

An Economic Program for Russia

By E. YURIEVSKY

In the serious discussions now under way as to what kind of world this will be when the war is over, little attention is being accorded to the prospects in Soviet Russia. Yet, no program of world reconstruction can be undertaken without taking into consideration that vast country, with its 170,000,000 people.

The belief and hope is expressed that after the war Europe will disarm. But would that be possible if Russia remains armed? Would not the continued armament and militarization of Russia lead to a new rearmament of Europe?

To be sure, it is difficult to imagine Russia remaining static with the rest of the world undergoing profound transformation. We are frequently told that Stalin will fall when Hitler collapses, that there will be a revolution in Russia. What would be the social and political character of a revolution in Russia? I think we can try to answer the question on the basis of available facts and their inescapable logic.

The chief objective of the future regime in Soviet Russia must be the country's emancipation from the fetters of Stalin and the dictatorship. And this involves not only politics but economics. Both in Russia and Germany the state has taken everything into its hands: food, clothing, housing, the theatre, the press, books. The state controls and dispenses everything. It holds every human being in its grasp. The state is all. The individual and the masses are slaves. Freedom can be restored only by the gradual liberation of the human being from the state. It will, therefore, be necessary to restore gradually a sector of private enterprise. For example, the commercial apparatus in Russia is working very badly. Czarist Russia had 1,166,000 trade establishments in 1912, both in the wholesale and retail fields. The United States has 1,543,000 wholesale and retail establishments. Soviet Russia, which is a much greater and more sprawling country, has only 352,000. In point of

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trade development, Soviet Russia occupies a position very much at the bottom of the scale among the backward countries. It will be necessary to emancipate private trade in order to give it an opportunity to develop and to supply the people's needs.

There are today 1,500,000 artisans and craftsmen in Soviet Russia. The Soviet government has forcibly combined them in 45,000 "artels," under control of the state. They work in the so-called "state workshops." No shoemaker, tailor, seamstress or carpenter is permitted to work for himself or herself. They must work together in the "artels." For example, if a peasant needs a pair of shoes and there is no "artel" in his village he must travel for miles to a "state workshop" to obtain them.

In 1937, according to official figures, 861,000 artisans deserted the "artels." But their places were taken by 987,000 others. This is not surprising, for the members of the "artels," like the population as a whole, are constantly striving to free themselves from control and oppression of the state. Government persecution of artisans compels them, however, to return each time to the yoke, to the "state workshops," if they are not to starve.

Coupled with the liberation of private trade, there must be a restoration of private housing construction. Few houses have been built since 1929. The horrible housing conditions pre-

vailing in Russia can be remedied only if private enterprise is added to government effort. Small homes confiscated by the government, particularly in the provinces, must be returned to their former owners. Houses "nationalized" by the government have fallen into decay and disrepair. If this condition continues to prevail, no one will have a home.

But the domains of activity mentioned do not exhaust the fields where private initiative must be restored. The natural resources, transportation and heavy industry can and should remain in the hands of the state, provided the state is democratized and returned to control of the people, but there is not the slightest reason why individuals should be forbidden to engage in hunting and fishing. Today, a Soviet citizen is forbidden under pain of severe punishment to fish or to hunt. These enterprises are government monopolies. As a consequence, the Russian people have much less fish today than they had before the last war.

The free trades and professions must also be liberated. Today only government clinics are available for medical and dental attention. Doctors and dentists are permitted to practice only in such clinics, of which there are not nearly enough, with the result that millions of people must travel long distances to get relief from illness or tooth ache, and to wait for many hours before they receive it. When the professions are set free, the people, who are now suffering from lack of medical and dental facilities, will find this condition much improved. Socialization of medicine and dentistry presupposes the existence of an abundance of proper resources. It is ridiculous to make the people suffer by "socializing" limited resources while interfering with the development of new resources, which can come only with a greater measure of freedom.

All the reforms mentioned here are now being widely talked about in Russia. They are demanded by

tens of millions of human beings, who do not dare to proclaim their demands publicly. As long as Stalin and his totalitarian regime remain in power, Russia cannot liberate herself so that she may once again breathe and work freely.

The alternative is simple: either Russia will be given freedom to think, to work, to live, to create, or the Stalin regime will be destroyed.