



Source 2

An account of the disruption during the civil war, written by AJ Youngman on a journey to Russia, 18 August 1919
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Questions

1. According to this source, what problems were there in the country?
2. What was being done to solve problems in the economy?
3. To what extent can we rely on this eyewitness account by a foreign visitor as a historical source?



HEROES & VILLAINS

Stalin & industrialisation > Why?

Source 2

Each district jealously guards its own frontier, and although they have not gone to the length of instituting a Customs barrier, that is about all that can be said, and one's papers are examined at the various frontiers, and any cases of luggage which look as if they contained merchandise are detained for further investigation. This is a feature of the situation which gives rise to considerable anxiety for the future, as the free passage of goods from one district to another is entirely suspended. If, for instance, a man wants to send oil from the Cuban district to the Don, he must first of all arrange to get some goods from the Don, coal, for instance, and then only do his troubles commence, for the obtaining of the various licences is an appalling task, and takes weeks. Then even his troubles are not over, for bribery has still to lay its heavy hand on the business before the waggons can be obtained and loaded. (Owing to the terribly low rate of wages, bribery is worse than ever it was, and I was told of the case where 40,000 roubles was the sum paid to get a waggon of grain moved, and bribes of 15,000 roubles and 20,000 roubles are quite a common occurrence.)

The natural result of this is that trade has come practically to a standstill between the various districts, and we have the curious anomaly that the price of bread in Rostof is 4.50 roubles, in Ekaterinodar 1.50 roubles, and Novorossisk 2.50 roubles per lb. The people themselves are very dissatisfied with this state of affairs, and it is to be hoped that within a short time this dissatisfaction will compel the various political cliques concerned to adopt a more common-sense attitude.

The general state of the people is appalling, and the rate of wages has not risen in anything like the ratio that prices of food have risen, and so translating wages into terms of bread we find that the ordinary workmen, middle classes and officials, are earning a good deal less than half what they were before the war, and so it is not to be wondered at that the distress among these classes is acute in the extreme.

There is plenty of food in the country, and with the promise of excellent harvests in all the districts so far occupied by the Volunteer Army there is no reason why food should be so difficult to obtain; but the fact is that the peasants are masters of the

situation and can ask any price they like in paper money, and in the long run the people are obliged to pay, so until the time comes that the peasants are able to spend their money on articles of clothing and household use, on agricultural machinery and "outside" food products, there is not much prospect of any great improvement.

Turning next to the question of industry in the country, it would not be much exaggeration to say that it had come to a standstill. Just round about Rostof, however, where coal is to be obtained, a few of the factories manage to "eke out a miserable existence," such as for instance soap works, an iron foundry or two, and one or two agricultural machinery works. In Taganrog there is an ironworks getting on fairly well, and also a tannery or two, but generally speaking Bolshevism has acted like a blight on industry. There is, however, one satisfactory feature to be noticed everywhere, viz, that the factories and works have in the great majority of cases come through the troubles undamaged, thereby clearly showing that when it came to the point, the workmen themselves prevented the retreating Bolsheviks from damaging the ultimate source of their livelihood. Signs are not wanting that the workmen in general have come to see that to carry on industrial concerns, especially those of any magnitude, without the capitalists and "intelligent" administrators, is beyond their power, and the latest news from many of the works which have just been freed from the Bolsheviks, is that the workmen are in a conciliatory mood, and keen to get to work again. It would be idle to ignore, however, the very great difficulties which lie in front of the industrial concerns in the country as not only the paramount questions of food, clothing, and transport (both of raw materials and manufactured products) have first to be dealt with, but there is the added difficulty of the inflated currency, and its effect on wages, which entails a considerable element of risk in the manufacture of articles which require a long process from the time of the acquirement of raw materials to the time when they are placed on the market.