

with him an order from the All-Russian Directorate that the militia of the Province be handed over to him.

"The militia is your police," I said to M. Medvleyeff, "how can you do without it?"

"We no longer have the power to arrest a pickpocket," he replied in his modest way.

"But why should the Directorate want to do such a thing? Most of its members are of your own party?"

A few members of the Executive Council entered the Chairman's cabinet.

"We have a theory" said one of them. "We have come to the conclusion that someone else is speaking for the Directorate."

"And the Directorate itself?"

"Is put out of the way."

"How can you imagine such a thing?"

"We can imagine nothing else."

Did they have their own secret information or was it instinct that led them on the right trail?

I had no time to conjecture myself. For while political history was thus making in Siberia, I was busy with my own work—taking stock of the accumulated stores of wealth in Vladivostok. The Tsar's old officials were bad bookkeepers. An item indicating the presence in Vladivostok of some millions of pounds of sewing machines and typewriters—articles greatly needed in Siberia—proved upon investigation to be nothing but electric bulbs. Some 75,000,000 pounds of tea and a similar quantity of rice were reluctant to make their appearance, as were a number of other articles in quantities of millions of pounds. But the most difficult task of all was to ascertain the contents of the private warehouses. Yet it was highly important for Siberia to get at the facts. For American merchants could not be expected to ship their products to Siberia unless they knew in advance what the Siberians themselves had on hand.

"You will find our cornerers of the people's bread a hard lot to deal with," I was told on every side.

The Zemstvo had a law on its statutes by which the merchants could be ordered to submit inventories of their stock. This order the officials of the Zemstvo government were very anxious to issue, for above all things

they valued the co-operation of the United States.

"Then why don't you issue this order at once?" I asked them.

"Because M. Tseklinsky insists that he will issue the order which you want."

M. Tseklinsky was the newly-arrived representative of the Ministry of Supplies at Omsk. It was true that he had promised to issue the order. But his procrastinations were endless and his excuses infinite.

"But he has promised a dozen times in the last few days, and he still keeps on postponing," I objected.

"He will never issue it," was M. Medvleyeff's laconic declaration.

"Why not, when it is so plainly in the interests of mere Siberia?"

"Because the speculators are among his staunchest political supporters. He will not molest them in the interests of mere Siberia."

"Then why don't you issue the order yourselves?"

"We probably shall. In a day or two the situation will clear up. . ."

The very next day there appeared in the newspapers an open letter by the newly arrived official from Omsk. It was to the effect that the Omsk representative had no right to interfere with the workings of that body. Furthermore, the letter stated that the regularly elected authorities of the Province were responsible to the people for the billions of rubles worth of commodities. They refused to hand them over to a person who bore no responsibility to the people of the Province.

But the Omsk government was ready for the occasion. M. Tseklinsky informed the Zemstvo administration that if it did not hand over to him immediately all the supplies of the Province, he would order what practically amounted to a blockade—he would stop railway shipments to and from Vladivostok.

The Zemstvo administration submitted, and vast quantities of supplies in the maritime Province were delivered to the government of Omsk.

Some days later the following item appeared in the newspapers:

"The temporary All-Russian government issued an order to the effect that the Siberian Duma which had been dissolved by order of the Ad-