

[*Berliner Tageblatt*, December 9, 1919]

THE CIVIL WAR IN RUSSIA

BY HANS VORST

MOST lamentable confusion and lack of counsel prevail everywhere in respect to the Russian problem. Even the political masters who are trying to rule the world from Paris, are becoming more and more inconsistent and vacillating as the Russian situation grows increasingly hopeless. Meantime, millions of people in that country, and in the whole civilized world as well, are suffering. Consequently, the imperative interests of statesmanship and of humanity impel us to seek clear vision upon the questions involved in the civil war in Russia, in foreign intervention in Russian affairs, and in the repeated tenders of peace by the Soviet government. We should grasp firmly in our own minds what can be done, and what cannot be done in respect to reestablishing peace. First of all it will be necessary to learn what Russian parties are concerned in the civil war.

At the outset we should understand clearly that there are really only two parties involved that have any effective influence. On one side the people are grouped about Lenin and Trotzky; on the other, just at present, about Kolchak and Denikin. There is no third party. The Russians who try to pursue a middle ground now, and who call Lenin a Terrorist and Kolchak a dictator, have not a sufficient following to entitle them to consideration. They draw their support from the Social-Revolutionists and the moderate Social-Democrats or Mensheviks. The Mensheviks will probably assume

leadership of the Russian labor party at some future date, but just at present they are helpless in the hands of the Bolsheviks. Furthermore, these parties have not adopted a consistent attitude toward the civil war: they are unorganized, divided among themselves, and destitute of resources. Therefore, they are incapable of playing an effective part in the present crisis. The only people we need here consider are the Bolsheviks and the volunteer armies opposed to them.

It is not worth the time to dispute about Bolshevism with people who insist upon making it something which they have conjured out of the depths of their own radical imagination. However, a great many people, through a lack of sufficient information, have formed erroneous opinions as to the attitude and plans of the Bolsheviks. They assume from reading Lenin's speech upon 'The Next Tasks of the Soviet Government,' and from certain reports concerning recent Bolshevik policies, that the Bolsheviks are turning conservative. They hear about piece-rate wages, premium systems, high salaries, extensive dictatorial power entrusted to the technical managers of industrial establishments, and other measures which convince them that little by little Bolshevism may change from a Utopian theory and a desperate social experiment into a rational, and possibly permanent and practical, system of governmental production. These ideas are mere dreams. In the first place the

people who hold them forget that Lenin's speech, although it has but recently been translated into German, was delivered in April, 1918, before the Central Executive Committee. It is not a new suggestion, and it indicates nothing novel or better in Bolshevik policy. The Bolsheviks never had a practical labor programme, and they have always been ready to make any kind of a concession in order to maintain their principles. But they are not willing to give up any of these principles. The principles themselves render inevitable the failure of their system. To put the whole thing in a nutshell, the political error in the Bolshevik system consists in placing control not only in the hands of a minority, but in the hands of a minority that is absolutely incapable and unprepared to exercise authority. The economic error consists in obliterating private capital, and destroying private incentive to enterprise and industry. These two errors condemn the system in advance to failure. They cannot be corrected, because they constitute the substance of the system itself. No alleged turning toward conservatism can possibly constitute a transition to a practical and permanent social organization. Real reform will never come through patching up Bolshevism: it will come only through crushing it.

Every sane political policy to be applied to the Russian situation must take as its guiding principle the conviction that Bolshevism, irrespective of how events may shape themselves, is ultimately doomed. It may be terminated by a revolt in the Red army, or by the success of Denikin. No one can predict these things. It would come to an end just as certainly if the civil war should cease and the blockade be lifted. In some ways it would be better to have these two things

occur. If they did, the collapse of Bolshevism would open the eyes of western radicalism to the innate faults of the system, far more convincingly than if that system is brought to an end by outside force. But for the time being any let-up of external pressure will strengthen the Bolshevik government, and may possibly prolong its existence. This would cost the suffering of the unhappy Russian nation, which would have to bear its terrible burden longer than it might otherwise.

The future of Russia does not belong to the Bolsheviks. The question then arises whether it belongs to the other parties in the Russian civil war — to such men as Kolchak and Denikin. The world is flooded with rumors that these men and their supporters have embittered the population of the territories which they occupy by their reactionary and arbitrary rule, and by their deeds of violence and their cruelty. We are told that this explains the evanescence of their military success. Against these charges we must set the democratic declarations which the government of Denikin and Kolchak have repeatedly published. We are deprived of authentic information concerning the true conditions in Siberia and South Russia, and so cannot form conclusions with confidence. The reports of Kolchak and Denikin do not deny that excesses have been committed, in the bitterness and bloodshed of civil war, by the volunteer army, and that they may be committed in the future. We may well assume that such excesses might occur not infrequently. We ourselves have witnessed atrocities at Berlin and Munich in our own civil war; some of which have been committed by government troops. In Russia, where severe disturbances have swept over tremendous areas, where the bitterness accompanying them has been so in-

tense, and where commanding officers are so remote from many of the detachments operating under their command, conditions are naturally far worse than with us. Barbarism and savagery have become a habit of life. But it is not fair to burden the government with the responsibility for deeds of cruelty which it may be doing its utmost to prevent.

