

It's Happening in Ireland

Shaemas O'Sheel tells the Irish Republican Army's side of the argument. "The heirs of an unfinished war."

THERE is a song that has been sung at countless Irish gatherings around the world. It isn't high poetry; it is set, slapdash and awkwardly, to the air of "Tramp, Tramp, Tramp, the Boys Are Marching." But it is worth study at this time, and I give you the first stanza and chorus:

High upon the gallows-tree
Stood the noble-hearted three
By the vengeful tyrant stricken in their bloom;
But they met him face to face
With the courage of their race
And they went with souls undaunted to their doom:

"God save Ireland!" said the heroes,
"God save Ireland!" say we all,
Whether on the scaffold high
Or the battlefield we die,
Oh, what matter when for Erin dear we fall!

Thus lives the memory of the Manchester martyrs—Allen, Larkin, and O'Brien, hanged in Manchester jail one morning in 1867, on "evidence" so flimsy that even the decent minority of English journalists protested.

The "evidence" against Peter Barnes and James Richards was even flimsier. They met death in the same spirit, saluting the Irish republic, uncowed by the British hangman. That was in Birmingham jail, in February 1940.

Thus in seventy-three years, despite some showy external changes, the essential relations between the Irish people and the British empire have not changed. Recognition of that fact is the beginning of wisdom if you would understand the Irish situation today, and particularly the activities of the Irish Republican Army.

The Manchester martyrs were hanged because an English turnkey was accidentally killed during the rescue of two Fenian prisoners by other Fenians in an English city. In English official eyes the Fenians—the IRA of that day—were a lawless mob. In Irish eyes they were an Irish military force operating on enemy soil; after all, the enemy had operated devastatingly on Irish soil for seven hundred years. The Birmingham martyrs were hanged because several Englishmen were killed or wounded in an explosion in England—in English eyes a dastardly, anarchistic crime; in Irish eyes, another unfortunate and unintended result of an Irish military operation on enemy soil.

BACKGROUND OF REBELLION

The Fenians who rescued Captains Kelly and Deasy in Manchester also conducted other operations in England during the sixties, seventies, and eighties: example, the dynamiting of Chester Castle. Simultaneously with Fenian activities there went forward in

Ireland one of the world's bitterest agrarian wars and one of history's most dramatic parliamentary agitations. Moreover, masses of English workers spoke up for agrarian reform and Home Rule for Ireland. But Irish parliamentarians and English workers were neatly betrayed at the right moment, and Home Rule became the mere meal ticket of as shabby a crowd of politicians as history exhibits. Carrying the war to England, however, plus an agrarian campaign liberally punctuated by the shooting of landlords, got results. Gladstone confessed that "the intensity of Fenianism" compelled extensive reforms in the Irish land and governmental systems. In such facts is rooted the Fenian credo that "England heeds nothing but force."

It was this Fenian tradition, passed on by Tom Clarke to Padraic Pearse, Sean MacDermot, and other young men, plus a tremendous new factor, a class-conscious proletariat organized on military lines by the most far-seeing of Irishmen, James Connolly, that gave us the glory of Easter Week, 1916. But the army with banners which fought openly under Pearse and Connolly was blasted into surrender by British artillery within that week. The "army without banners" which resumed the fight in 1918, by guerrilla tactics won the Treaty of 1921, giving Ireland a limited but potentially useful installment of freedom.

By a substantial majority the war-weary Irish people ratified the treaty. Clearly the cue for Republicans was to use the Free State machinery to elect a Republican majority to Dail Eireann. It is easy to deplore a lost opportunity, but more useful to understand the actual course and logic of events. Thousands of young Republicans, at a high pitch of excitement, were persuaded by a few fanatically sincere leaders that the treaty was treason to the sacred Cause. Here was a storm made to order for the devious Mr. De Valera to ride! He had been the first to lower the Republican demand. He was responsible for the treaty. Millions of dollars had been given him in America, and he used the money to split the Irish movement in America, thus releasing the British government from its fear of American public opinion. Meanwhile for want of a little of that money the fighting boys in Ireland were facing the Black-and-Tans with empty automatics, and few enough of them. Yet now this sinister master of verbal necromancy put himself at the head of the irreconcilables. Immune from arrest because the Griffith, Collins, and Cosgrave regimes did not dare make him a martyr, the former president of the Council had but to await the inevitable deaths of Brugha, Mellows, and Rory O'Connor; when the red tide of civil war receded, behold the Republican cause was centered and personified in Eamon

De Valera, whom millions of Irish at home and abroad, sullenly boycotting the Free State, acknowledged as president of a republic which, though not *de facto*, remained to them *de jure*.

