

Excerpts Relating to the Trade Union Congress Delegations to Russia, 1920 and 1924.

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[4] Bertrand Russell, 'The New Economic Policy of the USSR', *Foreign Affairs*, (June 1925) pp. 282-3.

[5] George Lansbury, *What I Saw in Russia* (1921).

[6] Two passages regarding Lansbury's plan to turn the British Empire into a social democratic commonwealth modeled on the USSR, from *Lansbury's Labour Weekly*, 23 May and 27 June 1925.

[7] Ethel Snowden, *Through Bolshevik Russia*, 1920

[8] *An Investigation by British Women Trade Unionists April to July, 1925.* (1925)

The object, then, of these reports is to review the advantages and disadvantages accruing to the people of Russia under the new system of Government, and whether the balance either way is tending to increase or diminish.

In this respect the most contentious point is the degree of political liberty for the individual resulting from the recent re-orientations of the Russian Revolution, especially since the abandonment of War Communism. In this respect, on the point place in it. This amounts to a denial in principle of individual political liberty as hitherto understood. And in practice there is a complete control not only of the Press, the platform and the political machinery, but of the schools, universities, and Army. It is obvious that a political system based on the assumption of such government authority by a minority can be judged best by results. It is with these results, not with the political philosophy of Russian Communism, that these reports are mainly concerned.

A reading of these reports, however, may suggest a conclusion, that is very probably correct, that the control by the Communists of the central authority is not so absolute as is claimed. The present tendency seems to be that the Communist organization is becoming more and more distinct from the Government, more and more a religion—a sort of State Church with an educational function. The governmental organs and the representative system are moving rapidly along lines that make their central control by a Communist caucus increasingly difficult. In other words, recent developments are towards a “democracy” in the sense of a Government based on the expressed approval of a majority of the electorate, not merely on its tacit acceptance.

The Soviet system at present consists of a series of compromises, most of them in constant change. One of the most striking characteristics of the present regime is its readiness to recognize failure. Should a Communist theory fail to give the required results it is scrapped for all practical purposes as ruthlessly as any Tsarist tradition. On the other hand, should ideas or institutions or individuals associated with the old order prove useful instruments there is no hesitation in using them.

At the same time, the precautions intended to prevent these compromises from carrying revolution right round into reaction have been very carefully elaborated as a result of constant experiment, and have so far been effective. The main safeguards are an absolute control of capital, credit, foreign commerce and concessions; and a supervision of all large private capitalistic enterprises through inspectors recruited from the working class operating under experts. Meantime, the Russian Communists hope that education of the younger generation in a collectivist creed and a civic conscience instilled with all the fervour of a religion will remove any risk of a relapse into reaction when the present precautions are relaxed.

Although Russian Communists themselves repudiate any suggestion that there has been a change in the fundamental principles of their political creed, or anything more than temporary tactical retirements, yet it seems clear to the Delegation that the present Communist system has by way of complicated

i) democracy and political liberty.

compromises arrived at a condition that is not Communism, but would be better described as a form of State Socialism or State Capitalism; and this without prejudice to the preaching of Communist ideals and the practice of severe devotion and discipline by those who take the vows. This is the same process that very rapidly took place in the case of other creeds that had originally a Communist character.

The conclusions arrived at by the Delegation as to the main compromises now in force in political, financial, economic, commercial, judicial, and social affairs will be found at the end of each chapter, and a final verdict at the end of Part I. of the Report on Labor Conditions. In presenting these conclusions its members have tried not to be biased by the atmosphere of cordiality and confidence which surrounded them from their arrival in Moscow, or by the attitude of sympathy for, and solidarity with, their fellow-workers in which they left London. They have earnestly endeavoured to present a report such as any body of their fellow countrymen would have made had it the same facilities. They are well aware that it would have been much better done had the resources of the British Government been available for what is properly a governmental function—the publication of reliable information as to political, social, and commercial conditions of one of the principal European peoples. But no official information has been so published that might counteract the ridiculous slanders by which public opinion is being misled. As, moreover, there can be no peace and progress in European civilisation until the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics is admitted on a basis of general agreement to a free and friendly footing in the community of peoples, the Trades Union Congress General Council has undertaken this task, and its Delegation has endeavoured to carry it out with a full sense of its responsibilities.



ii) On Ukraine, Georgia and the place of national minorities within the USSR:

That it did not so fall but was actually fortified by the strain was, no doubt, due to the fact that in a State structure founded on socialist solidarity the nationalist sentiment of minorities can exist and even be encouraged without danger of separatism. The revolutionary regime in Moscow has consequently been able to allow every regional, racial, and religious minority such autonomy as would satisfy the quantity and quality of its national sentiment. The result is an association of more or less amalgamated autonomous Federations and Republics of as national a growth and as varied a relationship as that of the British Empire; but so far without the frictions and collisions from which the British Empire has suffered and still suffers.

It its first stage the rule of the R. S. F. S. R. and the role of Moscow as the central authority were in their undefined

character not unlike those of the United Kingdom and of London over the Empire. But as a result of a treaty concluded in December, 1922, the Act of Union of July 6th, 1923, incorporated the four sovereign Soviet Federations in one Commonwealth or Union. The authority of the Union is constitutionally restricted to the powers given by the Act of Union under the contract of these Federations. The autonomies of the subordinate Republics, on the other hand, are restricted to the terms of their concessions from the sovereign Federations. The resulting relationships are very interesting and instructive, but an investigation of them from the material at the Delegation's disposal would lead too far from the main object of this report. An idea of the constitutional interdependence of the various constituents of the Union can be got from the annexed diagram.

The Ukraine

The Delegation had an opportunity of getting an answer in Kharkov, the capital of the Ukraine. Kharkov is the most prosperous industrial town of the Ukraine, itself the most prosperous region of the Union. The Ukraine, or, as it used to be called, Little Russia, is also the center and source of the music, poetry, painting, and craftsmanship, of the costumes and customs, that represent for us Russian culture. It is proud of this cultural superiority to Great Russia, White Russia, and the other regions, and is profiting fully by its new liberty to develop its language and literature. In Kharkov, therefore, if anywhere one might

expect to find a separatist sentiment. All the more that Communism is not congenial to the Little Russian temperament and tradition.

