

THE ACTIVITY of the RUSSIAN PEOPLE'S COMMISSARIAT FOR SOCIAL WELFARE.

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The People's Commissariat for Social Welfare, which arose from the will of the workers' and peasants' revolution, represents an entirely new departure for Russia. There is nothing in the past that is equivalent to it. Under the old régime, the needy population depended entirely on the scant aims of charity organisations. The latter represented merely the caprice of people who did not know how to kill time; the practical results of their work was therefore equivalent to zero. The November revolution has done away with this penny charity, and has put in its place the duty of the State toward all working citizens. The many-sided activity of the Commissariat for Social Welfare, and the tasks which it must meet, found their expression in the "Provisions for Social Welfare for Workers," confirmed October 31st, 1918, by the Council of People's Commissaries. In accordance with these provisions, welfare work applies without exception to all workers who obtain their livelihood by their own work, without exploitation of other people's work, and when we recall that with the introduction of obligatory labour duty, and with the nationalisation of capitalistic enterprises, the bourgeoisie must disappear in Soviet Russia, it is clear that in the near future the social welfare work must include all classes of the population of the Russian Federal Soviet Republic.

Welfare activity is applicable, according to the new decree, to all cases that have lost all means of subsistence, either through temporary incapacity for work, through general debility, mutilation, pregnancy, etc., or through permanent incapacity for work. According to the law, one has a right to welfare attention, even in cases of loss of the means of subsistence through unemployment, where such is not the fault of the unemployed. It is far from the intentions of the organs of social welfare to take steps to prevent sickness and mutilation, but it is their intention to provide for the whole population, every possible kind of medical aid, beginning with first aid in cases of sudden illness, up to every possible medical treatment of a special nature, such as that provided in ambulatories, sanatoriums, etc. In addition, every worker has a claim to medicaments and to special medical instruments, artificial limbs, etc. In cases of temporary loss of the ability to work, through disease or mutilation, compensations amounting to the sum earned by the unemployed are granted up to the time of complete restoration of health. Pregnant and confined women receive aids of like amount for a period of eight weeks preceding and eight weeks following confinement, if they are physical workers. Other cases receive such aid for six weeks. In cases of unemployment, the aid is granted up to the day of re-employment, at the rate of the smallest compensation in the locality in question that is permitted by its tariff. In case of permanent lack of employment, or unemployment for more than sixty per cent. of the working time, a full allowance is paid; in other words, for one month, twenty-five times the average daily wage of the locality in which the unemployed man lives; where unemployment amounts to 45-60 per cent. of working time, three-quarters of this allowance is paid; for 30-45 per cent., one-half; for 15-30 per cent., one-fifth of the full allowance.

According to its functions, the Commissariat for Social Welfare is divided into the following sections:—

I. SECTION FOR CHILDREN'S HOMES.—

Among the duties of this section are the care for children without guardians, such as the exposed child (foundling), orphans, illegitimates, children of beggar women and prostitutes, children who have been taken away from their parents by law (criminals, drunkards, street vendors, etc.), as well as abnormal children of three classes: (1) morally abnormal, who have committed a crime, and to whom the law of January 17th, 1918, is applicable (according to this law, courts are abolished for minors and they are assigned to the care of the People's Commissariat for Social Welfare); (2) Mentally abnormal children; (3) Physically abnormal children. The Section for Children's Homes establishes asylums, communes and homes for children in order in this way to replace their families. In these asylums and homes, the principle of labour and the principle of children's independence are carried out. The children's homes are connected with libraries, clubs, playgrounds, workshops, etc. After attaining a certain age, the children of these asylums and homes, as well as all other children, must attend the schools which are open to all. In the children's homes and asylums the children remain until the age of seventeen, whereupon they enter life for themselves, without relieving the State, however, of the continuance of its care, in accordance with the "provisions." According to the reports, up to January 1st, 1919, more than 100,000 children are under such supervision in Russia, and there are 1,500 children's homes. In the near future, a further considerable number of homes and asylums is to be opened.