DE VALERA'S TRICK

But the pretense of ignoring an elected, majority-supported native government was a quixotic business which no great mass of people could long continue; common sense and the impact of daily living worked inexorably against it. De Valera played out the farce until the moment came when, public impatience with the failure of the millennium to arrive being directed against Cosgrave, he perceived that he could carry an election. Then out of his hat came a formula which permitted his followers to vote and to enter the Dail. De Valera became chief of state; since then he has been engaged in progressive betrayal of the republic.

When the majority of Republicans followed De Valera to the polls, it was because they believed that was the way to the republic. When the majority of the electorate put him in power, they gave him a mandate to establish the republic anew. And, to be sure, he abolished the oath of allegiance to the British crown, revived the ancient name of Eire, rewrote the Constitution. But that these were mere sops to wean the people from the republic became suddenly evident at the time of the abdication of Edward VIII. Had Mr. De Valera been a true separatist, he might have found ways to turn this dramatic event to Ireland's advantage; but at least he would have ignored it. The very core of Irish nationalism is the concept of the British connection as a matter of coercion, to be acknowledged only under duress, to be ignored when possible. De Valera, however, like any provincial politician, like a Mackenzie King or a Hepburn, summoned a dazed Dail in special session and jammed through an act acknowledging the accession of George VI. Thus for the first time in seven centuries of Anglo-Irish history the suzerainty of the British crown was acknowledged by a body having authority to speak in the name of the Irish people.

A minority of irreconcilables deserted De Valera when he entered the Dail. Their unchangeable allegiance was to the republic proclaimed in 1916 and set up in 1918. They elected a new "president," maintained the shadowy forms of a "government." Had De Valera carried out his mandate, this devotion of a few fanatics to the pale wraith of a defeated ideal would have seemed both pathetic and ludicrous. But in the light of actual events, it acquired moral and spiritual validity and political importance. And there was noth-

ing ludicrous in the fact that this fugitive "government" began a new recruiting campaign among the young men of Ireland. For the force it recruited is the new IRA which has so dramatically broken through the smooth front of British imperialism's "democratic" pretensions, even onto the front pages of the world's press.

Now most people in Ireland, like most people everywhere, are chiefly intent on the round of daily living; work or the search for work, eating and drinking, wooing and wedding, having their fun, bearing their sorrows, getting a night's sleep. So with the close of the civil war the Irish people in the main took a holiday from those patriotic and political concerns which had kept life keyed to terror and exaltation. In the sweet or bitter business of daily living they forgot that their country was still unfree; they tucked the Cause away in the back of the mind; they lapsed into acceptance of the *status quo*.

IRA PERSPECTIVE

But like that Fenian father of whom William Z. Foster has written, "His main interest was in independence for Ireland," there are always Irish men and women to whom the Cause, handed down through the generations, is more than daily living; and if need be, dearer than life. Such are these young men of the IRA. And to understand their actions you must see them as torch bearers of a long tradition, and then try to see how the present Irish scene looks to them.

In the first place they behold their motherland partitioned. Through the long centuries the alien invader, frankly predatory and unpretentiously brutal, had stolen the people's land and stricken the people down; but it remained for Lloyd George and Chamberlain, Churchill and Birkenhead in our own day to devise Partition and exact consent to this monstrous division of a small country, under threat of immediate ruthless war. One corner, one-fifth of Ireland, six rich and historic counties, remain tied tightly to the alien crown. They are ruled by a subsidized swarm of politicians and militarized police. The essential qualifications for employment in either group are treason to their native land and hatred of the religion of the majority of their fellow countrymen. The natural economy of the country is disrupted; towns are cut off from their hinterland; men are arrested for transporting a dozen eggs or a sack of potatoes across an invisible line. Within the Six Counties there is a Catholic minority, which is also Nationalist, numbering almost 40 percent of the population; as Catholics they are excluded from civil service and official employment; as Nationalists they are virtually disfranchised by the gerrymander. They are harried by the police and by mobs incited by Cabinet ministers. Their industries decay, their workers starve in unemployment; but if they meet to protest, they are batoned and jailed. Hundreds of Irish men and women languish today in England's Northern Ireland jails, for the crime of being Irish; for such terrible offenses

as that for which a number of young girls were arrested last year—wearing lilies at Easter!