But Kharkov did not seem jealous of Moscow. Perhaps the bullet-splashes and shell-holes of foreign efforts to exploit such sentiment were still too recent. Perhaps because the Ukrainians after being bullied for centuries by the Tsars for singing their national songs and indulging their national sentiment are very well satisfied with their present bargain with the Union.

The bargain between Moscow and Kharkov seems in itself sound, and satisfactory to both parties. Its terms are evident from the moment of stepping on the station platform, where all notices are printed bilingually—Russian in black and Ukrainian in red. Its economic terms become evident on the streets where private trading greatly predominates over that of Government trusts and co-operatives; though out of polite consideration for Communist susceptibilities much private trading is thinly disguised by two or three partners constituting themselves as a co-operative. The bargain is perhaps most evident in the schools and theatres, which are revelling in a regular orgy of national sentiment.

In return the Ukrainian has no objection to an efficient Red Army securing him against being again ravaged by a reactionary Denikin or a Wrangel or a Petliura. For he has his own magnificent mounted militia in huge shaggy caps and long frogged coats keeping Ukrainian order in Ukrainian streets. The Union collects his taxes and returns him what it can. But he has his own Budget and local revenues to spend on local objects. If his clothes cost him more than in Moscow, his food is cheaper. He works in his factory from eight to two, and after dinner can, if he likes, attend an art school free, which undertakes in three years to teach him to get his living by some art or craft. The night the Delegation was there he could choose for his entertainment between a lecture by Karl Radek (of the Third International), on Leninism, a performance of the no less international "Charley's Aunt," or a highly-national ballet, with topical songs in which jokes about the Soviet system were discreetly veiled in Ukrainian.

Kharkov is to Moscow somewhat as Munich is to Berlin, but instead of being like Munich, a centre of separatism and reaction, it is making a cultural contribution to the Union that will become one of its strongest bonds. All the same Moscow prefers that the Ukrainian capital should be at Kharkov with its industrial proletariat rather than return to the historic capital in agricultural Kiev. For in Kiev, a market center of large farmers, one of the Delegation found there would be some "kulaks" who, if they no longer feared a fourth occupation by the Whites, might welcome a third evacuation by the Reds.

The success in satisfying national aspirations without sacrificing central authority is in respect of the Ukraine and the

Georgia Under Bolshevism

The history of Georgia since inclusion in the Union of Sovietist Socialist Russia has been relatively peaceful and prosperous. There seems no doubt that the Menshevist Government represent a political point of view more congenial to the majority of Georgians than the present Bolshevik administration. But there is a little doubt that practically the Menshevists were as great a failure as the Bolsheviks have been a success. Jordania, the Menshevist leader, is on record as having said of the financial situation in 1920: "We are not only approaching a collapse, we are already collapsing." The following figures suggest that the Bolshevik administration has not only stopped the country going downhill, but started it on a pretty steep upgrade.

Economic Development of Georgia

Under the Tsarist regime the industries of Georgia were of no great importance and the policy of the Government was to hinder rather than hasten development, a backward people being more easily handled politically. Under Menshevist rule during the years 1918 to 1921 such industries as there were fell into an almost moribund state, but have greatly improved during the last three years of Soviet Government, as the following figures suggest:

Success of Bolshevik Regime

Many more figures than the above could be given showing the practical success of the Bolshevik Georgians. But the broad facts are not locally disputed. Last summer, for example, two correspondents arrived with instructions to collect information showing the deterioration of the country under the new regime. Both were honest men. One conscientiously toured the country, writing well-documented articles all proving the contrary, which, of course, never were published. The other, wiser in his generation, enjoyed himself in Tiflis and wrote about the scenery and such sobstuff as he could get about the prisons. And no one who visits the country now and knows what its conditions were can doubt that materially it is prospering as it never did under Menshevist rule.

Insurrections Against Menshevists

In view of the general recognition that the Georgian Bolshevik Government is energetic and efficient, one might have hoped that Georgia would have been content with the measure of self-government it has within the Union, which only falls short of complete sovereignty. But intrigue and insurrection are inbred in the Trans-Caucasian races. During the four years of Menshevist rule there were no less than eight insurrections, which secured for a short time control in certain localities, besides smaller unsuccessful risings. These insurrections were in the Mingrelian, Letchkuma, Ratchinsky, Dushetsky, Sharabanski, and Borchalinsky districts; also in South Ossetia, Abkhasia, Gouria and Old Georgia. There was also trouble owing to Georgian frontier districts supporting the neighboring Sovietist Republics of Armenia and Georgia during the military operations of the Georgian Menshevists against them. This went so far in some cases as the formation of armed bands to co-operate with Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The Menshevist Opposition

One of the first acts of the Bolshevik Government had been to issue a decree legalizing all parties who would renounce armed action and act as a constitutional opposition. But this offer, no doubt naturally enough, was not accepted by the Menshevists. Their leaders in Paris continued to keep their followers in Georgia on a footing of conspiracy against the new Soviet State. For this attack on what was represented as an alien oppression of Georgia and an autocratic suppression of a democracy, they secured the support even of foreign Labor organizations. They were also supported by foreign political par-

ties antagonistic to Russia and associated with the Russian emigres, as well as by financial and commercial combines interested in the oil and manganese wealth of these regions. It is surprising that such a combination of moral forces and material factors should not have produced more trouble than it did to the Georgian Soviet State, and the combination undoubtedly caused great apprehension in Moscow as to another intervention for the overthrowing of the Soviet system and occupation of the oilfields.

Insurrection against Bolshevists

Local risings broke out on August 28th last in remote regions—the Senostski, Tzurgetski, Sugdetski, and Cherabanski districts and the Shiaturi manganese mines. The movement lost momentum within three days and was all over in the course of the first week in September. The risings were local affairs, and the local supporters of the Government for the most part suppressed them without the aid of the Georgian militia, which was mainly used for rounding up wandering bands. The Red Army garrison seems scarcely to have been engaged. Little disturbance was caused, but the loss of life was disproportionately heavy. The shooting by the Menshevists of 18 hostages exasperated the Bolshevists. The worst stories refer to those days of guerilla war-fare in remote villages, which was ruthless, as it always is in these regions. It is impossible to get reliable information as to the number of lives lost, but 3,000 is probably a fair guess.

