

Threepence

# We See Russia

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*Mrs. Leah Manning, M.P., with a group of Young Pioneers, Soviet children's organisation.*

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**I**N the spring of this year, the Committee for the Celebration of International Women's Day invited seven women from the Soviet Union to visit this country. We believed that if they saw us at work, at play, and in our homes they would be convinced of the peaceful intention of the great mass of the people of this country. We have seen the report which they wrote upon their return to the Soviet Union and are very happy to find that their visit carried conviction to them on this all-important point.

Now seven members of our Committee have had a similar opportunity of finding out how the Soviet people feel about peace. We are deeply grateful to our hosts for the magnificent opportunity which they gave us of meeting and talking to all kinds of people in all kinds of places. We have been to schools, universities, factories, churches, workers' homes, and places of amusement and recreation. We have seen the great collective farms of Georgia, and have stood among the ruins of Stalingrad while a new, planned, and beautiful city was rising around us on the banks of the Volga.

We have been deeply impressed by the scale of peaceful construction and reconstruction which is going on in the U.S.S.R., and it is clear to us that for a country so fully engaged in constructive work, war is unthinkable. Everywhere we went women talked to us about peace and war—the woman in the maternity home with her new-born babe, the student with her books, the engineer at her machine, the collective farmer tying back her tomato plants—it was always the same question: "Can't we be friends? We don't want to spoil everything again by fighting, do we?"

No, of course we don't. It is our deepest desire that the strong bonds of friendship which have bound our two countries together for so many years should be strengthened and maintained. In this way war would be impossible.

We want to tell our people about the Soviet Union as we have seen it, truthfully and objectively, for we believe that only in this way can false propaganda be undermined and the forces which use it for their own ends destroyed. It is in this spirit that we offer you our short pamphlet of impressions.

LEAH MANNING, M.P.

(Chairman, National Committee for Celebration  
of International Women's Day)

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY  
by Elizabeth Allen

Honorary Secretary, International Women's Day Committee

**O**NE of the first things which struck us as visitors to the Soviet Union was the variety of jobs done by women. We kept saying to each other, "Look, there's a policewoman directing traffic—look, there's a woman tramdriver!" On the Soviet ship which took us from England, the doctor and the assistant radio officer were both women, and they told us of at least one of their merchant ships which is commanded by a woman.

In the first factories we visited, we caused much surprise by asking about "women's pay"—as though it differed from men's. I embarrassed the woman head of one of the leading Soviet medical research institutes by congratulating her on her appointment. As she patiently explained to me, there was nothing unusual in a woman holding such a high Soviet post.

For not only are all jobs and positions open to women, but everything is done to make conditions easy for them. They have paid leave of absence before and after childbirth, and the right



In Leningrad: Dr. Wooster (second from left), Mrs. Kiddie, Miss Rose Carr, Miss Elizabeth Allen, Mrs. Rust, Miss Joyce Brown



to return to their jobs. Creches and day nurseries are attached to all factories and places where women are employed, and arrangements are made so that no child need return home from school till the mother is back from work.

Equality of opportunity is a reality in the Soviet Union. We met women factory managers who had worked their way up from the bench. In both Moscow and Leningrad the deputy chairmen of the City Council were women.

In the Soviet Union women are expected and encouraged to play their part as mothers, as workers, and as citizens, and they feel no conflict between these three roles. We were struck by the dignity and repose in so many of their faces. It could only come from a full and happy life, free from sex discrimination and from so many of the burdens which have weighed on women through the ages.

As a woman, I have always been concerned about racial discrimination, which like sex discrimination is based on qualities people are born with and not on anything for which they can be held responsible. I was therefore particularly anxious to see how the Soviet Union had dealt with the national minorities which in Tsarist times had been oppressed as colonies.

First test, of course, of the stage of development of any area is its literacy.

There is now no illiteracy in the Soviet Union. For instance, east of the Urals in Kazakstan, where before the revolution only 2 per cent of the population could read or write, now all are literate, one million children attend elementary schools, there is an academy of sciences, and so on. In Uzbekistan where before the revolution there were 160 schools there are now 4,500; in Kirghizstan there were 216 teachers, and now there are 16,000.

