

My dear Israel,

My toes are about healed and I shall commence work to-morrow.

At the moment I am working at home.
Great changes have taken place here lately; a fundamental change in the Soviet Policy, brought about by pressure from I do not know where.

Let us state the facts and realise that we know it. It is interesting to note, for instance, that I arrived just at the summit of the hot 5 years plan, lived through the crisis and am now witnessing the anticlimax, which possibly may be the improvement or the salvation of the general position of things.

However that may be, - I can only explain the effect and the changes wrought about this little world, within which I found myself here.

My chief Platanov, whom I lately found to be, by the way, both selfish and mean, returned yesterday from Voronezh with certain important instructions which are going to have far reaching effects upon us. I shall try to endeavour to coolly explain how it may reflect upon me amongst other people.

Let me start this way:-----

As a result of the new changed policy, both "Mostrotrest" (Bridge building head office) and ~~Moskwa~~ "Glavzheldostroi" (Headquarters of Railway Construction) have had their grants very much curtailed. Both organizations have stopped a large number of new proposed, started works, as well as slowed down expenditure and rate of execution of works well under way. We here got telegrams to stop Novosvetlovka job entirely; complete only till water level our bridge at the Stanitz and carry out only the sinking of the caissons at the bridge of "Andar".

A letter here again for sake of explanation says that the "Moskwa-Donbas" is divided into 9 divisions and that the Stanitz is the headquarters of the 2nd division; that within that 2nd division are two major bridges viz. that over the "Severnoi Donetz" at the very "Stanitz" and the "Lisia Balka" at Novosvetlovka. These two structures plus a third bridge over the "Andar" river in the 3d division of "Moskwa-Donbas" are under the management of one "Natchalnik Rabot", this time Platinov of which I spoke earlier. The work of construction is carried out by the organization "Mostrotrest", and for each portion of work completed it receives payment from the "Moskwa-Donbas" organisation according to a schedule of prices drawn up earlier prior to commencement according to a long and detailed contract.

This is the legal position.

No "Glavzheldostroi" gets less funds. It must economise. It therefore looks at the Moskwa-Donbas construction. What can one do? There are portions easier to finish and place into operation than others. Well, so it does. Those that are near Moscow were simpler to complete and these will be completed. But here in Divisions 1.2.3. and 4 work must cease for a year or so.

So far as the Stanitz is concerned, men are paid off and for the following month, i.e. till the Spring river floods all work of the construction will solely concentrate upon the defence of the big sand banks on the approach of the rivers. Otherwise, hundreds of thousands of roubles will be carried away into the ocean.

Hence as they say in Russian "Postromka Moskwa-Donbas Konserviruestia", i.e. there is a "conservation" of the works.... Do you follow me? (One month ago, this word "conservation" was "TREIF" and no one could ever suggest it. It smelt of Counter-Revolutionary Sabbotage i.e.)

They, i.e. the management of Moskwa-Donbas in Voronezh wished to "conserve" the bridge construction, too in so far as it ~~affixes~~ is possible under circumstances. As a result we received the telegram, I spoke of earlier.

Immediately on the 10th of February, Platanov went to Voronezh. Obviously, he did not want to be left a King without a Kingdom. He stayed there 6 - 7 days....

He is back, he has managed to persuade them completely. The "Severnoi Donetz" must be completed. The program of the "Andar" remains the same and "Lisia Balka" will linger on till

Autumn on 375,000 roubles... The sum is ~~incommensurate~~ so small (of which 150,000 roubles goes on cost of waggon transport of building material) that no more than 100 men can be kept and work on one shift and thus our friend Platonov has secured himself a post, easy, soft for six months to ~~which~~ while the time away until the storm passes and the position in Soviet Russia clears up.

I see in the near future many Soviet Railway Specialists, technicians etc. being thrown out and seeking pastures new.... So that it is very fortunate for Platonov to have secured himself a job.

Our "Donetz" job at the Stanitza cannot last more than a month. The floods come down there. After that men are paid off and a few stay to complete drawings, plans and accounts.

As for myself, my visa extension terminates on 23/3/33. This time I think I shall get extension easier. So they told me in December. But whether this will be so now with the heavy retrenchment, I, of course do not know.

Here, I have nothing to do, i.e. here at the Stanitza. On the "Isia Balka" to linger on through Summer, even if I am asked, I do not wish.

New constructions ceased. I believe that great efforts are concentrated on the Far East in the region of the Baikal lake, and the Amur river on Railway Location, i.e. on planning of new main lines to Manchuria and at the same time to open Gold Fields in the "Tundras" of Eastern Siberia.

But I think that you will pardon me all if I am not too keen to vanish in the cold wastes yonder.

I have experienced a certain ~~disillusionment~~ disillusionment in the ideology of the creed here, having come to it, face to face !!!....

I am sorry if my last statement hurts you a little ! But truthful to myself I must be.

I am afraid I shall have to go home. And now I feel that even work outside my profession but in a "freer" atmosphere, could be acceptable.

To live as we do to-day in a changing policy, to see works stopped and men retrenched and never read about it, never see or hear of it, as if it never took place at all is very, very sore.

When you in America have 20,000,000 unemployed we all seem to know. We seem to get the news partly through. Only partly, be it admitted. But here we still read of greater successes, of greater attainment in every sphere..

Well ! Israel, do you follow me ?.

The backbone of the Winter is, I think, broken and in the atmosphere feels the nearing of the Spring. We still have temperatures of - 5 °C, 10 and 15 °C. and very very rarely + anything. But all the same, we are in the second half of February.