Character of the Insurrection

It does not seem true, as is asserted by the more enthusiastic and less intelligent Georgian Bolshevists, that the insurgents were entirely Tsarist officers and nobles with their feudal retainers out to get back the land, and mountain banditti out for loot. These elements were prominent, but it also was a real appeal to a national sentiment that could not be satisfied, as such sentiment elsewhere is in the Union, with anything short of complete sovereignty. The insurrection probably had the sympathy of a majority of Georgians, and would have had their support had it succeeded. But it never had any chance of success.

Such support as it had was got largely on false pretences. The procedure was for the leader in any village to let local supporters listen to a telephone conversation with an accomplice in Batoum or Baku, in which information was given as to an Allied naval squadron said to be operating in the Black Sea and a British Indian expedition said to be embarking on the Caspian. These lies were readily believed in view of the recent British and French occupation, the expressions of sympathy given by French and British political leaders when visiting the Menshevist Government, the intrigues of secret agents during the summer, and the notorious disputes of the great oil interests and of the British and French manganese enterprises with Moscow.

Thus the insurgent workmen in the manganese mines welcomed the first Government aeroplanes from Tiflis under the impression they were those of a French force. And as soon as the fraud was discovered of course all faith was lost in the movement.

Cause of Collapse

But if this want of foreign support had been the only cause of failure it would not have collapsed so completely. The real cause of failure was that there is in Georgia no active discontent with the Soviet system, only a certain discomfort under it and a dislike of its Russian connections. Moreover, Georgia is inhabited by many other races than Georgians, and these, such as the Adjars at Batoum, had no intention of losing the Home Rule they enjoy as an Autonomous Republic within the Georgian Republic, the Trans-Caucasian Federation, and the Union. They supported the Tiflis Government, and would have joined, if necessary, in suppressing the risings. As would the other races enjoying Home Rule.*

Political Effect of the Insurrections

This sacrifice of brave followers who took the field with swords and pistols against machine guns, by leaders living comfortably in Paris, has for the time being killed the Menshevist cause in Georgia. The party was in course of formal and final dissolution when the Delegation arrived in Tiflis.

The bulk of its leaders have accepted the authority of the present Government, some even taking service with it. In the course of a long conversation with these Menshevist ex-rebels many hard things and home truths were said by them about the part played by all British parties in respect of Georgia, culminating in this year's catastrophe.

Menshevist Party Dissolved

The Menshevist or Social Democratic Party at one time included a very large majority of the politically conscious population. The upper classes in Georgia under Tsarism had been more inclined to socialism and democracy than anywhere else in the Empire. With power put in its hands by the Revolution the party membership grew to 60,000, and with supporters could count on a vote of 80,000, the active membership being about 15,000. With loss of power in 1921 the party rapidly fell in numbers and divided into a "constitutional" opposition and an "il-

* On this point, the following evidence, given to the Delegation by one who was a Menshevist leader, is of interest:—

"During the Menshevist rule all non-Georgian members of the population were severely kept under. Armenians, Russians, Ossetinians, Tartars, etc., to escape from the Menshevist rule went out of Georgia, and formed detachments against the Menshevist Government. The Russians, in Red Army uniform, found fighting against Menshevist rule were Georgian natives who had suffered under Menshevist rule."

legal" organization. And the position of the "constitutional" opposition became more and more impossible between the Bolshevik Government and their "illegal" colleagues; so that the question of voluntary liquidating the party gained favor. In the autumn of 1923 a party Congress representing 12,000 members voted by majority in favor of liquidation, an example followed by the Young Marxians with 5,000 members. A minority of Constitutionalists decided to carry on. But after the collapse of the insurrection there has been a final liquidation of the constitutional Menshevists, who have either become Communists or as non-partisans co-operate with them, as elsewhere in Russia. There remains a residuum of "illegal" Menshevists of not more than 2,000 members, who continue to conspire with the help of the Menshevist emigres*

Elections

The elections are conducted by show of hands as elsewhere in Russia, and what is said in the report on Russia about them

* On this point an extract is given from the shorthand report of evidence given to the Delegation by a Menshevist, who opposed Bolshevism until last autumn.

"At the present time the position of the members of the Menshevist Party is this—the leaders are remote from the working class, and do not realize what has been happening in Georgia. They continually assured the peasants and workers that the Soviet power in Russia was very temporary. Each day they said it could last only one day more. And when it didn't fall they said it would last only another week, and when the week was over they said it would last only another month, and finally it became years, and still the Soviet power in Russia lasted. The reason the Georgian Menshevists kept on working so long was because they were relying on foreign help. They believed that any minute the Soviet power in Russia would fall, and then Georgia would be in the power of the foreign capitalist States. And they preferred an independent State under the protection of foreign countries. The Menshevists were afraid that they would lose all they had gained by the February Revolution if they allied themselves with the Soviet Government and relied on the Russian workers instead of on foreign Governments. The Committee abroad was receiving help from foreign Powers. The Committee in Georgia, which is now liquidating the party, is sending a special Commission abroad to Comrade Jordania to ask him to refrain from destructive agitation and to co-operate with the Soviets."

Mr. Purcell: "When was Jordania elected for the last time to represent Georgia in the Second International; when was the last time that Georgia paid affiliation dues to the Second International; and who authorized the Second International to raise the question of Georgia with the League of Nations?"

The Witness: "Jordania has never been elected to represent the Menshevist Party in the Second International. Four members were delegated in 1918 by the Central Committee—Tseretelli, Akhmedishvili, Tchkhelli, and Tcheldze—to serve as a liaison between the Second International and the Central Committee. No elections since that time have taken place. The last time affiliation fees were paid was in 1920.

"While I was a member of the Central Committee it never did anything to raise the question of Georgia in the League of Nations. The 'illegal' Central Committee asked Jordania to raise the question in the League of Nations, but no one here and no one on the Presidium in Georgia ever authorized such an act. The question was not even discussed by the real Central Committee of the Party."

is applicable to Georgia. With the addition that, no doubt, in Georgia fear of another race and a ruling class, and above all, of the Tcheka does count for a good deal. Under Menshevist rule the average attendance at elections was about two-thirds of the electorate. It now seems to be about three-quarters. The disfranchisements under the Soviet system are about 2 per cent. And if the elections were a mere farce, it is difficult to see why they should be so well attended.

