

## *Russian Wheat and the Neglect of Fundamentals*

It is becoming increasingly clear that the Russian people may have to endure severe food shortages, in large part because their government has neglected certain basic chemical industries. Recent reports tell of greatly inadequate fertilizer-manufacturing facilities and of a considerable program of importing fertilizers and chemical factories from the West. There are also other reports of many inadequacies in allied lines of manufacture such as synthetic rubber and synthetic textile operations and plants for the production of process equipment. One is led to suspect that the Russian leaders have diverted entirely too much of their resources into the pursuit of certain spectacular aspects of science for propaganda purposes and that they have neglected some much more basic and fundamental considerations in the process. Rockets and missiles may make headlines, but their development is notoriously wasteful and unproductive. Efforts spent in fostering and developing a basic chemical industry may not make news, but such efforts will generate more food, more jobs, and a higher standard of living on a permanent basis.

In Western free-enterprise economies the people decide in the marketplace what is to be developed, and generally one must say that the people are considerably more astute than most governments. In recent years, however, our government has gone a long way toward changing this. Vast quantities of government funds are being spent on spectacles—for example, the space program and the more recent proposals for new atom smashers to cost eight billion dollars. These projects involve propaganda and national prestige and very little more. There is little evidence that these schemes will lead to any permanent and fruitful expansion in the economic backbone of the nation. They may lead now to temporary expansions, but they cannot be continued forever.

Unless some productive by-products are generated, the prospects of the ultimate termination of the programs are grim indeed.

While so much effort is directed to these unproductive enterprises, the neglect of basic matters grows. The diversion of technical manpower, quite apart from the great cost, is a serious worry in industrial circles. Who knows what new products and processes for a civilian market might have been developed in private industry by some of the technical manpower diverted to these science-fiction projects? Since private industry remains the great source of productive wealth it must not be allowed to suffer permanently from manpower shortages, for if it is there will be some considerable trouble in meeting the bills of these unproductive ventures.

There are also many problems which are being neglected, at least relatively, in what might be considered the sphere of government—problems of an engineering nature, most of which could be solved by proper application of sound engineering principles with a little assistance from basic scientific research. Air pollution, urban sprawl, mass transportation, water supply, water pollution, and conservation of raw materials are some of the matters with which we might be concerning ourselves to a much greater extent than we are if more funds were available.

No one in his right mind would suggest that our neglect of these matters would lead to food shortages of the Russian type in this richly blessed country. Undue emphasis on the wrong things, however, can produce other disastrous effects of a sort peculiar to the nation which acts thus. A rich and beautiful country, becoming overcrowded, over polluted, and economically weakened can be almost as unhappy as a hungry one.

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