

SAMOKOV NEWS

AMERICAN SCHOOL FOR BOYS

AMERICAN SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

SAMOKOV, BULGARIA

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Compulsory Labor Law

When they passed the Compulsory Labor Law, Bulgaria's Agrarian leaders put into practice, whether they knew it or not, one of William James' strikingly fertile ideas. In his famous essay on "The Moral Equivalent of War," published in 1910, James wrote: "If there were, instead of military conscription, a conscription of the whole youthful population to form for a certain number of years a part of the army enlisted against Nature, the injustice [of

some men having nothing else but toil and pain while others never get a taste of it] would tend to be evcned out, and numerous other goods to the commonwealth would follow To coal and iron mines, to freight trains, to fishing fleets in December, to dish washing, clothes-washing,

and window-washing, to road-building and tunnel-making, to foundries and stoke-holes, and to the frames of skyscrapers, would our gilded youths be drafted off, according to their choice, to get the childishness knocked out of them, and to come back into society with healthier sympathies

and soberer ideas. They would have paid their blood-tax, done their own part in the immemorial human warfare against nature; they would tread the earth more proudly, the women would value them more highly, they would be better

fathers and teachers of the following generation."

There are no skyscrapers and precious few "gilded youths" in Bulgaria, but James's main suggestion is universal in its application. So far as we know, Bulgaria has the honor of being the first nation



SENIORS ENJOYING "LABOR WEEK"

to put into operation a system which it is not difficult to imagine other nations following, when once standing armies, barracks, and parade grounds have been rendered as obsolete as bows and arrows or the duel.

There are four kinds of compulsory labor in Bulgaria.

1. Of course the bulk of it is performed by the young men previously subject to army conscription. The labor conscripts wear a uniform of slightly different color from that of the army and a cap of a little different shape. Their term of service is eight months; which may be divided by the government Bureau into two or more periods. For example, this winter most of the laborers were sent home, only 5000 being kept under tools (no arms), to look after various buildings and establishments connected with the service, to prepare materials and make general arrangements for the usefulness of their 30,000 comrades who will be called out on April 1st. This spring the men will be distributed as follows: for work under the Ministry of Roads 16,000; Ministry of Railways 7400 (working on road-beds alone); Ministry of Agriculture 520; Ministry of Commerce 1090; other Ministries and forms of service 9000, including the clerical work connected with the compulsory labor service itself. Besides road-making and farming, the following industries have been established,—the plants serving as training schools for young men who wish to learn the trades involved: a brick factory at Sofia, the product of which is used for buildings; a shoe factory just begun at a neighboring village, where it is expected that the foot-wear used by the labor conscripts, the gendarmerie, and Bulgaria's

small volunteer army will be produced. There is a factory for clothing, which already is turning out all the uniforms used by the 40,000 gendarmes and the 35,000 labor conscripts. Of course, the saving in cost to the government on the garments is enormous. In a certain forest district is a saw mill which produces boards for public buildings, ties for the state railways, and telegraph poles. There is also a furniture factory which turns out all the desks, cabinets of drawers, cupboards etc. used in all the government offices of the country. The fuel cut in the forest by the labor conscripts is costing the government this winter 90 *levs* a cubic meter, while the ordinary citizen of Sofia pays 400.

2. The compulsory labor of young women is being tried out in eight large cities as an experiment. The girls are selected from the wealthiest families, who can support them, to serve their home towns alone. The only equipment they receive from the state is an apron and a pair of sandals. They are used as assistants in orphanages, hospitals, and similar institutions. Some of them learn book-keeping and typewriting in public offices, thus acquiring a trade at the same time that they discharge their labor obligation. In six large villages the experiment is being made of giving the girls courses in hygiene, sewing, gardening, bee culture, etc. The village furnishes a room, heat, light; the state supplies the teachers and the necessary instruments, such as sewing machines for the sewing course. The success of the plan where tried has created a demand for such courses in other villages far beyond the ability of the government to meet with the instructresses available.

3. The compulsory labor of the men above conscript age (the old army reserves)

Labor Week

lasts 10 days each year and is discharged in their own municipalities. Each municipality plans a year in advance, in consultation with a specialist from the Labor Bureau, on what kind of improvements to use the men available for ten days. Astonishing results already have been attained in improving village streets, linking up villages with main highways by bits of macadam road, and introducing sewerage.

4. School children and students have one week of compulsory labor in the autumn and one in the spring. Under the oversight of teachers they clean and disinfect school buildings, clean up and adorn the grounds, stitch up loose leaves of library books, and put things in order in general. They also are used in public parks and other municipal institutions.