The Tcheka

The least satisfactory feature of the Trans-Caucasian situation is the maintenance of the "Tcheka" or Extraordinary Commission abolished in Russia itself at the close of the civil wars. There is a Trans-Caucasian Tcheka for the whole Federation, and under it a Georgian Tcheka run by Georgian Bolsheviks. Moscow disclaims any responsibility for either, but the Trans-Caucasian Tcheka was not long ago in charge of the man who ran the Russian Tcheka during its greatest activity. It is the Georgian Tcheka that has been "liquidating" the August insurrection and that is responsible for the numerous executions and exiles. The severity of the suppression of a revolt that was never formidable is justified by Tchekist officials with the arguments usual in such cases. And these severities have been so exaggerated and embroidered that it is almost impossible to arrive at any real facts from opponents of the Government with which to check official information. Some of these stories were inquired into, but no real evidence could be got of wholesale terrorism. Since the fighting finished there is a discrimination between those responsible and the ignorant; and there seems no reason to suppose that the innocent are suffering. But undoubtedly the name of Tcheka alone would create an atmosphere of terrorism.

Army

As a National Republic incorporated in the Union, Georgia has its own army or militia. This has been overlooked, partly because the uniform of the infantry is the same as that of the Red (Union) Army—though the cavalry has a uniform of its own.

As to the total strength of the troops in the Caucasus, the authorities were naturally reticent for reasons of foreign policy. But it was not difficult to ascertain that it was less than half that of the Tsarist garrison. The Red Army in Georgia is less than the British Army of occupation, and is on better terms with the population. The Caucasus is one of the very few places abroad where stories are told of misbehavior of British troops; and though no doubt untrue this shows the temper of the population to that occupation and to occupations in general.

Georgian Language and Customs

An unmixed asset accruing from the present position is the complete cultural liberty enjoyed by Georgia after a century dur-

ing which its language and literature were practically proscribed. The delegation attended some interesting plays in the national language, in which Tsarist Russia was mercilessly guyed. The publication of books in the Georgian language has gone up. Under three years of Menshevism, althogether 162 Georgian books were published. Under three years of Bolshevism, 505 books were published by the Commissariat of Education alone. Moreover, there were published ten Armenian, seven Turkish, and ten other books in minority languages, as against four only under Menshevism. The total copies issued under Menshevism were 405,000; under Bolshevism, 3,500,000. In other words, there has been a great impetus to national culture.

The Delegation in Georgia

This was the situation on the arrival of the Delegation in Trans-Caucasia. And even before leaving Moscow it was evident that the atmosphere in Trans-Caucasia would be different from that in the rest of Russia; more resembling, in fact, in its unrest that which was found in Russia in 1920. For example, the Delegation was warned that the Union Government would not be responsible for the safety in Trans-Caucasia of one of the advisory delegates who had been associated in an official capacity with the British armed occupations. But the delegate in question was prepared to take the risk, and the Delegation did not wish to lose the advantage which his exceptional local knowledge and personal connections afforded them in arriving at a just estimate of the situation. On arrival in the Caucasus this delegate moved freely among his former acquaintances without interference and without untoward results.

During their stay in Tiflis delegates were constantly receiving communications from the "illegal" Menshevist organization. Most of these were found to be of no value. One of them, however, contained a statement that a porter of the hotel and a servant there had been arrested for trying to convey a Menshevist letter to the Delegation. The Delegation having ascertained that this was so, the Chairman, accompanied by two advisory delegates, visited the Georgian Tcheka and without great difficulty secured the release of these men. This was the only incident of the kind. And members of the Delegation in Tiflis, as elsewhere, visited persons of every point of view without obstacle or observation.

The Tiflis Citadel

Most of the lurid stories circulated in the Georgian capital have their scene in the citadel. This mediaeval fortress is perched on precipitous rocks over the gorge of the Koura. It is the political prison, garrisoned by Russian troops, where several hundred prisoners were still awaiting trial for participation in the insurrection. Daily executions were said to be still taking place there, and undoubtedly convicts were still being sent thence to prison camps in Siberia.

The advisory delegates took an early opportunity of visiting the citadel without notice and unaccompanied. On the bridge over the gorge they were warned by a passer-by not to point at the scenery or loiter, as the sentinels shot at everyone supposed to be signalling to the prisoners. They penetrated, however, without difficulty into the interior of the citadel and talked to the young Red Army guards. These did not know who they were talking to, and described with great freedom all the doings in the prison. In no country are such doings pleasant and each country thinks those of another worse than its own. It will be enough to say that the sensational stories circulating in Tiflis were clearly untrue. They then asked to see the political prisoners. This rather cool request led to the Governor being fetched up from the town, who explained that this could not be done without a governmental order. As a visit to the "politicals'" quarters under such conditions would be of no particular interest the matter was not pursued further.

Delegation's Reception

The reception given to the delegates and the numbers that marched in the public processions convinced them that a large portion of the industrial population of the capital were enthusiastic supporters of the present Government. The situation in Georgia, in fact, seems to be essentially the same as in Azerbaijan and Armenia—that is, a majority of the industrial workers with a nucleus of Russians are prepared to lay down their lives for the present Government. The small minority that remains in opposition are not now prepared to lay down their lives to overthrow it.

Delegation's Recommendations

On its return to Moscow the Delegation put before the Union Government its view of the Georgian situation. It pointed out the great advantage that would accrue to the prestige of the Union of the Sovietist Socialist Republics if the "Tcheka" were now abolished in Georgia as elsewhere and the Red Army withdrawn, say, to Baku—Georgia being left to its local militia like other Autonomous Republics. This was fully admitted, and it was indicated in reply that these two measures were only a question of time. In fact, that in the interests of economy it had been suggested to the Trans-Caucasian Federation that the Red Army should be withdrawn, but they had asked that it should be left until the situation was clearer. As to the "Tcheka," it was pointed out that it was not only a question of the internal position in Georgia, but of the international situation also. The Caucasus under Tsarism was garrisoned by a very large force. It was now practically held by local militia, but was still an object of foreign intrigue, and might possibly become an objective of foreign intervention. The frustration of such intrigues in the interests of peace required special precautions.