We took a flying visit to Georgia—1,250 miles from Moscow to Tiflis. At the airport, we were welcomed by Nina Ajabakisvila, a Deputy of the Georgian Soviet and also of the Supreme Soviet—which showed us at once that women had won the same status among the national minorities as in Russia proper.

The Rector of the University told us that before the revolution Georgia had no institutes of higher education; now there were twenty, including the University, with 25,000 students.

Religious discrimination is dead, too, in the Soviet Union. We visited the Yelokovsky Cathedral in Moscow on a weekday when a special service was being held for St. Alexis. There was a very large and devout congregation. I asked the Bishop whether the



*Care of the children is the keynote of the Soviet Union. Picture shows one of many forms of treatment in use at child clinics.*



Church received any State subsidy. He told us that any congregation, on application, could receive help with the maintenance of the fabric and also subsidies towards the cost of lighting, heating, and so on.

I asked every Jew I met whether there was any anti-Semitism or discrimination against them, and they all denied it hotly. It seemed to make them sad even to be reminded of the days when anti-Jewish feeling flourished. From everything we saw and were told it seems clear that discrimination against people because of their sex, race or language is now a thing of the past.

## SOCIAL SERVICES

by Dr. Nora Wooster

*Cambridge Scientist*

**D**URING our visit to the Soviet Union we were able to see for ourselves how all-embracing are the social services which give the Soviet citizen an unparalleled sense of security, leaving him free to devote his energies to the things that really matter. All the services I shall describe—and of course there is not space to describe more than the main ones—are non-contributory, being paid for entirely by the State, mostly out of the profits of industry.

### *Health Services*

The health services are based on polyclinics, which are local or factory consultative centres where a great number of medical experts are on tap. (Two of us—Mrs. Leah Manning, M.P., and Miss Elizabeth Allen—actually had treatment at one of them, and very efficient it was, too.) Under the doctor-in-charge are a gynæcologist, dentist, dermatologist, radiologist, surgeon, etc., etc. There is a wide network of hospitals, and where someone needs hospital treatment the polyclinic ensures that he receives it. There are no waiting lists. Doctors are not overworked by our standards: in Georgia there is a doctor to every 400 members of the population! There are special polyclinics for babies up to three years, run by the maternity hospitals, and children's clinics for the 3-16's.

### *Care of Mother and Child*

If a woman is not working she will consult her local polyclinic when she believes she is pregnant. If she is working, she will go to the gynæcologist in the factory. Thirty-five days before her

confinement is due she is given leave of absence on full pay. If there is any abnormality she will probably spend the last few days at the hospital. Otherwise she is fetched when the time comes by an ambulance, with a doctor and nurse on board. She is given 180 roubles (about a week's basic pay for a semi-skilled worker) to buy the layette. There is no shortage of nurses, who are not expected to do any domestic work at all. All the nurses live at their own homes.

The mother stays twelve days, or longer if necessary, at the hospital after the confinement. (Very many women then go to a rest home provided from trade union funds, where they may stay for three weeks.) In any case she receives forty-four days' holiday with pay after the birth, and this is not counted in calculating her ordinary holidays. A grant of money is given to the mother on the birth of her third or subsequent baby—200 roubles for the third, 650 roubles for the fourth, 850 roubles for the fifth, and 3,500 roubles for the tenth! Monthly allowances, similarly increasing, are also given up to five years of age. If the mother is working she usually leaves her child at the factory crèche. Here she feeds the baby as often as necessary, without loss of wages.

When one remembers that these services are not confined to the big cities, but are practically universal, one finds it possible to believe that the infantile mortality rate is less than ten per thousand, and that maternal deaths are less than one per thousand.

### *Orphans*

As a result of the war, there are hundreds of thousands of orphans who are wards of the State, although thousands have been adopted by private families. Every effort is made to give them a secure and happy life. In addition to what the State provides, an orphans' home will be "adopted" by various factories or trade unions, and a close personal relationship is established between these patrons and the children.

