Russia from a Car Window

III. The Spirit of the Government

By OSWALD GARRISON VILLARD

I. The Great Fear

"W"hat of the Government of the Soviets? Is it sincere? Has it abandoned its anti-foreign propaganda? What is its attitude toward the payment of its debts? Is it planning to conquer the world? These are but a few of the many questions hurled at the visitor to Russia. They cannot easily be answered. I am prepared to say, however, that I believe that the Soviets genuinely desire to be a peaceful government; that they are planning their armaments for defense and not for offense, and that the strongest wish the government has is to be let alone. I am aware, of course, that the Commissar for War, Mr. Voroshiloff, has in various speeches declared that Russia will soon have to be fighting for its life against the capitalist nations, and has been talking the same militaristic buncombe voiced by every war minister and militarist the world over. Much of this sort of thing is done deliberately in Russia in order to keep the government before the people in its role of defender of their rights and of the ark of the Communist covenant. But there can be no doubt that there is genuine fear of another attack upon the Soviets by the capitalist nations. Can anyone blame them?

Put yourself in their place. Supposing certain foreign countries claiming superior virtue and greater social, economic, and political vision had planted armies on American soil, encouraged civil war, supplied arms and ammunition to one side, and killed and wounded many thousands of Americans. Would any American be blamed eight years later for believing that those same nations might repeat the same wicked acts, especially if they admitted no change of heart or regret? As this is written the dead bodies of the pathetic American soldiers who were killed in the Archangel district are being returned to the United States. They had no personal quarrel with the Soviets or their subjects; they were the pawns of Woodrow Wilson in his illegal and unconstitutional war on Russia. Most Americans have completely forgotten that we sent two armies into Russia, without a declaration of war, to fight and kill. The Russians have not. In a workers' club in Nizhni Novgorod, where some of us made a totally unexpected visit one evening, we found a teacher showing an illuminated map of Russia to a group of boys and girls. For our special benefit he turned on the lights which showed where the American troops invaded Archangel and Siberia. The Russians are surely sincere in saying that they wish no more such outrageous and murderous attacks.

This is not a defense of the Soviets' policy of keeping their people in a state of alarm. To me it seems as if they ought to muzzle their war minister. Such speeches are as hateful to me in Russia as when they come at home from talking generals of our own army, or from officials of the National Security League and the American Defense Society. Mr. Voroshiloff simply plays into the hands of the cynical and hypocritical statesmen at Geneva who, while pretending to wish to disarm, refused to discuss the Russian proposal for complete and genuine disarmament offered by Litvinov—the only decent proposal forthcoming from anybody. Such speeches as M. Voroshiloff's may achieve the desired results at home; they cost too dearly abroad.

Far wiser and finer was the attitude of the Soviet Government after the seizure of the Chinese Eastern Railway by the Chinese last July. Their refusal to go to war was, of course, sneered at. They were pacific, the foreign press declared, because they could not afford to be anything else; their Communist system, their great work for industrialization, would collapse if they went to war. Undoubtedly there was much truth in this. Yet I am convinced that other motives also controlled. The Russian army, under a descendant of Field Marshal Blücher, could have taken Harbin easily and readily defeated any army the Chinese could have thrown against it; foreign experts declare that the Red Army is a good one. By such action the Russians could have added considerable stretches to the communized territory of the world, have achieved a great deal of prestige and possibly some indemnities, and thrown all Chinese out of a large part of the Chinese Eastern Railway. It had excuses enough according to pre-World War standards. Had its honor not been impugned? Had its citizens not been thrown into Chinese jails by the hundreds?

