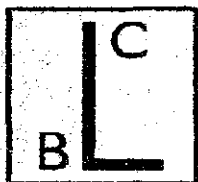


THE CONDITION OF THE WORKERS IN  
GT. BRITAIN, GERMANY &  
THE SOVIET UNION 1932-38

by

JÜRGEN KUCZYNSKI



LEFT BOOK CLUB EDITION  
NOT FOR SALE TO THE PUBLIC

**The Condition of the Workers  
in Great Britain, Germany and  
the Soviet Union  
1932-1938**

## N.B.

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JÜRGEN KUCZYNSKI

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# CONTENTS

Preface and Introduction

*Page 7*

## PART I

### THE CONDITION OF THE WORKERS IN GREAT BRITAIN AND GERMANY, 1932-1938

<i>Chapter</i> I. Wages	14
II. Hours of Work	28
III. Productivity and Intensity of Work	31
IV. Accidents	36
V. The Mobility of Labour	40
VI. Unemployment	43
VII. Health Conditions	49
VIII. Social Insurance	52
IX. The Relative Position of the Workers	57
X. The Pleasures of Life	60
XI. Lost Freedom	62
Conclusions	63

## PART II

THE CONDITION OF THE WORKERS IN GREAT  
BRITAIN, GERMANY AND THE SOVIET UNION

1932-1938

<i>Chapter</i> I. The Food Standard	<i>Page</i> 69
II. The Clothing Standard	75
III. Man Does Not Live By Bread Alone	79
IV. Social Insurance	84
V. Rights and Liberties	88
Conclusion	90

## PREFACE AND INTRODUCTION

THIS little book attempts to give a comparative statistical history of labour conditions in Great Britain, in Germany, and in the Soviet Union. The period dealt with comprises the years from the depths of the last crisis in Great Britain and Germany to the present time.

The difficulties of such a comparison are numerous. In the first place, we have to base our study of conditions in Great Britain and in Germany on government material which is biased against the workers. Furthermore, the material is not of uniform quality, since quite a number of cooks have had their part in preparing the different statistical dishes, the figures coming from various British and German official sources. Finally, conditions in each of the three countries are so different that the same development means something different in each of them.

If, for example, employment increases in each of the three countries from one year to another by the same percentage, this may mean something different in Germany, where employment is now being increased through the forced conscription of women, in Great Britain, where it would mean a decline of unemployment, and again in the Soviet Union, where it would be a sign of a healthy growth of the population. Another difficulty of comparison is created, for example, by the fact that British statistics of wages refer either to the wage rates of a fairly comprehensive number of workers or to the earnings in a comparatively small number of industries, whereas the statistics of wages in Germany refer to wage rates as well as to the earnings of a large number of workers. Finally, yet another significant difficulty consists, for example, in the fact that the bias of the German cost of living index is much greater than that of the British index, so that certain alterations in the German index are necessary, not to eliminate the bias, unfortunately impossible with the material available, but only in order to reduce the



bias of the German index to about the level of that of the British index.

These are only some indications of one group of difficulties which we encounter in comparing conditions in Great Britain and in Germany. If we furthermore remember that the Soviet statistics have on the one hand no such bias and on the other hand that their form of presentation is in many respects so very different,<sup>1</sup> chiefly because conditions are so different, it is obvious that our study can be only a preliminary and very tentative one.

But there are other difficulties of a very different character. We start our comparative survey with the year 1932, the year before Hitler came into power. In 1932 the standard of living in Germany had been almost halved as compared with 1929. There was comparatively little scope for further reductions without physical destruction of the working class through hunger and misery. A considerable increase in the purchasing power could take place without even an approximate approach to the standard of the pre-crisis years 1927 to 1929. In Great Britain, too, the standard of living of the worker has declined between 1929 and 1932, but not by any means as much as in Germany, and the same rise in purchasing power which could easily have increased the British standard above that of 1927-9 might have left the German standard very considerably below the 1927-9 level. Since the standard in the Soviet Union always had a tendency to increase, a further rise would mean putting even more distance between the former and the present level. One, therefore, must be extremely careful in evaluating the comparative importance of a rise in wages and purchasing power in two or three countries—a rise by the same percentage does not mean the same for the different countries.