Is it strange that Irishmen resent these things? Is it strange that ardent young patriots have organized to redress these conditions? When moreover these ardent youths contemplate the fact that the four-fifths of their country now called Eire must still acknowledge the British crown and accept partnership in the empire whose enslaving rule has girdled the world in blood; and when they observe that the propertied classes and their weasel-worded politicians have forgotten the republic, and that the masses seem to be forgetting—is it any wonder that they have determined to strike again "for Ireland's right"?

THE ANCIENT PATTERN

They repeat the pattern of Irish rebellion, the pattern of 1798 and 1916: strike when England is in difficulties, strike to carry fear to the enemy and to awaken the Irish masses from creeping lassitude. And they imitate the Fenian example by striking on enemy soil.

Editors' Note

TAKING issue with some of the assumptions in this article, NEW MASSES wishes to reemphasize its long, warm friendship and high regard for the author. But we cannot share Shaemas O'Sheel's tolerance of the individual violence inherent in the present activities of the Irish Republican Army. Such tactics must not be explained by lack of funds, nor justified by the strategy of operating on the enemy's soil. They always spring from deeper faults: the lack of systematic contact with the bread-and-butter problems of the Irish people. In Lenin's opinion, the Easter Week 1916 rebellion was exactly the opposite of a "putsch," because it integrated the social and national elements of Ireland's historic battle. James Connolly's leadership Easter Week could not have been so generally acknowledged were it not for the tradition of working class action dramatized by the great transport workers' strike of 1913.

Ireland's social problems cannot fully be solved until genuine national independence has liberated her political life from toadies and traitors; but national independence without a genuine social basis degenerates into individual acts of violence which eventually frustrate the noblest hopes, and waste the deepest passions. The movement of Irish masses for unification and genuine national liberty will grow, we are convinced, and reach toward victory. The IRA may emblazon dramatic chapters in that struggle. But complete and permanent victory is possible only if the full lessons of Ireland's past are learned in a fundamental way. Shaemas O'Sheel would probably agree with that last sentence. But if so, he cannot condone those faults of the IRA's theory and tactics which only lead a one way course down a dead end street.

But from one tradition they have departed: though Irish history sanctions alliance with any enemy of England, from the Spanish and French monarchies in their most despotic days to the German imperial government of 1916, the IRA, by all available evidence, has sought no help from Hitler.

To the Irish Nationalist, it is axiomatic that a perpetual state of war exists between Ireland and Britain, and will so exist until the British government clears out of Ireland; therefore any act of war is legitimate at any time. So once more a militant minority constitute themselves custodians of an immortal Cause. Their sanction is the self-given sanction which is all that any revolutionary group has to start with. But all Irish history tells them that if they grapple with the ancient enemy and if they accept unflinchingly the jail or the death in battle or on the gallows which will be the fate of some of them, their people will rise to the old call, and the national front once more will take form.

There is today, however, one circumstance in which the situation differs radically from that faced by any previous Irish revolutionary movement. The present government of Eire, led though it be by one the IRA calls a traitor, composed though it be of small politicians and opportunists, is an Irish government freely elected. Revolt against that government means civil war; and that, on all grounds, is to be avoided if possible. This circumstance, then, also points them toward a campaign not in Ireland, but in England. If thereby the English taste some of the suffering and death inherent in war, that is too bad. But the Irish have known these things long enough; and, says the IRA, the English can avoid them by forcing their government to get out of Ireland, and to give up all claim to rule Ireland or any part of it—which it could do in forty-eight hours.

But putting bombs in mailboxes and baggage rooms, in washrooms and shop windows—aren't these pretty small tactics? Beyond denial, yes. Some of these bombs, it is the best opinion, have been planted in fact by Scotland Yard. But let us concede that most of them were placed by the IRA. What can be the object? It is clear and it is avowed: to create a demand among Britons that their government shall let these troublesome Irish go, thus putting an end to these outrages. Are the means taken effective to that end? So far, and on any such scale, no. Why then does the IRA persist in these futilities? The answer is simply that they lack the means to do more. If they had the means, it seems certain that they would conduct operations of indisputably military character against British military objectives. But why haven't they greater means? Doesn't that indicate lack of mass support? For one thing, the Irish nationalist movement is disastrously weakened by the continuance of those divisions caused by Eamon De Valera twenty years ago. And when was any revolutionary movement well financed? The members of the IRA and their American affiliates are 99 percent workers—

