“We do not,” said Stalin, leader of the Russian workers, “want an inch of anybody’s land; but neither will we surrender an inch of our own territory to anyone.” Echoing his words, upon all the frontiers of the Soviet Union stands the army of the workers, grimly prepared to fling back every attack of its capitalist enemies.
THE RED ARMY

The Making of the Red Army

In November, 1917, the old Czarist army was in the last stages of dissolution. But in the meantime a genuine army of workers and peasants was already being formed; it drew its main strength from the Red Guards or armed corps of industrial workers, organized by the factory councils, trade unions, and similar working class bodies. These were reinforced by the revolutionary sailors of the Fleet and certain units of the old army.

By January, 1918, the Red Guard formations numbered fifty to sixty thousand men. The new offensive of the German army made it necessary to tighten up the loose structure of this force; and on January 28, 1918, a Soviet decree formally established the Red Army, the class army of the workers. At first this army was based on voluntary service; but the appearance of White Guard forces, subsidized by the former allies of the Czar, so lengthened the revolutionary front, that by June the calling up of certain "age classes" of young peasants and workers became inevitable.

During the subsequent period of civil war the army continuously gathered strength from the inexhaustible reserves of the Russian masses. It was an army led by a number of capable commanders, who sprang as by a miracle from the ranks of the workers themselves. A few Czarist officers also
threw in their lot with the revolutionary army, but the vast majority took arms against their own country.

By 1920, after the defeat of the last counter-revolutionary forces and after the Polish War, the Red Army numbered five and a half million men. Peace brought with it the problem of demobilization. The reduction of this enormous army to the normal strength of 560,000 men took several years and taxed all the organizational resources of the Soviets.

It was not until 1924 that the second great period opens in the history of the Red Army, a period of reforms associated intimately with the work of Frunze, one of the most outstanding of the Red commanders. This period continued until 1928, the year in which the first Five-Year Plan was initiated. In the course of these four years every detail in the structure, training and equipment of the army was examined and remodelled. A new system of recruiting was established and the territorial system fully developed (see below). Statutes and regulations, based on the experience of the Civil War, were drawn up. A network of military schools was established throughout the country. The result was a thoroughly modern army but an army different from all others, in that its class character as a workers’ army revealed itself even in the smallest particulars of routine and discipline.

But as yet the Red Army, while modern in structure and theoretical outlook and always prepared to defend the revolution, was still backward in equipment; and for what equipment it possessed, it depended partly upon its potential enemies, the great capitalist countries. It was only the completion of the first Five-Year Plan that gave this army the technical
equipment it required to make effective the vast man-power of the Republic.

Voroshilov, People’s Commissar for the Naval and Military Affairs, said in 1933:

“The industrialization of the country, the growth of Soviet metallurgy, engineering, chemistry—this is what created the favorable conditions that enabled us to strengthen the defenses of the Soviet Union. We have produced our own heavy artillery. We have designed and put into production our own anti-aircraft guns, tanks, and anti-tank artillery. We have now not only scout planes, which predominated in 1928, but all types of modern machines, bombers, raiders, 'chasers, and heavy bombers—and these in a proportion that makes our air fleet really powerful. . . . We can also safely say that in facing chemical weapons we shall not be defenseless.”

Service in the Red Army

The Red Army is flesh of the flesh of the toiling masses of the Soviet Union, not divorced from them. It can never be used against the workers, as can the armies of the capitalist world. All toilers in the Republic—and none but the workers—bear arms. As Frunze said in 1924, “The regular army of peace time is but the skeleton that, at the moment of danger, must be clothed in the flesh of the armed masses of the workers.” This principle finds expression in the law of 1928 on recruitment to the army, which lays down that, although the defense of the Soviet Union is the duty of every citizen of the Republic, only those belonging to the toiling population are called upon to do their duty with arms in their hands.
Thus military service in the Soviet Union is a proud privilege of the whole working class.

