the other hand, caused a glut of labour on the farms, with a fall in agricultural wages and a rise in rural unemployment. The inevitable result was a migration of workers from the country districts to the towns. This rural depopulation was the so-called "Rural Exodus". Between 1861 and 1884 agriculture lost 717,000 men—a loss of 34 per cent. By 1901, the loss had reached 45 per cent.

Agricultural Population numbers of workers

1861	2,100,000
1884	1,383,000
1891	1,311,000
1901	1,152,500

The total population was rapidly increasing during this time, so that the *percentage* of the population employed in agriculture fell even more sharply than the absolute numbers so employed. Thus, agricultural workers numbered 7 per cent. of the total population in 1861, 3 per cent. in 1901, and 2.6 per cent. in 1931.

Between The Wars

Between the wars the general trend continued, farming becoming more and more a depressed industry. Some crops such as sugar beet, were kept on an economic basis by means of government subsidies; but the drift from arable production was maintained, specialist farming—dairy and poultry farming, and stock-raising replacing the old mixed farming to which the terrain of Britain is peculiarly suited. Even stock raisers, however, found it cheaper to buy imported cattle food rather than grow their

food on the fields at home. (Hence the cutting off of imported cattle food during the war disorganised their economy.) Between the wars, another million acres of agricultural land went out of production and became derelict. That the farming of to-day does not represent anything like the full possibilities of English agriculture (leaving aside the question of technical advances for the moment) is clearly indicated by this enormous acreage of unused, derelict land. In July, 1936, Sir George Stapledon, one of the foremost agriculturists of the day, declared "that in round numbers we have 16½ million acres of land in a more or less neglected condition, and much of it absolutely derelict: and . . . every single acre of this enormous area (no less than 43 per cent. of the land surface of England and Wales) is capable of radical improvement." Sir George Stapledon expressed this opinion as a result of the great grasslands survey which he directed: but the same opinion is held by almost all agricultural experts.

War Needs Increase Production

That British food production can be increased is shown by the experience of wartime. In the 1914 war production of wheat, oats, barley, rye, mixed corn, peas, beans and potatoes fell during the first two years of the war, but with the necessity imposed by the submarine blockade rose markedly during the last two years:

1914	14,017,000 tons.
1916	11,611,000 tons.
1918	18,007,000 tons.

The increase was considerably greater in the war of 1939. Home production increased so that two-thirds of the total food consumed was grown on Britain's soil. The entire domestic sugar ration was grown from home-grown sugar beet (*Land at War*, 1945, H.M.S.O.). Between 1939 and 1944 milking cows increased by 500,000; other cattle by 400,000. On the other hand there were 6,300,000 less sheep, 2,500,000 less pigs, and 19,200,000 less poultry.

Since 1939, 6,500,000 more acres of land were ploughed up. Yet even at the height of the production drive derelict fields could be found in every district. The new acreage under the plough represents just over one-third of the neglected or derelict land described by Sir George Stapledon as "capable of radical improve-

ment". Yet the increased production from this land is very significant, as the following table shows:

Increased Production in Wartime
Average (tons)

	1934-38	1943-44	Increase %
Wheat	1,651,000	3,449,000	109
Barley	765,000	1,641,000	115
Oats	1,940,000	3,059,000	58
Potatoes	4,873,000	9,822,000	102
Sugar Beet	2,741,000	3,760,000	37
Vegetables	2,384,000	3,197,000	34
Fruit	455,000	705,000	55

(from *Statistics Relating to the War Effort of the United Kingdom*, H.M.S.O., November, 1944.)

This really striking increase was achieved in spite of the fact that conscription deprived the land of 98,000 skilled men, who were replaced by 117,000 unskilled women.

Potential Increase Greater Still

The significance of these figures is even greater, for they had to be achieved within the framework of the capitalist system of production for sale, for a market, and within the "needs" of a war economy. It is clear enough that if the problem were simply to increase production in order to satisfy needs, and without regard to the restrictions of economy, much larger increases would have been possible. With more labour available, the other 10 millions odd acres referred to by Sir George Stapledon could have been brought into cultivation. A revolutionary economy faced with an absolute blockade would be able to devote its energies to this problem far more effectively and wholeheartedly than a capitalist one, even though it would have to do without the small trickle of cattle feed, etc., which was allowed in during the war.

