

The British Fleet and the Baltic Provinces

By J. Klawa

THE imperialistic press states that England has sent her fleet to the Baltic shores to "prevent Bolshevik anarchy" in the Baltic provinces and also that "the provinces are calling for help."

An examination of the facts should reveal the truth. As a former resident of the Baltic Provinces I know something about conditions there.

Only nine months ago the German imperial fleet sailed the same way "to bring help" to revolutionary Russia. The Allied diplomats protested then and stigmatized Germany as an invader and oppressor of peoples. They emphatically protested against Germany's actions in Belgium and the Balkan peninsula and led the peoples of the world to believe that none of the Allied governments would ever attempt anything along the same lines. But today it is a fact—the British fleet with troops aboard approaches the Baltic coast.

Before it is possible to understand the real meaning of the presence of the British fleet on the shores of the Baltic it is necessary to understand something about conditions in the Baltic Provinces. I do not intend to speak about all the Baltic states; two will suffice—Courland and Livonia—but what is true of these two is true of the others especially Estonia and Lithuania.

Courland and Livonia are the home of the Lettish or Lettic people, who are today playing such a prominent role in the Russian Socialist Republic, adhering to the Soviet form of government.

All the Baltic Provinces, but especially Courland and Livonia, have been invaded by foreign armies time and time again. At one time they were under the domination of Prussia, then of Sweden and at last they passed into the hands of the Russian Czars. Everything was constantly changing in these provinces, the government, the policies, the economic life, except one thing and that was static—the political and economic privileges of the German landlords who have held sway for more than 700 years, and during this time the Lettish people have borne the yoke of the old Prussian junker regime. What held the people in this state of subjection?

There is no need to turn to the general history of Courland and Livonia. The history of the German landlords furnishes the answer and at the same time reveals the true character of those who call for aid when the existing conditions change.

Although lately the Baltic Provinces have been officially under the Russian government, the real governors were the German landlords. They are a particular type and race of junkers, speaking their own language and having little in common with their brothers in Germany. They have always affiliated with the ruling power, one third of the members of the ex-Czar's cabinet were Baltic barons. Baltic history is a tale of the trampling of the people by the Baltic junkers who possessed all the political and economic power.

The Landtag (landlords' political institution) during the rule of the ex-Czar had no legal title to exist but secretly it was the real political machine in the provinces.

A rough estimate of the ownership of these two provinces will illustrate. In Livonia there are 740 estates, of which 600 are owned by 162 junker families. These 700 estates represent 65 per cent of all the land. Count von Wolf alone owned 36 estates of about 200,000 desyatins (1 desyatina is about 2½ acres).

In Courland there are 640 estates comprising about 52 per cent of the whole province. Some of these estates such as, for instance, Dondangen and Pope are larger than the state of New Jersey or Massachusetts.

Against these 700 estates in Livonia—and this is exclusive of the Crown lands and the land held by priests—there are 30,000 farms averaging 44 desyatins each and half a million people who have no land at all. Against the 640 estates in Courland there are 32,000 farms averaging 42 desyatins each, 8,000 averaging 5 to 25 desyatins and about 1,800 soldiers' homes. Two-fifths of all the privately owned land is in the hands of 25 German junker families.

Practically the whole population is entirely dependent on the landlords. Woods, waters, the rights of hunting and fishing, even on the lands owned by the farmers, all belong to the barons. They control the establishment of industries but in addition to all this the common people bear all the expense such as repairing the roads, the building of schools, the upkeep of the schools, etc., the barons pay nothing towards the upkeep of

the provinces. In addition to the estates enumerated there are large tracts of land belonging to the priests who are usually the barons' sons-in-law.

Besides watching out for the souls of the peasants, the chief duty of the priests is to keep the people obedient to the barons. For example, in the church hymn books, approved by the Baltic Consistory—the highest church council—appears the following:

"I'll obey my masters with all my heart
And to the best of my ability
To magnify their wealth."

These lines express the program of the church in the Baltic.

In 1905 the people, under the banner of Socialism, revolted against this divine right of the barons which had existed for over 700 years, and in a few weeks drove out all the barons. Then the Russian Czar sent General Orloff, the same Orloff whose forefather secretly killed Peter the Great, to suppress the revolution. The dragoon Escadrons, under the direction of the priests, raided the country, court martialled thousands of revolutionists, set fire to more than 600 peasant homes, jailed thousands and transported thousands more to Siberia. Thus the revolution was suppressed for a time.

Then came the world war. Courland and Li-

Chapters from My Diary

(Continued from Page Six.)

of the court madams of Potsdam, as occurred so recently in Tsarskoe Selo.

All the banalities of present-day speeches and articles would again be unpacked. Mr. Renaudel would have to change, in his article only the proper names, a task for which his mental faculties and abilities would doubtless suffice. But we will remain the outspoken, sworn enemies of Germany's rulers that we are today, for we hate German reaction with the same revolutionary hatred that we have sworn against Czarism and against the French moneyed aristocracy.

When you dare, you and your newspaper lackeys, to applaud a Liebknecht, a Mehring, a Luxemburg, a Zetkin, as the inflexible enemies of the Hohenzollerns, dare you deny that they are ours, our faithful comrades, our comrades in battle? We are united with them against you and against your chiefs, with the unalterable unity of revolutionary warfare.

