

The New Economic Policy in Soviet Russia

By A. A. HELLER

WHEN our train was nearing Moscow, on a bright sunny day early in June, I remarked to the Russian comrade next to me: "Vot matushka Moskva, belokamennaya!" (Here we are approaching stony-white Mother Moscow); "Red Moscow, Comrade," answered my companion.

Truly Moscow is red. The red flag is waving from the Kremlin palace—the old palace of the Czars—and from numerous flag poles all over Moscow.

GREET WORLD'S DELEGATES

On the 17th of June the Red Square in front of the Kremlin was ablaze with red banners of marching hosts, the Red Army passing in review, in honor of the delegates to the Third (Communist) International.

Red Moscow is the heart of Soviet Russia. But no less red are the other towns and villages of the Republic.

Red, by the way, is synonymous with beautiful in the Russian language, and is the chosen color of the Russians.

Everywhere the presence of the Soviet Power is in evidence: an arch with some striking inscription, as, for instance, "In October was born, for the first time in the world, the power of horny hands," or, "The bourgeois takes with gold, the workman with the hammer," etc., or a monument or a People's House, or a simple "Agitpunkt"—Agitation Point—a room at the railway station where meetings are held or where information, literature and newspapers can be obtained by travelers.

WORKERS' STRENGTH OF REVOLUTION

These are of course only the outer signs. The real strength of the Soviet Government comes from the working class that made the Revolution and carries the brunt of it on its shoulders to this day, as well as from the peasants, the vast majority of the Russian population, to whom the Revolution brought not only civil rights and liberty, but actual material improvement in their condition.

The peasants to-day own 96.8 per cent of the land as against 76.3 per cent before the war. Where the crops haven't failed, as in the Volga district, they live better. They have bread and eggs and butter, frequently meat, which they didn't have under the Czar's rule. They have also obtained in exchange for their products much of the possessions of the bourgeoisie.

In the course of my six months' visit in Soviet Russia, I covered a great part of European Russia and Siberia, studying conditions, observing life in town and country, visiting factories, mines, communal and private farms—in a word, coming very close to the people, in their daily life.

SOVIET POWER TO STAY

I have come out of Russia firmly convinced that there is no power on earth that can dislodge the Soviet Government, and that the achievements of

the Revolution have penetrated deeply into the life of the people.

There are many things about Soviet Russia which do not seem clear, which may be difficult to grasp.

To get a clear picture of the situation there, to understand Soviet Russia, it is necessary to bear in mind firstly, that the revolution is still on; it is not completed, only the first phase of it, the destructive phase, the period of military communism, as Trotsky calls it, being completed.

The revolution is now entering the second phase—the constructive period.

The whole thought and energy of the Soviet Government and the nation are now concentrated on what is called in Russia the Economic Front—the rebuilding of the economic life of the country, the rehabilitation of its industries.

REVOLUTION PREPARES GROUND

Secondly, the revolution itself has not produced communism, but only prepared the ground, in a thorough and decisive manner, for the communist edifice.

The Russian leaders endeavor to make this plain on every occasion. They repeat again and again that the present order in Russia is not communism.

Lenin, in his famous brochure, "On the Tax in Kind" (April 1921), says: "Not a single communist but desires that the expression 'Socialist Soviet Republic' denotes the determination of the Soviet Power to realize a transition to Socialism, but not at all the acceptance of the given economic arrangements as Socialist." We are thus only at the beginning of a Communist State.

Hence the new Economic Policy. This policy attempts to establish governmental capitalism in Soviet Russia; in other words, to use the capitalist method of industrial organization—mass production, extensive application of the latest technique, careful accounting—in order to develop industry quickly, in a country as industrially backward as Russia with its vast agricultural population, comprising 83.8 per cent. of the total number.

COMMUNISM MAKES A DETOUR

Of the 130 millions of inhabitants of Soviet Russia, only 21,252,600 or 16.2 per cent live in cities; and only 3.9 per cent or 4,755,100 are workmen in factories, mines and transportation.

