

ONE PENNY.

**Freedom**  
*in the*  
**Soviet Union**

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LD

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SINCE this Pamphlet has been written, the Press has published the forecast of a measure said to be under consideration by the Commonwealth Government, to render certain working-class organisations illegal and to persecute and imprison their supporters. This is a striking example of the "freedom" granted in capitalist countries to bodies which place at the top of their banner the simple demand of the worker's right to live. The proposed repressive Bill may or may not be introduced at the present stage. But the mere fact that such a measure is under consideration serves to emphasise the purpose for which the "Slavery in the Soviet Union" lie was invented. It was invented to divert the attention of the workers from the slavery at their own door, which becomes daily more intense as the system of which they are the victims draws nearer to its inevitable collapse.

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## Freedom in the Soviet Union

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"Yes, it's all very efficient, but it leaves no room for individual liberty." This is the argument with which many people now attempt to dispose of Soviet Russia. It is impossible any longer to deny the rapid economic progress of the Soviet Union, its great triumphs of engineering, its abolition of unemployment, its pre-eminence in matters of health and child welfare. The new line of attack is not to deny these triumphs, but to assert that they have been made possible only by what is virtually a new form of slavery. "Russia is a nation of slaves." "Material welfare is no substitute for free thought." "We must have liberty at all costs." There is no doubt that many would-be "Friends of the Soviet Union" are deterred by remarks of this kind. But let us examine the question a little more carefully. Are the Russian people slaves? Are our own people free? And what do we mean by freedom and by slavery?



## What Does Freedom Mean?

We must beware of talking about freedom without thinking what it means. Australia is called "a free country." And certainly a list of our present liberties on paper would look very fine. But what do they usually amount to in practice? Liberty to take orders from the boss. Liberty to go round from one factory gate to the next and be told that one is not wanted. Liberty to wear out one's last pair of boots. Liberty to starve. For those who feel satisfied with this conception of liberty this pamphlet has not been written. It has been written for those who think of liberty as something larger and more positive—something which means, in fact as well as in theory, the freedom to exercise all one's varied faculties, whether of mind or of body.

### Economic Security.

What are the factors which go to make up liberty in the larger sense of the word? The first and the most important is economic security. No man is free to exercise his faculties fully with hunger at the door. He is too worried over the problem of the next meal to be either free to play or free to think. His power to develop what is in him, and get the best out of the life he sees around him, is crushed out in the continual struggle to make ends meet. That struggle is the very first thing we must abolish if

we are going to have freedom at all. When, therefore, we look round the capitalist countries to-day, and find over 50 million workers unemployed, we know that, whatever their form of government, those countries are not "free." Those 50 million workers, not to speak of the much larger number dependent on them, whatever freedom they can boast on paper, have not yet been freed from the mere battle to keep alive. Then there are the still larger number of people who, while in work at the moment, have no guarantee that their job will last until next week and thus have no feeling of security. Taking all in all, we see that for the masses of the people in capitalist countries the very first condition of liberty does not yet exist.

### Russia Banishes Unemployment.

Soviet Russia is the one country in the world which has conquered unemployment and banished economic insecurity. This fact is not contradicted even in the most hostile Press reports. Mr. C. M. Lloyd, of the London School of Economics, wrote in the "New Statesman" last October: "Every able-bodied Russian is, of course, fully occupied." The fact is so well established that this well-known economist feels entitled to say "of course." The difficulty, in fact, since the end of 1930 has been, not to get enough jobs for the workers, but to get enough workers for the jobs. Peasants, clerks, teachers, and others, have been en-



couraged to take up industrial work during their holidays and free periods. Thus the Russian worker, alone among the workers of the world, can feel that his means of living is secure. Whatever else may be said of him, he is at any rate free from starvation and from the fear of starvation. He can think, he can read, he can take part freely in sport, discussion, and constructive work, while the attention of other workers in "free" countries is absorbed in the fight for food.

### "Liberty is Leisure."

Let us turn now to another factor which goes into the making of real liberty—Leisure. Without leisure there can be no liberty worthy of the name. Mr. Bernard Shaw, in one of his books, goes so far as to identify the two. He says, "Liberty is leisure," and leaves it at that. By leisure, of course, we mean not merely leisure to do nothing, but leisure to play, leisure to think, leisure to do work OF ONE'S OWN CHOICE. The great majority of people, while they are at work, have to submit to a fixed discipline and routine. They are only free to do what they like outside working hours. How, then, do the Soviet and capitalist systems compare in the amount of leisure that they allow to the average man?