The last of the four classes of compulsory labor described in the preceding article provides for a *trudova sedmitsa* (Labor Week) in every school in the country twice during the school-year, — once in the autumn and again in the spring. During Labor Week all regular school lessons are suspended, the pupils don their working clothes, and form in groups under the leadership of their teachers for various pieces of work. Precedence is given to work on the school grounds or in the buildings, but there are always some groups employed outside the school on municipal work. The pupils ordinarily work four hours in the morning and four hours in the afternoon, with a two-hour recess for lunch. The "week"



COTTAGE GIRLS LAYING IN A SUPPLY OF WOOD

Does it Pay?

consists of five working days and a sixth day for rest.

We have had four Labor Weeks in the two years since the law came into force. During these *trudovas*, the boys have laid out grounds and built walks, cleaned the campus, removed rubbish, painted buildings, built fences, broken stone, cut down and trimmed trees, sawed and piled wood, and made some repairs, — all on the school premises. Outside, they have cleaned streets, dug ditches, worked in the State forestry nursery, and dug thousands of holes on a near-by hill-side for setting out young trees.

Or take the activities of our girls during last fall's *trudova* alone. While some groups cleaned the buildings, others were tidying the yard. Another group cleaned the church building. Still another worked on the grounds of the city hospital. One group carried stone some distance for a new wall around the Protestant cemetery. The girls in the VII and VIII class cottage cleaned out the woodshed, dug new gardens, and put up the winter's supply of fruits and vegetables.

The City Council has already requested Mr. Ostrander to furnish as many boys as he can spare during the spring *trudova* to set out young trees on the hill-sides, the city supplying the instruments. Thus school and town cooperate.

In most schools the day's work ends with a *horò*, the national folk dance, in which all join hands in a long row, which winds in and out to the weird music of fiddle, flute, and drum, or the rhythmic *horò* melodies sung by the dancers themselves.

In the fall of 1903, when the Turks were burning Bulgarian villages in northern Macedonia, and the population of Belitsa, 1600 strong, had fled a day's journey thru the mountains to Samokov, in free Bulgaria, an intelligent-looking peasant appeared at the office of the principal of the American School, accompanied by two fourteen year old boys. Having lost home



NIKOLA ALEXIEV (STANDING)

and property, he was determined, if possible, to prevent the greater catastrophe of loss of education for his son and nephew, whose cause he pleaded so ably that the principal had the courage to accept them just as they stood, with only the clothes they had on, agreeing to meet their expenses for the first year.

Their story, and the way they improved the opportunity given them, persuaded American friends to meet their fees thruout the course, at the end of which Nikola Todorov returned to his district, where he has since been a useful citizen, and Nikola Alexiev, who held the highest record for scholarship ever attained in our school, entered the National University in Sofia.

During his first year there he was instrumental in inviting Dr. John R. Mott to the university and assisted in the organization of the Student Y. M. C. A., becoming its first secretary, and from it he was the delegate the same year to the World Student Conference in Constantinople, and the following year to the Student Volunteer Conference in Liverpool. The outbreak of the Balkan war in 1912 interrupted his studies and he enlisted as a volunteer in the First Macedonian Division.

Finally completing his chosen course of Literature and Philology in the summer of 1915, he was compelled by the entrance of Bulgaria into the Great War, in the fall of that year, again to bear arms for more than three years. During the latter part of that time, as a correspondent from the front, he published a series of articles on military life, and a number of poems, later collected in a small volume. During that time he was looked at askance by some because of his position that Bulgaria's attitude was contrary to her own interests. When released from service he married a former student of the Girls' School, who had completed the university course in mathematics, and together they returned and taught here for three years.

Mr. Alexiev's admirable work in the schools, the eagerness with which he was listened to by the students, his grasp of

their needs, and his realization of the great opportunity hitherto neglected in the schools of the country, all combined to make him the fit person to assume the work of General Secretary of the Y. M. C. A.



MR. ALEXIEV

for all Bulgaria. He succeeded in obtaining for the first time the sanction of the Ministry of Education for such work, and has established branches of the Association in the High Schools of the principal cities, the full fruition of

which can be known only as the years go on. While we parted from him with deep regret, we feel that he is released for work in a wider field, and that the youth of the whole country will be the richer for our loss.

Books for Boys

Dr. Frank Crane says somewhere that at the end of every month a truck draws up at his back door and carts off the superfluous books which his library has accumulated during the month. He evidently believes that one's library, like one's body, should be kept "fit" by reducing all superfluous matter. We think there is much sound sense in the idea, but we have another suggestion to make as to how to get rid of superfluous books besides selling them for old paper. Which is, in short, to wrap them up and send them to our school English library.

