

Some Impressions of Siberia

The Editor has asked me to write a few of my experiences and impressions whilst in Siberia as a member of the C. E. F. (S), thinking they may be of interest to readers of the RED FLAG.

I must first state that, owing to the fact that I was stationed near Vladivostok during the whole of the time I was in Siberia. I can only speak from personal experience about that district. What I write about the rest of the country, and conditions therein, is from information obtained from various sources, from officers and men of the Russian Army, civilians, Czech-Slovaks, American and Japanese soldiers, from some of our own men who went into the interior, and from German, Austrian and Hungarian prisoners of war with whom I came much in contact. I was very careful to compare and weigh all statements made by my various informants, and to take into consideration the prejudices likely to exist in their minds; and I consider that any statement made by me in the following article is as near the truth as it is possible for an outsider to get, as to what happened, and what is happening in Siberia.

With regard to the Expedition itself, I can only say that it was graft from beginning to end, an absolute waste of time, and a cause of unnecessary discomfort to the men. I was one of those unfortunates doomed to three weeks hell on the S. S. *Protesilaus*, where even the common decencies of life were lacking. Packed together in the depths of an ill-ventilated, gloomy hold, with no lavatory or toilet accommodation except on deck, (and these were frozen up the latter half of the journey,) it was little wonder that the majority of the men being very sick, the place stank like a sewer, and life became unbearable. The weather was rough, and one night, when one of the propellers broke, one of the hatchways was washed away, and we were flooded with water, which greatly added to our miserable condition. The food was as bad as they thought we would tolerate, and even this had to be fetched from the other end of the ship at the risk of being washed overboard whilst going along the icy decks. I myself, stood one evening in about one-foot of water, waiting for a pail of tea, with the ship bobbing like a cork, and the waves washing over me incessantly. That was some voyage, and none of us who were on board will forget it in a hurry. On arrival at Vladivostok, the temperature was about 20 below zero, which was the coldest weather we experienced. There was not much snow and very little fell afterwards, the sun shining brilliantly most of the time. We were marched to some barracks about eight miles east of Vladivostok, which had been built by the Russians. They were cold and bare, the floors being of concrete, and most of the windows having broken panes of glass. There were huge heaters, but we were not able to have much fire in the heaters. For the first few weeks we had to pack water in pails a distance of about two miles, and in consequence there was a shortage of that necessity. However, on the whole, life was tolerable there. In April we were told that we should be returning to Canada either that month or the next. No reason was given, but most of us, being only too anxious to get back, did not worry about that. The whole expedition was absolutely unnecessary. We did nothing but useless drills and fatigues.

I was amused to read in the 'Japan Advertiser' sometime in February, a paragraph which, as near as I remember read as follows:

"The people of Vladivostok are beginning to wonder why it is that so many foreign soldiers are allowed to remain in the country, eating up food which is so scarce, and so much needed for ourselves."

One can read a good deal in that little paragraph.

On the whole, we Canadians were made welcome by the Russians, and were treated with courtesy. I myself soon made friends and started to gain the information for the purpose of obtaining a signing

up the situation as between the Bolsheviks and the counter-revolution.

The Russian peasant is a good-natured, peace-loving, industrious individual, the Doukobours being typical specimens. The Russian autocracy relied almost entirely on the Cossacks, and a few of the more warlike Russians for a permanent army to maintain them in power. Production, especially in the country villages and small towns, was carried on in a communistic manner. The Peasant belonged body and soul to the land owners, who treated them with the utmost cruelty and barbarity, a very well known fact. The contemptible inferiority of the "lower" classes, is an idea deeply rooted in the minds of Aristocrats but more especially in Russia, perhaps, is this idea openly acted upon. In the country, in the factory, in the army, one sees the peasant treated with injustice, ferocious cruelty and contempt.

When, therefore, the Bolshevik doctrine of "taking much" was preached, it was willing ears that listened. The communistic method of production was not a new idea to them. Freedom from the tyranny of their oppressors was greatly to be wished.

Ninety-five per cent. of the votes were given to the Bolsheviks. Soviets were established, and a bloodless revolution was accomplished. The land was taken away from the owners and given, in some cases to the peasants and small holders, in others to the Soviets to hold in trust for the peasants. The toilers got the result of their toil for their own benefit. Schools were established in every place and all was going on smoothly and peaceably. But this was too good to last; the inevitable attempt of the master class to get back their power came.

Before going on to the counter-revolution I wish to mention the fact that all political prisoners and prisoners of war were liberated and given equal rights and opportunities with the Russians.

