

A Trip Through the White Sea-Baltic Canal

By WM. Z. FOSTER

The Stalin White Sea-Baltic Canal is a very important waterway. The trip from Leningrad to the White Sea which formerly lasted 16 days and extended all around Northern Europe, is now accomplished in four days, entirely in Russian waters. The canal is highly strategic from both an industrial and military standpoint.

The Stalin Canal, starting at Medvezhaya Gora (Bear Mountain), extends 152 miles Northward through Karelia to Shorocky, 600 miles North of Leningrad. It is part of the great system of inland waterways which the Soviet Government is now pushing to completion with tremendous speed. When the Stalin Canal was opened recently, it attracted world-wide attention, not only because of the great speed of its construction, but especially because of the splendid work of rehabilitation done with the prisoners who built it.

"Medvezhaya Gora"

When Walt Carmon and I stepped off the Polar Arrow train at Medvezhaya Gora on the Kiroff R.R., we were met at the station by Comrade Rappoport, head of the White Sea-Baltic Combinat, the organization controlling the Canal and the surrounding industries, and of which we were the guests in viewing the Canal. Our first experience was in looking over Medvezhaya Gora, the Southern terminus of the Canal.

This is an interesting place. In the heart of an important lumber country, most of its houses are of log construction, many of them being architecturally quite attractive. The town is being rapidly rebuilt into a model Socialist city, with a large modern hotel, newspaper plant, docks, apartments, parks, etc. The night of our visit, the local theatre was playing Schiller's classic "Love and Intrigue."

Close by the town, we visited two sovkhoses conducted by the Combinat. Here we found an extensive and scientific cultivation of black fox, sable and other valuable fur bearing animals. Besides, there were many acres under glass of tomatoes, cucumbers, watermelons and other vegetables exotic to this high Northern climate. These sovkhoses gave an indication of how arctic towns in the future will solve their food problems.

The Canal

Embarking on the steamer Karl Marx, in company with 115 students

from all over the U.S.S.R. who were enjoying a month's trip as a premium for work well done, we reached the mouth of the Canal after a 2½ hours' sail on Lake Onegin. After visiting the local Canal museum and other points of interest, we began to pass through the Canal itself.

Right at the start we encountered several locks. There are no less than 32 of these altogether. They raise the Canal level 350 feet, or several times higher than the Panama Canal. I was amazed at the magnitude of these locks and spillways. Not long ago I passed through the Panama Canal and it was plain to see that the Stalin Canal was a much bigger and more complicated engineering job.

And whereas it took 11 years to build the Panama Canal, the Stalin Canal was done in less than two years. In October 1931, the actual construction work was started and in June 1933, the first steamer passed through the Canal. And to make the achievement still more wonderful, it was done under arctic conditions, with everything frozen up tight six months of the year, and also with very inadequate mechanization.

For 36 hours we sailed along the Canal, through the chain of lakes and rivers that form its base, and with long stops at various logging centres en route. The surrounding country was a wilderness of woods, raw and undeveloped. The students sang hour after hour. As for myself, I never ceased wondering

how such a tremendous engineering job as the Canal could possibly have been accomplished in less than two years. It was a vivid example of the meaning of the term, "Bolshevik tempo."

Former Boy Waifs

A most interesting interlude in the journey was a several hours' halt at Naddvoytse, about midway along the canal. Here, in a most beautiful place, is located a colony of former boy waifs, or "bezprizornyy." I remember the great thrill I got when several years ago I saw the famous Russian film, "The Road to Life" before my eyes in reality.

Our guide, Comrade Zakharoff, Cultural Director of the Combinat, was especially delighted to explain to us the splendid achievements of this institution in reclaiming the boys. We visited a long succession of schools, clubs, workshops, theatres, athletic fields, etc., and heard innumerable stories of the remarkable progress of the boys under such intelligent direction.

We were greatly interested in Comrade Krassnov, the 16-year old president of the boys' Soviet. Only 18 months before a member of a dangerous gang of Moscow boy criminals, he had now become an ardent revolutionist and militant political leader. Intelligent and energetic, everybody connected with this school management believes he has in him the making of a strong political figure. He was very pleased to write for our Pioneers' paper a

greeting to American boys and girls. We left Naddvoytse thoroughly thrilled.

Shorocky

On the second day out the "Karl Marx" reached Shorocky on the White Sea, Northern terminus of the canal. Here we bade good-bye to our student friends, first speaking a while to them on the American situation, in which they displayed a keen and intelligent interest. Then, conducted by Comrade Rubtsov, head of the Shorocky port construction, we started out to see the city and the port development work.

Shorocky is now a small town, but the plan calls for its rapid transformation into a large city. Rubtsov told us that it was to be built into the biggest city of the Soviet North within the next few years and the extensive building going on dovetailed with this fore-

cast. Especially important was the extensive work in the harbor, which we inspected by motor boat. Several great dredges were at work digging a channel out to sea and using the dredged soil to make many acres of new docks. The whole thing, with the usual speed, must be completed by next year.

Rubtsov is a real live wire, like those in charge of all these developments. He was filled with enthusiasm and energy. One of the most interesting things on our trip was to hear the different heads from the various centers, speak of their achievements, good-naturedly boasting of how their plants and cities were outstripping their neighbors. Manifestly, Socialist competition, by creating a comradely rivalry, is doing much to stimulate production.

Murmansk

Leaving Shorocky, again on the Polar Arrow, of the Kiroff Railroad, we went northward through the timbered country tapped by the Stalin Canal up to Murmansk. This city, lying on the edge of the Polar Sea, is about 250 miles above the Arctic Circle and 1,000 miles north of Leningrad. Murmansk, an open port in winter because it is reached by the Gulf Stream, is highly important from a commercial and military standpoint. It was a strategic point of attack during the imperialist armed intervention against the U. S. S. R. in 1918-1920, foreign troops, including American, capturing the city and penetrating as far south as Shorocky.

We were shown about the Murmansk hydro-electric works by the exceedingly active "Nachalnik" or head-man, Comrade Laptejev. He glowed with pride at their achievements and he stated that we were the first Americans ever to have visited the job. We were astounded at the whole construction works, which gave us a glimpse of the gigantic industrial advance that is now being made in the U. S. S. R. At midnight, in broad daylight, we drove back to our hotel, "The Arctic," in Murmansk, preparatory to beginning on the morrow our long 1,400-mile railroad trip back to Moscow. Altogether our 10 days' visit to the Stalin Canal and its contiguous territory had been profoundly interesting, stimulating and educational.



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A Soviet lumber camp in the timber country tapped by the Stalin White Sea-Baltic Canal.