In fact, the Delegation was left with the impression that

[2] Friedrich Adler, *The Anglo-Russian report: a criticism of the report of the British trades union delegation to Russia, from the point of view of international socialism* (1925)

Note: ('Thomas' refers to J.H. Thomas, Secretary of State for the Colonies under J.R. MacDonald in 1924. Purcell is A.A. Purcell, a CPGB founding member who lead the TUC Delegation to Russia).

In writing this chapter the authors must have bethought themselves of the sentiments of the former Colonial Minister Thomas and his narrower following, who have a tender spot in their hearts for the needs of the British Empire. They reveal to them that Russia did nothing but what seems to them a matter of course in the Colonies of Great Britain. And as against Thomas this line of argument is perfectly right. The extreme Right wing of the British Labour Movement has no moral right to condemn the imperialist policy of *other* States.

But an argument of this kind cuts both ways, and suddenly the so-called extreme Left of the British Labour Movement is completely in line with the extreme Right. In their recognition of the argument of imperialism, Thomas and Purcell are one in heart and soul, Thomas champions it for Great Britain, Purcell for Soviet Russia, but both *champion* it. Consequently this book, which is invested

Anyone who has read in official blue-books the fate of British Colonies can recognize the manner, the text, and the worthy authors. The great majority of the natives are so unreasonable and crazy that they want to assert their independence, but the Imperialist Government will not be turned from its work of Christian neighbourly love. It brings to the poor natives the "*assurance of peace and prosperity,*" it affords them "*protection against invasions and interventions,*" it introduces real "*material prosperity*" into the country. It cannot sacrifice itself too much for the natives, and thus it is only fair that the natives should also put up with "a certain discomfort" and learn to overcome their antipathy towards the foreigners. For, finally, it is to the interest not only of the natives, but also of mankind, that the "*inclusion should continue.*"

[3] [*The Communist Mistake: Extracts from the diary of a disillusioned revolutionist*](#) (1925)

Excerpts from Alexander Berkman, *The Bolshevik Myth* (1925). Berkman was an interpreter for the 1920 delegation. He was a committed communist, but his experience in Russia turned him to anarchism.

DELUDING BRITISH LABOUR REPRESENTATIVES.

In May, 1920, Mr. Ben Turner's Labour Mission arrived in Petrograd, and Mr. Berkman was attached to it as an interpreter. In this position he had to interpret a speech made by Antselovitch, the Chairman of the Petrograd Soviet of Labour Unions, at a banquet. In the course of this speech, Antselovitch, we read—

“ rose even to the height of asserting that full individual liberty is established in Russia—at least, for the workers, he added, as if suddenly become aware of the recklessness of his statement.

“ Perhaps I did Antselovitch an injustice by omitting that falsehood in my translation of his speech. But I could not stand up before the delegates and repeat what I knew, as well as they, to be a deliberate lie, as stupid as it was unnecessary. The delegates are aware that dictatorship is the reverse of liberty. They know there is no freedom of speech or press for anyone in Soviet Russia, not even for Communists, and that sanctity of home or person is unknown.” (p. 136).

But things occurred to open the eyes of the British Mission, as for example :—

“ I listened to some of the British delegates discussing the printers' meeting from which they had just returned. Melnichansky and other Bolsheviki had addressed the gathering, eulogizing the Soviet regime and the Communist dictatorship. Suddenly a man wearing a long black beard appeared on the platform. Before anyone realized his identity he launched an attack on the Bolsheviki. He branded them the Isars. His fiery oratory kept the audience spellbound. Then someone shouted: ‘ Who are you? Your name!’

“ ‘ I am Tchernov, Victor Tchernov,’ the man replied in bold, defiant voice.

“ The Bolsheviki on the platform jumped to their feet in rage.

“ ‘ Hurrah! Long live Tchernov, brave Tchernov!’ the audience shouted, and a wild ovation was tendered the Social Revolutionary leader and former President of the Constituent Assembly.

“ ‘ Arrest him! Hold the Traitor!’ came from the Communists. There was a rush to the platform, but Tchernov had disappeared.

“ Some of the Britishers expressed admiration for the daring of the man whom the Tcheka has been so assiduously searching for a long time. ‘ It was rather exciting,’ someone remarked.

“ ‘ I shudder to think what will happen to him if he's caught,’ said another.

“ ‘ Deucedly clever, his escape.’

“ ‘ The Printers will pay for it.’

“ ‘ I hear the leaders of the Third Soviet bakery are under arrest, and the men locked out for demanding more bread.’

“ ‘ It's different at home,’ a delegate sighed. ‘ But I believe we all agree that the blockade must be raised.’ ” (pp. 150-151).

And so with the Italian Socialist Mission. With regard to these Mr. Berkman writes :—

“ The occasion is celebrated with the usual military parades, demonstrations and meetings. But the show has lost interest for me. I have looked back of the curtain. The performances lack sincerity; political intrigue is the mainspring of the spectacles. The workers have no part in them except for mechanical obedience to orders; hypocrisy conducts the delegates through the factories; false information deceives them regarding the actual state of affairs; surveillance prevents their getting in touch with the people and learning the truth of the situation. The delegates are dined, feted, and influenced to bring their organizations into the fold of the Third International, under the leadership of Moscow.” (p. 156.)

DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT.

As everybody knows, this is a phrase by which the Communist Party indicates its policy ; and everybody should know, as they may know from this book, that the dictatorship is not of, but over the proletariat.

