

# Allied Diplomacy and the Bolsheviks

(Extracts from "Bolshevist Russia," in the August Metropolitan.)

The "Metropolitan" Magazine for August contains the third installment of Col. Raymond Robins' experiences in Russia. This installment continues from last issue the account of the Bolshevist Government's efforts to secure Allied aid to continue the fight against the Germans and so avoid the signing of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty.

Col. Robins' account fastens irrevocably on the Allied Governments the blame for the Treaty being signed in so far as they ignored the appeal of the Soviet Government for help.

The last of a number of appeals was made on March 5, on March 16, no answer having arrived, Lenin threw his influence into the scales in favor of Peace, for reasons which will be found in the extract from his speech.

## The Russian Army Refuses to Fight.

Therefore they never did personally sign it. It was too personally portentous to them. When all resistance collapsed, Trotsky was asked to go and sign. He refused. Radek was asked. He refused. Finally certain very subordinate leaders were outrightly ordered to go. They went. They signed. They signed the document without reading it. They wished the Germans to know that they did not regard it as a binding act of agreement. They regarded it as a revocable act of force.

Out of this spirit, as furious as it was futile, the Council of People's Commissioners issued its summons of February 21, 1918. It commanded a universal resistance to the Germans. The "bourgeois" must be compelled to resist. They must be compelled to at least dig trenches. And "all Soviets and Revolutionary organizations are charged with the duty of defending every post to the last drop of blood."

But the mass of the army at once showed that on this point it agreed with the Constituent Assembly and not with the People's Commissioners. Even the "revolutionary proletariat," in most of its representatives in the old army, was finished with fighting. Soviet leaders, in Petrograd and in most other places, passed resolutions for fighting. The army could not and would not fight.

Lenin noted this contradiction acidly in Pravda. He said:

"In the week of February 18-24, we were instructed by the comparison between two different sorts of communications which reached us. On the one hand there were the communications telling us of a debauch of 'resolute' revolutionary fighting phrases. On the other hand there were the communications telling us of the poignantly disgraceful refusal of regiments to hold their positions, of their refusal to hold even the Narva line, of their failure actually to obey the order for the destruction of supplies before retreating."

Russia was in mass-flight. The Allied Embassies were leaving Petrograd. They were leaving Russia. The American Embassy did not leave Russia. It was able to be calmer. It was better acquainted with Smolny. It knew that Lenin and Trotsky intended to keep all of Russia they could for the Soviets and that they could still keep much of it.

Mr. Francis and Robins decided that to go to Vologda would be to go far enough. Robins accompanied Mr. Francis to Vologda. Lenin gave him a personal letter, written with his own hand, asking the Vologda Soviet to provide the American Embassy with every possible assistance. The Embassy, arriving at Vologda, cast its eyes on Vologda's best clubhouse. The members moved out, and the Embassy moved in.

Robins started back for Petrograd. He arrived there on March 4. On March 3, the preliminary signing of the Peace—in the field—the signing without reading—had happened. On March 5, Robins went to Trotsky's office. Trotsky, as soon as he entered, said to him:

"Colonel Robins, do you still want to beat the Peace?"

"Mr. Commissioner," said Robins, "you know the answer to that question."

"Well," said Trotsky, "the time has come to be definite. We have talked—and we have talked—about help from America. Can you produce it? Can you get a definite promise from your Government? If you can, we can even now beat the Peace. I will oppose ratification, at Moscow, and beat it."

"But, Mr. Commissioner," said Robins, "you have always opposed ratification. The question is: what about Lenin? Lenin, Mr. Commissioner, if you will pardon me, is running this Government. What about him?"

"Lenin," said Trotsky, "agrees."

"Will he say so?"

"He will."

"In writing?"

Trotsky bared his teeth to reply. "Do you want us to give you our lives?" he said. "The Germans are thirty miles from Petrograd. How soon will your people be within thirty miles?"

"Nevertheless," said Robins, "I will not handle a verbal message to my government. It's got to be written. I'll bring my interpreter back here with me. You tell him what you mean—in Russian. He'll write it down—in English. Then you and Lenin will read it in English and will say you understand it and will promise me to go through with it. Otherwise I can't handle it."

Trotsky yielded. "Be back at four," he said.