Orphans spend the whole of the summer holidays of nine weeks at holiday camps. Children with parents seldom get more than three weeks! It is against the law for an orphan to go to work until he is eighteen years old without special permission from the Ministry of Education. The career he adopts is his own choice.

We were able to see with our own eyes a war orphans' Pioneer Camp near Moscow, run by the fish industry trade union. All the children were extremely gay and happy, and the war orphans were particularly brightly dressed.



### *Sickness and Accident Insurance*

Temporarily ill or disabled people are paid their wages, and sent to hospitals or sanatoria, if necessary, to recover. Permanent invalids, whether civil or military, are entitled to pensions and to places in special homes if they wish it. People who have lost a limb are supplied with an artificial limb, and soldiers who lost both legs are supplied with a motor-driven carriage. Anyone, who as a result of injury, is unable to follow the work in which he was skilled, is given any training he wishes to qualify him for other work, free of charge, and is kept during his period of training.

### *Pensions*

Those branches of work which are highly esteemed by the community are rewarded by special pensions. Coalminers, steelworkers and teachers fall into this category. As the State becomes wealthier, other groups will benefit.

Old age pensions are granted to women at 55, men at 60. Old people who have no relations or friends with whom they want to live can find accommodation at special homes, where they get the attention they need and can enjoy the company of other old people.

In the factories of Leningrad, in the schools of Moscow, in a silk-weaving factory in Tiflis, we found teachers and workers who could have retired and lived on their pensions, but preferred to go on working. There is no obligatory retiring age, and no means test. They get their full pension, whether they work or not.

## EDUCATION AND RECREATION

by Leah Manning, M.P.

**T**HE first thing a teacher in a foreign country wants to see is a school; the first people to whom she wants to talk, the teachers, the Minister of Education and above all the children. We were fortunate in our visit to the U.S.S.R. that we were able to see schools wherever we went and talk freely to teachers and children. The Minister of Education gave us several hours of his time. There are many points of similarity between the Soviet system of education and our own, and some points of profound difference, the most important being that there are no private schools of any kind—all schools are “people’s” or “common system” schools.

The backbone of the system is the ten years of free, compulsory, universal education from seven to seventeen. For the first seven years the children work together. At fourteen they stream off into three groups; those who remain in the ten-year school for an academic secondary education, those who go to the “Technicum” for a technical secondary education, and those who become apprentices and attend part time at a factory school. This arrangement is common throughout the R.S.F.S.R. (Russia proper), although the Minister of Education is anxious to change it as soon as he can overtake the school building programme which was interrupted by the war.

“It was our intention”, he said, “to have complete full-time secondary education by 1938, but so much energy was diverted to other things in that war-threatened world that the plan had to be abandoned. Now it is again in active contemplation—and we hope that in the cities at least, it will be fulfilled by 1952”. Already in some independent Republics it is an accomplished fact, while in others it is almost achieved—in Georgia for example, where we saw schools in Tiflis, 85 per cent of children already take full-time secondary education to the age of seventeen.

The ten-year system is built upon a wide network of “crèches” (babies and up to age of two), nursery schools (two to five), and kindergartens (five to seven); it is supported by a vast array of clubs, circles, camps, and a wide variety of out-of-door activities, and is crowned by 800 institutes of higher education and thirty-five universities.

When the ten-year course at school or technicum has been completed, the pupil must decide if he wants to continue his education to university standard or if he now feels ready to go to work. An interesting point about the Soviet education is that these choices, i.e., the one made at fourteen and again the one made at seventeen, are not absolute and final. If the student finds he has made a mistake he may change to a different type of school or to a different course at the university. He may even leave the factory for school or university.