II. A Bolshevik Statesman

At the height of this crisis I was one of the American journalists who interviewed Commissar J. E. Rudzutak, the Soviet Minister of Transportation, one of the three foremost personalities in the government, who is also first vice-chairman of the Council of People's Commissars. This impressive man, who looks like an efficient German schoolmaster, answered freely and fully every question put to him. There would be no war with China. There could be no thought of that. Yes, the seizure of the railroad would cost the Soviet heavily—25,000,000 rubles a year. But to go to war for that? How many millions would it cost a day to fight a war with China? Not once did any of the familiar shibboleths come from his lips, no buncombe about national honor, no resort to Theodore Roosevelt's pet phrase that there are worse things than war, no assertion that the glory of the Russian people would be upheld in blood, not one word to inflame the populace or to arouse further the wrongdoers in China. Instead came a quiet, firm insistence that whatever other nations might have had in mind, when Russia signed its name to the Kellogg Pact it meant what it said. It would not go to war. All this without "side," without passion, without the manners of the self-conscious Western statesman bent on impressing his audience. Others in this group of American journalists besides myself wrote this down as a genuinely thrilling in-
terview; we had seen and reported too many statesmen of the other kind not to be moved by the contrast. Incidentally, M. Henri Barbusse, the distinguished Frenchman, has just published a collection of seventy documents of the Russian Government issued between 1917 and 1929 bearing upon peace and disarmament. I think he is correct when he writes that "despite the innumerable international obstacles put in the way of the Soviet Union by its imperialist foes and opponents, it has never relinquished its aspirations toward peace, never lost an opportunity of demonstrating them, and never refused to take the initiative in advancing the affairs of peace."

We took up in this same interview with M. Rudzutak the question of Russia's relation to the United States and asked why he was not satisfied with the existing trade relations. Normality, he replied, is not to be established by accidental contacts. He explained that any large amount of business with the United States would require long-term credits which involve complicated legal questions. The operation would be a matter of years and this fact alone called in turn for diplomatic relations. Russia, he said, was ready to discuss the question of the payment to the United States of the many millions advanced to Kerensky's government by the United States, but when it came to the repayment of the Czarist debts his answer was emphatically no. His people, he said, did not feel that it was a proper debt since it was used in part for the support of the police, the gendarmes, and the troops which held the Russian people in subjection. He added that he spoke with some feeling in this matter because he himself had been sent to prison for ten years and he was sure that some of that money helped to keep him in jail. The war, he went on, started without consent of the peoples, cost 10,000,000 lives and untold suffering, and the money that made it possible should not be repaid. It was not a question of the amount, he stated, but of principle. When I asked him if in any settlement of the American claims the Soviets would submit bills for the damage done by the American troops in Russia, he replied "most assuredly"—which means that Uncle Sam will have to pay a very large bill, indeed.

As for the much-mooted subject of propaganda against the governments of foreign nations, he declared that no government with which the Soviets now have relations has been able to prove any hostile propaganda whatsoever. The Soviets, he went on, even limit their diplomatic representatives in their personal freedom in political matters, and had just recalled a minor official in the Turkish Embassy for his activity in connection with the Turkish Communist Party. He insisted that the Soviets would use, and are using, no influence to change any governments anywhere, but he added: "In this respect we can complain of some foreign governments which urge us to change our form of government." He suggested that there were organizations in America that were very much interested in propaganda to overthrow the present government of Russia.

He declared that his government was ready to send a mission to the United States to discuss all outstanding issues. It has repeatedly offered to do this, but there has been no satisfactory reply from the United States. M. Rudzutak then stated his belief that there was organized propaganda at work in other countries to prevent the United States and Russia from coming together. As for the Third Interna-

## III. The Compelling Motives

Obviously what the present controllers of the government are striving for is to make Russia self-contained and self-sufficient. To an outsider it would seem as if, from their point of view, it would be wiser and safer for them not to have close business relations with the greatest capitalist nations, that it would be better for them to lift themselves by their bootstraps, rather than to enter into those elaborate financial arrangements which so easily lead to quarrels, misunderstandings, and then diplomatic entanglements. The answer has already been given in the first of these articles: The Soviet leaders have a slender margin of time. Hence their ardent desire to bury the hatchet even at the risk of another such sudden and damaging rupture of relations as took place with England. Hence their willingness to enter into close diplomatic relations with the United States and England, the two nations most suspicious of them and hostile to them.

