

EMIGRATION TO THE SOVIET UNION IN THE 1920's

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If material factors were the chief motivation for emigration to America, in the case of migration to the Soviet Union, ideological reasons predominated. The international proletariat's campaign to aid the USSR encompassed not only collection drives (money and provisions) but also the organization of working collectives which decided to emigrate to Soviet territory in order to help reconstruct the areas devastated by the war. Following Lenin's directives, qualified skilled workers were engaged throughout the world to aid in rebuilding the Soviet economy.

The first contracts were concluded by the Soviet government in 1921 with several groups of American workers, technicians and engineers from the most varied branches of industry; they also took with them all sorts of industrial equipment. Farming communes brought agricultural machinery as part of the effort to overcome Soviet backwardness in the agrarian field. The American emigrants were followed by organized groups from almost all parts of Europe and even from Australia. Indeed, the Soviet government was not in a position to permit entry into the country of all those many who — with their great illusions about the nature of this first state of the dictatorship of the proletariat — wanted to come. For there was widespread unemployment in Russia, and, moreover, convictions about the victory of the world revolution still ran strong.

In Czechoslovakia, communes and cooperatives for emigration to the USSR were organized from 1923 on; this process was helped along by Soviet representatives in Prague who sought to nurture the illusions — which were in any case strong enough among the proletariat — about Russia as the Promised Land.

The attitude of Czechoslovak officialdom was an ambivalent one: it never directly prohibited emigration to the USSR, but put considerable obstacles in the path of actually organizing such emigration. The reason for this ambivalence was that the government authorities on the one hand saw the economic opportunities for exploiting the Russian market, but, on the other, wanted to prevent the propagation of Communist ideology in Czechoslovakia.

With the five largest communes and cooperatives, a total of 2,441 workers and peasants emigrated from Czechoslovakia to the USSR in the years 1922—23. „Interhelpo“, an industrial and production cooperative whose field of activity was in Kirghizstan, was the most successful of these groups, but also suffered the greatest hardships and the most individual tragedies. This organization built the first electric power plant in Kirghizstan, as well as a textile factory, an ironworks, a furniture factory, a school and a hospital. During this period a total of 32 communes and cooperatives from abroad were working in Soviet Russia — 21 in agriculture and 11 in industry. The USA and Canada had the largest share of this emigration to the USSR, and

were followed by Czechoslovakia. Under Stalin, finally, many of these Communists who had devoted their whole lives to rebuilding the Soviet state were accused of high treason, espionage, and the like and were liquidated.