Mr. Berkman gives the views of a Left-Social Revolutionary whom he met in Kharkov :—

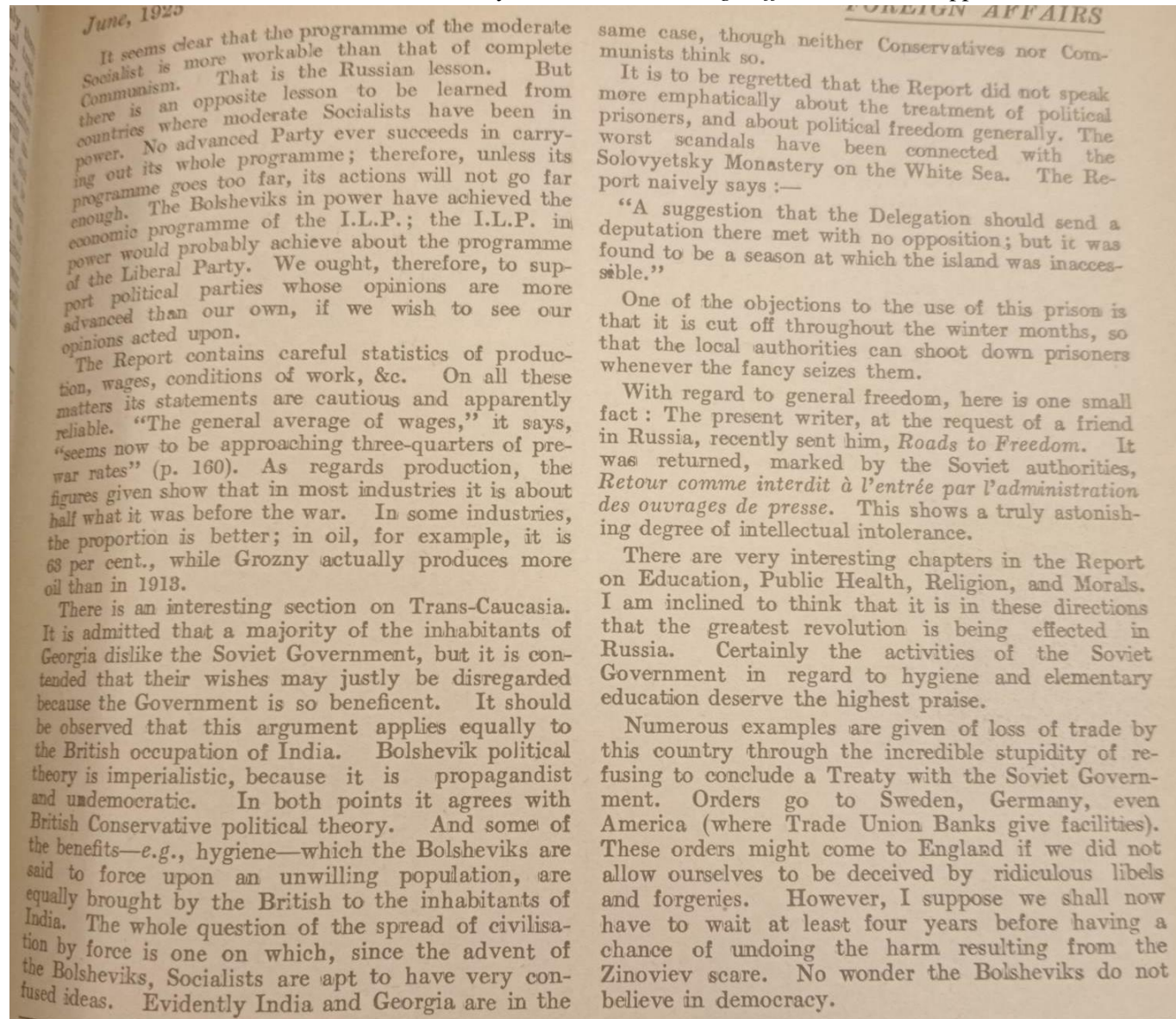
“N— voices the sentiments of the Left Social Revolutionary group, his views fully shared by his comrades. The rule of a minority, they agree, is necessarily a despotism based on oppression and violence. Thus 10,000 Spartans governed 300,000 Helots, while in the French Revolution 300,000 Jacobins sought to control the 7,000,000 citizens of France. Now 500,000 Communists have by the same methods enslaved the whole of Russia, with its population of more than 100,000,000. Such a régime must become the negation of its original source. Though born of the Revolution, the offspring of the movement for liberation, it must deny and pervert the very ideals and aims that gave it birth. In consequence there is crying inequality of the new social groups, instead of the proclaimed equality ; the stifling of every popular opinion, instead of the promised freedom ; violence and terror, instead of the expected reign of brotherhood and love.” (pp. 168-169).

No wonder another Ukrainian declared :—

“Russia has never before lived under such absolute despotism. Socialism, Communism indeed! Never had we less liberty and equality than to-day.” (p. 185.)

Or, as another revolutionary who, though an Anarchist, held a high position in a Soviet institution, put it :—

“The Communist Party is only a political body, attempting—successfully indeed—to create a new master class over the producers.” (p. 194).



[5] George Lansbury, *What I Saw in Russia* 1921.

IN a striking appeal to the Russian people for loyalty and effort on behalf of the nation, Lenin said: "All Soviet Russia will become a United All Russian Co-operative Society of Workers." This is the keynote and explanation of the Soviet Government's attitude towards the old Russian Co-operative Movement. Socialism, Communism, Bolshevism, mean co-operation, and co-operation means all three. It has taken months of weary arguing and much effort to overcome the open and avowed hostility of co-operators towards the proposal to absorb them as part of the organisation of the State. I am not sure it is yet overcome.

No one should be surprised at this. The Co-operative Movement everywhere has prided itself on the voluntary character of its work. In England, Co-operators and Socialists are only just commencing to understand how much their theories of life are akin to each other.

find themselves free of the domination of either landlord or rich peasants, are slowly learning the benefits to be derived from intercourse and co-operation with each other. It is always difficult to make people anywhere understand that their wellbeing depends on each other. I think, however, it will be easier in Russia than anywhere else, as the peasants are very simple and have not yet been spoiled by the commercialism of America and Europe. Alongside the small holdings of the ordinary peasant the Soviet Government, using the machinery of the co-operative movement, is endeavouring to teach the benefits of mass production. Some of the older agriculturists pour scorn on the efforts and prophesy failure. As I listened to one friend who had nothing but scorn and contempt to heap on all such schemes, I remembered my own experience at Hollesley Bay where a scheme of co-operative agriculture in England was ruined by the same kind of criticism. The results will be different in Russia because the Government wants only one thing, and that is the very highest standard of life for all the people by the co-operative effort of the whole nation. Once the townspeople are able to give the peasants what they need in the way of clothes, seeds, tools and other necessaries of life, all friction will have passed away between artisan and peasant; once the advocates of mass production are able

WHAT TO DO WITH IT

There is no reason for breaking up the British Empire any more than there is a reason for smashing our own national institutions. Our duty is to transform the British Empire of Domination into a Commonwealth of free nations, including within this Commonwealth those peoples who themselves desire to join with us.