And all this ignored the advances in farming technique which have been developed in the agricultural research stations but have never been applied because of the decaying nature of British agriculture over the past 70 or 80 years. Forty years ago, Kropotkin demonstrated what an increase was possible using the then existing methods. Technical advances have immensely increased the latent potential of British land since then. For a fuller statement of the possibilities, the reader is referred to George Woodcock's *Freedom Press* pamphlet, *New Life to the Land*.

Thus, although Britain is very vulnerable to blockade, the very decay of farming has provided a large reserve or leeway which can be made up. From this point of view, this country is more favourably placed than those countries which already extract the last ounce out of their soil, and so have less possibility of increase.

In the next articles some political aspects of revolutions in agriculture will be discussed—in Russia and Spain.

J. H.

IN the last two articles, we have considered the broad issues surrounding agriculture in a revolutionary situation. The limitations which capitalist economy places on farming are seen to be the main obstacle in Britain to the feeding of the population without relying on imports. Once it is seen that there is no *physical* impossibility in the way of supplying the revolution with bread, there still remains the problem of how such a supply can be organized. This may be termed the *political* aspect of the question, and it will be helpful to try and learn the lessons which the revolutions of the recent past have to teach us. We shall find that these lessons are chiefly concerned with mistakes which the revolution will have to avoid, but they are none the less important for that.

The Bread War in Russia

In Czarist days Russia exported agricultural products. The peasants lived at a very low level, and famines were not unknown when crops failed or were unduly low. But very large amounts were usually available to send abroad. During the war of 1914, however, production fell very markedly on account of the draining away of manpower into "the armies—composed mainly of peasants. Bureaucratic incompetence also contributed to reduce the output.

During the years after the October Revolution in 1917 agricultural production continued to fall, and, moreover, at an even greater rate than under the Czarist and Kerensky regimes. "The agricultural crisis," wrote Michael Farbman, an observer favourable to the Bolshevik regime, "first of all affected the area under cultivation. Already in 1916 this had decreased by 7 per cent. as compared with what it was in the previous five years. In 1920 it decreased by over 28 per cent., in 1921 by over 37 per cent., and in 1922 by nearly 50 per cent."

This 50 per cent. decrease in the area under cultivation was all the more serious since it involved the most fertile parts of the country. And not only did the cultivation area diminish. The yields per dessiatine also fell. Thus for wheat the average yield for the ten years before the revolution was 61 poods per dessiatine. In 1916 this figure had fallen to 47.4; in 1920, to 34.1; and in 1921, to 32.7. (Farbman: *Bolshevism in Retreat*, p 234).

Forced Requisitioning

Much of this decline was due to the physical conditions brought about by the war. But revolution should have created conditions which favoured recovery by removing the restrictions which a market economy imposes on any form of production. Instead, the new political administration attempted to force agriculture into new channels by purely political measures. The inauguration of the "Bread War" during the period of War Communism was carried out under the slogan of "carrying the class war into the villages", for the peasants were looked upon as a reactionary element, only the diminutive proletariat being regarded as the true messianic bearers of the revolution.

Although the peasants needed agricultural instruments from the industrial areas, these were so scarce as to be obtainable only at high prices far beyond their reach. Meanwhile, they were offered in exchange for their own products a paper money which was turned out in an absolute spate as fast as the government could requisition presses to print it on. This inflated currency could not buy for them the products they needed and they soon refused it.

Since the peasants could not be paid for their corn, the Bolshevik government organized a so-called "Food Army" to requisition the food in the villages by force. Such forced requisitioning was met with sharp resistance by the peasants, and completely defeated any schemes of co-operation between town and country. Left to themselves after the February revolution, the peasants had sent food into the towns, asking for textiles, etc., in return. But it is important to note that they did not make their deliveries to the towns dependent on an equivalent return in industrial goods being made for them. Spontaneously they had applied the principle of 'to each according to his needs, from each according to his ability' which completely overthrows the exchange conceptions of market economy.