Another factor which must be taken into account is that we start our survey with the year of the depths of the crisis—that is, we start with a year which, under capitalism, has always been the basis of an improvement in labour conditions. If labour conditions in Great Britain, for example, have improved since 1932, this does not mean that labour conditions in Great Britain usually improve. On the contrary, all who lived through the years from 1929 to 1932 know how very much labour conditions in Great

<sup>1</sup> See on this subject pp. 67, 68 of this book.

Britain can deteriorate. We have simply started from a base, from which labour conditions, according to the Marxist analysis of the trade cycle, always have improved.

Finally, we must remember that the three countries under review are each different in character. The Soviet Union is a socialist society; Great Britain and Germany are finance capitalist countries. But between Great Britain and Germany, too, there is a significant difference: Great Britain is ruled by finance capitalism as a whole and by democratic methods, Germany is ruled by the most reactionary section of finance capitalism, the heavy industries, the armament industries, and by dictatorial methods. In Great Britain the whole of finance capitalism, the heavy industries, the export houses and banks, the textile industries, and so on, rule the country; finance capitalism, "pure and simple", in fact, reigns. In Germany the interests of the armament industries are decisive: Fascism rules.

The difficulties mentioned above are only an indication of the great number of obstacles which stand in the way of such a study. Since this book is nothing but a first attempt at such a comparative study, it is understandable that, on the one hand, a number of difficulties have not been surmounted, and that, on the other hand, the author will have failed to become aware of quite a number of difficulties which he should have overcome. This little book has, therefore (in addition to the faults which the author may have made in any case), all the marks of a first exploration of new territory. Others must try to do better. Others must enlarge the field of observation. They must add other countries to the survey—the United States, for example, or a colonial country. Think of comparing the development of social insurance in the United States, Great Britain, Jamaica, Germany, and the Soviet Union! What lessons to be learned! What a variety of events, trends, and implications! Think of comparing the standard of living of the unemployed in the United States, Great Britain, Italy, Palestine! How much more vivid will become our picture of labour conditions not only in the rest of the world, but in Great Britain too! For through such comparisons the various features of labour conditions in this country will become much clearer; difference, contrast, or similarity help us to understand much better what really are the conditions in this country.

Such comparative surveys, therefore, are important for the understanding of our own life; they are not only of importance for those who want to know what is happening elsewhere, they are of importance also for those who want to grasp what is happening here and now, where we live.

But such studies are of importance not only for our understanding of present-day conditions; they are of importance also for our understanding of what will happen in the future. We must learn from the development in other countries. And in this connection the comparison of conditions in Great Britain with those in Fascist Germany and in the Socialist Soviet Union is of special significance. While it would be absolutely wrong to say that there are abundant traces of Fascism to be found in this country, it would be equally wrong to deny that there are any Fascist tendencies and elements at work in this country at all. The example of Germany and the conditions of the working class in that country will show what Fascism means for the working class. On the other hand, the working class in this country wants to fight for Socialism as its ultimate goal. The example of the Soviet Union will show what Socialism can do for the working class, what the working class can do with Socialism.

Such comparative studies of labour conditions, therefore, can also serve as a guide to the future. They can help us to visualise what a certain development (towards Fascism or towards Socialism) will mean to the working class, and this very visualisation will make the will to fight the Fascist tendencies at work in this country more determined than ever. Hence such a comparative study of labour conditions may be of political significance, of some help in labour's fight for better labour conditions, of some help, that is, in the formation of a broad and solid front of determined fighters against Fascism.

London,  
*March 1939.*

JÜRGEN KUCZYNSKI.