

## INTERVENTION: A BRITISH PROTEST

OUR present relations with Russia are about as indefensible as can be imagined. The Foreign Office, or those who control the policy of the Foreign Office, can hardly be ignorant of that — how should they be? — but, so far as appears, are preparing to cover one error with a greater error and to make bad worse. In the midst of the pre-occupation of a great war the little war with Russia has received comparatively little attention, and it is hardly realized that, though the great war is over, the little war goes on, and, moreover, that if it is not stopped now or soon it is likely to become a very much larger war and a more and more intolerable and indefensible one, so intolerable and indefensible, indeed, that it is capable of producing grave reactions here, extending to the overthrow of a government. We originally embarked on this Russian adventure under wholly different circumstances and for reasons — so far as reasons were given — which have no present application whatever. After the intervention by Germany in the civil war between 'Reds' and 'Whites' in Finland and her virtual occupation of the country there was a real, if somewhat remote, danger that she might strike through Finland at the narrow strip of Russian territory which divides the north of Finland from the Arctic Ocean and establish for herself a naval station on the Murmansk coast giving her access to the Arctic and a new outlet for her submarines. At a moment when the submarine war was at its height and Russia lay helpless and subservient there was reason, if not very urgent reason — since the district was extremely inaccessible and a long railway would have had to be built

guarding against this peril. That was the extent of the danger and the extent of the need for our occupation. Its extension to Archangel, which is not ice-free, and to a large stretch of country inland had no such justification. The occupation of Vladivostok, Russia's ice-free port in the Pacific, five thousand miles away, followed by the advance, with the coöperation of Japan, westward into Siberia, was as a military measure equally unjustified. Both these extensions of the original intervention were defended on quite other grounds. It was said that Russia had become the mere tool of Germany, and that it was necessary, first, to prevent the further extension of Germany's influence and her increasing exploitation of Russian resources and, secondly, to 'reconstitute the eastern front.' In this connection the happy discovery was made of scattered bands of Czecho-Slovak prisoners who, it was urged, must in the first place be rescued and in the second place utilized in this process of reconstituting the eastern front.

So matters stood at the time of the collapse of Germany and the conclusion of the armistice. Obviously every reason hitherto alleged, whether for the original occupation of the Murmansk coast or for the subsequent expeditions to Archangel and Siberia, had now disappeared. They were all in the nature of defenses against the attack of Germany, and there was no longer any attack or possibility of attack from Germany. Germany as a military Power was dead. But were the defensive measures, the counter-attacks, dead also? Not at all; they continue in full force. There is quite a prospect

that they may be largely extended. For the moment, of course, there is a pause. Winter is no respecter of persons or of policies. Very soon Archangel will be frozen up, and our army of occupation there will be frozen up also. In the east the Japanese have steadily and very sensibly refused to advance a mile farther. They have reached Lake Baikal, and beyond Lake Baikal they decline to go. So if we desire to extend our operations in this direction we shall have to do it ourselves, for America will certainly not assist us and will prudently follow the Japanese example. But there are other possible fields of operation. We have recently obtained access to the Black Sea. We are therefore now in a position to repeat in the extreme south of Russia our performances in the extreme north, and as a matter of fact it is credibly reported that the War Office is now engaged in making a survey of the country. The Ukraine, under German and Austrian control, has become the refuge, or dumping-ground, of a whole collection of Russian reactionaries of various sorts and sizes, and the same is true to a less extent of the Don country and other districts to the east. It would be easy to play into the hands of these gentry, as we have played into the hands of others of the same description in Eastern Siberia, where a purely reactionary party has now dismissed the local popular (not Bolshevik) Government and established a military Government of its own.

But what conceivable justification, it may be asked, is there for any such proceedings? And how is it possible that any British Government should embark on so wanton and criminal an interference in the affairs of another nation? Such questions may indeed well be asked, but it is doubtful if they will receive any presentable answer.

For the fact is that the real though unavowed reason for our previous interference is entirely different from the avowed reasons, and it is a little awkward now that the avowed reasons have disappeared to produce the real one, the more so as this is not a very nice reason, or one which is likely to commend itself to reasonable people in this country or to our working class. That reason, of course, is that the war against Russia has from the first really been a war against that particular form of Socialistic theory known as Bolshevism. We are no admirers of that theory. Applied to any Western European country, we believe it would be disastrously subversive. Even in Russia we may doubt its permanence. But there it is. It has established itself; it has existed for more than a year. It is not weakening in power; all trustworthy information goes to show that it is gaining in power, that it has established order, that it meets with general support from some eighty millions of people whom it controls, that it is grappling successfully with the food problem, that it is promoting the popular arts, music and the drama, and is preparing a great scheme of popular education — that, in fact, it is performing most of the normal functions of a Government, and performing them with increasing success. These are the facts, but they do not suit the policy, the policy at least hitherto pursued, of our freedom-loving Government. The telegrams of the few British correspondents, including our own, who are still in a position to give authentic information are ruthlessly censored or suppressed, and the Government goes on in its blind and foolish way, a way that can, if persisted in, lead only to discredit and disaster. This is the situation as we understand it. Bolshevism is to be suppressed by armed force, and in order to prepare people's minds for

it and to lend it some color of justification not only is truth as to the condition of Russia suppressed but currency is given to all kinds of wild statements and palpable exaggerations. The Bolsheviks are not angels from Heaven. They have, like most revolutionaries, executed a good number of their enemies, but these executions have mostly taken place since the intervention of the Allies gave encouragement to the counter-revolutionaries and made them more formidable. Mr. Litvinoff, who is an honest man and a Tolstoyan before he is a Bolshevik, puts the total number of executions since the Bolsheviks came into power at four hundred, half of them of ordinary criminals. That is probably an under-estimate. If information were allowed to come through from other sources we might get nearer the truth. This then, so far as there is a policy, appears to be the policy. It has got to be changed. Perhaps the Government are already awakening to the fact, but find it diffi-

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cult to get out of the mess they have themselves created. Let them take heart. It is easier now than it will be later. Every week, every month that they stay in Russia and wage a war on Russia which has lost every shred of avowable reason and has no justification will make it more difficult to escape. If with the coming of spring they should see fit to resume or extend their military operations, it is well they should understand that it will not be tolerated in this country. The workers here are not going to send their sons to slaughter and be slaughtered against the workers of another country against which we have never even declared war and for the purpose of destroying a form of social economy with which some of them at least are in sympathy. If it is sought to check the progress of Bolshevism and prevent its spread to this country, that is precisely the way to defeat that object. We prefer not to consider the possible further consequences of such reckless folly.

## THE TREES OF ENGLAND

THE trees of England! While she hath her trees  
 She hath great virtues still! While formal yews  
 Guard her trim gardens, she can never lose  
 Homes for her scholars, men of learned ease.  
 And while her pines stand stark against blue seas  
 Murmuring of yet bluer seas to cruise —  
 Her sons, that hear them, as of old shall choose  
 To quit her peace, and though it burn or freeze,  
 To win for her in grim and perilous realms  
 New and great glory. With her mighty-thewed  
 Oaks shall abide her spirit bluff and strong;  
 And while her winds are prayerful in great elms,  
 Poets shall seek her haunts of solitude,  
 And English leaves shall murmur through English song.

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