Slaughter of Stock

The Bolsheviks also sought to regulate peasant economy by new laws. In the face of the forced requisitioning, peasants would slaughter their stock, partly because

there was no prospect of feeding them, and partly in order to defeat the hated requisitioning measure. But there was a relatively slight diminution in the number of cows because the law allowed every household to keep a cow, so that large households simply divided up into small ones so as to retain as many cows as possible. Sheep and pigs on the other hand were requisitioned for the army, and the peasants slaughtered them to avoid their being commandeered. Later on they were consumed because, in addition, there were no feeding stuffs for them, and a terrible shortage of human food. Probably the peasants did not kill the beasts "for spite", although they had plenty of reason to feel hostile to the new government. Where money is retained, it is obvious that stock is going to be requisitioned without adequate compensation—otherwise it would be "bought", not requisitioned. Hence the peasant will endeavour to save money spent on raising the stock by slaughtering it, for it would be uneconomic (by money exchange standards) to do otherwise. It is no use lamenting these things; they are the inevitable consequence of such political coercion as forced requisitioning.

In addition, with no prospect of receiving either their harvest or an adequate compensation for it, the peasants reduced the area of sowing. (They also found it very difficult to get seed, which contributed to produce the same result.) Finally, the Bolshevik requisitioning was extremely inefficient, the peasants frequently having the mortification of seeing the grain which had been forcibly taken from them left to go rotten in the trucks in the railway sidings.

Meanwhile any attempt to remedy the state of affairs by direct initiatives between town and country was firmly repressed, the government placing military cordons round the towns to prevent direct exchanges between workers and peasants. The Soviets were thus unable to contribute any local initiative. The government was determined to control economy solely in its own hands, and it could not therefore brook any dual system of control by sharing it with the soviets. When "war communism" produced the famine of 1920, the only course open to the Bolsheviks consistent with their retention of power was to make economic concessions in a capitalist direction by re-opening markets and restoring production for profit. This course was inaugurated

by the NEP (New Economic Policy) and produced a gradual recovery.

The Five Year Plans

With the First Five Year Plan of 1928 the Russian government sought to bring the peasants under control by making them wage workers on the collective farms. Again there was tremendous opposition on the part of the peasants, thousands of whom were transported to the labour camps of Siberia, where they were later to build the White Sea canal and double track the Trans-Siberian Railway. The peasants, on their side, retorted by once more slaughtering their stock, this time on a formidable scale. Horses fell from 34 millions in 1929 to 19 millions in 1932; cows from 68 to 40 millions; sheep from 147 to 52 millions; and pigs from 21 to 11 millions. (Warriner: *Economics of Peasant Farming*, p. 174.) The result was the famine of 1933 and 1934, now officially admitted.

Once again the government resorted to the reintroduction of capitalist methods to restore production, a limited degree of private ownership being allowed.

The Lessons

I have treated the Russian experience very broadly. But I hope I have been able to show that the failures were not due to the ignorance and treachery of the Stalinist clique, but were the inevitable result of the discouraging of initiative and the centralization of all planning activity in the hands of the State. Similar results would inevitably follow from the centralizing theory of all governmental socialists.

The other clear lesson of the Russian experience is that with such a centralized power, which must retain a money economy in order to maintain its power, recovery from the disasters of doctrinaire control of farming was only possible by economic retreats, by partial reintroduction of the profit motive. In this country, it is the profit motive which strangles agriculture, so such a "remedy" could have only the most limited effect.

By contrast with such authoritarian measures as war communism and the five-year plans, both of which produced the most ghastly famines, the voluntary collectivizations of the Spanish Revolution of 1936 produced a startling increase in agricultural production. The Spanish experience will be the subject of the next article.

J. H.

NOTE.—1 Dessiatine = 2.7 English acres. 1 Pood = 36 lbs.

IF the attempt to solve the problem of agriculture by the political methods of the Bolsheviks was a disastrous failure, the application in America of purely capitalist methods to the exploitation of the soil has produced similarly catastrophic results. In America, the method of large-scale *extensive* cultivation has been widely employed for many years. A similar method characterized the Five Year Plans for agriculture in Russia, but the Americans have been practising it for far longer, and the end results are much clearer there.