Although we may assume beforehand that atrocities have been committed, we may feel equally assured that they have been exaggerated. It is impossible under present conditions to trace back reports and rumors to their sources; but we know that many of those that have become current in Germany originated among the Bolsheviks or the Ukrainians. Both parties are interested in making the government of Denikin odious. Reports from Social-Revolutionary sources are also likely to be biased, for the Social-Revolutionists were deprived by Kolchak of a position in Siberia which they owed solely to their former prestige, and not to their present actual power. We know that

similar stories are spread abroad by our own more radical parties, for the purpose of discrediting the present German administration as reactionary, imperialist, and militarist. However, after making all these reservations, an impression still remains that the atrocities committed by the troops under Denikin have assumed proportions that imperil his government.

The weakness of the volunteer army is not due so much to an unsatisfactory programme as to its dependence on foreign countries for arms and munitions. Its successes have always been in direct proportion to the material assistance which the Entente has given it. Its failures do not indicate that the Bolsheviks are powerful, but that its own resources are inadequate.

The outcome of the civil war, therefore, depends in a great degree upon the future attitude of the Entente. There is, undoubtedly, danger of extreme reaction in Russia. For this reason Russia and the western world are deeply interested in fostering every democratic influence that manifests itself in that country.

[*Leipziger Volkszeitung*, September 29, 1919]

A DYING METROPOLIS

VERSAILLES promised the peoples of the earth justice and freedom. The peace treaty has brought them injustice and betrayal. The peace treaty was to inspire the ruined world with new life. It has sown broadcast over Europe death and destruction. The high council of the four great powers has wrought its harshest vengeance on the weakest, most powerless, and least capable of resistance of its enemies. The spirits of destruction have speedy wings. Already the cold, gray pallor of death lies over Vienna. But yesterday it was the proud, rich capital of a mighty empire. To-day it is the head of a petty state, more deeply scarred by the suffering of war than even the fragment of distressed territory that still owes it allegiance.

The Austro-Hungarian monarchy before its dissolution was a gigantic economic entity with a population of 54,000,000. Vienna was the heart of this great empire, its capital whence industrial initiative and organizing enterprise spread over the whole country. Vienna directed the labor and the commerce of the millions who resided in all parts of its domain. The emperor, the court, and the heads of all secular and spiritual authority had their seat in Vienna. Furthermore, the princes of industry and finance, the leaders of material and intellectual production, the greatest men in science, literature, and art made that city their home. Vienna was the transshipping point of Europe, where the industrial products of the manufacturing North and West were bartered for the agrarian products of the South and East. Vienna was the junction point of a transportation system radiating throughout central Europe and constituting a bridge between the

Mediterranean and the Black Seas on the one side, and the North and Baltic Seas on the other. Within the coffer of the great banks of Vienna lay accumulated a vast capital drawn from a network of branches extending to the remotest villages and towns of the empire. All the surplus of the country's industry was accumulated at this point.

The collapse of the monarchy has broken this vast economic unit into fragments. Vienna's 2,000,000 people were fed in former days with Hungarian grain and meat, Bohemian sugar, and Moravian potatoes. The furnace industries of Vienna and German-Austria were supplied with coal from the rich colliery districts of Ostrov, Kladno, Brunn, Bruk, Falkenau, and Pilsen. The tenements of the working people in the cities and the cabins of the peasants in the country were lighted with petroleum from Galicia. This close unity of interest had endured for centuries, and had knit together the people of the ancient monarchy with such close ties that they could not be rent asunder without disaster.

This common economic area fell apart, and little German Austria found itself surrounded by the insuperable commercial barriers of the newly established states. It produced scarcely a tenth of the coal which it consumed. The result has been a tragedy unparalleled in modern history. For months the great furnaces that converted the ores of Styria into iron and steel for the uses of civilization have been silent. The fine manufactures of Vienna and its suburbs have been reduced to a fraction of their former volume. More than 100,000 workmen, out of a total population of 6,000,000 have recently lost employment. There is no fuel for domestic use. The street railways have not been