This privilege is as a matter of course extended to the peoples of the national minorities. The well-known policy of the Soviet Union in giving complete national independence to these minorities is necessarily mirrored in the structure of the Red Army. Although each nation contributes its own contingents, it must not be supposed that any of the republics forming the Soviet Union maintains an army of its own as distinct from the Red Army. The Red Army is thus a genuine international force.

What about conscientious objectors?

Members of religious bodies, whose doctrine forbids the bearing of arms and forbade it also before 1917, may be exempted from service or employed for sanitary duties. In peace time they may be called upon for special duty in fighting epidemics, animal epidemics, forest fires and so forth; such service may not extend beyond the period of two years in all. In war time objectors are drafted into special detachments for auxiliary service.

What is the period of training?

The first stage is pre-military training at the age of nineteen and twenty. The young men are trained for one month a year in their home districts.

For the regular army recruits are called up at the age of twenty-one. Their period of service is two years in the land and air forces or three to four years in the navy, after which
Red Army men and commanders at dinner.

A Red Army man writes for the regimental newspaper on maneuvers.
they are on the reserve list, training for one month each year, until they have completed five years in all.

Territorials also begin their service at the age of twenty-one and terminate it at the age of twenty-five. Their training lasts eleven months in all—three months the first year, and two in each succeeding year.

Reservists are divided into two categories. One includes ex-regulars up to the age of thirty-four, the other ex-regulars from thirty-four to forty. Both categories may be called up for not more than three months’ special training in all.

In addition to these, all men eligible for service, but in excess of the numbers required for regulars and territorials, are trained for a period of six months in all, but not more than two months each year, in their own localities.

What are the numbers in the Red Army?

The regular army consists of 560,000 men. Each year a contingent of about 270,000 men is drafted into the regulars, while the same number passes out on completion of its training.

The entire annual contingent of recruits is about one million two hundred thousand. Of these, an average of about 300,000 are found medically unfit. As was stated above, 270,000 go into the regulars and a further 350,000 pass into the territorials. The remainder receives a certain military training outside the army.

_The Red Army as a Workers’ Army_

What is the class composition of the Red Army?
It will be seen from the figures quoted below that the
vast increase in the number of industrial workers under the Five-Year Plan is reflected in the changed composition of the army.

In 1921, 18 per cent were workers, 71 per cent peasants, 11 per cent others.

In 1930, 31.2 per cent were workers, 57.9 per cent peasants, 10.9 per cent others.

On January 1, 1934, 45.8 per cent were workers, 42.5 per cent peasants, 11.7 per cent state and cooperative employees, etc.

These proportions apply not merely to the rank and file but to the commanding ranks as well.

What about “officers” in the Red Army?

The Red Army has no “officers” in the old sense of the term. The Red Army knows no rank; all men in the army are members of the same class, fulfilling different functions in one and the same organization. To emphasize this, those in command of any unit are not called captain, colonel, etc., but after their function: “company commander,” “battalion commander.” They are addressed by everyone alike as “Comrade company commander,” etc., while they themselves also address the rank and file as “Comrade.”

The commander is responsible not only for the military but also for the political training and the welfare of his unit. Orderlies are detailed to commanders but must in no case be used for personal service. Off duty commanders and rank and file mingle on a footing of absolute equality at mess, in the libraries, clubs and so on.

The senior and higher commanders are required to pass
through a special training in the military academies. They are “skilled workers,” and make the army their life’s profession.

What about discipline?

On duty discipline must naturally be maintained; though cases of insubordination are rare owing to the strong revolutionary consciousness of the army. Abuse of authority is punished far more severely than insubordination.

Serious offenses against the discipline of the workers’ army—such as non-fulfillment of duty, insubordination, embezzlement and corruption—are treated as crimes against the Workers’ State and are punished according to revolutionary law.

Off duty, every soldier enjoys all the rights of a citizen, and as such is subject to the same laws that govern the conduct of other citizens. All men must be given leave of absence to register their votes in elections, to exercise their functions if elected, to attend conferences and to serve on the peoples’ tribunals.

What is the daily routine of the Red Army?