II. SECTION FOR CARE OF MOTHERS AND INFANTS.—

This section has established, in large numbers, asylums and homes for the pregnant. For women in confinement living in establishments have been organised, in which the mothers obtain instruction in the nourishment and care of children. After leaving such establishments, the mother, together with the new-born child, is placed in a new home which is under supervision of special physicians. In the factories and works, as well as in the country, at the time of work in the fields in summer, day nurseries are established, in which mothers can feed their own children; orphaned infants are taken care of in special institutions under medical supervision, in which the children are fed. The Section for the Care of Mothers and Infants has its own dairies, in which milk is provided for the mothers and children. In addition, they supervise the milk trade, in so far as the latter is intended for children. The section has also established courses for the instruction of those supervising these homes, in which the students receive, in addition to general instruction, also certain specific instruction.

III. SECTION FOR THE WAR-MAIMED.—

The chief task of this section is to make the maimed capable of performing such variety of work as is compatible with their individual mutilations. With this in view, the section aims particularly to secure the greatest possible restoration of normal health in the individual in order to prepare him for work that will be in accordance with the character of his mutilation. For cripples, there is a great number of the most varied workshops in which they may apply their forces and their energy. In Moscow, there are ten vocational courses for cripples.

IV. SECTION FOR INVALIDS.—According to data thus far received, which are as yet by no means complete, this section is at present taking care of about 65,000 old men and women, who are living in 2,000 homes. In the near future, a thorough transformation of the homes intended for invalids is proposed: they are to be based on a model unit for 50 and 100 inmates, instead of the numbers hitherto sheltered. In these homes, the principle of labour and the principle of independence are carried out as far as possible.

V. OUTSIDE AID.—Permanent financial aid is at present granted not only to the unemployed, but also to the families of Red Army men. At a very early date, a decree will probably be issued as to the care of families of physicians and victims of the counter-revolution. The maximum annual allowance of this kind is 2,000 rubles per person. In the decree of the Council of People's Commissaries on Social Welfare, the payment of allowances to all men over fifty, all women over fifty-five is provided; yet the serious financial situation, together with the continued war needs, which are at present forced upon Russia, make it impossible to carry out this decree with absolute completeness; for this reason, the invalids, as has been already mentioned, obtain aid in the form of actual necessities, at the various homes.

VI. TEMPORARY AID.—As a matter of principle, aid is granted to the needy soldiers of the old army, namely, to 400,000 men (according to the financial report more than 1,000,000,000 rubles have been paid out this way). In addition, the section has established workshops of all kinds, in order to secure work for the needy population. For the same purpose, Government constructions are being undertaken, cheap and even free eating houses established, dwelling places and night lodgings opened. A great amount of work arises for this section from the fact that it provides aid for fugitives from the localities that have been taken by the White Guardists.

VII. SECTION FOR AID TO THE VICTIMS OF THE COUNTER-REVOLUTION.—This section provides aid for the workers in the Soviet and the Party, who have suffered under the counter-revolution, also to political fugitives who are returning with the Red Army. For the purpose of aiding fugitives and victims of the counter-revolution, all sorts of agricultural communes are established, while persons of this kind may obtain, previous to their assignment to such communes, a financial aid equivalent to the minimum necessary for maintaining life.

VIII. THE SECTION FOR RATIONS provides for the rationing of the soldiers of the old army and the families of the Red Guardsmen.

In addition to the above cited chief sections, there are also less important sub-divisions, such as that for the combating of mendicancy and of street vending.

In the second half-year of 1918, the People's Commissariat for Social Welfare spent 600,000,000 rubles, while the proposed budget for the first half-year of 1919 was for more than 2,000,000,000 rubles. The funds of the People's Commissariat for Social Welfare consist of payments of the following classes: For aids paid to mothers and the unemployed, in the form of a uniform impost for the entire territory of Soviet Russia; for the remaining varieties of welfare work, the amount to be paid in is fixed by the local organs of the People's Commissariat, on the basis of tariffs depending on the danger-class to which each occupation is assigned by the local authorities. All these funds together constitute a single, All-Russian Fund for Social Welfare.

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