Robins went away. He went away confident. He remarks now, regarding Lenin and Trotsky:

"They never convinced me in the slightest degree that they could make Bolshevism work. But they did convince me absolutely that they could keep their word. They made me many promises about Red Cross affairs and about other American affairs in Russia. They always made good on them. Unlike many gentlemen in the Government which preceded them at Petrograd, Lenin and Trotsky never gave me any blue-sky talk. They never promised unless they had the will and the power to deliver. They often refused to promise. But, having promised, they delivered—always. The Germans tried to double-cross them, and they double-crossed the Germans. I tried to deal with them on the square—every time. Therefore, when Trotsky told me to be back at four, I knew that at four I would get the document and that it would say precisely what Trotsky had said it would say."

## Trotsky Agrees to Oppose Ratification of Peace Treaty.

At four o'clock Robins returned with his interpreter. Trotsky received them at once. He had a sheet of paper in his hand. It was his message to America, already dictated—in Russian—and type-written. He conducted Robins and the interpreter to Lenin's room. There were other people there. Lenin left them. He led the way to the Council Hall of the Council of People's Commissioners. There, at the end of a long table, Lenin and Trotsky and Robins and the interpreter sat down. The interpreter took Trotsky's piece of paper and translated the message on it into English, and then read the translation aloud.

Robins said to Lenin:

"Does the translation give your understanding of the meaning of the document?"

"Yes," said Lenin.

"Mr. President Commissioner," said Robins, "I must ask you another question:

"If the United States Government answers this document affirmatively, will you oppose the ratification of the Peace of Brest-Litovsk at the All-Russian Congress of Soviets at Moscow?"

"Yes," said Lenin.

"Very well," said Robins, and rose.

The document is in the words following:

"In case (a) the All-Russian Congress of Soviets

will refuse to ratify the peace-treaty with Germany or (b) if the German Government, breaking the peace-treaty, will renew the offensive in order to continue its robbers' raid, or (c) if the Soviet Government will be forced by the actions of Germany to renounce the peace-treaty, either before or after its ratification, and to renew hostilities—

"In all these cases it is very important for the military and political plans of the Soviet Power for replies to be given to the following questions:

"1. Can the Soviet Government rely on the support of the United States of North America, Great Britain and France in its struggle against Germany?"

"2. What kind of support could be furnished in the nearest future and on what conditions—military equipment, transportation, supplies, living necessities?"

"3. What kind of support would be furnished particularly and specially by the United States?"

"Should Japan—in consequence of an open or tacit understanding with Germany or without such an understanding—attempt to seize Vladivostok and the Eastern Siberian Railway, which would threaten to cut off Russia from the Pacific Ocean and would greatly impede the concentration of Soviet troops toward the East about the Urals—in such case what steps would be taken by the other Allies, particularly and especially by the United States to prevent a Japanese landing on our Far East and to insure uninterrupted communications with Russia through the Siberian route?"

"In the opinion of the United States, to what extent—in the above-mentioned circumstances—would aid be assured from Great Britain through Murmansk and Archangel? What steps could the Government of Great Britain undertake in order to assure this aid and thereby to undermine the foundations of rumors of the hostile plans against Russia on the part of Great Britain in the nearest future?"

Such was the document. Robins went with it immediately to Mr. R. H. Bruce Lockhart.

"Have you heard from your government?" said Lenin to Robins again. It was on the day after he had made his first inquiry.

"I've not heard yet," said Robins again.

"Has Lockhart heard from London?" said Lenin.

"Not yet," said Robins, and added: "Couldn't you prolong the debate?" It was a rather courageous question.

On March 6, in Petrograd, Robins had gone to Lenin and had told him about the unavoidable stoppage of Trotsky's message to America in military code at Vologda. He had asked Lenin for an extension of time to get his reply from Washington. He had asked for an extension of forty-eight hours. Lenin had made no definite answer, but therefore Izvestia carried the announcement that by request of President Commissioner Lenin the Moscow Congress had been postponed from March 12 to March 14.

Now, in Moscow, Lenin simply said:

"The debate must take its course."

"Can I get the credentials of the delegates?" said Robins.

Lenin consented. Robins got them from Sverdlov, chairman of the All-Russian Soviet Executive Committee. There were 1204 delegates. Robins got 1186 credentials. He had them examined by two persons.

One of these persons was a follower of the Revolution, but not a Bolshevik—a Menshevik. The other was a member of the old nobility.

From their reports he knew that this convention was not a packed convention. He had already put out a supplementary investigation through men in his service who lived among the delegates at headquarters in the National Hotel. This convention was a valid convention of conscious Russia.

It did not represent—it did not pretend to repre-

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