

Russia Under the Soviets

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

By W. A. PRITCHARD

"THE TRUTH ABOUT RUSSIA"

A Lecture by Wilfred Humphries—(Reported by Amy Oliver of People's Institute)

"Another result of control by the workers, combined with the peasants' ownership of the land has been the 'back to the land' movement. Petrograd and Moscow have materially decreased in population, chiefly as a result of the agitation to go out and take up land, agitation that arose because Petrograd and Moscow were the two places where it was hardest to get food on account of the crippled railroads. But even in those cities during the worst of the railroad demoralization, it cost no more to live than in San Francisco. In Moscow I got dinners of soup, meat, vegetables, coffee, and sometimes dessert for from five to ten rubles, that is fifty cents to a dollar—and, of course, conditions have much improved since then. Through the darkest days, from the time the Bolsheviks got control, I am sure there was not one hungry person in Moscow.

"They had begun to organize the distribution of food in a most fair and thorough manner from the time I arrived in Russia, when the great army of twelve million was still demobilizing itself. Even while happy groups of soldiers with their gas masks and tea kettles hung on their backs were trooping home, I saw armed guards handing out leaflets that announced a moratorium on house rents. 'Rentals under one hundred and fifty rubles a month are not payable for three months,' the leaflets said, 'Rentals above this amount are payable as usual.' This and the rationing of food was a godsend to the poorer people. Of course, this was in the early days of Bolshevik rule. Later it could not be said that the working people were poor people. Their wages were more than adequate—that is, they could live well and save, too. When the White Guard overthrew the Bolsheviks in Siberia and re-established capitalism there, the guard complained during the first few weeks that they could not force workingmen to work because they had too much money saved up.

"Whenever there was a shortage of anything, sugar, bread, whatever it was, the Bolshevik government monopolized it and rationed it out, issuing food cards to make sure that no one could buy more than his share. Sugar was scarce all over Europe. The Soviets set the price at fifteen cents a pound and allowed each person a monthly allowance of from a half pound to a pound, depending on the locality. At first for a short time there was a little sugar for sale in isolated markets and the rich people were buying it at the rate of \$1.50 a pound.

"I had a capital opportunity to see the efficient working of Soviet food control, for in taking twelve hundred Serbian refugees across Siberia, for the American Red Cross, I entered into relationship with more than one hundred soviets over three thousand miles of territory. These were refugees who had fled to Roumania, then to South Germany, then to Siberia in Russia. Raymond Robbins got an appropriation of a quarter of a million dollars with which to take them out and colonize them until there should be a chance to take them back to Serbia, and was loaned to the Red Cross to take care of the job.

"I found how ready the soviets everywhere were to help the refugees. They sold food at the same rate as it was sold to the Russian people, prices that might interest you, particularly as they were little more than half what would be charged in this country. Butter was from two to four rubles a pound, that is twenty to forty cents; eggs were two to two-and-a-half cents apiece; bread three cents a pound; and at one place we got whole roasted chickens for thirty to sixty cents apiece.

"We were as generously treated in other respects. At Omsk we asked for a monastery for the housing of the refugees, and would have received it except that it was already full of other refugees, as was the whole city. But the Omsk soviet sent a celebrated man of the city, a doctor,

along with us to help us get settled in the next city. He accompanied us and helped us for ten days, and when I offered him reimbursement for his work and time, he refused it. Afterward, when the White Guard had overthrown the Bolsheviks at Omsk, I saw him under quite different circumstances, a pitiable figure being taken to prison to be hanged, and I was glad to be able to effect his release by telling his captors how he had aided the American Red Cross.

Another proof of the remarkable efficiency of the soviets was the tremendous campaign of propaganda carried on up to the German revolution. Boris Rheinstein, the Socialist Labor Party delegate from America to the proposed Stockholm conference, was and still is the head of the English-speaking department of Foreign Propaganda. Petroff, one of the two men released from English jails on the demand of the Soviet Government which ruled that no English merchant could go into or out of Russia until they were freed, is the right-hand man of the chief of all the propaganda. Two dailies in German with a half-million circulation were printed and shipped to the German front, some by airplane, some by hand, through Russians who had become acquainted with Germans during the fraternization period. An illustrated paper for the benefit of the uneducated Germans was also got out. One of these showed the photograph I am showing you here of the German Embassy building, with an inscription something like this beneath it: 'See the building of the German Embassy, with a banner above it bearing the words of a great German. Is it Bismarck? No. Is it the Kaiser? No. It is the immortal Karl Marx, and his words are 'Workers of the World, Unite!' We now throw back to you the words of your great countryman and ask you to unite. We Russians have taken the words seriously and all power is now in the hands of the workers. How long will it be before a German Socialist will come as Germany's ambassador?' Besides these pamphlets were got out in English, French, Swedish, Turkish and Chinese. I came in close contact with these propaganda workers while I was working for the American Y. M. C. A., getting out and distributing copies of President Wilson's Fourteen Point speech. The Russians liked that speech and agreed with most of its fourteen points, but they were a little skeptical as to whether the Allies would stand by it.