These motives will, I believe, induce the Soviets to desist from foreign propaganda if once they get relations established with the United States. They have left far behind them the days when they "believed a world revolution at hand. They ought to have learned from their experience in England and Germany the utter folly of the attempt to propagandize abroad. They did do a lot of damage in Germany for a time. Then they had to stop their activities. In England they admittedly spent millions some years ago, but when the ballots were counted in the election of May, 1929, out of a total of about twenty-two millions less than 50,000 were cast for Communists—I have seen the figure put as low as 39,000. Obviously, the Soviets wasted every ruble they spent in Great Britain. Stalin, Rudzutak, and their associate directors of the Russian state ought to be wise enough now to see that the only sound propaganda is to make a complete success of their government and of their economic system, and to prove that it is a better way of life for mankind. If they do that there will certainly be no need whatsoever to agitate abroad, especially if by that time they should be willing to share their power with larger groups, abandon their bloody repression, and move in the direction of complete freedom.

Meanwhile Russia arms. There is no doubt that it is carrying its military training of youth into the schools and the clubs where children congregate. The Russians are doing precisely what the American General Staff would like to do, inculcating nationalistic and militaristic ideas in every child no matter what the age. Our supporters of universal service would also like to pump into every child under our flag the doctrine that the proudest distinction open to it is service in the army, and that the severest sentence which can be passed upon a criminal is to deprive him of his right to serve with the colors. If we gave our militarists free rein there would be no difference whatsoever in their policies and the extent of their propaganda and those of the Bolsheviks. Both desire to adopt precisely the pre-World War tactics and philosophy of the Germans. Arguing with some teachers in Nizhni Novgorod about their instructing boys and girls in the use of the rifle, we encountered a
passionate defense of it on the familiar ground that all the capitalist nations were certain to attack Russia. When I pointed out that their language was identical with that of the militarists in all capitalist nations, our new-found Russian friends appeared as hurt as they were puzzled. “But we are right,” they replied; “we are never going to attack. We are going to be the ones attacked.” No amount of arguing could make them see that a persistence in this attitude of theirs is bound to lead to repercussions abroad and to deliver other peoples more and more into the arms of their militarists; that such a policy is certain to produce a conflict.

IV. THE PEOPLE NOT MILITARISTIC

Other Americans who were in Russia when our delegation was there reported that they ran across many who declared that the Soviets would not fight China, but said: “Wait until 1932 and then let the Chinese attack us.” I encountered nothing of this. I cannot feel that the people are anything like as badly humbugged by their militarists as were the Germans in January, 1914. The Russians are still too near the horrible mass-murders of the World War and of their civil war. Nor do I see anything sinister in the fact that in their industrialization program the greatest attention is being given to their heavy industries. This would have to be the case if the country were absolutely pacific and without a single soldier. For what the Russians need most today is steel and iron for new buildings and innumerable rails, railroad cars, automobiles, trucks, tractors, plows, harvesters, and all the implements of modern agriculture and transportation. While we were not taken to any of the factories in which guns and munitions are made, we found that the impression is widespread that although hundreds of thousands of men and women are being given some military training, there are no very large stores of military equipment on hand and that much of the artillery is antiquated. We heard very little of the development of the chemical industry; yet this, in the eyes of many, perhaps most, soldiers, is the vital arm in the war of the future. That industry may, of course, be important in Russia and quite concealed. It would seem as if the Soviet leaders must recognize that all the attention they devote to purely military affairs retards by so much the fulfillment of their five-year program and thereby threatens their success in their race against time.