The Spring will start. Men, women and children will again begin to wander (as if they really ever stopped ?...) on the Russian Railways this time for work, for a mere job instead of as before in 1930-1931 in search of better food, accommodation and living conditions in general. Russia will be on wheels.

At the same time the Government has taken already gigantic measures to restructure agriculture. To bring back to the "Kolkhozes" the labour hands it took so recklessly away, drawing illiterate "moujicks" into new factories and constructions. There will be a forced migration back to the land. Everyday come out new decrees in the preservation of cattle, horses, on the planning of sowing. Congress of Kolkhozes, Soviet strengthenings; then mobilisation of men for Kolkhoz work etc. etc.

Of course, I must draw inferences. Were I a Russian, I might not have seen anything at all. There are no commentaries in the Press.

Can you see why I am so glad to get "The Manchester Guardian" or even your "Star" cuttings and Aaron's "Argus" ?....

Do not forget that in the local press I find nothing of India, Australia, Canada, Ireland etc. Just machines and production units. (Needless to say, these too are interesting).

Do not ask me why I do not leave at once. I cannot answer you that.

I think I told you about the money you sent me.

I have intimation that Beile's 21.10.0. and 22.0.0. are in "Gosbank" Lugansk and that I must call there personally to receive it. That further a sum of 10 dollars is lying for me in "Artemovsk" (late "Bachmut"). I wrote to "Gosbank" Artemovsk to transfer the money to Lugansk. Whether they will do it and when I do not know. In any case, to Artemovsk means absents 3 days from work. That cannot be done at all.

To Lugansk I shall go at my very first opportunity. Once more (should it be wanted) I ask you to forward me no money to me. I can manage without.

Please send this letter over to Beile and others. I cannot go on repeating the same to everyone.

Please send a copy to Max Raphael, St George's street, Apetown and to Joe Marcus, Lansdowne road, Claremont Apetown.

I write only to you (most frequently) and the family now and again. To all and sundry I simply cannot. I have neither the time nor patience of late.

I am awaiting letters from you.

JERRY.

P.S./

At the moment the food shortage in Russia must be very acute, for only very high specialists get bread rations (1 lb) for members of their households. That means that a blacksmith, his wife and three children will get only 800 kgrams a day for the blacksmith only and the whole family will survive on his ration. That that is really physically almost impossible I need not tell you. So the hardships are enormous. Members of the "Kolkhoz" had had no flour or bread given them to them for two three months because they have not carried out their plan of food tax. They live on sour cucumbers, cabbage pickled and a little potato. Meat fetches today fabulous prices, perhaps one kilogram, the "money" wages of a 10 days earnings of a fairly qualified workman. You will thus see that something radical must be undertaken to avert a catastrophe !..

On this "Severnoi Donetz" one has also a Stolovaia for workmen. I feed here, not to have to go to our Special "Elite" Stolovaia in the Stanitza. I get my food without a queue. Otherwise, I would get crazy. I mean it. The filthiest, loudest queue, cursing as thick as the atmosphere in the kitchen !....

I get the privileged dinner here, which only the workers of the Caissons under compressed air of 2-3 atmospheres get; I fail to see how they survive. Soup of sour cucumbers and nothing else. (All workers get the same) and then the second dish is mashed potatoe with a tiny bit of meat ! This is the privileged part, for the other get no meat !.. This is as true as I am here ! Say it and tell it to all your Communist friends and let anyone deny it !

On such semi-alive men is being built successfully (?) the Five Years Plan !....

For a workman to get his lunch, or his bread, he must not only have his monthly bread card, but also a daily "Zhilton" (?) card. That is that only having worked the day to the satisfaction of his boss and the Engineer, does he get his card daily after work. On this card he gets his bread and the food in the Stolovaia.

State planning in everything ! In the minute feeding of everyone ! What an enormous amount of work for the office it is ! Everyone hardly explain ! Every 8 hours changes a shift of men. (We have 700 workmen) and to everyone such a "Zhilton" (?) is issued. The complaints, the curses etc. I need not relate !..

I am not an Artist

This is how by this colossal heavy controlling machine every man is made to work. Even if only officially !..

Russia does not laugh. I've never all these months heard a man sing a tune while working. If my statement is true, Israel, then does that not reflect the state of affairs ?....

Listen to this, Engineers, Technicians, Doctors and Specialists of any kind do not go to such Stolovaia's. For them there are others, better ones with even better food, which is possibly more cleanly prepared. As I often feed in these "Restaurants", my health is O.K. and you need not worry about it.

Here the queues are somewhat less, the language used is purer, but as everyone is equal here and all must wait their turn and as

there are only two waitresses serving, the queue is respectably large; I, too, go through the procedure which every time gives me a headache. For this reason I prefer feeding in the workman's restaurant where by virtue of my post, I get my plate of cucumber and mashed potatoes within a minute. I get in from the back of the kitchen.

In former days, the sight of tons of potatoe peel and wet black floors and cabbage leaves, and rotten seeds of cucumber could and did upset me.

These days of Bourgeois refinement are over (and quickly it goes over, when one is hungry) and I feed just as lavishly in the Stolevaia Kitchen as I did a five years ago on a virgin spot of some mountain camp!

Ach, it just reminds me of such days of yore. Of the wonderful clean pastures and slopes we would reast and eat and collect the rubbish and burn them!. How fastidious we were and how silly

One can live otherwise, I see.....

I shall remember Magoebaskloof and the waterfalls and you and me.

Was it only a year ago ?.....

JERRY

There is still a bit of paper left. But I will not use it up. I just will not.

Only excuse mistakes. I write too fast.