### Using Machines to Lighten Toil.

No large body of workers under capitalism work for less than 44 or 48 hours a

week. Sixty-hour weeks are still common in Europe, 70-hour weeks in Asia. The Australian worker has for some time been flitting between the 44 and the 48-hour week. Furthermore, nowhere in the capitalist world do hours of work to-day show any tendency to go down. Wonderful machines are introduced, capable of getting the necessary work done in a mere fraction of the time once required for it; but these machines, as we know, have served merely to create unemployment, not to lighten each man's burden of toil. But again—what about Russia? Russia, before the Revolution, had an average working day of ten to twelve hours. The Australian worker could boast as great a superiority in this matter over the Russian worker as over the worker of the East. Now, however, the majority of workers in Russia enjoy a seven-hour day, with a five-day week, and one day off in every five. That means an average of 39 hours of work in every seven days, or the equivalent of a thirty-nine-hour week in Australia. The six-hour day enjoyed by Russian miners and young workers is the equivalent of a 33½-hour week. Moreover, every Russian worker obtains, and has obtained ever since the Revolution, a fortnight's holiday each year on full pay. Having brought the machines under his own control, he has been able to use them, not to extract profits for the few, but to lessen the drudgery of all. This has been true not only in the factories, but on the



fields, where the introduction of a hundred thousand tractors has enabled the peasants to get their work done in fewer days and thus left more days free for other things. Here again, on examination, it turns out that it is the Russians who are the "free" people, while we are the "nation of slaves."

### The Shadow and the Substance of Freedom.

There we have the first important factors in the making of liberty—economic security and leisure. By themselves, however, they are not enough. One needs also a certain amount of wealth with which to make effective one's claim to the good things of the world. This wealth may take the form of cash, or it may take the form of a right to certain goods and services. But without it freedom can become a mere shadow, as the Australian worker knows only too well. Free to buy yachts and aeroplanes, he is lucky if he can raise his daily train-fare. Free to establish multiple stores, he finds himself unable to set up the smallest shop in a back street in the suburbs. What the law gives him perfect liberty to do in theory, his own poverty in fact prevents. The Soviet system, however, gives some real substance to the different rights and liberties permitted under the law. This it has done partly by an extensive system of free or specially cheap services. For example, it does not simply say to the Rus-

sian worker, "You are at perfect liberty to attend the theatre any night of the week." It provides him with a cheap seat so that he will be actually able to get in. It does not say, "You are at perfect liberty to spend your fortnight's holiday in any part of the Soviet Union." It provides him with a free railway-pass, with free accommodation for the fortnight, very likely in some fine old palace, in one of the Grand Duke's bedrooms. There are still, of course, many things in Russia that are not granted free, and that the worker still has to buy. But here we should recall the fact that while capitalists all over the world have been cracking the whip to bring wages down, the real wages of the Russian worker are being continually raised, and are now twice as high as before the war. This means a great increase in the number of things that the Russian worker is able to buy and in the number of things that he is able to do.

### Freedom for the Capitalist.

Security, leisure, sufficiency of economic means. This is the great economic trinity on which all freedom depends. The capitalist system has indeed provided the whole trinity for its own chosen class. Newspapers love to depict the capitalist as insecure, short of funds, and terribly overworked; but we know that this is far from his normal condition of life. The capitalist class, taken as a whole, has enjoyed the



economic conditions of freedom. But it has been a freedom gained at the cost of the oppression of others. Liberty for the capitalist? Yes. Liberty for the worker? No. The great new thing that the workers of Russia have done is to try to convert this class-freedom into a freedom for all humanity. Freedom for every worker, and every man a worker! That is the Soviet motto, and the facts show that they have done their best to live up to it.

### **"Democracy."**

You may say, perhaps, "Freedom is not only a matter of economic conditions. It is also a matter of political control. It is not only a matter of how people live, but of how much say they have in deciding how they are going to live. In a word, there must be Democracy." But here again let us avoid being carried away by catchwords. It is true that Australia is called a democracy—a Parliamentary democracy; and that the Soviet Union is under what is called a dictatorship—a dictatorship of the proletariat. But when it comes to actual fact, which is the more "democratic" system of the two? Undoubtedly the Russian. For two reasons.

### **Who Rules Australia?**

(1) The real power of control in Australia lies with the capitalist class. It is

this class which decides whether we shall be allowed to work. It is this class which decides what shall be produced, when it shall be produced, and, very largely, under what conditions the work shall be done. Nor is its power limited to the economic field; for it proves to be the master of Parliament itself and the whole State apparatus. A few members of this class were recently able to lay down the main lines of Australian policy for a period of years by sending an ultimatum to the Governments threatening to cut off their supply of credits. That incident has shown us once and for all where the real political power lies in a modern capitalist State. It lies in the capitalist class, and especially in the banks. Therefore Parliamentary democracy is really a dictatorship of capital. But in Russia there is no longer a capitalist class of any importance. Thus the ground has been left clear for a new and a far freer system than has been possible before.