In America and Canada, huge tracts of virgin land were ploughed up, sown, and reaped by mechanical methods which allowed of a maximum reduction of labour content. One man with a tractor could cover enormous areas of land. Thus wages, as a part of the agriculturists' costs, were reduced to a minimum. At the same time rents, by comparison with land rents in England were purely nominal.

By this *extensive* method enormous total crops were achieved, though the yield per acre was far less than is usual in the mixed farming practised here. (*Extensive* farming is thus the reverse of the *intensive* method suited to land where rents per acre are high, and which aims to get the maximum yield per acre.) Costs being so low, these huge crops could be marketed at very low prices, and American grain successfully undercut the market for European farmers, with the results for British farming which were discussed in the second article in this series.

Soil Erosion

But in the not-so-long run it was to have a disastrous effect on American farming also. For after growing several crops, the land became exhausted and the yields fell to uneconomic levels. When this happened the capitalist combines simply moved to new virgin territory and repeated the process all over again.

In this way, large tracts of once-fertile land in North America have become exhausted. Not only will they not grow crops; the worn-out soil will not even support any vigorous plant life of any kind. With the death of the surface vegetation, the surface soil is exposed to the winds and becomes more and more broken up. Finally, it breaks down into dust and is blown away by the winds, creating a dust bowl. In addition, the soil no longer absorbs water, which runs off the surface and causes widespread floods, ruining crops elsewhere. It is this exhaustion of soil for profit (and the des-

truction of much European farming) without anything being put back into it, which is the root cause of the dust bowls and the destruction and loss of life from recurrent floods which have been such a feature of middle western American life in the past 20 years. Whole populations have been compelled to migrate because their home country has been transformed into desert. John Steinbeck's film *The Grapes of Wrath* provides an eloquent picture of the misery caused by this extensive mode of cultivation. While the dam systems of the Tennessee Valley Authority scheme exhibit the vast repairs which the government has been compelled to undertake in the attempt to try and stem the destruction.

Soil erosion is not a problem confined to America; it also faces Africa and Russia. And its importance is such that many soil scientists consider that man-made deserts provide a greater threat to mankind than even war itself. Vast areas in America, Africa, and Russia are losing their capacity for food production on account of the one-sided treatment of the soil necessitated by a market economy. Fortunately, the nature of the terrain in England makes it unlikely that similar extensive cultivation would be possible here.

SOCIAL REVOLUTION IN AGRICULTURE — SPAIN

Hitherto we have discussed the ruin of agriculture: in Britain from undercutting by food imports; in Russia by political attempts to coerce the peasants; and in America, by extensive cultivation and soil erosion. It is a relief to turn to the Spain of the 1936 revolution, for here we have the one example of a successful and expanding agriculture.

Spain is an agricultural country in the sense that the majority of the people work on the land and food imports are not heavy. But the agriculture of Spain was a very poor affair compared with countries like Denmark, Holland, Belgium or Switzerland. Ever since the expulsion of the Moors, irrigation had been neglected so that drought hampered the growth of all crops. Moreover, the implements used by the peasants were incredibly primitive, for wooden ploughs were still used in many districts just as in Roman times. It was not that the peasants were too "backward", and lacked the initiative to get better implements: they were so crippled by poverty in an economy centred round buying and selling that they were

unable to pay for improvements. Transport, too, was of the most rudimentary kind, for all roads and railways (built, no doubt, to facilitate the collection of taxes) led to Madrid, communication between outlying provinces being very poor indeed. The degenerate nature of Spanish agriculture resulted in a very poor standard of life, while crop yields were among the lowest in Europe.

Peasants Take Over The Land

The chief factors maintaining this backward agriculture were the system of land ownership by large absentee landlords, and the impoverishment of the peasant by taxation. In July of 1936, when the workers and peasants seized the initiative in order to frustrate the military coup of General Franco, all that was swept away. The peasants took over the land, and began to work it collectively. In every village and region they elected committees from among themselves to organize the work of farming the land of the village. These collectivizations were of an entirely voluntary character, and had nothing in common with the forced collectivizations of the Russian Five Year Plans. In the first place, no peasant was required to join the collective against his will: if he preferred to continue as a small individual proprietor no constraint was put upon him. On the contrary, the collective farms made available to such peasants the facilities in the way of farm machinery, seeds, etc., which they had been able to organize. In addition, the uncollectivized peasant reaped the benefit of irrigation schemes which the collective farms established. At the outset, 75 per cent, of the peasants joined the collective farms, and they were quite willing to let the example of the collectives provide the sole incentive to change the individualist attitude of the remaining 25 per cent., whose good will they never alienated by any kind of coercion. The result was that most of the remaining peasants gradually joined in the collective farms.

