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THE SEVEN HOUR DAY (II)

One of the most interesting studies yet published of the transition to a shorter working week in the USSR has appeared in Planned Economy (No. 11, 1959). It reveals that as early as January 1957, more than 200,000 Donbas coal miners, out of a total of 430,000, were working a six hour day, while the remainder had had the length of their day reduced to seven hours. The proportions make it clear that the average day worked throughout the whole of the USSR's largest coalfield since then can have been little more than 6 1/2 hours. It is obvious that this artificial restriction of output, with the limitations which it must impose on the earnings of individuals, has not been universally well received, since one pit at least is now meeting criticism for opening up a section not provided for by the plan in order to benefit from the bonuses for exceeding its target.¹ These bonuses are of course officially intended to act as an incentive to higher productivity, and their effect becomes wholly negative if they result in the accumulation of unwanted coal.

It seems, too, that the labor force in the Donbas is now slowly being reduced, since the 430,000 miners mentioned by Planned Economy is 25,000 less than the 1955 total calculated by ECE.² For industry as a whole, the article confirms that night shifts are now at last on their way out (see Izvestia, 13 November 1959 and Background Information, "Comparison of the US and Soviet Economies - the Labor Force", p. ii). The intention is to curtail them when the 41 hour week is introduced in 1960, and finally to eliminate them when the 35-hour week arrives, which is expected to be during the 1964-68 period.

The precise dimensions of the expansion of the labor force due to the reduction of the working day are not disclosed by Planned Economy, but for a big plant extra staff running into three figures appear to have been hired in many cases. The Azovstal and Zaporozhstal steel works, Magnitogorsk and Krivoi Rog Metals Combines and the Stalinogorsk Chemicals Combine are all mentioned as having recruited additional labor, while at Azovstal the new workers required numbered 472. An influx of this size makes it easy to understand why output has continued to mount in most of the heavy industrial sectors, despite the reductions in hours made during the past three years. Reliance has not been placed solely on increases in productivity, which often could not have been large enough by themselves to enable targets to be reached.

¹ See Trud, 4 December 1959.

² Economic Survey of Europe in 1957, Geneva, 1958, Ch. VII, p. 34.

Planned Economy calculates that the transition from a 46-hour week in 1956 to a 41 hour week now, in those industries where this has already been achieved, has reduced the average number of hours per worker by 10.9% ($\frac{41.1}{46} = 89.1\%$). The corollary is that output per worker has had to increase by 12.2% ($\frac{46.1}{41} = 112.2\%$). The transition period began in 1956 and was completed in 1958, so that output per worker per year has in fact had to rise by little more than 4% - a creditable performance certainly, but not an outstanding nor an inherently improvable one.

The magazine then uses the same type of reasoning to argue that the transition from a 40-hour week to a 35-hour week is equally practicable. In the years 1964-68 the weekly hours per worker are intended to be reduced by 12.5% ($\frac{35.1}{40} = 87.5\%$). Hence the necessary additional hourly output per worker will be equivalent to 14.3% ($\frac{40.1}{35} = 114.3\%$). But since the time allotted is a four-year period, 35 instead of the 3 years 1956-58, the average annual increase in hourly output per worker appears to be less (about 3.6% p.a.) than in the earlier case.

However, Planned Economy shows that this is not precisely true, in fact, because the average length of the work day in the factories has in the past usually been less than 8 hours. The shortfall was caused by the substantial number of workers whose day was reduced for special reasons (adolescents, night-shift workers, and those in shops with harmful labor conditions). Thus at the Manometr factory in Moscow and the Kuibyshev Auto-traktordetal plant it was found that the change to the seven-hour day involved an increase in hourly output per worker of only 9.2% and about 4.5% respectively.

The article ends with the unexplained remark that the switch to the 7-hour day in those factories where it occurred in 1956-1958 had not been provided for in the annual plans, and consequently the necessary preparations had to be hurriedly made in the short period of 2-3 months. So the reader is presented with a puzzle to which there are remarkably few clues. What caused the sudden change of heart in the Kremlin during those years - desire to give the workers more leisure, a shortage of markets for heavy industrial products, or a surplus of labor which could not otherwise have been absorbed? Readers of Komsomolskaya Pravda, and Literary Gazette, who recall their long series of reports on juvenile unemployment, are awarded no prizes for selecting the right answer..

r.r.g.

Average Length of the Work Day - Industrial Workers

(source: Statistical Handbook, USSR in 1958, p. 665)

	Hours Worked by Adults	
	1956	Beginning of 1959
Throughout Industry	7.96	7.70
including:		
Electric Power	7.98	7.14
Coal	7.94	7.03
Oil	7.98	7.94
Ferrous Metals	7.98	7.05
Engineering and Metal Working	7.97	7.81

Average Length of the Work Day - Industrial Workers (con't.)

	Hours Worked by Adults	
	<u>1956</u>	<u>Beginning of 1958</u>
Chemicals	7.74	6.91
Paper	7.97	7.81
Textiles	7.98	7.96
Leather and Furs	7.99	7.98
Shoes	8.00	7.98
Food	8.00	7.99

Notes (a) The transition to a 7- and 6-hour work day for all workers and employees, which began in the 4th quarter of 1956, is due to be completed in 1960.

(b) The data above are cited without taking into account the reduction of the work day to 6 hours on the days before holidays and on Saturdays, which was introduced in March 1956. If this is taken into account the actual length of the work day in industry at the beginning of 1959 was 7.4 hours.

AVERAGE WEEKLY HOURS WORKED IN CERTAIN INDUSTRIES IN UNITED KINGDOM
(April 1959, census)

Cement manufacture	55.7
Civil engineering contracting	53.0
Electricity Supply	48.9
Paper and Board manufacture	48.4
Building	48.1
Shipbuilding and repairing	47.4
Motor vehicle manufacture	46.9
Sheet steel manufacture	46.9
Chemicals	46.6
Woollen and worsted spinning and weaving	45.7
Machine tools	45.5
Air Transport	45.2
Cotton spinning and weaving	43.4
Wrought iron plate manufacture	42.8
Boot and shoe manufacture	42.7

(Source: Financial Times, Dec. 29, 1959)

ACTUAL HOURS WORKED IN UNITED KINGDOM
(Average for each April)

1956	46.7
1957	46.6
1958	46.2
1959	46.3

(Source: Financial Times, Dec. 29, 1959)