Part of the education of the Soviet child, as of the Soviet citizen, are the opportunities offered *outside* the school, university, and institute. First there are the “Amateur Circles” which are attached to every school, club, farm, and factory. These cover a wide range of activities from a study of the arts to such hobbies as chess, photography and gardening. They



afford the double purpose of self-development and the discovery of talent. "Talent spotting" is a national occupation in the U.S.S.R. A tiny tot who shows the makings of a ballerina, a promising boy musician, a collective farmer with a grand voice, will be trained, regardless of expense to the State, by the most highly qualified teachers in the U.S.S.R. At the ballet and opera, where thousands of workers crowd every night at prices ranging from three roubles (the price of three and a half pints of milk), to fifteen roubles for the best seats, one may hear the life story of almost any star appearing on the stage.

Another important function of the amateur circle is that of criticism. Anxious to learn something about the alleged tyranny which prevents the creative artist from expressing himself in any other than strictly ideological terms, we had a talk with a well-known and popular Soviet writer. Was there such criticism, we asked, and if so, where did it come from? Plenty of criticism, was the reply, and not only ideological, but sociological, psychological, and artistic, and it comes from the thousands of Readers' Circles which exist all over the Soviet Union. Every new book which is published is read in these circles and authors expect, and get, a barrage of criticism both favourable and unfavourable. The author can either take this criticism as a guide and corrective, and give his reading public what it wants, or he can stand out against it and probably lose his popularity—although that does not always follow, any more than it does in this country.

There is a lively, provocative, inquisitive air towards all things educational and cultural in the Soviet Union, which seemed to me much more important than the pompous, reverential approach of people who have not grasped the fact that education is every man's birthright. "But isn't it a vast regimentation?" I am sometimes asked. What happens to the child who doesn't want to go to the Young Pioneers' Club, or the Summer Camp? Well, there are obviously plenty who don't! One sees thousands of them with their parents in the parks or on the Moscow River which is joined by the New Canal to the Volga; one sees them at the children's cinemas and the children's theatre; as they enter adolescence, one sees them going off on expeditions or giving voluntary group labour to some Soviet project. No, I don't think it is regimented—it is just there to take or leave. The fact that it is usually taken is proof that its provision has been planned with an eye to need and variety.

Seen against the background of utter illiteracy which existed in Russia in Tsarist days, 80 per cent for the whole country and 98 per cent for some of the Central Asian Republics, Minister Voznessensky has every right to say, "We have carried out a cultural revolution in the space of thirty years; liquidated illiteracy, given all our people the opportunity for a full and complete education. We are proud of our achievement."



*New block of flats in Stalingrad.*

## RECONSTRUCTION

by Tamar Rust  
*Editor of "Woman Today"*

**P**ERHAPS the most revealing and impressive thing about Soviet Socialism at work is the colossal effort of reconstruction in the cities, particularly the shattered Hero City of Stalingrad.

We had a talk with the chief architect of Stalingrad; in spite of a sultry, tiring day, in which we had crammed a seven-hour flight from Moscow and visits to factories, clubs, museums, and many other places, we listened, enthralled, far into the night. With a big map in front of him, talking very quickly, Mr. Allabian unfolded to us the fourteen-year plan of reconstruction. A city with only 200 survivors, now already grown to 400,000, the Stalingrad of tomorrow is taking shape.



It was one of the 200 who showed us round—Nina Shapochkina, Deputy of the Stalingrad Soviet: young, attractive, and expecting a baby, she symbolised her own unconquerable city, with its eyes on the future, in spite of the unbelievable grimness of the very recent past.

Key to the new town will be the immense embankment running along the Volga, 23 miles long and 100 yards wide, interspersed with trees and open-air swimming pools. Three big squares will be connected by green boulevards, starting with the Square of Fallen Heroes. The opposite bank of the Volga will be used as a tremendous health resort, with gardens, parks of rest and culture, and children's playgrounds, to which ferry-boats are already constantly running. The building of forty sports stadiums is included in the plan.

#### *New Blocks of Flats*

According to the plan, Stalingrad will have a population of 800,000 people housed in five-storey buildings most suited for the climate and soil. The town will be surrounded by a green belt, which will also help to prevent soil erosion.

Thirty-seven new schools were the first buildings to be built. A beautiful Palace of Culture, attached to the Tractor Works, completely rebuilt, was due for official opening the week after our visit. It had a winter garden, a stately ballroom, a sports hall, restaurant, children's sections, all done in beautiful marble.