What a wonderful lesson for the world it would be if these leaders were but willing to lay aside their arms, confident that the workers of the world would never permit their governments to attack the Soviets if they remained unarmed and obviously friendly to all and without military ambitions! Unfortunately, even idealists like these, when in office, turn to the familiar technique of repression at home and to the sword for defense abroad. The pacific Wilson of 1914 became in two short years the militarist Wilson demanding, as at St. Louis, “incomparably the greatest navy in the world.” The liberal democrat Wilson became in three years the complete autocrat, imprisoning as many as possible of those who, like Debs, dared to oppose his course, and determined to brush aside all who dissented from his demand for “force without stint.” The spirit of the Bolsheviks who dominate Russia is much the same.

It is, of course, a bitter disappointment that Communists whose desire it is to exalt the masses and to free them from the tyrannies and unfairness of capitalist society should adopt the same methods as those whom they repudiate. But surely there is no need for those of us who are onlookers to be pharisaical and hypocritical about it. It is no worse for a Stalin to do these things and teach reliance upon gas bombs, airplanes, and heavy artillery than for a Mussolini, or a Churchill, or a Coolidge, or a de Rivera. They are all parts of a mad world and preachers of a mad philosophy which during four insane years brought humanity to the very edge of the abyss.

V. CULTURAL FREEDOM AT HOME

It is pleasant to turn from Russia’s attitude toward foreign countries to certain phases of its domestic policies. It has, for example, granted full cultural freedom to the Ukrainians, to Georgia, to the Tartar Republic, to the German Volga Republic, and to other separate government units, and has just now set up a new republic quite near the Afghan border, in response to popular demand. However much one may regret the increase in the number of languages when the whole world ought to be moving toward a single medium of communication, the Soviets have shown great wisdom in reversing the policy of the Czars and granting linguistic freedom to all groups which desire it. For example, the Czars long sought to suppress the Ukrainian language—until 1905 there was no Ukrainian press; the Soviets have made it the first language in the Ukraine just as they have permitted the Germans of the Volga Republic to speak their mother tongue while the Tartars and all the rest of the varying groups rejoice in similar freedom. In the schools of all these linguistically different republics Russian must also be taught—every Russian child must learn two languages; indeed, the pure Russians are now to learn English in their schools, German having just been ousted from the second position—an extremely important decision.

The effect of this policy in the Ukraine has been extraordinary—for one thing an amazingly rapid creation of a Ukrainian daily press and literature. At Kharkov we of the American-Russian Chamber of Commerce delegation were shown a large collection of standard works of all the world—even “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” and an anthology of recent American poetry—all brought out since the conferring of linguistic autonomy. In the first nine months of the fiscal year 1928-1929 there were printed 12,200,000 copies of books in Ukrainian, and 7,200,000 periodicals and pamphlets were sold or distributed, for the sum of 15,000,000 rubles—this in a country which is still 20 per cent illiterate but hopes to wipe out all illiteracy by 1932. There are today 232 Ukrainian dailies and the several racial minorities within the Ukraine, such as Germans, Poles, Moldavians, Greeks, and Bulgarians, have their own press.

To turn to Georgia, where the Soviet regime was established with great harshness and the driving or blotting out of a whole section of the population, the present head of the—Soviets in Tiflis listed for us the following benefits which Bolshevik rule has conferred upon the Republic:

1. It has abolished feudal land ownership and established peasant ownership.
2. Peasants and workers have been relieved from all payments to feudal land lords, pay no rents, and but small taxes.
3. Church and state have been separated.
4. Universal education has been affirmed in principle.
5. An oppressed colony of the Czar has become a free state.
6. In place of autocratic Russians appointed by the Czar, native Georgians conduct the government.
7. All local government officials are elected by the people instead of being chosen in Moscow.
8. Free development of native Georgian culture, art, and language has taken the place of compulsory Russification.
9. Friendly interracial cooperation has been encouraged between Armenians, Georgians, and Azerbaijanis instead of their being played off one against the other.

"Georgia," he said, "is far better off under the Soviets." There can be little doubt that this is true.

