

Comments

October 3, 1917

Source : *Works*, Vol. 3, March - October, 1917

Publisher : Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1954

Transcription/Markup : Salil Sen for MIA, 2008

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Starvation in the Countryside

Everybody is now talking about the food crisis in the cities. The spectre of the "gaunt hand" of famine is stalking the towns. But nobody wants to admit that famine has now spread to the rural areas. Nobody wants to realize that it is starvation that is now the motivating cause of a good half of the "agrarian disorders" and "riots."

Here is a letter from a peasant on the subject of the agrarian "disorders":

"I should like you to explain to us, 'the unenlightened folk, the peasants,' what is the reason for the riots? You think it is all the work of hooligans and vagabonds and drunken tramps, but you are a bit off the mark. It is not the work of vagabonds and tramps, but of people who are drunk from starvation. I, for instance, can tell you about the Murom Uyezd, the Arefino Volost. They want to starve us to death here. We get five pounds of flour a month per person. Just think what this means and try to understand our situation. How are we going to live? It is not so much people drunken with wine who are rioting here, but we ourselves, because we are 'hunger drunk'" (see *Birzhovka*).

The curs of the bourgeois *Dyen* and *Russkaya Volya* are constantly yelping that the countryside is rolling in wealth, that the muzhik is well off and so on. But the facts incontrovertibly show that the countryside is suffering from starvation and exhaustion, from scurvy and other diseases due to starvation. And the conditions in the countryside grow more trying as time goes on, because, instead of food, the Kerensky-Kono-valov government is planning to send new punitive expeditions into the countryside, and the approaching winter promises the muzhik new and still severer hardships. The same peasant writes:

"The winter will soon be here, the rivers will freeze over, and there will be nothing left for us then but to starve to death. The railway station is a long way off. We shall go out and get food. Call us what you like, but starvation compels us to do this" (*Birzhovka*).

Such is the eloquent story of a peasant.

The Socialist-Revolutionary and Menshevik compromisers trumpeted about the all-saving virtue of coalition and a coalition government. Now we have a "coalition" and a "coalition" government. But we ask:

Where is the all-saving virtue of this government?

What can it give the starving countryside except punitive expeditions?

Do Messieurs the compromisers not realize that the artless letter of this peasant pronounces sentence of death on the coalition they have concocted?

Starvation in the Factories

The sufferings of the factory areas are severer still. This is not the first time starvation has visited the industrial population, but never has it been so rampant.

Russia, which before the war exported 400-500 million poods of grain annually, now, in time of war, is unable to feed her own workers. Factories are coming to a standstill and the workers are fleeing from their jobs because the industrial areas are without bread, without food.

Here are some reports from various localities.

"A dispatch from Shuya states that wood sawing has stopped throughout the uyezd owing to lack of food. The Koryukovka sugar refinery may have to close down because there is no food for the workers. The sugar beet is beginning to rot. The 12,000 inhabitants of the Yartsevo spinning and weaving mills settlement, Smolensk Gubernia, are in a dreadful plight. Flour and cereal stocks are completely exhausted. The gubernia food committee is powerless. Not receiving food, the workers are getting restless. Disorders are inevitable. The factory stewards' council of the Kuv-shinov paper mills, Tver Gubernia, wires: Workers on the verge of starvation; food denied everywhere; request immediate relief. The management of the Morokin factory, Vichuga, wires: Food situation menacing; workers starving and getting restless; urgent measures needed to ensure supplies. The factory committee of this company has sent the following telegram to the Ministry: Urgently implore supplies of flour for the workers, who are already starving."

Such are the facts.

The agricultural areas complain that they get extremely small supplies of manufactured goods from the factory areas. They therefore release grain for the factory areas in equally small quantities. But shortage of bread in the industrial areas is driving the workers from the factories and cutting down factory output, thus further reducing the quantity of goods sent to the countryside, and this, in its turn, leads to a further reduction of the amount of grain flowing to the factories, worse starvation, and further desertions of workers from the factories. We ask:

What is the way out of this vicious circle, of this iron vice which is gripping workers and peasants?

What has the so-called coalition government to offer besides the notorious "dictators" it is secretly sending to the starving industrial areas?

Do Messieurs the compromisers realize that the imperialist bourgeoisie, whom they are still supporting, have driven Russia into an impasse, from which there is no escape except by stopping the predatory war?

Rabochy Put No. 26, October 3, 1917

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