

# Tchitcherin's Report to the Fifth Soviet Congress, July, 1918

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## II

THE relations of Russia to the states of Central Europe were determined by the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk, and the principal part of our policy in relation to Germany was to execute this treaty. The indistinctness, the as yet undecided agreements and the imperfection of the treaty of Brest encouraged the exponent of the annexationist policy to develop this policy still further, with regard to Russia.

The treaty of Brest is not distinct as to the boundaries of the territory occupied by Germany, and yet it determined that at the moment of the signing of the treaty all further progress should cease. The treaty leaves the situation of territories occupied by Germany an open question. The territory of the Ukraine is not defined, and the question of the boundaries of the Ukraine, together with the uncertainty of where the German troops would stop, was an extremely dangerous one. The indistinct, contradictory, and somewhat impracticable stipulations concerning the Russian ships creates the possibility for new demands from Germany and the Ukraine upon Russia. Besides there was the possibility of going still further than the stipulations, under the pretext of "self-determination."

The simplest method was to accept a fictitious "right of self-determination" in the regions occupied by Germany. In fact, we had already received a report concerning the "self-determination" of Dwinsk (on the railroad from Warsaw to Petrograd and from Riga to Moscow, Warsaw in Poland and Riga in Courland being under German control) who desired to become part of Courland. We also heard from the delegation in the White Ruthenian regions (the governments of Grodno, Vilna, Vitebsk, Smolensk, Mohilef and Minsk—the region between Warsaw to a short distance from Moscow) that they wished to withdraw from the sovereignty of Russia.

Section 7 of the treaty of Brest provides that a special commission determine the boundaries of those regions that withdrew from Russia. When this commission convened at Pakov (between Dwinsk and Petrograd) it was empowered, by the consent of both governments to determine definitely the boundaries of the regions occupied by Germany. However, after the first session of this commission, their work was interrupted, and has not been continued since.

The following proposition was submitted by the Germans: *that the basis for the right of self-determination be established on the boundaries of German occupation; that every landowner whose land was bounded by the German line of occupation should have the privilege of deciding to which side (Germany or our side) his property should belong in the future.* The solution of this question of principle was referred to Berlin, where the Political Commission (a mixed commission of Soviet representatives and Germans) will be occupied with it.

The position of the occupied regions is not as yet clear. The German government informed us that the railroad employees would retain their former wages, and enjoy all advantages as to the division of the necessities of life, and that malicious agitators were spreading rumor amongst the employees that all those who continued their work under German occupation would lose their employment, their pension, and all their savings when later the now occupied territories were restored to Russia. Therefore, the German government requested us to send a public notice to the occupied districts containing the information that these rumors were baseless and that the Russian government recommended that the railroad employees continue with their work. However, we found upon direct information that the wages of the railroad employees were reduced fifty per cent, and that these employees and all other officers were subjected to all kinds of persecution and that they did not enjoy any advantage in regard to the necessities of life.

We informed the German government that we could

not take any part in the responsibility of the administration of the occupied district as long as the German government insisted upon deposing all Soviets and continued to destroy traces of the Soviet system. The question of the internal administration of the occupied sections had also to be referred to the Political Commission in Berlin.

The military advance of the Germans after the treaty of Brest-Litovsk occurred in two directions: in Finland and in the Ukraine. After the Russian Republic had submitted to the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk and had recalled her troops from Finland, there remained in Finland but few Russian citizens who, upon their own responsibility, took part in the struggle of the Finnish working class. At the moment of the invasion of German troops into Finland, and thereafter, we received continual threatening notes from the German government claiming that we had sent troops and munitions to Finland. But every time when the occupations complained of in the notes were investigated we found that in reality they did not exist. They merely served the Germans as a motive for delaying the cessation of military measures. The notes served to justify the government of the Finnish White Guards when they refused to liberate the Russian citizens, Kamjenef, Sawitski and Wolf, who were returning from Sweden and were arrested at the Aland Islands. The Finns pointed to our violations of the Brest-Litovsk treaty when bands of White Guards invaded Karelie and the Murman regions, the southwest half of the former having been a part of Russia for two hundred years, and the latter being wholly Russian.