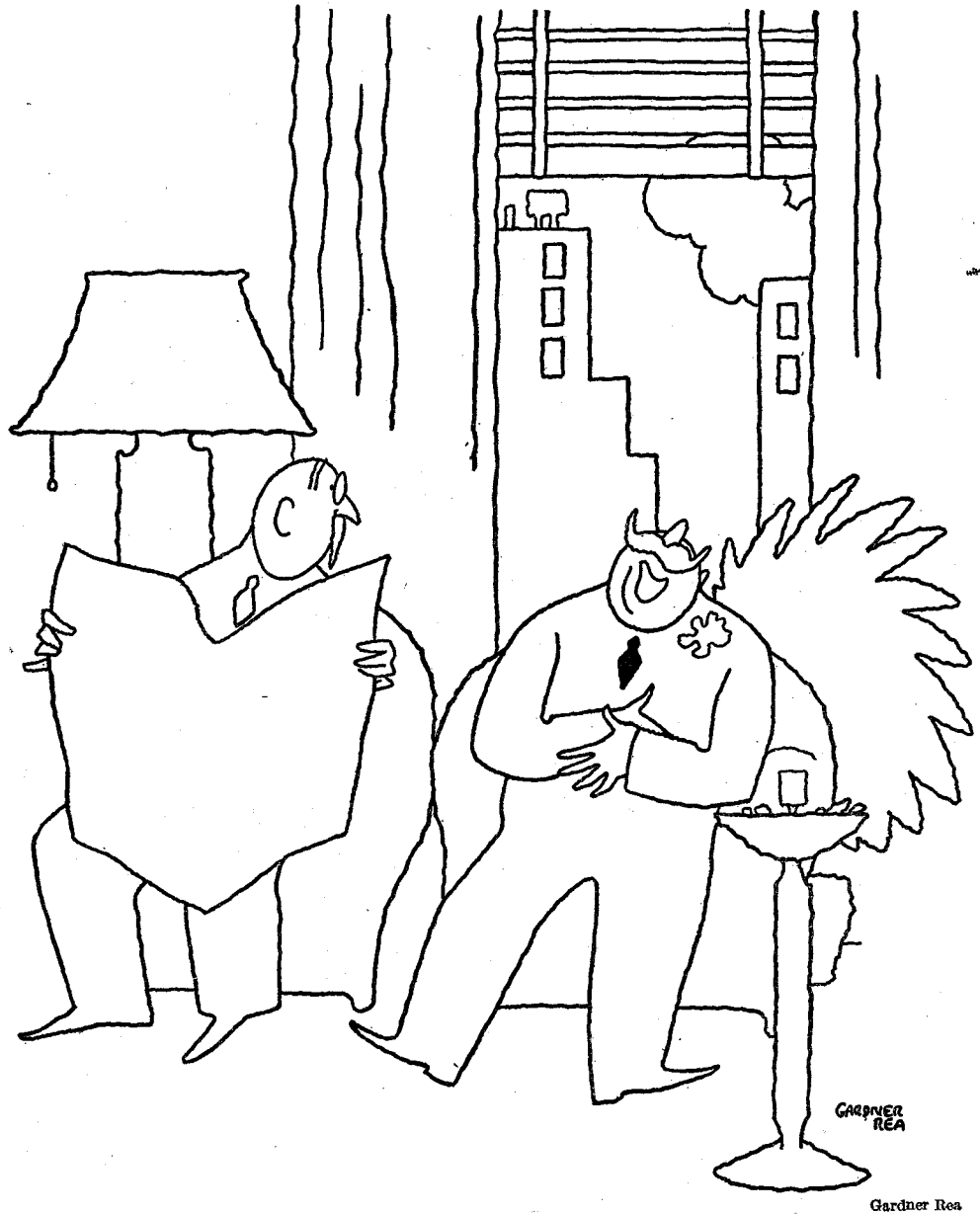
employed and unemployed—men of the smallest means.

But if this is a fight carried on and financed by workers, has it then no aspect of economic and social revolution? The only possible answer today is yes-and-no. There has been published in the Irish press a purported program of the IRA envisioning a socialistic state: all land to the people, all means of production publicly owned. The authenticity of this declaration is not clearly established. My contacts compel me to suppose that some few of these IRA men grasp the concept of the class struggle clearly; more, dimly; and many not at all. Some have sharply resented the efforts of Peadar O'Donnell and others to link the national struggle with the class conflict. A responsible leader of the IRA and the American auxiliary organization said to me lately, "These men will not fight for economics. They will fight only for Irish independence."