If this generous treatment of national minorities now in control of Soviet states is the height of wisdom, it is again in marked contrast with the attitude of Moscow toward those beyond the Russian borders whose philosophies are so different from their own. Somehow or other I believe that if Lenin had lived the spirit of the government would be different. It would not fear so much, or incite fear of other nations so wildly for its own ends. The Soviets should at least realize that fear responds to fear, hate to hate, and hostility to hostility. Naturally, the Soviet leaders say that as soon as they are secure and communism safely established they will cease to take life to safeguard them against the failure of their sacred experiment and will bestow greater freedom upon their people. One wonders. Dr. Arthur Feiler, a distinguished editor of the Frankfurter Zeitung, recently asked a high Russian official how soon he thought the time would come when he and his associates would turn back authority to the people. The frank reply was: "Never." One need not take this too seriously, but it is true that this is the inevitable tendency of men in autocratic control of nations.

VI. RECOGNITION BY THE UNITED STATES

As for our own relations with Russia, I am more than ever convinced that we should recognize the Soviets at once and resume diplomatic relations with them, and I should attach no terms beyond an agreement for a conference to settle the question of war debts and the bill to be presented by Russia for her inexcusable military attacks upon the Russian people. In Moscow, among the men I met privately without any official Russian's knowledge, was one who had many reasons to be bitter against the Soviets. He had a long list of friends who had been exiled or imprisoned; he may himself be in Siberia by now. But he begged me to continue to urge the recognition of Russia by the United States. "Nothing," he said, "could do more to help us than that. The sooner international relations are normal, the sooner will the force of the world's public opinion be felt here, the sooner the Soviets reach the point where they will desist from repression and give up the punishment of those who differ from them." The man who said this had lived years in America; for all the wrongs he sees about him, he is convinced that the Communist experiment is priceless and that it should not be allowed to go down because of the blunders of the leaders. Colonel Hugh L. Cooper, the great American engineer I have already cited, declared to us: "If it were in my power I'd give those fellows (the Soviet leaders) every opportunity to try out communism to the nth degree. I'd do anything to help keep them in power until they work out the changes now necessary in Russian life." This is wisdom and common sense.

PITY THE POOR TARIFF

By PAUL Y. ANDERSON

WASHINGTON, November 9

The heartburning and chagrin which resulted from Hiram Johnson's failure to receive his invitation to a White House dinner to which all other available members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee were carefully asked, has doubtless impressed the Great Engineer with the truth that efficiency should begin at home. No President celebrated for the perfect functioning of his personal staff was ever placed in a more embarrassing position. It is difficult to say which was the more awkward—the "accident" itself, or the subsequent efforts to explain how it occurred. In his letter of apology Mr. Hoover did not go into detail, beyond explaining that he learned of the omission on the night of the dinner. This was strange, because the absence of Johnson's name from the guest list was detected at four in the afternoon by White House reporters who promptly sought an explanation from a responsible member of the President's staff. From that official's reply they gained a distinct impression that it had been omitted deliberately. Not until after the ubiquitous Dave Reed had made a hasty call on the President the following morning was this impression corrected. Then it was explained that the discovery that the list contained too many names had resulted in an order to "strike off Johnson"—meaning Nelson Johnson of the State Department—and that Hiram's name had been deleted by mistake. But this only added to the mystery, since it developed that Nelson Johnson wasn't there either. It was an unfortunate coincidence that made Johnson the victim of the "accident." The well-known fact that no love is lost between him and Mr. Hoover gave color to the initial impression that he had been deliberately slighted, and even among the Old Guard the reaction was unpleasant. Responsibility for the "accident" has not been established, but the White House seems badly in need of a little more Hoover efficiency—or a little less.

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The admiring hosannas which originally welcomed Uncle Joe Grundy's exhibition of brutal frankness before the Lobby Investigating Committee have sunk to low moans of pain as the sad truth dawns that Uncle Joe wasn't so very clever when he bluntly admonished the "backward States" of the West and South to step aside while Pennsylvania and Connecticut wrote the tariff bill. A few days