The German government constantly reminded us that we are compelled, according to the treaty of Brest, to reach an agreement with Finland, and the Russian Soviet Government declared their willingness time and again, despite the extreme provocative acts of the Finnish White Guards. I remind you of the shooting of thousands of Russians in Wyborg, of the many executions of Russian citizens, even of official members of the Soviets in Finland. I remind you of the arrest of Kowanko, the commander of Sweaborg, the Russian fortress on the Island of Helsingfors, the capital of Finland, of whose appointment Finland was duly informed through our representative ad interim and the agency of the German government. Kowanko was arrested immediately afterwards and had to submit to an investigation, and up to this date, July 19, 1918, has not yet been liberated. I remind you also of the violent seizure of the Russian ships by the Finns, of the seizure of the hospital ships, also of the enormous sums of money, amounting to many billions, taken from the safes of the fortress and the vaults of the Russian exchequer. Notwithstanding, the Russian government declared itself willing time and time again to negotiate, not only as an answer to the German demands, but the Russian government addressed itself directly to Finland with a proposition which was never answered.

The question of our relations to Finland was especially acute when an important German-Finnish army on one side advanced towards the Russian frontier near Bielovstrov (directly northwest of Petrograd) and the German government on the other side questioned us concerning the presence of English troops in the Murman district (which territory, as mentioned above, the German-Finnish White Guards had invaded) in this inquiry, the number of English troops was grossly exaggerated by the German government. In May, the question of Fort Ino became the most prominent, when the German government followed the example set by the Finnish High Commander and demanded the surrender of this Russian fort to Finland. This took place in the general critical period of the advance of the Germans, after the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, when the German troops advanced into the governments of Worenesj and Koersk (in which governments the rivers Donetz and Don enter the Azov Sea) and the end of this advance could not be foreseen. Our notes to the German government at

the latter part of April and the beginning of May, containing pressing inquiries as to their exact intentions in relation to Fort Ino, resulted in the commencement of negotiations to reach a compromise. (Note: Fort Ino is one of those forts which threaten Petrograd).

When, despite the negotiations, the Finnish troops demanded the immediate surrender of Fort Ino, and the Fort was destroyed by the retreating Russian troops, the German government at last proposed as a basis for an agreement with Finland: the return of the town of Ino, upon the condition that this place and the district Ravoli (on the railroad, exactly N. W. of Petrograd) in the vicinity of Bjetvostrof should not be enforced by the Russians, and upon the condition that we abandon the western part of the Murman regions, which the Germans and Finns had invaded, to Finland. Our acceptance of this as a basis for an agreement led to the discontinuation of the critical situation of May. However, notwithstanding this, Finland still continued to refuse to answer our proposal to enter into mutual negotiations.

The separation of Esthonia and of the northern part of Courland from Russia is in no way the result of the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, because this treaty only provided for the temporary occupation by Germany of these parts. Already on the 28th of January there was delivered to our representative Worofski in Stockholm a declaration from the land owners and barons of Esthonia and Courland concerning the independence of these provinces. After that, meetings of the landowners and barons were held in Esthonia and Courland, and in Riga, the capital of Courland, on March 22, and at Reval, the capital of Esthonia, on March 28, they decided on the convocation of congresses. These congresses were held in Riga and Reval on April 9-10, and they accepted the declaration as to the separation from Russia. On the 19th of May, our representative Joffe received notice to that effect through the office of the German Minister of Foreign Affairs.

In this note of May 28th, addressed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Joffe called attention to the fact that the action taken in Riga and Reval was in reality but the expression of a comparatively small part of the people of Courland and Esthonia and that only by a real and general unhampered expression of all the people, under the condition of the withdrawal of the army of occupation, could the basis of self determination and separation be decided.

The Russian Government was but lately confronted with the question of its relations to Poland, when the representative of the Polish Council of Regents, Mr. Lednitzki, came to Moscow, and in his position as representative of Poland, desired to enter into relation with the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs. On his first visit, we found his credentials unintelligible, but when he came the second time, he came with the formal authority of the Council of Regents to negotiate with us, concerning matters regarding Poland. However, we do not recognize the present situation in Poland as politically independent, and therefore cannot consider the Polish government as expressing the will of the people.

We entered therefore into relations with Mr. Lednitzki, but, as is self explanatory, only in essential, not in diplomatic relations, and then only when Count Mirbach, who was at that time the German ambassador in Moscow, informed us that by maintaining such relations we would gratify an expressed wish of the German government.

A more intense German offensive on the Ukraine side would have been more threatening than the advance upon the side of Finland. Directly after the conclusion of the treaty of Brest the troops of the Central Soviet government were ordered to withdraw from the Ukraine. The Soviet government was maintained within the borders of the Ukraine, which, after the second congress formed itself into the government