CLASS STRUGGLE

Yet readiness for the class struggle must lie at all times close beneath the surface among small farmers, landless farm laborers, and sweated, tenement-herded workers. James Connolly demonstrated that the passion of the workers for a better life has been the underlying strength of every Irish insurrection. There is at the moment no Connolly, no Citizens Army, yet the national struggle certainly has its roots among the proletariat. One thing, however, stands as a towering obstacle to conscious proletarian action in Ireland: the still unsatisfied passion for simple national independence. "Old Ireland must be free, from the center to the sea!" Only when that has been brought about, will the passion and intelligence of the Irish workers be brought to bear on the struggle which knows no national boundaries. Only then will they perceive how little freedom simple freedom brings. An independent Ireland tied to the Pound Sterling, they would soon learn, would not be free. An Ireland divorced from the Pound Sterling but still tied to the British market would not be free. An Ireland independent of the British market, but still a tiny nation in a world of ravening competitive capitalist empires, would be no more free than the small Scandinavian, Balkan, and Central and South American countries are free today. Only in a world where the British workers are also free, where the workers of all lands are free, and not only free but rulers of the state, can Ireland be free.

Deplorable, if you will, the fact that the vision of the IRA stops short of these perceptions, looks only to simple national independence. I am here intent not on saying what should be done, but on examining what is being done and what is likely to be done by the men who consider themselves today the heirs of an unfinished war, the militant sons of a motherland still in bondage. My information is that the IRA numbers some thousands of men, moderately well organized and disciplined; and that they will be heard from



MAJOR NERTZ OF THE FASCIST SHIRTS

"... Every time I think of Kermit Roosevelt!"

further. Now that the Irish bishops and the Vatican are trying to frighten them, pronouncing membership in the IRA sinful, we may expect a toughening of their will and an increase in their numbers. Good Catholics all, like the Fenians before them, they will show that their revolutionary passion is not to be exorcised by ecclesiastical threats. They know that what they want is right and reasonable: they want their country, undivided and independent. For that they will fight. And as they fight and suffer, they will awaken the Irish masses, for this is what the masses most passionately desire—their country, undivided and free.

LENIN'S COLONIAL THEORY

Lenin, studying specifically the Easter Rebellion in Ireland, saw clearly the catalytic importance of a nationalistic upsurge. Lenin understood that only in the course of a struggle for what the masses already value most, can a broadening of mass understanding, a

new direction of mass purpose, take form.

And let those who see the British imperial government as the marplot of a purposed worldwide war remember that Karl Marx said that the deadly blow at British imperialism must be struck through Ireland.

SHAEMAS O'SHEEL.

Biting the Hand

"IT is my honest belief . . . that some of the ultra-rich members of the Republican Party have done great harm to our party by creating in the mind of the public the belief that we were dominated by a few rich men. I think they have done us a great deal of harm with the electorate and in getting votes on election day. They do, however, use their money freely in influencing nominations at party conventions and often to the detriment of party success."—Rep. Hamilton Fish of New York, on the floor of the House, March 20.

The Myth of a Finnish Munich

Alter Brody contrasts the Soviet-Finnish peace treaty with Versailles, Munich—and Copenhagen. "The terms are the most generous a vanquished government has ever received."

THE Soviet-Finnish peace caught the typewriter generals, who had been waging the Soviet-Finnish war in the newspapers, on the gallop. Unable to stop their runaway typewriters, they were still destroying Soviet divisions in the never-never land "north of Lake Ladoga" at the very moment the Finnish delegates in Moscow were begging for peace. However, no sooner was the Soviet-Finnish peace treaty signed than the typewriter generals reversed their ribbons and galloped off in the opposite direction. "A Finnish Munich" they shrieked. Finland was another Czechoslovakia that had been compelled to sign its own death warrant at the point of a gun. In another few months immolated little Finland would be gobbled up by the Russian bear as Czechoslovakia was gobbled up by the Nazis a few months after Munich. And not only Finland but all of Scandinavia was now helpless at Russia's mercy. Poor Finland, wept the typewriter generals, poor Sweden, poor Norway! There was only one comfort. The mythical myriads of frozen Russian corpses in the never-never land "north of Lake Ladoga" which threatened Finland with pestilence in the spring, were now safely on the Soviet side of the new frontier.

