

The Repudiation of Debts in Russia

IT happens occasionally, because of some obscure impulse, either twitches of conscience or reasons of circulation, that the press prints something favorable to the Soviet Republic. In this class belongs an interview with Dr. H. M. Kallen, prof. of Philosophy at Wisconsin University, published recently in the Boston "American". According to the interview, Dr Kallen "is fully convinced that the present system of government in Russia is of such a liberal democratic nature and so responsive to the people's will that should a majority desire an overturn of present policies, that majority could do so through the ballot."

The reactionary press insists that the Soviet Government and the Bolsheviki are incapable of reorganizing Russia. are plunging the country into chaos. On this head, Dr. Kallen says:

"It is my firm belief that the Russian government as it now stands is moving on toward substantial and well-regulated systems of control. If the Russian people are allowed to work out their own destinies in accordance with President Wilson's clause in his points dealing with self-determination of the peoples of Europe, they should soon be able to rehabilitate the agricultural and industrial systems."

There are a number of reasons why international forces violently oppose the Soviet Republic, but there are two fundamental reasons: one, that it is introducing Socialism and industrial democracy which is a danger to Capitalism and industrial autocracy everywhere; the other, that the Soviet Republic has repudiated the national debts of Russia. The initiative in the campaign for intervention came from the French financiers, who have billions invested in loans to the former Czar's government. Dr. Kallen ventures a prophecy about this repudiation of debts: "It is my belief that when prosperity returns and the spectre of famine has been removed, they will voluntarily reconsider the vote taken to repudiate their national debts."

Whether the Soviets will reconsider the repudiation of debts depends largely upon the strength developed by International Socialism and the revolutionary proletariat. But the Soviet Republic will never "voluntarily" reconsider the repudiation. Why?

It was not alone the debts of foreign financiers that were repudiated, but equally the debts to

Russian financiers—all loans contracted by the Czar's government were repudiated. The Czar never was the people.

It is suicide for the Russian people to pay the enormous debts of the Czar's regime: they would ruin their recovery from the catastrophe of the war. The government of the people, the government of the workmen's and peasants' Soviets, cannot without stultifying itself accept the financial obligations of the Czar.

The world knows that the Czar's regime was an autocracy, that it never in the slightest degree represented the will of the people, that it fattened upon the misery, murder and degradation of the people. The debts of the Russian state were contracted by the Czar and his corrupt bureaucracy, out of which they grew rich and maintained their power.

But, more important, if it had not been for the money loaned the Czar by foreign financiers, Czarism would have collapsed long ago. The great fact, the unforgivable thing, is that English and French bankers, international finance generally, maintained the power of the Czar by loans of money. This money was not used to promote the interests of the Russian people: it was used to pay the murderous secret police, to maintain the gendarmerie that "guarded" the people, to sustain the army that crushed the people, to provide the Czar with the moral and physical instruments of torture necessary to maintain "his" people in subjection. Shall the Russian people pay the debts of their former murderers and oppressors, shall the Russian people compensate the international financial brigands who, as an ally of the Czar, maintained the predatory autocracy in power?

International finance was aware of the infamous character of the Czar's regime—but the Czar paid and accordingly was respectable, even though these payments represented the blood and tears and agony of the Russian people. The Soviets refuse this blood money, and they are brigands, scoundrels, and must be crushed. International finance is the most brutal and infamous of hypocrites; it despises liberty, scorns justice, and will tolerate anything providing it means money. The French and British and German financiers knew that their money was used to strengthen and

maintain a vile autocracy: but what of it? It meant profits, and profits must be secured, out of blood and massacres if necessary.

The Russian people in 1905 started a revolution. They battled heroically against Czarism, and they were conquering. They might have destroyed Czarism then and there. The Czar was desperate, the Czar required money to finance the counter-revolution. The money was provided by the French banks. The Russian revolutionary democracy, democracy and Socialism throughout the world, protested against the loan, declaring that the money was to crush the Russian Revolution. But the bankers of France, intent upon profits, intent upon conciliating Czarism, made the loan, millions and millions of francs, and this money crushed the revolution, this money paid for the thugs that murdered the rebels, that massacred the Russian people, that maintained the Czar supreme for another terrible twelve years. Shall the Russian people pay back this money, approve of this murderous slave trade of French finance?

The Czar engaged in a war against Germany and Austria; it was his war, the war of the autocracy, started without the consent of the people. The Czar did not wage war for democracy, but to grab territory, to increase his power. International finance loaned money to the Czar, most of which was not used for purposes of war against Germany, but for war against the Russian people, to murder them into subjection, to prevent a revolution. It is this money that the People's Government in Russia refuses to pay.

Why should the workers recognize the financial obligations of their masters? The workers are not slave-traders, and refuse to honor the money obligations incurred in the slave trade of international finance against peace and democracy.