Increased Production

The collectivizations extended over a large part of Spain, embracing Aragon and Catalonia, Levant and "loyalist" Andalusia, and parts of Castille. Their immediate organization had been made possible by the continuous educative propaganda which the anarchist syndicalists of the CNT and the FAI (The National Confederation of Labour and the Iberian Anarchist Federation) had been carrying on for years among the peasants. As a result of this propaganda many of the peasants had deeply studied the economic

causes of agrarian distress, and so were enabled to take fundamental economic steps to set agriculture on a rational footing when the revolutionary opportunity came. They were not content to look to the illusory promises of politicians and party men, but took their affairs into their own hands.

Theoretically, the social revolution should release the forces of production from the hampering limitations of capitalist property relations. But Spain provides the only revolutionary example of recent times in which this release has been realized. The peasants received more up-to-date machinery from the industrial collectives (though not nearly as much as they required), they organized stock breeding, and arranged the distribution of better quality seed. As a result the corn crops in Aragon increased by an average of 30 per cent., with similar increases for potatoes, sugar beet, lucerne, etc. Meanwhile, the numbers of cattle and pigs were immensely increased, and modern farm buildings erected to house them. In this, the voluntary collectives of Spain were in striking contrast to the fall in agricultural production which distinguished "War Communism" and the Five Year Plans in Russia.

Workers' Control

The collectives were controlled by their members, and were organized in federations so that they could carry on close contact with each other and with industry. But their independence constituted a continuous threat to the government. Hence, with the victory of the counter-revolution in the May Days of 1937, the latter began a steady offensive against them. In the end, those which had not been destroyed by economic measures designed to that end, were physically destroyed by Communist-controlled International Brigades under General Enrique Lister. By 1939 Spain has been reduced to starvation once more.

I have dealt more briefly with the Spanish lessons than their great importance merits. But that is because the achievements of the voluntary collectives are described in a penny pamphlet published by Freedom Press (*Collectivizations in Spain* by Gaston Leval). What is important to stress here is the voluntary character of these collectives—the total absence of coercion. It is this reliance on the creative endeavour of the peasants themselves which made Spain of the revolution such a striking—indeed, unique—example of revolutionary success. This lesson of voluntary organization will be kept in mind when we come to sum up the foregoing articles in the next and last article in this series.

J. H.

THE time has come to sum up this series of articles, and to recapitulate the main points. Capitalist Britain used to derive two-thirds and still derives one-third, of its food from abroad. Since the social revolution in this country will involve a complete change in the social relations regarding property and in the mode of carrying on production and distribution, it is reasonable on historical grounds to expect some form of intervention from the governments of other countries. The object of such intervention will be to defeat the social and economic measures proposed by the revolution in favour of a maintenance of the reactionary *status quo*, involving a clear distinction between rulers and ruled and the social institutions which flow from such a class distinction (*i.e.*, a wage system and a machinery for imposing the will of the rulers on the ruled—law, police, army, and a variety of propaganda outfits).

In the opening article we gave some reasons for expecting that any such reactionary intervention would take the form of a food blockade. In addition, the failure of revolutions of the past to solve the problem of bread has been a main cause of their defeats.

It is apparent therefore that the success of the social revolution in this country demands that (for a time at any rate) Britain should be able to become self-supporting in food. We have seen that there is no outstanding physical obstacle in the way of such an attempt, but the difficulties do not by any means end there. We saw that Russia, a food producing country, had her agriculture completely disorganized by such attempts to coerce the peasants as forced requisitioning of food, forced collectivizations, etc. In America, by contrast, failure arose from the adoption of a wasteful and soil destroying mode of extensive farming. This method had as its root cause the market system applied to a terrain where rents were low, and massive mechanization possible; while at the same time, the social system took no account of the economic disasters produced, let alone the social misery of floods and dust bowls, with enormous numbers of farmers driven off their land and compelled to enter into competitive and wage lowering struggles for too few jobs.