The typewriter generals' account of the Soviet-Finnish war has been exposed by the Soviet-Finnish peace as a mythical epos like the fabled siege of Troy. It now remains to expose their latest literary effort the myth of a Finnish Munich. For far from being a "Munich" the terms of the Soviet-Finnish peace are the most generous a vanquished government has ever received under similar circumstances, not excluding the terms which the "democracies" that offered to come to the aid of Finland imposed on vanquished Germany at Versailles.

A COMPARISON OF TERMS

Let us for a moment accept the typewriter generals' challenge and compare the terms which a vanquished Finland received from a victorious Soviet Union with the terms which an undefeated Czechoslovakia received from Hitler and, be it not forgotten—Chamberlain and Daladier.

Czechoslovakia was forced to sign away about a third of its area and population. It lost about half of its industry and the other half was mortgaged to Germany by the cession of the coal and lignite mines on which it was based. The boundary line was purposely drawn so as to cut every important communication link in Czechoslovakia and in addition Germany won the right to build—at Czechoslovakia's expense—a military motor highway, to be policed by German

troops, ten miles wide cutting the country in half. Extraterritoriality such as is enjoyed by Europeans in China was bestowed on the German-speaking minority that was left in Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia was forced to surrender its only possible line of defense and the frontier was so drawn as to bring the famed Skoda works within sight of the border. Czechoslovakia was also forced to give up its alliance with France but in view of its demonstrated value this could hardly be considered a sacrifice.

These were the explicit terms of the treaty. The implicit terms were far more drastic. Actually as a result of the treaty Czechoslovakia became an economic, diplomatic, and military dependency of the Reich and the contemporary Czech government was quick to recognize it. A few days after the treaty was signed Benes and all the other important anti-Nazi political leaders not only resigned but fled abroad for their lives. In a few weeks the Communist, Socialist, and liberal parties were outlawed and a semi-authoritarian government was established at Prague consisting only of people known to be acceptable to Germany. Even the Nuremberg laws were introduced in an attempt to win Germany's favor. The Czech Army was not abolished but it became an atavism as a result of the demilitarization of the country. On March 15, 1939, when Germany decided to take formal as well as *de facto* possession of Czechoslovakia it took the Reichswehr only a few hours to occupy it.

Contrast these terms with the terms of

the Soviet-Finnish peace treaty. Only 9 percent of its territory is ceded by Finland and about the same proportion of its industry. Few important Finnish industries are seriously affected by the cession and few of its vital communication links. The railroad that is to be built through central Finland gives the Soviet Union no military right of way but is expressly restricted to commercial uses. That the territory ceded is only of strategic importance to Finland in waging an offensive war against the Soviet Union but in no way impairs its ability to defend itself against attack is attested by the statements of Finnish spokesmen. On March 15 the New York *Times* printed the following dispatch from Stockholm: "Finland still has a natural defense line in the Kymi river between Viborg and Helsinki and in the cluster of lakes behind her new southeastern frontier. Here a new Mannerheim line might be built." This is exactly what the Finnish government is now doing, according to the *Times* for March 21.

DEFENSIVE PEACE

The purely defensive nature of the Soviet terms is further emphasized by a fact that seems to have escaped the attention of most commentators. While the treaty provides for the cession of several headlands (Rybachy and Sredni peninsulas) off Petsamo of a purely strategic value in safeguarding the USSR's Arctic outlets, the port of Petsamo and the province of Petsamo is left in Finnish hands. The port and province of Petsamo (Pechenga) which was never ethnographically or politically part of Finland as any pre-war map of the czarist grand duchy of Finland testifies, is an ancient Russian province which the USSR was forced to cede to Finland in 1920. Normally one would expect the return of this province to be one of the first demands of the Russian victors. The relinquishment of Petsamo therefore is in effect a Soviet exchange for the cession of the Karelian Isthmus.

An article in the *Moscow Teachers' Gazette*, commenting on the peace, declares: "This treaty does not infringe one iota on the sovereignty and independence of Finland. Any imperialist government would undoubtedly have utilized its overwhelming superiority of strength to impose a crippling treaty." It is only necessary to read the statements of the leaders of the present Finnish government about the treaty as flaunted in the capitalist press in order to corroborate the absolute truth of this Soviet comment. Vaino Tanner, the Finnish foreign minister, in his report on the peace said: "The Soviet Union does not intend to interfere in either our domestic or our foreign policy. . . .



Coleman

Reflections in an Old Samovar