This "library," the accumulation of gifts from two generations of missionaries,

contains about 500 volumes, of which a good two-thirds are theological works, dating back anywhere to 1830. You can perhaps imagine how enthusiastic our boys wax over Hodge's "Systematic Theology," Schaff's "Creeds of Christendom," and Peloubet's Sunday School Notes for the past thirty years! Even among the few non-theological books, the rattling good boys' authors—Scott, Stevenson, Kipling, Conan Doyle, Fenimore Cooper, Ernest Thompson Seton, G. A. Henty, C. C. Coffin, Rider Haggard, Jack London, and others—are conspicuous by their absence.

Up to two years ago, before English was made the prominent subject on our program that it is today, this lack was not acutely felt: our young people patronized the Bulgarian books in the library, and left the English works on theology gathering dust and dignity on the shelves. Now, however, there is a real demand for English reading matter. A frequent question on the campus now is, "Has *Boy's Life* come yet?" or, "When will *Popular Mechanics* come?" Recently a dozen second-hand books acquired by the school were snapped up by the boys within ten minutes. The demand for English reading has "arrived." The supply, however, is woefully insufficient. The school has a very modest "appropriation" for the purchase of new books, but this is totally inadequate to supply the growing demand.

And so, gentle reader, those young peoples' books, short stories, tales of adventure, travel, and history, nature-books, and bound magazines which have served your children so well, and which now perhaps lie neglected up in the attic or on some half-forgotten shelves, — would you not like to see them brought back into the current of usefulness, and actively circulating among

young people who would enjoy them to the full? Won't you look them over again and see which ones you could spare? Mark "For the English Library," and send to the American School for Boys, Samokov. Please write your name on the outside of the package. We shall be glad to acknowledge every book received. Let's see how attractive a boys' library we can build up by the end of this school year.

Russian Scholarships

In the spring of 1921, Professor Thomas Whittemore of Cambridge came to Samokov and asked Mr. Ostrander if, their support being provided for, we could take in some Russian refugee boys and girls. The answer was that we could. Professor Whittemore is a well-known archeologist, who, during the war especially, extended his interests to relief work in the Near East. Perhaps he has done more for the Russians than for any other people.

This year there are 18 Russians in the two schools. Most of them are capable, industrious, and attractive in personality. Every boy and girl has an interesting story to tell of his flight from the Bolsheviks. Here are two.

Toward the end of the Great War, when



VSEVOLOD PATRONOV

Vsevolod Patronov was 16 years old, he was in a military school in Poltava in the Ukraine with 500 other boys between the ages of 8 and 20. At the news that the Bolsheviks were coming, the whole school — officers and cadets — removed

to Vladikavkas, in Georgia, where they remained for two months. Then the approach of the Bolsheviks again forced a hasty departure. They set out on foot for Miskhet, 250 kilometers distant. Heavy snows made the walking difficult, so that the smaller boys fell behind. Circassian highwaymen stripped them and left them to perish with the cold. About a hundred suffered such a fate. The survivors continued their journey partly by train and partly by boat to Yalta, a Crimean port. They had no more than begun their studies when the Bolsheviks once again appeared. The boys and their teachers managed to get on a freighter, which threatened to capsize during a storm in the middle of the Black Sea. But after three days of exposure and panic, they arrived in Constantinople, where for a week they were fed and cared for by English relief workers.

By good chance Vsevolod met his mother and sister at one of the big Turkish bath-houses. His school companions left Constantinople by boat, eventually settling down to routine in a military camp in Serbia. Vsevolod, with his mother and sister, came to Sofia to be with the father who had preceded them; but soon the difficulty of procuring food made it necessary for Vsevolod to rejoin his companions in Serbia. There he stayed two years, enduring the hardships of camp life and subjected to strict discipline. Last summer he walked all the way from Nish to Sofia to see his parents. Hearing of our school, he applied for admission, and after a satisfactory examination, was admitted.

In 1918, Galya Vesenkova, the daughter of an officer under the old regime, was living with her parents in Moscow. The report of the nearness of the Bolshevik army made it imperative for the family to leave. Permis-



GALYA VESENKOVA

sion to ride on a hospital train (in reality a cattle-car) was granted to Mr. Vesenkov and Galya because of their ill health, but the mother had to remain behind. What of their most valuable possessions they could, they took with them. Arriving at Kerch, they were fortunate enough to find places for themselves on a small Black Sea steamer, and for their possessions in a tiny boat, tied on behind, which contained also 12 officers and 150 soldiers. They had proceeded no great distance, when, for lack of fuel, they had to put into port. On approaching the town of Toapse, however, they found the Bolsheviks in possession. In order to make a quicker escape, the captain cut loose the small boat. The Vesenkovi were left without a thing in the world except what was on their backs,—their jewels, clothes, and the few pieces of furniture having fallen into the hands of their enemies.