There is still another consideration. The nations of Europe are tottering under a huge national debt, because of the war. They face bankruptcy. The national debt of the United States is a trifle compared with the national debt of the European states; moreover, this country is as wealthy as all Europe together. A great problem in Europe will be these debts; and already a general campaign is developing to repudiate the national debts as a phase of the developing struggle for Socialism.

The Flowers that Bloom in the Spring

STABLE government, as the veriest tyro in diplomacy knows, is one of the first laws of international politics. Without it no self-respecting nation will grant recognition—other than that required to successfully kill them, of course,—to any people. So important is stable government that not only will the great powers not grant recognition to the unstable one, but they will send armies and fleets to shoot the people into a condition of stability—the stability of death.

Take Russia for example!

The whole trouble with that unfortunate country is that it has no stable government. Under the Czar it was a great empire, any nation would lend it money. Its flag, ambassadors, soldiers, sailors were respected everywhere. None dared interfere in its internal affairs; if a dispute arose regular diplomatic observances were followed and if war resulted hostilities opened only after formal declarations had been made.

But now, under the rule of the people, nobody respects Russia, not even her enemies. Alien troops land on her soil and slaughter her citizens without any declaration of war. Her flag is trampled in the dust, even Tammany politicians forbid its display in public. Her ambassadors are hounded from pillar to post and arrested in spite of diplomatic immunity, her sailors and citizens are publicly flouted in the streets of "friendly" nations.

In the matter of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty her enemies imposed outrageous terms upon her. Why? Because she had not a stable government. This is clearly seen by a comparison between the terms of that treaty and the terms imposed upon the then stable governments of the Central Empires by the Allies in their armistice.

It is, however, in comparing the outlying parts of Russia with the rest of the country that the blessings of stability and the reasons for the refusal of the Allies to recognize any but a stable government become clearly apparent. Throughout Russia generally the Soviets are in control

but the Allies have persistently refused to recognize their authority because they do not constitute a stable government. In remote parts things are different: the Bolsheviki have been overthrown in the cities and stable government once more holds sway.

After the arrival of the Allied troops in Vladivostok the local Soviet was disbanded and its members jailed. Democracy being the keynote of things governmental nowadays, an election was immediately held to form a proper government. But the Russians are an ignorant people—they elected the Bolsheviki. This would not do at all so a group of counter-revolutionists got together and formed the All-Siberian government, which promptly found favor with the Allies. After issuing a few proclamations regarding its plans for reorganizing not only Siberia but all Russia it was found that it did not represent all Siberia at all. General Semenov at the head of a few hundred Cossack and Chinese troops, appeared one day and, after arresting the All-Siberian government and declaring that he was the Heaven-sent savior of Siberia, established himself as dictator. Representatives of the Allies visited him, however, and the worthy general thereupon issued another proclamation to the effect that it was all a mistake, that he was not the instrument of heaven after all but only a humble general, that it was clearly a case of mistaken identity, and that the All-Siberian government was all that its name implied.

With the arrival of the Allied troops in Archangel the Bolsheviki were again put in their proper place and a group of gentlemen announced to a bewildered people that they were the "Government of the North" and really the representatives of the entire Murman coast. The population of the Murman coast being mostly composed of a few tribes of wandering fishermen who care little about governments, nobody contradicted the new government, and the presence of the Allied

armies decided the citizens of Archangel to let the issue go by default. Suddenly a group of 50 or 60 monarchists arose, transferred the "Government of the North" to a couple of barges, shipped it off to an island in the Gulf of Archangel, and formed a new government.

The island on which the "Government of the North" landed was controlled by the Bolsheviki—which circumstance added to the fact that the "Government of the North" had been landed on the south side of the island resulted for a time in relations being somewhat strained. The Allies intervened, however, convinced the monarchists that they, like general Semenov in Vladivostok, were the victims of a cruel mistake and brought back the "Government of the North" which promptly issued a manifesto laying forth its plans for the regeneration of all Russia.

In the meantime, inspired apparently by the presence of the Allies, the counter-revolutionary forces at Omsk set up another government, jailed the local Soviet and issued some proclamations regarding the benefits of stable government, while yet another group set up the All-Russian government at Ufa, at the same time issuing an invitation to all the other governments to send delegates so that it might be All-Russian in something more than name. Difficulties occurred right away, owing to the fact that all these governments were widely separated and that the country intervening was controlled by the Soviets, so for a time the All-Russian government mysteriously disappeared—apparently leaving all Russia without any government, stable or otherwise.

Recently it turned up at Omsk with a flourish, announcing the names of the generals of the All-Russian army, the admirals of the All-Russian navy, the chief of the All-Russian police, the head of the All-Russian street cleaning department and many other important All-Russian officials. All went merry as a wedding march until two or thr

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