

## Book Review

THE CRISIS IN RUSSIA.—By Arthur Ransome. 201 p.p. Publishers, B. W. Huebsch, New York City.

I THINK, in this review of Arthur Ransome's latest book on Russia, "The Crisis in Russia," it will not be out of place to say something on the personality of the author, so that readers may have confidence in his fitness to be an impartial and open minded observer of the internal affairs of Soviet Russia—as having himself a minimum of conviction on social theory, and of being concerned solely with presenting the uncolored facts of the Russian situation. Diogenes, seeking for an honest man, had an easy task compared to the task of finding a detached, unpartisan mind today on the Russian question. Beginning with the proletarian revolution in 1917, the Russian question developed characteristics which proved capable of arousing the most intense and contradictory feelings of repugnance and hostility on the one hand, and on the other, sympathy and approval. A reasoned consideration of Russian development has played but small part in arousing those feelings. Mainly, society has been stirred to its depths and split into hostile factions, because Russia, striking at the institutional foundations of the present social order, has quickened into passionate activity, instinctive loyalties, mental attitudes or habits of thought, laid down by ages of organized social life in which the property institution and the existence of ruling and subject classes have been the dominant and all pervading features. All that conflict of opinion is unavoidable in the nature of things when the world is in the throes of new birth. In such circumstances it is the fate of most men to have their minds forced into the rigid mold of political conviction, either in favor of the old order, or of the new order a-borning.

Ransome appears to a great extent to have escaped such a fate; for, even though not a believer in Communism, he still retains the generous spirit to sympathize with human endeavors to throw off age long oppressions, as well as historical insight to recognize such an endeavor in the purblind strivings of the underlying populations in the world today. For the part of unbiassed observer, from what I gather, Ransome's life has been cast in favoring conditions. Well educated on broad cultural lines, a traveller, mainly for the purpose of observation and study of folk life, especially in the Russia of pre-war days, and a writer of books on folk lore and other subjects of literary and historical interest remote from the rancours of current political life. Those who desire to know the truth of the situation in Russia, as it existed during the latter part of 1919 and the first few months of 1920, when Ransome was in Russia as special correspondent for the "Manchester Guardian" for the second time since the Bolsheviks attained power, will find in his book the most objective account we are likely to see presented to the outside world.

In his introduction to the book under review, the author states that the problem in Russia, as he sees it, is not a struggle between rival political parties, but as detached from politics, mainly a struggle for civilization against ruin, a struggle against the decay of civilization, to which city life gives character, and reversion to the fragmentary social life of a village barbarism. If, he says in effect, his book has a bias, it arises from that conception. Moreover, if Russia goes back that way, he sees great danger of the rest of civilization being dragged down with her. It is so, he says, that it is now recognized in Russia, by both the Communists and their opponents as well as by those who are indifferent to all social and political theories, but who are chiefly concerned that Russia shall get back from sheer starvation on to its feet again economically. Disputes now are chiefly over ways and means of increasing productivity and obtaining and distributing the necessities of modern civilized life. In a former book, "Russia in 1919," Ransome stated modestly that he knew nothing of economics. Regarding this later book, I can say in that case, at least so far as the economics of industrial production are concerned, that he has made haste to learn.

After reading "The Crisis in Russia" any reader can say to himself, "Surely, in all history, no administration has had such stubborn problems and complicated un-ideal conditions as a test of their programmes and their abilities as have had the Communists in Russia since they took over the reins of power in November, 1917. The first chapter, entitled "Shortage of Things," and the second "Shortage of Men," show clearly that with the opening, in 1914, of the great war there began an avalanche-like decline of the economic life of Russia, which gathered momentum that even the Communists, with all their realistic grasp of Russia's problem, backed by unity of purpose and ferocious energy and zeal, could not stay for a considerable time after they had seized political power. Even at the time of preparing his book for the press, so desperate did Ransome conceive the economic situation in Russia to be, that for him the outcome seemed doubtful; nevertheless, he still remained certain that if Russia was to be saved from complete and utter ruin, the Communists were the only body of men with the necessary energy and vision to accomplish the task. Some brief extracts here follow, though they will give only slight indication of the quality of Ransome's observations, or of the task of the Soviet administration, or of how its foreign and domestic policies have been determined by the inexorable facts of Russia's needs—needs that are of the most primitive and essential kind.