The seven years of imperialist and civil war have ruined Russian industries, while the primitive, inefficient agricultural methods of the Russian peasant never really produced sufficient food for the country even in the best years.

In 1913, for example, Russia had per person 22 poods of grain and 9.1 poods of potatoes, as compared with 54.6 poods of grain and 4.9 poods of potatoes per person in the United States, or 15.4 poods of grain and 40 poods of potatoes in Germany.

Thus Russian export of foodstuffs prior to the revolution was at the expense of the population.

Washington Plans United Front Against Russia

KARL RADEK, one of the keenest critics in Soviet Russia of international politics, in a special article on the Washington Conference, declares that:

"In Washington the Allied Entente is endeavoring to form a single front against Soviet Russia. The great powers wish to come to an understanding with each other, not only over Eastern Siberia but over the whole Russian question.

"They are attempting to settle questions in advance which can only be examined with Russian participation. Soviet Russia can await the results of the Washington Conference quite coolly and quietly.

"Decisions which are made by this conference will remain without force because these decisions will stand face to face with the organized force of the Russian people, who in spite of hunger and cold will not submit themselves to the orders of Washington, all the more so as these orders will undergo a certain loss of emphasis by the time they reach the people ordered.

"The unity of the Allied Entente is for the time being only a pious wish. If this unity is put down on paper the difference of interests between the members of the Entente will be stronger than the paper which they have created."

Under these conditions Russia has no reserve, no saved up capital with which to start the operations of her industries, and is compelled to invite foreign concessionaires and capitalists to bring the required funds.

This of course is a detour from the straight road; but is in no way an abandonment of the Communist principles.

The new policy is dictated by "living life" to use Lenin's expression, in fact, by the very course of the Russian Revolution and the peculiar structure of the economic fabric in Russia.

NEW POLICY IS SUCCESSFUL

The new economic policy was promulgated with the approval of the Russian Communist Party.

Whatever dangers some may see in it, whatever fear some may have is overcome by the confidence of the Party and the government in themselves, in the ability to control the situation.

The powerful Soviet ark may have to alter its course to weather a storm, but being seaworthy and capably managed, it will reach the port for which it started.

Already the effect of the new policy is everywhere apparent: peasants bring their products to market, in the cities stores and shops open, many of the smaller factories are leased to organized groups or individuals, foreign trade is increasing.

WELCOME REAL HELP

The Soviet Government in its efforts to rehabilitate the industrial life of the country, is prepared to give concessions to capitalists on advantageous terms.

It invites at the same time organized labor in America to take part in the re-establishment of Russian industries.

It is prepared to turn over to organized groups of workmen or farm workers, co-operatives, partnerships, etc., factories, mills or farming property on

lease, rental, or other basis, and to help such groups in every way to establish themselves in Russia.

It is also inviting technicians, professional men, engineers who, understanding Russian conditions, wish to go there to help in the rebuilding of the Soviet Republic.

This of course does not mean inviting general immigration, which for the time being is not desired. But industrial or agricultural groups are welcome and will be given every opportunity to succeed.

CONFIDENT AS TO FUTURE

Soviet Russia is laboring under great difficulties. The famine in the Volga district affecting 25,000,000 people has struck her a heavy blow, especially after the bad harvest of last year.

Instead of feeding the workers in the industries as the government planned when the new tax law was proclaimed this spring, it is obliged to throw all its resources into the hunger-stricken region.

There is a shortage of fuel, of medicines, of many other necessities. For want of fuel, the railroads are not operating fully or efficiently; for want of repair parts, electrical supplies, leather belting, many industrial undertakings are shut down.

But in spite of all this, in spite of all the hardships and privations, the feeling in Soviet Russia when I left at the end of October was that of confidence in the future, of determination to win, of more life and activity there than in the spring, of renewed enthusiasm.

The Irish Free State has come out of the nationalistic struggle between Ireland and England. The class struggle will now be renewed with increased vigor for the establishment of the Irish Workers' Republic. James Connolly did not die, and James Larkin is not in prison in vain.