As a rule, duty occupies not more than eight hours a day. Every encouragement is given to participation in training classes of all types in spare time. Men must not be wakened in the morning more than an hour and a half before work begins. After the midday meal at noon an hour and a half’s rest must be allowed. A full supper is eaten between six and eight o’clock. Evening roll call is at nine and lights out at eleven, when all entertainments must end.

How is the Red Army equipped?
A Red commander and a Red Army man on duty and at leisure. The same men are in both pictures, which illustrates the comradely discipline existing.
The Red Army is now a mechanized force. This was rendered possible by the complete success of the Five-Year Plan. The degree of mechanization is reflected in the figures submitted by Voroshilov to the 17th Congress of the Russian Communist Party on February 3, 1934. In 1929 the average of mechanized horsepower in the Red Army was 2.6 per man; in 1930, 3.07; and in 1933, 7.74. This figure is considerably higher than that of the French and American armies, higher even than that of the British army. Thus the Red Army is becoming an army of technicians. Fifty per cent of its men are technical specialists to a greater or lesser degree. If one includes machine-gunners, the percentage is raised to 70. Given the vast numbers in the army, this ensures a tremendous fighting capacity.

The Red Army is mechanized for defense only; for defense also the frontiers of the Soviet Union have been strongly fortified. A chain of fortified areas now extends from Lake Ladoga (near Leningrad) to the Black Sea, and along the Far Eastern frontiers. The coast defenses on the Black Sea and the Baltic, the White Sea and the Pacific, have all been considerably strengthened. The navy—in accordance with the defensive policy of the Republic—is limited to such smaller vessels, submarines, hydroplanes and light cruisers, as are required for coast protection.

Thus the Red Army stands on guard over the vast and growing achievements of Socialist construction, in which the army has itself played a most conspicuous part. For the Red Army first remolds its men and then sends them out to remake the social fabric of the country and to transform
the mental outlook of its people, especially of the peasants. It is a training ground for the builders of Socialism.

The influence of the army as a body and of the ex-army men as individuals in the collectivization of agriculture has been decisive. Men returned to their villages not only as trained mechanics but as the conscious political leaders of the countryside. The Red Army of today is reaping the fruits of the patient work of former years. Whereas not long ago the recruit contingents showed a high proportion of illiterates, these now number scarcely one per cent. Needless to say, no man is illiterate on leaving the army.

How does the army educate its men?

By January 1, 1934, the army had 1,478 army clubs and over 2,000 libraries containing more than thirteen million volumes, 5,300 cinemas and innumerable reading rooms, study circles and classes. These classes provide training on all theoretical and practical subjects. Besides the central Red Army playhouse in Moscow, there are twenty-five army theaters and 2,800 amateur dramatic groups.

The army has its own daily paper, the Red Star. Ten other dailies for the army and two for the navy are published in various parts of the Soviet Union.

The barracks are not, as in other countries, “closed to the public.” The men in them receive numerous visits, both from the local factories with which they are in close touch and from the peasants in the collective farms, whom they regularly assist during harvest time or other emergencies.

To illustrate the spirit of absolute unity that binds the soldier to his class, we may quote the solemn promise made
by each recruit on entering the army—a promise that has been substituted for the old oath of allegiance to the Czar:

"I, the son of the toiling people, and a citizen of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, assume the duties of a fighter in the Workers' and Peasants' Army. Before the working class of the U.S.S.R. and of the whole world, I promise to bear this title with honor, conscientiously to study the profession of arms and to guard like the apple of my eye the national and military property from damage and theft. I promise to observe military discipline strictly and unswervingly and to carry out implicitly all orders given me by the commanders appointed by the workers' and peasants' government. I promise both to refrain myself and to restrain my comrades from any act unworthy of a citizen of the U.S.S.R., and to direct all my acts and all my thoughts towards the great goal of the liberation of all workers. I promise at the first call of the workers' and peasants' government to come forward in defense of the U.S.S.R. against every danger and against the attacks of all enemies. In the struggle of the U.S.S.R. for Socialism and for the brotherhood of all nations, I promise not to spare either my strength or my life itself. Should I of evil intent break this my solemn promise, may the general contempt of all be my lot and the heavy hand of revolutionary justice fall upon me."
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