Perhaps you console yourselves with the thought that we are few in number? We are greater in number than the police souls of every grade believe. In your official myopia you do not see the ghost of rebellion that is arising from all the places of suffering and martyrdom; you do not see it spreading through France, through Europe, in the suburbs, in the workmen's dwellings, in the country places, in the shops and in the trenches.

You imprisoned Louise Soumoneau in one of your jails; but have you thereby diminished the despair and the despondency of this land? You can arrest hundreds of Zimmerwaldists, after having ordered your press agents to besmirch them again and again with police suspicions; but can you return the husbands to their grieving wives? Can you restore the sons to their suffering mothers, the fathers to their children, strength and health to the sick and debilitated? Can you return, to a betrayed, exsanguinated people, the trust in those who have deceived them?

Jules Guesde, get out of your military automobile. Abandon the gilded cage in which the capitalist state has imprisoned you. Look about! Perhaps then fate will have pity, for the last time, upon your enfeeble tragical old age, and let you hear once more the dull noise of approaching events. We expect them, we cause them, we prepare them! The fate of France would be too terrible, if the *via dolorosa* of its working masses did not lead to revenge, to our revenge, where there will be no room for you, Jules Guesde, and for yours. Expelled by you, I leave France with the deep certainty of your triumph. Over and above your head I send brotherly greetings to the French proletariat, that is preparing for great actions. Long live, without you and against you, Jules Guesde, Socialist France!

Leon Trotsky.

vonias suffered terribly, like Belgium and Alsace-Lorraine. Hundreds of thousands were driven from the country by the approaching Germans, but the landlords welcomed the Kaiser's army as they were always striving for German protection. Then the revolution broke and the parts of the Baltic unoccupied by the German army rose with the rest of Russia and the power of the barons was wiped out by the Soviets. But the German army marched into the country and wherever it penetrated the rule of the barons was restored. The ideals of liberty cherished by the Baltic peoples was again destroyed and once more the yoke of the barons was placed upon their necks.

When the Allies signed the armistice with Germany they demanded the evacuation of Belgium and Alsace-Lorraine but on the contrary they demanded that the German army stay in the Baltic Provinces. What was the Baltic peoples to do? They were deserted by the great Western "democracies", not only deserted but a fleet is sent to destroy the wishes of the people—"to prevent Bolshevism spreading" as the New York "Times" says.

Many of the inhabitants of the Baltic Provinces believed the Allied diplomats when they stated they stood for the evacuation of all occupied territory and the self-determination of nations. But when the Allies demanded that the German army stay in the Baltic states then the people began to think that there was no difference between the Allies and the Baltic junkers.

Today the people are rising, again determined to wipe out forever the domination of the Baltic barons. But the British fleet is on the Baltic shores.

The struggle waged in the Baltic today is not, as some nationalists are saying, a struggle for an independent state. The Baltic Provinces want to remain part of the Russian Socialist Republic, as resolved by the Lettish Social-Democracy in their Congress in May, 1917, asking only a cultural autonomy. The Lettish Social-Democracy is a part of the Russian Communist Party, the Bolsheviks.

Baron Uexcell, one of the murderers of the Estonian workmen who fled from Estonia to Stockholm, testifies that the Baltic inhabitants are all Bolsheviks, and that if the British fleet does not immediately arrive in Reval the cause of the Baltic barons is lost.

This is quite true. The inhabitants, excluding the junkers, some bourgeois and typical counter-revolutionists, are Bolsheviks not only in words but in deeds.

The enemies of the Baltic peoples, and especially of Courland and Livonia, whoever they may be and no matter what banner they may carry are faced with some of the best trained revolutionists in Russia. The Lettish Social-Democracy which has trained all the workers of both Courland and Livonia to be fighters for the revolution, has for more than 25 years played its part in spite of the terrible persecution of the old Czar. The "funny Peters", as the capitalist press says, "who in the Moscow cabinet signs the death warrants of counter-revolutionists until his hand is tired" is typical of the men from these provinces. The Lettish units, the Lettish sharpshooters (now the Red Guards) were the first to go out of Petrograd to meet Kornilov; it was they who assisted in the overthrow of Kerensky, guarded the Smolny Institute, and the Kremlin and 82 per cent of the Baltic Provinces are people of the same fibre.

The majority of the Lettish people are peasants, but they were driven out of their homes by the war and now they are the soldiers of the revolution. Their literature is filled with the revolutionary spirit, with ideals for the welfare of the peoples, not only of the Baltic Provinces but of the whole world.

The physical strength of the peasant, his high literary education, his revolutionary spirit tinged with the romanticism of the country and his belief in the cause of the workers, are the basis of his revolutionary action.

Neither anarchy nor chaos reigns now in the Baltic, but the new regime set up by the oppressed masses. The cries for aid that ring through the bourgeois press are not the people's cries but the whimper of 200 German ex-barons who owned 69 per cent of the wealth of the provinces and want to be restored to power. If the British navy is going to "prevent Bolshevik anarchy" or in other words, crush the will of the people, they are going to assist the Baltic barons to once more set the yoke of slavery on the neck of the Baltic peoples.