Eventually they arrived at Sochi. There they remained in a sanatorium for one year, after which the father returned to the army, and Galya was put into a boarding school in Kerch. The next spring the news of the approach of the Bolsheviks made the whole school pick up in haste and flee to Toapse, which, since the boat episode, had been evacuated by the Bolsheviks. There the girls spent a wretched summer without sufficient clothes or food, which they had abandoned in their haste to leave Kerch. In the autumn Galya's father came to get her, and together for months they wandered from place to place, always trying to get out of reach of the Bolsheviks. At last they came to Bulgaria, and Galya was admitted to our school in the fall of 1921. During the following Christmas vacation, the mother, who had made her escape, surprised Galya with a visit. Mrs. Vesenkova, not realizing how her daughter had grown, brought her a doll and numerous childish playthings. Perhaps because hard and harrowing experiences had cheated her out of the joys of "playing house" when she was at the proper age, she enjoyed her doll all the more when it did come.

Correction

By the inadvertent omission of a single sentence in our last issue, Dr. Byington was made to establish the American School for Girls in Sofia, instead of at Stara Zagora. The school has never been located in Sofia. From Stara Zagora it was removed directly to Samokov.

News Notes

The Sport Club has marked out a basketball court, and is introducing the game to our boys.

* * *

The young Bulgarian poet, K. Konstantinov, gave two lectures in the study hall of the Boys' School, the first on the Russian writer, Dostoevski, and the second on the New Russian Poetry.

* * *

Miss Agnes Baird of Sofia, who was the Mission delegate to the Womans' International Conference for Peace at the Hague in December, reported on its work to the full student body, and made a powerful appeal for the spread of the Peace Movement and the abolition of war.

* * *

On Washington's Birthday our schools sent over a deputation of seven to join the Sofia colony in celebrating the day at a delightful tea given by Mrs. Kemper, the wife of our Consul. Some of us had time the next morning to inspect the Trade School that has been opened for 300 Russian refugees by the American Y. M. C. A.

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"The Torch of Culture" was the name of a pageant written and staged by a graduate of the Girls' School, and given for the citizens of Samokov by the members of the Y. W. C. A., for the benefit of needy Russian students. In a series of eight vividly interesting scenes was portrayed the advance of civilization from primitive times to the highly complicated life of today. The detailed and careful work of the girls in the presentation was rewarded by the enthusiastic approbation of the audience which witnessed it.

* * *

At the close of the Jubilee Week which had celebrated the 65th anniversary of the first dramatic performance in Bulgaria, and the 15th anniversary of the laying of the corner-stone of the fine National Theater in Sofia, occurred the disastrous fire which destroyed the whole interior of the handsome building — the only one of its kind in the country — leaving only a blackened shell. This loss to the nation is keenly felt, and voluntary subscriptions are coming in from all over the country toward a fund for its restoration.

* * *

On the 10th of March the school Temperance Society arranged for a public concert in

the assembly hall of the Boys' School for the purpose of raising funds for carrying on its campaign to close the saloons of the town. The music was of an unusually high order, the program consisting in part of Chaikovski's "Chanson Triste" and selections from Wagner's "Die Walküre" by the orchestra, a Berceuse by Chopin, and Rakhmaninov's "Polichinelle" played on the piano by Miss Marika Dobrovska of the Senior class, Grieg's "Sonata No. 2" for piano and violin played by Mr. Goncharov and Lazar Vankov '24, and a medley of Bulgarian folk-songs sung by the V class mixed chorus, all of which was enthusiastically received.

* * *

In the recent municipal election campaign, the Samokov Communists pledged themselves to close the city's seventy saloons, if returned to power. They won, and have taken the necessary legal steps to carry out their pledge. Bulgarian law permits a referendum on the closing question, provided it is petitioned for by one-tenth the population of a city or village, and that this petition is backed by another signed by a certain percentage of actual voters. In the years of preliminary temperance agitation, our schools have played an active and honorable part. Principal Ostrander has been an effective temperance lecturer, and the student organizations have worked hard. For the four weeks preceding the referendum, our school society united with one from the city in publishing a weekly paper named "Sunrise." A society composed of former students in our Girls' School took the lead in securing the needed number of signatures to the first petition, and the referendum was held on March twenty-fifth. On the afternoon before the referendum, the societies with their sympathizers paraded the streets with songs and banners, finally gathering in the public square, where hundreds of people listened to a powerful speech by Mr. Alexiev, who had come from Sofia for the occasion. The Communist leaders brought their followers in line for closing, and on this issue they were supported by many non-communists, so that the splendid result was achieved of voting down the saloon by a majority of five to one, thus making Samokov the first city of the kingdom to accomplish this by popular vote.