

# Russia Under the Soviets

Being a series of articles based upon an interview with Wilfred E. Humphries, American Red Cross man, recently returned from Russia

By W. A. PRITCHARD

One of the interesting stories Humphries tells is concerning alleged Bolshevik atrocities upon the famous "Battalion of Death," that group of hysterical females who formed a fighting force (!) at the time of Kerensky's regime, to "save the revolution and the soul of Russia."

Horrible yarns have been manufactured and retailed throughout the world concerning unmentionable outrages committed by Bolshevik troops upon this band of enthusiastic but misguided women. Deeds too horrible for words have been perpetrated. Humphries says the truth of the whole matter concerning the "Battalion of Death" is as follows:

This famous female regiment was marching down the street of a certain city one day, when they were stopped by a number of Red Guards who addressed them as follows:

"What's the trouble with you women. Go home and put on female attire, you look ridiculous dressed like that. If you are really serious about dying why not go home and take poison."

## And How Do You View Affairs in Russia at This Moment: What Is the Present Situation?

"One of the greatest dramas is going on there that the world has ever known. It's a pity that we can't get full information. And it's very discreditable that we should be so woefully deceived in regard to matters of supreme importance. When the people of this country (America) find out how persistently they have been fed on lies they will be very indignant. My work for the Red Cross enabled me to get into intimate relations with the Russian people and their Soviets and convinced me that at heart they were very different from what they had been represented as being since the revolution. I hadn't been in Russia very long before I was convinced of the absurdity of the reports that were flying around. For example, before I went into Moscow for the first time, I was told that the city was in flames, that thousands of people were dying, and that the Kremlin was destroyed. I actually found that five buildings had been burned and that the Kremlin Gate and two of the churches had been damaged in the bombardment. The city, as a whole, was quiet; food was being equitably distributed; theatres were soon running full blast. Women went home from theatres and political meetings without male escort."

## Now That You Have Mentioned Women, How About That Famous Decree on Socialization?

I have a paper here which is a translation from the Russian of the repudiation made by the Federal Anarchists in Samara and Saratov. They are twin cities. The alleged decree you speak of was surreptitiously plastered one night all over Samara and Saratov by unknown enemies of the revolution. Later it was found they were very young fellows attached to the monarchist party. It transpired that it was put out in the name of the Federated Anarchists, not of the Soviet, because everyone knew that the Bolsheviks stood for no such thing. The insinuation was that the anarchists were getting stronger, would soon overthrow the Soviet and here was what the anarchists stood for. Therefore, better go back to the monarchy. The next morning they were all torn down by order of the Soviet, and the Federated Anarchists came out with this emphatic repudiation. Let me read it to you:

"Enemies! You are defeated, and you are going down lower and lower. You have reached such a low level that your cause is now desperate. You wish to continue living in idle luxury and have us work for you, and you find the revolution a menace to you. Enemies, you slander and misrepresent us when you say that we anarchists would use our liberty to enslave women.

"You forge our name to this vile decree that your vile hands have written. For centuries and all over the world, anarchists were fighting against all decrees, all force and all oppression. We ourselves have used force and violence only against our oppressors. We want to live and let live in perfect freedom. Is it conceivable that we would now issue such a monstrous and contradictory decree?"

"Think for yourselves! Is it likely that anarchists would advocate or even permit such degradation of women? You think only to provoke trouble. You are only trying to deceive the ignorant people. Don't you suppose we have wives, sisters and daughters of our own?"

"You provocateurs apparently don't know our strength; but you shall know. Death for the provocateurs. Death, no matter who they are. We will make you pay for your vile crime. Anybody found circulating such dirty propaganda will be put in the same class. Everybody, whether with us or not, who opposes such contemptible propaganda methods deserves commendation."

"With all our soul we fight on for all that is best for Russia."

"Isn't it strange that the world should be asked to believe such a slander against Russia when it already knew that the Russian revolution had put women politically on equal terms with men? Can you imagine anything more absurd than the idea that political equality and general prostitution should go together?"