"I got up to Petrograd in time to spend six interesting weeks seeing big things happen there, with John Reed, Louise Bryant and Albert Rhys Williams. I was at the meeting of the Central Executive Committee when it was decided to let the Constituent Assembly meet for one day as a demonstration of class line-up. And I saw the Assembly dissolved early one morning by a sailor who did it by simply telling them that the Red Guard was tired and wanted to go home.

"I saw one whole Sunday of bourgeois protest meetings in Moscow. These were carried on in a very sensible way. Two hundred or more groups of two or three bourgeois men and women formed about the city, each group engaging a few soldiers in an argument. There was no disorder, the Russians are so amazingly reasonable. But they didn't convince the soldiers that they had done anything wrong in taking the power from the 'natural rulers,' as they put it. 'Why don't you trust the educated peoples to lead you, instead of putting faith in this Lenin, this man in the service of the German government?' some bourgeois men asked one soldier. 'We are dark and ig-

norant, I know,' the soldier replied, 'but there is one thing we do know, and that is that the educated people have always deceived us.'

"Here are some of the 'dark and ignorant' Russian people at their new work of governing," Humphries continued, showing a slide of half-a-dozen, stolid-faced earnest workingmen. "This is a village soviet holding a meeting to discuss the ways and means of forming a farmers' school. Notice the calculating frame on the chair. That is used to help them in adding and subtracting.

"This is one of the ten thousand schools the soviets have opened," he said, indicating a slide of a schoolroom with rows of earnest children at one side, three teachers, all eager and competent looking.

"The Bolsheviks have, as you have heard, turned many of their munition factories into factories for the manufacture of agricultural machines, but not all of them. They knew that they must aid the first nation that had a revolution, so they kept a necessary number of the munition plants going."

THE END.

ITALY

A few weeks ago in Milan, the greatest industrial centre in Italy, at a meeting of thousands of workers organized to protest against the holding of political prisoners and to demand the evacuation of Italian troops from Russia, a Socialist representative defined the situation sharply and clearly, amidst thunders of applause from the crowds.

"The Italian bourgeoisie is bankrupt. The state which represents it is bankrupt. It matters not that bankruptcy has not been declared. It exists every public service and the state is disorganized. Unemployment is growing. There is nothing to meet and face the needs of the people. The state and the bourgeoisie fear the situation. (Voice: It is true. We need revolution.)" "Even if Italy has won a military victory by sacrificing a half-million of its workers, it has been defeated economically. Our problem now is to feed the people, and the bourgeoisie cannot feed them. Only if the revolution in Russia, in Germany, in Austria succeeds will it be possible to obtain food from the East."—New York Dial, May 3.

A correspondent in the New York "Nation," says that, "there are two names written in profusion on the walls of Rome.—W. Wilson and N. Lenin."

DISTURBANCES IN INDIA

India after having been devastated by influenza, a most serious famine. These are facts that ought with appalling loss of life, is now in the grip of not to be forgotten in reading the accounts of the disturbances, amounting to "grave disorder," which have broken out in various parts of the country. On top of this misery the heavy hand of D. O. R. A. has laid with unrelaxed weight since the armistice.

The present disturbances occurred principally in the Punjab. Troops were called in to restore order and there were casualties on both sides.

As showing the extent of the revolt against British rule, the Punjab is the home of the Sikh. These people have always been most "loyal" to the the British Regime. They practically conquered India back for the British after the mutiny of '57, and since then have policed the East Indies for them.

The Executive Government has called up the whole of its reserves, military and other, and is applying all the special powers of war-time, with some others revived from the days of the East India Company, and several well-known Punjabi political leaders have been deported or interned, and it may be taken for granted that to all intents and purposes the Punjab is under martial law.