Next to the October Steel Works was a new park with young trees and shrubs. Responsibility for this park has been taken over by the works, every shop looking after a certain section.

#### *Rent and Accommodation*

Turning to the other Hero City, Leningrad, we visited a three-roomed flat with parquet flooring, kitchen and bathroom, in the Kirov district, where we discussed problems of rent and accommodation with a toolmaker's wife, mother of two children. All the families in this district lost everything during the 900 days' siege (35 per cent of the buildings were destroyed, and nearly every house lost a roof or windows), but now 140,000 families have been rehoused in Leningrad alone.

The rent of the flats (Russian workers prefer flats) was never more than 5 per cent to 10 per cent of earnings, and that included light and water. And blocks of flats are never built on their own. As soon as one is going up, shops, playgrounds, kindergartens and schools are built with it.

Building of schools, kindergartens and nurseries is a national priority in the Soviet Union. In Leningrad, 262 schools, 218 kindergartens and 141 nurseries have been restored; in Moscow, 398 schools, kindergartens for 60,000 children, and 94 nurseries planned for construction in 1949. In the White Russian Republic, one of the most devastated areas of the Soviet Union, 3,500 schools have been restored.

Moscow, a city I knew well, I could hardly recognise with its houses moved back to widen the streets, and scores of new buildings. At the Lenin hills we inspected the site of a new university, to be completed in five years. A new building for the historic Academy of Sciences has just been constructed. Fourteen new bridges and new sections of the famous Metro are under construction. The Volga Canal Station, completed before the war, took our breath away with its beauty.

We found out in our talks, and saw with our own eyes, that an ever-greater proportion of State and Town Budgets goes to housing, health and education. Of the budget of the R.S.F.S.R. (Russia proper), 70 per cent is spent on social services and culture: 53 per cent of the Moscow City Budget is allocated to health and culture.

#### *No Landlords*

Every town has a plan. No vested interests or landlords stand in the way of its fulfilment in a Socialist country. They are carried out by the Soviets, trade unions, tenants' committees, by hundreds of thousands of ordinary people. "Everything depends on the people" was the last word to us of the woman Deputy Chairman of the Leningrad City Soviet, a former village teacher and daughter of a railwayman.

No country so profoundly engaged in Socialist construction can desire or prepare for an aggressive war. That is why the question of peace and the way we in Britain are fighting against the warmongers was the point put to us wherever we went.

In Stalingrad I stood silently and with uneasy conscience in front of the Sword of Honour sent by King George VI, with its legend: "To the steel-hearted people of Stalingrad, as a sign of homage from the British people."

The Sword of Honour is in a special section of Stalingrad Museum devoted to messages and gifts from all over the world. Among them is a big tablecloth embroidered with the names of hundreds of Coventry housewives.

Let us revive the spirit of those gifts.



## COLLECTIVE FARM

by Jessie Kiddie

*Scottish Housewife*

**M**OST of the 600 farmers running a 7,500-acre collective farm we visited near Tiflis were women. Lying at the foot of the Caucasus, it was one of the loveliest places one could imagine.

We walked through fields of tomatoes, beetroot, corn, and all kinds of vegetables. Vines grew over our heads, and everywhere there were trees laden with apples, cherries, plums, and apricots.

Like all the Soviet workers we had met, the farmers were anxious to tell us all we wanted to know, and very anxious to let us know how happy they are.

First we learned that the Farm Council is elected by the farmers at a general meeting held once in two years. The Chairman could be dismissed by the farmers if he proved unsatisfactory, but so far that had not happened.

The farmers average an eight-hour day, with one day off per week. Hours are of course longer during harvest and cropping, and very much shorter during the winter. A certain amount of work is determined by the Farm Council to constitute one labour day, so farmers doing twice as much in one day would be counted as working two days.

In 1948, this farm produced 2,450 tons of wheat, of which 150 tons were sold to the Government. A similar proportion of other produce was sold in the same way. The remainder is sold in the farm's own shops, or in the case of wheat, is sold privately or to the Co-operatives. Profits are divided between the farmers.