Soviet Russia has created a Republic representative of many smaller Soviet Republics; in other words, they have created a Federal Commonwealth of those nations, formerly part of the Empire controlled by the Imperialist Czars, who are now willing to live together bound by the bonds of mutual interests and goodwill. The British people, as represented by the Labour Party, recognising the fact that time has flung together this British Empire, should, as soon as a Labour Government is in power, take all steps necessary to create in word and deed this British Commonwealth of free nations, not a forced Federation, for that is a contradiction in terms. Neither must such a coming together mean a menace to other nations. We should assume that our Federation, as also should be the Russian Soviet Federation, is one within which all nations will eventually be found.

Finally, all nations are in the throes of a world crisis, the like of which mankind has never before experienced. The old order is breaking down in every direction, but in no direction is the crisis so acute as in that of International relationships. With peace on their lips and war, economic and bloody, in their hearts, our rulers keep up the absurd cry of competition, and bid all prepare for more and more strife, national and international.

Along that road there is only death and destruction. Men like Mr. Baldwin, good natured, good intentioned as they are, think that peace can come by keeping up the system which has led, and must inevitably lead, humanity to the shambles.

FOR COMMON GOOD

We, of the Labour Movement, must give up worshipping at the shrine of Free Trade, or giving heed to those who talk of tariffs as a cure for present evil, and must without fear declare for International Socialism here and now. Our demand is, at least within the Commonwealth, that production, distribution, and exchange of goods shall be organised for and on behalf of the community. The great International, as well as national trusts, monopolies, and corporations who now control vast areas under the British flag in Asia, Africa, Canada, and Australia, and who fix wages and prices both in those countries and here at home, must give place to a nobler order, an order which will establish the principle of co-operation between all members of this great community of free peoples. There should be no monopoly, except a monopoly owned by the Commonwealth.

Finally, let us all forget once and for all the blasphemous lie that it is a law of God that some nations shall rule over others. It is exactly the same argument used by men against freedom for women, and the classes against the workers. The lie has never worked, and never will. Those who believe it have always perished. Let the British nation lead the way in not only proclaiming, but in practising, the glorious doctrine of the Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of Man. Once we truly believe this we shall give up competing for death and co-operate for life.

A COMMONWEALTH PROGRAMME

In a year or two's time Labour will once again be in office, and also in power, and great questions of public policy concerning economic and political arrangements with India and the Dominions will come up for discussion. We shall not assist in breaking up the British Empire. We shall endeavour to establish a "Union of Free Nations." In place of the Empire as now founded on force and domination we shall create a Commonwealth within which there will be only those nations who desire to be partners in the development of human society.

Our Russian comrades, faced with the Russian Empire, claim that they gave freedom of choice to Georgia, the Ukraine, Finland, Poland, etc. Some of these nations refuse to join the Union of Soviets or to accept the Bolshevik form of government; others remain united with Moscow and are represented there at the seat of government. British Labour, out of the British Empire, should create a Commonwealth of Free Nations, including India on equal terms of free partnership, with a Commonwealth Parliament or Senate, meeting at regular intervals in order to decide questions of policy and trade in which all are concerned.

If it is argued that this is only a Parliament, not a Supreme Council—well, words do not make things different. Commissar is another name for official; Soviet is only another name for Council. In any case, we who want to replace the British Empire by a Union of Free Nations based on equal partnership, are as sincere Socialists as are those comrades who work night and day for the Union of Russian Socialist Soviet Republics. Let us all remember that a rose smells just as sweet no matter by what name

[7] Ethel Snowden, *Through Bolshevik Russia*, 1920

The Russian people are the most illiterate in Europe. Their civilisation is generations behind Western civilisation and is of a different sort. They have a tradition of tyranny that sets them in a different category from the people of Anglo-Saxondom. They are a silent, passive people for the most part, sentimental and idealistic. They are composed, in the main, of peasants whose chief absorbing interest is the land which they love with intense passion.

Such a people are in huge contrast to the teeming industrial populations of Great Britain and America. In these countries the workers have long enjoyed a measure of political and social freedom unknown to the people of Russia. They have organised themselves politically and industrially on a big scale, and the standard of comfort they have been able to exact for themselves and their families from the employing classes and from Parliament is very considerably higher in average than the best the Russian workman has known.

Most of the organised workers of Great Britain (and probably of America also) possess a little property, if it is only the dividend they draw from the Co-operative Stores. The illiterate man or woman is practically unknown amongst them. Their children enjoy free education. Their cities are organised and comparatively healthy. With the power of the franchise and the industrial power of their trade organisation they can achieve any reform they may desire. They possess a tradition of freedom of conscience, of speech, of Press, of general living which no tyrant in office would dare long and without good cause to defy.

They are moving slowly but surely towards the achievement of that economic freedom without which they cannot hope to make secure the rest. And this they are doing without the bloodshed and suffering to themselves and innocent people that violent change would inevitably produce. Why, then, should they copy Russia, whose condition is so different and to whom it might have appeared there was no other way out? I feel myself so strongly the value of liberty that I would not jeopardise it, even for a hypothetical Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

I do not think the British workman is in danger of committing this folly. He sees much too far for that. By temperament he is slow but sure. He is not easy to move along unaccustomed paths, but he jogs steadily along the old high road. He is often charged with loving comfort and his glass of beer too fondly; but the ruling passion as I have seen it in him is his love of home and wife and children. He will not readily risk their happiness in pursuit of a chimerical Garden of Eden which might rob him of his present content. He knows there are even greater things in the world than bread and meat, important though these things be. If the alternative were placed before him of security without freedom, or the liberty to live his own life in his own way with as much risk of losing his livelihood as he suffers under the present system, he would choose liberty.