We have been told through our newspapers, etc., that Russia is a country at the present time torn with revolution, her industries completely disorganized, her economic and social life upset. But Humphries says that such is by no means the case. Though at first there was some disturbance, the activities in the interests of peace went on in the liveliest way. Many of the workers were highly pleased with the new conditions. One reason was that they felt they were having greater opportunities for self expression. "The theatres and opera houses were going full blast in the larger cities," he said. "They had big audiences. There was a marked increase in the number of community centres. The restaurants were crowded. And, by the way, the revolution put an end to tipping there. The waiters felt that it was degrading to free Russians to accept tips." The position of the Russian people toward Germany, as given by Humphries, is decidedly interesting. He stated that there was not hate of a personal kind. "The Russian didn't feel that they had any quarrel with the German people. Their quarrel was with the imperialistic government of Germany. In fact, the more intelligent of them hated, with a great deal of bitterness, imperialism of every kind. Lenin used to say that the new movement of industrial democracy meant the end of imperialism in the world. If there had been intense hatred between the Russian and the Germans there could not have been fraternizing between them and the Russians could not have been so successful in their propaganda work among them. The revolutionists have shown a great deal of shrewdness in trying to reach the minds and sympathies of their enemies. For instance, I used to hear it said while I was in Russia that a good many of the American boys who were prisoners there were given a great deal of freedom and encouraged to go about among the people and to make themselves familiar with what was actually happening. Lenin and his colleagues, remember, have great confidence in the strength of the appeal they are making to the people of the world. "You have read the Declaration of Rights!

Very well, think of what promise is held out to the toiling masses of workers and peasants. In the first place Russia is declared to be a republic of Soviets made up of deputies chosen by workers in the industries, by farmers and by soldiers. All power is placed in their hands. Each Soviet is treated as though it were a republic by itself. So Russia, with her one hundred and eighty millions, might claim to be the first real league of free nations. It announces as its basic task the abolition of all exploitation of man by man, the removal of class divisions, and the triumph of Socialism in all lands.

"The declaration says plainly that private ownership in the soil is abolished, that the land is transferred to the toilers without compensation on the principle of equal use and that all livestock and other equipment are declared national property.

"Of course, during my first two or three weeks in Russia, I thought that, from their own point of view, they were working too fast. But later I became convinced that they knew what they were doing and were getting away with it far better than I had supposed. See how they have defended themselves from the internal aggression by this passage in the declaration: 'In order to assure the plenitude of power to the laboring classes and to render impossible the re-establishment of the exploiters' rule, the arming of workmen, the forming of the Red Socialists army of workmen and peasants, and the complete disarmament of the propertied classes is decreed.'

At one period during our conversation he told me of the fact that in Moscow and Petrograd he had seen more of the operas of which he had heard in America and England than at any other place during his travels around the world. "And do you know," he continued, "that the working class so appreciate music and art that for one opera I had to wait myself several nights before I could get a ticket."

I thought of working class existence in Seattle or Vancouver and gazed pensively at the ceiling.

## MINING CONDITIONS IN GREAT BRITAIN

Continued from Page Two

only 2s 3d. And the miners are the most highly organized occupation in the country. Those figures stigmatize the capitalist press of Canada as malicious liars. Furthermore the reports of the evidence given before the Coal Commission as to living conditions in the mining districts have been out for publication and make most interesting reading, but the capitalist press in Canada has suppressed them. So it is left for the socialist and labor press to do the best they can under the handicaps of limited circulation and denial of the mails by the government.

Mr. Robertson also gave statistics on housing conditions. In Northumberland and Durham the percentage of tenements of more than two persons per room was 28.6. He gave Lanarkshire as a sample of Scotland. Between fifty and sixty thousand persons were employed in the mines. He gives the population of Hamilton as 38,000—a large proportion of other workers besides miners. Of the population 27,000 live in one or two-room houses; with the whole population, six per room. The town is built on ground mostly owned by the Duke of Hamilton. In Wishaw (Lanarkshire) there were numerous houses with one apartment—husband, wife, seven children; also several houses, three men, one woman, two children. And so on, a similar condition prevailing all over the industrial portions of the county. Observe the death rate for children under twelve months: In

Continued on Page Seven