As showing the gradual increase in power of the proletariat, I will just give the wages of the soldier after each revolution.

Before the 1905 Revolution, 48 Kopeks, (25 cents) in 2 months.

After the 1905 Revolution, 56 Kopeks, (29 cents) in 1 month.

In war time these amounts were doubled.

After Kerenski Revolution, 40 Roubles, \$20.80, in 1 month.

After Bolshevik Revolution, 15 Roubles, (\$7.80), per day. This 15 Roubles being given to all, whether soldiers or civilians.

To return to the counter-revolution, the Czech-Slovaks, before the war, lived in Bohemia. They refused to fight in the Austrian Army, and at the beginning of the war gave themselves up to the Russians as prisoners, offering to fight with them against the Germans, their offer being accepted. With the revolution in Russia, and the treaty of Brest-Litovsk they found themselves amongst people who were at peace with Germany, which did not seem to please them. Since they could not go back to Austria, they expressed a wish to go to France to fight the Germans. Now the quickest way to France would be, one would think, via Odessa and Marseilles. But the Czechs asked permission to go across Siberia to Vladivostok, and from thence said to France. The Bolsheviks, for some reason, did not see their way clear to compel them to go the shorter route and gave consent, imposing certain restrictions as to the number of arms to be carried, which evidently showed that they were suspicious of them. It is perfectly plain from subsequent events that the trans-Siberian trip was instigated by the capitalists and land owners of Russia, and was backed by the Allies. No sooner had the Czechs got nicely spread over Siberia, than, almost simultaneously, they started a wholesale massacre of the peasants who for the most part were unarmed. Some of the Czechs justify this by saying that the Russians set upon

TRADES UNIONS IN GREAT BRITAIN AND NATIONAL INDUSTRIAL COUNCIL.

(Extracts from an Article in the "Christian Science Monitor," of July 4.)

LONDON, England.—The present writer was among the few—the very few—who found himself unable to gather enthusiasm over the setting up of the National Industrial Council, which, in the opinion of the experts of Labor problems, was the golden key to the paradise of peace wherein men labored and were content, confident in the hope that their grievances had but to be stated to be removed, and that the representatives of Capital and Labor, sitting together on terms of equality, were the safest guarantee for the future welfare and harmonious relationships of the conflicting interests in industry.

Although the necessity for prompt action was recognized at the time, and the work of the joint committee was carried through with an eye on the calendar, over two months have slipped by, and the council has not yet been formed. Why this delay in setting up a body of whom so much was expected in the way of creating the conditions for industrial peace? Does the opposition come from the employers in those trades that are badly organized and for which it was admitted by the most powerful unions that the recommendations, if given effect to, would do so much?

Council Prospects Doubtful.

It is exceedingly doubtful if the industrial council will be established; and if it does see the light of day, it is extremely doubtful if it can allay the industrial unrest which appears to be daily gathering strength.

At the annual meeting of the Transport Workers' Federation, held at Swansea in Whit week, Mr. Harry Gosling, the president, said that it was a subject for congratulation that they had decided to hold aloof from the industrial conference, which was, in the opinion of their executive, simply a temporary expedient to frustrate the workers' demands.

No! the industrial unrest is far too deep-rooted to be appeased by the promise of a council, upon which Labor shall be represented, to advise the government. Labor's immediate demand is for an opportunity for employment with reasonable security for continuity. It objects to having the stalking specter of unemployment, with its misery and degradation, constantly in the background.

them first, but I could get no evidence to support this. Other Czechs said that some German prisoners fired on them and set the ball rolling. On the other hand, prisoners who were in Urdutsk at the time, whom I questioned, stated that it was the Czechs who fired first on the Camp where they were, without any provocation whatever. Bearing in mind the fact that the Czechs seemed to bear an intense hatred to the Germans, and also that the trans-Siberian route was certainly a curious one to take, it seems certain that the Czechs themselves started the firing in order to start the counter-revolution. The savage barbarities committed by the Czechs and the Cossacks, who soon followed them into Siberia, surpass anything attributed to the Germans, and it is little wonder that the Bolsheviks retaliated. The members of the Soviets were shot, and anyone suspected of being a leader was arrested, and after a farce of a trial before a military tribunal, was also shot. A reign of terror was established and blood flowed like water. The Bolsheviks tried to organize an army, and have maintained a guerrilla warfare ever since, all the time strengthening themselves and gaining power. That they will ultimately triumph I have not the least doubt. The Russian peasants are Red to the core, and although overcome by treachery and cunning, know that the only way to freedom is through the re-establishment of Bolshevism. They are fighting for real freedom.

(To Be Continued.)