And he would do this because instinctively he would feel that tyranny was an evil, and that kindness and toleration are worth more than the most perfect system in the world without these things. And he would be right.

The choice is not an inevitable one. The tyranny in Russia is due to the domination of a minority, to the seizing of power by violence, and the necessity of holding it by force. It is not inherent in the Socialist system if that be achieved gradually and in harmony with the people's desires and developing intelligence.

My great hope for the future of Russia lies in the possibilities of peace. If outside aggression really ceases Russia can begin at once to amend herself. If the blockade be really broken down, contact with the world will soften many of the acerbities of the Communist rulers and ameliorate the condition of the people; but it must be a real breakdown. The people of England must see that they are not deceived by misleading replies to Parliamentary questions. There are more ways than one of blockading a country. Postal, telegraph and commercial relations should be at once established; there should be no Customs rules and regulations to block the way to full free trade: the people of the two countries should be given liberty freely to travel from one land to the

[8] *An Investigation by British Women Trade Unionists April to July, 1925.*

IN giving our report of what we saw and learned during our visit to Soviet Russia, we are not at all concerned with the question as to the righteousness of the Bolsheviks, or as to their methods of establishing the soviet system. In investigating conditions in a foreign country we have to take institutions as we find them, and only two things concern us: firstly, is that system accepted by the majority of the people who live under it? secondly, does it on the whole work out for the benefit of the toiling masses of the country? With Mr. Keynes we say quite frankly that we are definitely and all the time on the side of our own class, the exploited working class (including working peasants and both brain and hand workers).

As to the question of whether the Soviet Government is accepted by the people who live under it, we have no hesitation in giving a very emphatic "Yes." The vast majority of the town workers and the more educated of the peasantry in every part of the Soviet Union we visited, are enthusiastically in its favour; they take a pride in its achievements, and feel that, so far from the Soviet Government being the dictatorship of a comparatively small party, it is the expression of their own dictatorship—the dictatorship of the workers and peasants. They look to the Russian Communist Party for leadership. They respect and love it as the party that has led them to success; but State power, they feel, is actually under their own control, through their direct representatives on the soviets, through their trade unions, their workshop committees, and so on.

As regards the masses of the illiterate and backward peasantry, they give the Soviet Government at least their passive support. Their life is still very hard, but so it was formerly—who is to blame they do not know; they do not understand the "high politics" of the townspeople—but most of them do know that they have more land now than formerly. Some of them do appreciate the fact that in time of drought and special hardships the State comes to their help far more frequently and readily than had ever been the case before. More and more of them are beginning to appreciate the efforts being made by the Government and town workers to spread education amongst them and to give them some of the benefits of modern science, or, as they say themselves, "some of the present-day wonders," such as electricity, agricultural machinery, aerial methods of pest destruction, and so on.

There still remains the intelligentsia, or semi-intelligentsia, and the private employers and traders. The intelligentsia, in so far as they are represented by such classes as teachers, doctors, professors, and journalists, for the most part support the Government, either actively or at the very least passively. We met many of them in schools, hospitals, colleges, and privately, as our report shows. We met some people privately who are

not active supporters of the Government, who would probably acquiesce in another form of government equally well, but what struck us was the way in which they took the Soviet Government for granted as their own stable Government. They criticised some of the activities of Soviet Government—but not nearly so vehemently as the Government of the day in England may be heard to be criticised any day. Nevertheless, a housewife, for instance, in one case, showing us her two children (very bonny ones, aged ten and two respectively, who did not look at all as though they had gone through the hard days of the wars, revolution, famine, and blockade) said: "Just look at his little limbs, don't imagine that our soviet children are starved or neglected!"

We also spoke to a number of private shopkeepers when they did not know who we were, to hairdressers, and private employers. Here it is quite true that in many cases they complained of various restrictions, more particularly of the restrictions imposed by the Government in the first years of the Revolution. For the most part, however, they also said that things were improving, and in any case there was no question of regarding the Soviet Government as anything but a permanency. They may not like it, but they certainly realise its strength—that is to say, the support it has from the masses, and they accept it with more acquiescence and far less hope of overthrowing it than Socialists and supporters of the Labour Party in Great Britain accept the present Conservative Government.

We admit that our report deals mainly with the best side of present-day life in Soviet Russia. We do not at all mean to deny that there is still much suffering, much poverty in the Soviet Union. We are perfectly well aware that the work still awaiting the Soviet Government in the spheres of education, of raising the general cultural level of the people of that vast country, as in agriculture, industry, housing, sanitation, health, is still enormous. If we have described and emphasised the good, it is for two reasons. In the first place, there are not lacking scribes in this and other countries who are continually, not merely painting the bad sides of present-day Soviet Russia, but exaggerating them out of all proportion. Secondly, and far more important, we have emphasised the good because the bad is entirely an inheritance of the past; the good is the work of the present and an earnest of the hope of the future.

Although in this report we do not desire to discuss the question as to whether the soviet system is applicable or not to this or other countries, we can say that in Russia, at any rate, it has lent itself to a far more genuine and widespread participation of the masses of the workers, and of those working peasants who take an interest in public affairs, in the actual machinery of every-day government, than is the case here at home. Moreover, it is the constant endeavour of the Soviet authorities, of the Russian Communist Party, and the Russian trade unions, to draw larger and larger sections of the toiling masses, urban and rural, men and women, to participate in the work of government.

Whatever our abstract theoretical views may be of the soviet system of government, however we may differ from the Bolsheviks in points of detail, or even in general outlook as regards the position of affairs in our own country, no honest observer of present-day Soviet Russia can doubt for one moment that a great and sincere experiment in working-class government

is being carried out in Russia. We consider: that this experiment is worthy of the interest, sympathy, and assistance of the workers of the world; that there is much in Soviet Russia that our workers might do well to study; that so far this experiment has resulted in bringing about enormous benefits for the toiling masses of Russia; that these benefits are lasting and are likely to become more and more widespread as the economic position of the country recovers from the blows dealt it by world imperialism and capitalism, and from the ruin and miseries it has inherited from the Tsarist regime.