He says: "Russia produced (before the war) practically no manufactured goods (70 per cent. of her machinery she received from abroad), but great quantities of food. The blockade isolated her. By the blockade I do not mean merely the childish stupidity committed by ourselves, but the blockade, steadily increasing in strictness, which began in August, 1914 . . . The war, even while for Russia not nominally a blockade, was so actually. The use of tonnage was perforce restricted to the transport of the necessities of war . . . things which do not tend to improve a country economically, but rather the reverse. . . ."

"The war meant that Russia's ordinary imports practically ceased. It meant a strain on Russia, comparable to that which would have been put on England if the German submarine campaign had succeeded in putting an end to our imports of food from the Americas. From the moment of the Declaration of War, Russia was in the position of one 'holding out,' of a city standing a seige without a water supply, for her imports were so necessary to her economy that they may justly be considered as essential irrigation. . . ."

" . . . a huge percentage of the clothes and the tools and the engines and the wagons and the rails came from abroad, and even those factories in Russia which were capable of producing, such things were, in many essentials, themselves dependent upon imports. Russian towns began to be hungry in 1915. . . . In the autumn of 1916 the peasants were burying their bread instead of bringing it to market. . . . In 1917 came the upheaval of the revolution, in 1918 peace, but for Russia civil war and the continuance of the blockade. By July, 1919, the rarity of manufacture was such that it was possible two hundred miles south of Moscow to obtain ten eggs for a box of matches. . . ."

" . . . The most vital of all questions in a country of huge distances must necessarily be that of transport. It is no exaggeration to say that only by fantastic efforts was Russian transport able to save its face and cover its worst deficiencies even before the war began. . . . Russian transport (during the war) went from bad to worse, making inevitable a creeping paralysis of Russian economic life during the latter already acute stages of which the revolutionaries succeeded to the disease that had crippled their precursors. . . ."

"In 1914 Russia had in all 20,057 locomotives . . . of that number over 5,000 were more than twenty years old, over 2,000 more than thirty years old, 1,500 more than forty years old and 157 had passed their fiftieth birthday. Of the whole 20,000, only 7,108 were under ten years of age. That was six years ago."

Depletion through wear and tear and captured in war resulted in there being only 3,969 engines in

working order in January, 1920, in spite of the utmost efforts to keep up the supply. Lathes and other machinery have become worn out, while the Whites have deliberately wrecked many factories. The combined effect of ruined transport and the six years of blockade on Russian life in town and country is graphically described at length by Ransome. But I have already, I fear, over-reached the limits of my space, and so will conclude by giving the chapter headings of a book which I recommend as a very readable, single-minded and capable study of Russia's internal problem of reconstruction.

Contents: Introduction, The Shortage of Things, The Shortage of Men, The Communist Dictatorship, A Conference at Jaraslavl, The Trade Unions, The Propaganda Trains, Saturdayings, Industrial Conspiration, What the Communists are Trying to do in Russia, Rykov on Economic Plans and on the Transformation of the Communist Party, Non-Partyism, Possibilities. C. S.

### THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL

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- 1—Report of the Executive.
- 2—The world economic crisis and the new tasks of the Communist International.
- 3—Tactics of the International during the revolution.
- 4—Transition period—partial actions and the final revolutionary struggle.
- 5—Campaign against the Yellow Trade Union International.
- 6—The Red Trade Union International and the Communist International.
- 7—Internal structure and methods of Communist Parties.
- 8—Internal structure of the Communist International and its relation to affiliated bodies.
- 9—Eastern question.
- 10—The Italian Socialist Party and the Communist International. (Appeal of the I. S. P. against the E. C. decision).
- 11—The German Communist Labor Party and International. (Appeal of the United German C. P. against the E. C. decision).
- 12—Women's movement.
- 13—Young Communist movement.
- 14—Election of the E. C. and fixing of its headquarters.
- 15—Various business.

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Published in October, 1920. Fiftieth thousand now ready, 233 pages; cloth, \$1.00; paper, 25 cents or six copies \$1.00; postpaid (Canada 5 copies for \$1.).

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