Alone upon the historical canvas, the example of Spanish voluntary collectivizations during the revolution of 1936 showed an increase in agricultural production.

The Lessons For Britain

What lessons can we learn from all this? On the economic side we can see that it is absolutely necessary to free

a revolutionary agriculture from any dependence on markets as the controlling element in production. The only revolutionary criterion of production is—is the product needed? If it is, then it must go into production. All ideas of equivalent exchange must be relegated to the capitalistic past.

On the political side we can avoid the catastrophic lessons of the Russian revolution. The whole population depends on the farm workers: they are the producers of food. If they do not co-operate with the population as a whole the battle for bread will be lost from the beginning. Hence any attempt to dictate to them or impose force upon them will strangle the revolution (of course, the setting up of a coercive power, a government, would itself signify the transfer of revolutionary initiative from the workers to a governing minority, whether new men or the old rulers. It would signify, in short, the victory of the counter-revolution).

From Spain we can take the general principle that voluntary co-operation in a collectivized agriculture—with no attempt to coerce those who do not immediately accept such a principle—is the soundest social basis for revolutionary agriculture.

The Special Problems

These are general principles: free collectivization of land and tools, and abandonment of a market and exchange economy in favour of the principle "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need." But there are vast differences between Spain and this country; and the conditions which obtain in America and Russia do not exist here in anything like the same forms. What we have now to consider is the application of the general principles to the particular conditions of Britain.

The outstanding problem is that of manpower. The rural exodus drained skilled men away from the land in hundreds of thousands and they cannot be rapidly replaced. Then the depressed condition of capitalist farming has made agriculture a field of endeavour where broad initiative and planning is impossible because of the subservience of agricultural interests to those of export capital. The anarchists and anarchist syndicalists in Spain carried on the most thorough educative propaganda to the peasants for years before the revolutionary opportunity came. By 1936, there were men in almost every village who understood the problems of agriculture in its social setting, as well as the technical improvements necessary in order to increase production. But even if the anarchist movement in this country were very much larger, it would be a much more formidable problem to get its

agricultural proposals across to the workers in such a depressed industry. This problem will nevertheless have to be solved; if not before the revolution, then in its immediate early days.

The Allotments Movement

There is however a temporary expedient which might successfully be resorted to during the critical early days. I refer to the allotments movement. In both wars the problem of rapidly increasing food production has arisen, presenting the blockade problem in a less acute form. In both wars, urban workers have been encouraged to work allotments and so grow their own food. In 1913, there were 530,000 allotments; by 1918 the number had risen to 1,400,000.

It is clear that such a number is capable of producing immense amounts of food. Small patches of ground can be thoroughly manured, and receive a very large proportionate amount of work performed on them, so that the yield per acre is potentially very high. Furthermore, crops such as potatoes can be readily grown on allotments without much experience on the part of the grower, and potatoes allow of a very high calorie value per acre of land worked. At all events, it is from such local beginnings that the food problem of the revolution may well have to start. And such a movement might provide the training ground for rural workers to replace the million or more lost to the land through the rural exodus.

The Problem Of Needs

I have treated of allotments in order to show that there is a means to hand whereby large amounts of food can be obtained without an undue delay, and so dispel (I hope) at the outset any despair at the magnitude of the problem. Having done so, we can go on to consider the question from another angle—that of the needs of the population as a whole as regards food.

The most rational way to approach such a problem is to work out how much of various food elements (proteins, fats, carbohydrates, minerals, vitamins and trace elements) is required to keep an individual in *full* health, and then multiply this by the numbers of the population as a whole (for simplicity's sake I leave out of account differences in amounts required by men as compared with women, or with children at various ages; and also variations in need according to the strenuousness of the work done, etc. These factors can be worked out, and a total requirements figure arrived at.) The problem then is to produce such amounts.

In a country like Britain, some districts

are more suited than others to the production of particular crops, or the raising of particular stock. I leave the technical aspects to the farmers themselves. But it is clear that a small amount of organization would allow of the maximum propensities of particular localities being utilized so as to achieve the desired total.