We met a remarkable old man who was still working very actively, and who was as agile as a young lad. He was well over eighty and he was about the happiest person I have ever met anywhere. He spoke about the bad old days before 1918, when he was a farmer, and how he had been imprisoned for failing to give 50 per cent of his produce within a specified time. This old man told proudly how last year he had worked 450 labour days!

All the 500 houses on this farm are owned by the farmers. We visited one woman farmer's house, though we were invited to many of them. Our hostess, her husband and their son were all farmers. Their house was big and roomy, and very comfortably furnished. They also took us over their own large private garden, which brought them in a very comfortable income last year, while providing the house with a good larder.

The owners of these farm houses pay no rates (there is no rating system in the Soviet Union) and only a very low charge for electricity.

Our host and hostess gave us a very excellent meal and of course there was Georgian wine, to drink the numerous toasts. And the toast of the evening was the one to peace.

"Why shouldn't we want peace? We have everything and we have security" our hostess told us. We all assured her that the British people too want peace, and that we would work towards that end when we returned to Britain.

## TRADE UNIONS

by Joyce Brown

*Engineering Worker*

and Rose Carr

*Tobacco Worker*

**W**HAT a difference we, as British trade unionists, saw between our own ceaseless struggle against the employers and the status and prestige of trade unions in a country where the means of production belong to the working people!

Some people believe the Soviet trade unions are not "real" trade unions. They are very real indeed, and play a great role in Soviet life—negotiating collective agreements, participating in the planning of production, running the social services, and organising cultural and social activities. It is true to say that nothing which affects the Soviet worker's living or working conditions can be done without the co-operation of the trade unions. And unlike our own unions, none of the higher union organisations—including the Soviet equivalent of the T.U.C.—can take action "over the heads" of the members, without widespread discussion in the factories themselves.

During our visit we talked with ordinary union members, chairmen of factory committees, and full-time officials of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions. Mr. Kusnetsov, President of the Central Council, explained to us the new role of trade unions in a Socialist country.

In the Soviet Union, where the means of production belong to the people, there is no antagonism of interests between workers and management of a factory. The management, instead of being representatives of a boss out to make the maximum profit at the workers' expense, are the representatives of the workers themselves and are responsible to them.



The workers we talked to knew that increased production would mean—and already does mean—more consumer goods available to them, and improved living standards. For this reason the trade unions help to raise productivity and work to see that the Five-Year Plans are carried through.

All Soviet factories have collective agreements, drawn up between managements and trade union committees, laying down conditions of work and wages. All workers take part in the discussions around these collective agreements, and around the production plans which are integral with them.

Soviet workers' incomes are not limited to wages alone; their free non-contributory medical, health, social, educational, insurance, and other services are equivalent to an average of 38 per cent added to their wages. It is natural therefore that in all these services the trade unions should play a vital part.

A typical factory we visited was the Calibre Tool and Instrument Factory in Moscow, also called the "Garden Factory" because of its orchards and extensive grounds, where masses of lilac were to be seen when we called. This factory has an overnight sanatorium, run by the trade unions, where workers who are run down or in poor health can spend their non-working hours for a month or more under special treatment. (One of the amenities of this sanatorium is a very luxurious television set for the patients!) The manager is a woman.

Unemployment does not exist in the Soviet Union in any shape or form—neither unemployment, "redundancy", nor under-employment. Under the Soviet planned economy, every man and woman can always find work, and booms and slumps are meaningless words. Indeed, we were told on many occasions that there is a shortage of labour in all Soviet industries. No worker can be dismissed, nor can piece rates or bonuses be altered, without trade union consent—and contrary to the old anti-Soviet propaganda story, a worker can change his job if he wants to.

There is full machinery for airing grievances, and once a grievance is raised it must be solved within a given time—no protracted negotiations such as we are used to in Britain.

As British trade unionists, we were able to see that under Socialism the trade unions take on a new role, becoming a truly noble force in building prosperity for all.