### **The Soviet the Voice of the Workers.**

(2) The Russian workers have established a new and better form of democratic machinery of government. They have created the Soviet. The lower soviets or councils in the towns are elected direct from the places of employment at mass meetings of the workers. In the villages, the village soviets are elected at mass meetings of the peasants. The workers and peasants have



the power to recall delegates at any time and elect others.

In the higher soviets the town workers have greater representation than the peasants. Employers of labor are not allowed to vote, nor can they be candidates in soviet elections. These measures guarantee the leadership of the industrial workers, a condition necessary for the building of a socialist society, and suppresses those elements which seek a return to capitalist exploitation.

The soviet form of government gives democratic expression to the interests of the toiling masses. Not only are great numbers of the toilers members of the soviets, but through subsidiary organs literally millions of them are drawn into the work of government.

### **Police Batons and Press Combines.**

There is one further aspect of the subject that we ought to examine. Is there in Russia to-day any intellectual freedom—freedom of publication, freedom of speech? Here, too, we should remember that under capitalism it is a question of freedom for a particular class. Public halls are only available for those who can afford to hire them, and who have not offended too deeply against the capitalist commandments. Street meetings and demonstrations are “free” only if the capitalist State organs permit them, and the police refrain from

wielding their batons. Nor is there any real “freedom of the Press.” True, anyone who can raise money to set up offices like those of the “Argus” and the “Herald,” and who is friendly enough to capitalism to capture the necessary advertisements, is free to start a newspaper at any moment. But the result of this “freedom” has been to leave two gigantic combines—the “Sun” combine and the “Herald” combine—closely linked with each other, in control of the majority of important newspapers in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, and West Australia. Lenin hit the mark when he said that freedom of the Press under capitalism was “freedom for a man who could afford to own a newspaper to debauch the minds of those who could only afford to buy it.”

### **“A Hundred Million Orators.”**

Now in Russia the columns of the paper are not entirely free. They are not open to capitalist and counter-revolutionary propaganda. But, subject to that exception, freedom of criticism is complete. The most bitter attacks one can find on such flaws as have occurred in the working of the Five-year Plan have appeared, not in the “Argus,” but in “Izvestia” and “Pravda,” the two leading Soviet newspapers. From all over the Soviet Union they pour in day by day the articles of the “workers’ correspondents”—correspondents who make it





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their special job to criticise, complain, and make new suggestions in regard to the running of the economic machinery. This free interplay of opinion has resulted in a large increase in the circulation of newspapers in the Soviet Union, in marked contrast to the position in Fascist Italy, where, owing to the suppression of opinion, the circulation of newspapers has greatly declined. Further, the wide freedom of criticism in the Press is matched by the wide freedom of speech allowed in the Soviets. The American Senator, Elihu Root, visiting Russia after the Revolution, summed it up in a phrase when he said that Russia had become "a nation of a hundred million orators." Those who fear that Communism would mean the suppression of all free speech and the silencing of all free opinion can, therefore, feel reassured.

Thus we find that not only has the Soviet Government, unlike any other Government, set out boldly to create the economic conditions of freedom; not only has it prepared the way to a true Democracy by destroying capitalism and setting up the Soviets; but it has allowed the freest expression of all opinion except that which would bring back the arch-enemy of Freedom—Capitalism—whose slaves we now are.

## "THE INTERNATIONAL"

Arise ye workers from your slumbers,  
 arise ye prisoners of want,  
 For reason in revolt now thunders, and at  
 last ends the age of cant;  
 Now away with all superstition, servile  
 masses arise, arise;  
 We'll change forthwith the old conditions  
 and spurn the dust to win the prize.

### Chorus:

Then comrades come rally and the last  
 fight let us face,  
 The International unites the human race;  
 Then comrades come rally and the last  
 fight let us face,  
 The International unites the human race.

No saviours from on high deliver, no trust  
 have we in prince or peer;  
 Our own right hand the chains must  
 shiver—chains of hatred, of greed,  
 and fear;  
 E'er the thieves will disgorge their booty,  
 and give a happier lot,  
 Each at his forge must do his duty and  
 strike the iron when it's hot.

### Chorus.

We peasants, artisans and others, enrolled  
 among the sons of toil,  
 Let's claim the earth henceforth for  
 brothers, drive the indolent from the  
 soil.  
 On our flesh too long has fed the raven,  
 we've too long been the vulture's prey,  
 But now farewell the spirit craven, the  
 dawn brings in a brighter day.

### Chorus.



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