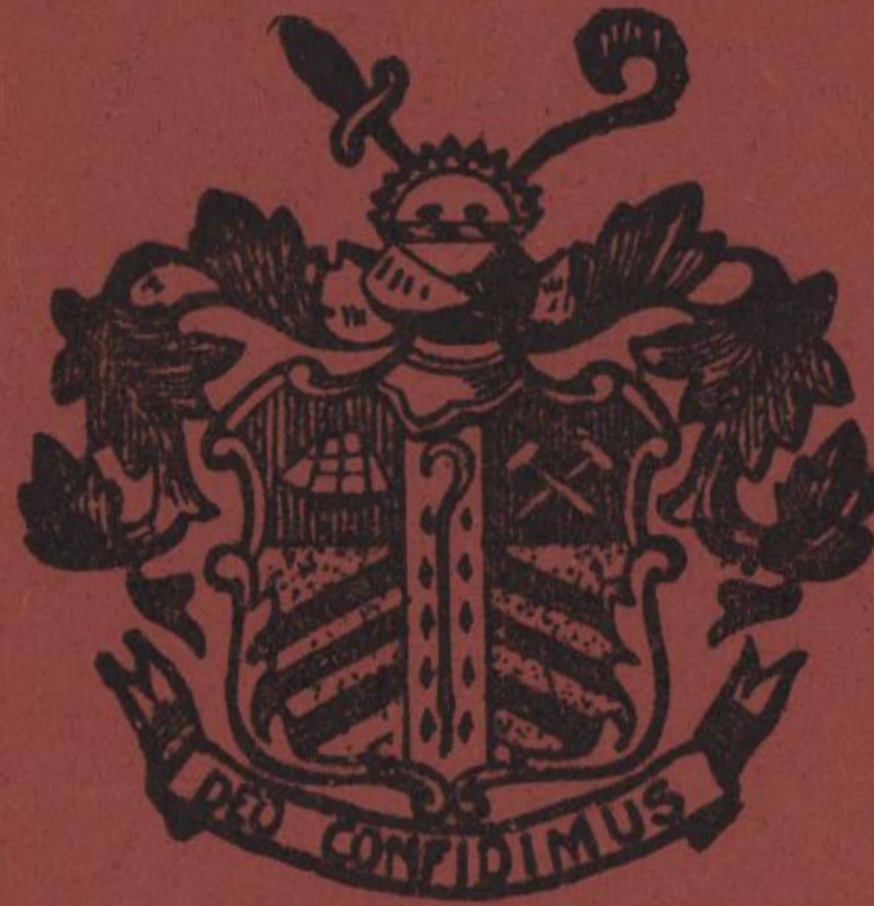
“Revolutionary Austerity”

At the present moment, very large numbers (in 1936, more than 50 per cent.) of the population do not consume a diet adequate for full health. Hence the revolutionary objectives would be much higher than the present consumption levels, and it is obviously doubtful if they could be realized quickly enough to make them a feasible immediate target. Since the immediate problem will be to feed the population during the critical period of blockade, probably a much lower figure would be aimed at. Fortunately, there is a considerable gap between an optimum diet and a diet on which people can subsist without serious loss of working capacity for many years—long enough, at all events, to establish the revolution in a non-agricultural country like Britain. “Revolutionary Austerity” may be an unavoidable necessity, but it has its exemplars. In Spain, for example, the peasants had a very small sugar ration; but in many cases they went without it altogether in order to release sugar for the local manufacturer of explosive materials. A degree of luxury should be the aim of the revolution, but in the moment of struggle revolutionary workers have not in the past insisted on any immediate achievement of such an aim.

A Programme Of Research

It will be recognized that the problems have been treated in the most cursory manner. I hope, none the less, that the general scope of the questions involved has been outlined. In treating even more cursorily the suggested solutions, I hope to have sketched a programme of research which could be carried out only by those with technical knowledge and farming experience. The working out of the problems in detail would be a labour of immense value; for on it may well rest the success of the social revolution in this country. History teaches us only too well the price of yet another failure, in deaths from counter-revolutionary violence and revenge. The problem of bread is the key not only to the avoidance of such a tragic outcome, but also to the realization of those revolutionary vistas which a rational economy and a humane social order open up to men and women of revolutionary imagination.

J. H.



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