

# Strictly Personal

by RUTH MCKENNEY

## NO MARKET FOR ATROCITIES

THE newspaper called *PM*, mistaken for the first six weeks of its career as a progressive New York daily, came out last week with a frank, if somewhat naive demand for English atrocity pictures. Mr. Ingersoll, *PM*'s editor, feels that the prints sent over from England have no zip. Gently chiding the English censor, Mr. Ingersoll argued that a couple of kids with their heads blown off or a bevy of blinded mothers might rouse the sluggish American public to do or die for the British empire.

Mr. Ingersoll's clamor for atrocity pictures brought him a loud horse laugh in the trade, at least. It is a well known fact that atrocity pictures can be produced by the baker's dozen in any news service dark-room. If Mr. Ingersoll wants something special in the way of hands cut off or Red Cross nurses nailed to barn doors, he can, of course, consult the 1917 files of any newspaper. Or if he prefers winter snowscapes, there are the Finnish pictures kicking around cheap, and hot stuff too, as any photo expert will tell you. Some of the best picture faking done in years came out during the Soviet-Finnish war, and a Russian corpse frozen to death while high-jumping could easily be doctored into an Anzac paralyzed to death by poison gas. Better yet, if Mr. Ingersoll wants the bona fide real thing he can take the very real pictures from the Barcelona morgue, complete with children, and have his retoucher cut in the background of the House of Parliament, and substitute a Queen Mary hat for the shawl draped over the head of the weeping mother identifying her shattered child. Incidentally, he need have no fear of the public catching him in a fraud, for the pitiful pictures of the Spanish dead appeared almost exclusively in the *Daily Worker*. In the days of the German-Italian invasion of Spain, President Roosevelt and his fellow humanitarians among the American publishers were much too busy helping the British strangle a democratic republic fighting for its life to have time for informing the American public what appeasement was doing to Spanish babies. So Mr. Ingersoll will find the terrible pictures of suffering Spain quite fresh and new. With a little fixing, they should serve his purpose admirably.

Unless, of course, Mr. Ingersoll, always a quixotic fellow, wants his English atrocity pictures one hundred percent truthful. In that case, it is my personal opinion that he'll have to wait a long time. For this war is slightly different from the last one, not in fundamental

causes, of course, for it's still the same old fight for markets and world domination between two sets of imperialists. But this war is different because the little man at home is busy doing the dying. And it is the firm conviction (and should I question them?) of the big boys running this jolly old war that if the public, American, English, German, or what have you, ever got on to the true facts of life, there might not be any more second imperialist war at all.

Thus, to Mr. Ingersoll's printed dismay, the English censor passes only the pictures of the London bombings which show the jolly cockney with his thumbs elevated and a song on his lips. Mothers identifying headless children in morgues are taboo—for it takes a very deep conviction, and an absolute knowledge that freedom and only freedom is at stake to stomach the sight of a woman weeping over the mutilated body of her little girl. The English censor evidently feels that pictures of the London morgue may fill the reader with uneasy ideas about India and the Suez Canal. For I think it may be considered an axiom that no one but Winston Churchill and President Roosevelt and such like people consider the Suez Canal worth the life of even one baby or the agony in the heart of even one mother. For what shall it profit a Plymouth factory girl or a London worker to win back the whole world for the English gentry if the people they love lie broken and burned beyond recognition in the ruins of the tenements and hovels where they lived.

No, this is not the kind of war to favor atrocity pictures. Mr. Ingersoll is wrong. The American public, looking upon the real face of the English people, twisted in terrible agony, paralyzed by fear, frozen by sorrow and pain, could only ask, "Is it worth it? Is it worth so much that the people, the plain people should suffer so? Who cares for the Suez Canal except the ship owners and traders, and to a woman with both her legs crushed under a beam, what are the ship owners of England?"

Mr. Ingersoll is wrong. Even in Germany the only pictures of the war show the *Panzer* divisions getting kissed by Bulgarian or Greek or Norwegian or French young ladies. The German people will never see the pictures of the German corpses piled river deep in some lonely valley of the Balkans. They will never hear the dying screams of the little soldier boy with a bullet through his guts, for German newsreel men do not record such interesting

passages on their sound tracks. The mother at home is only told that her boy died for the greater glory of his country; she will never know that he was trapped in a flaming tank and slowly roasted to death. Even in a military dictatorship it is never safe to let the people know the cost of what Hitler tells them is glory. If the mother knew her son took all of an hour's agony that transcends description finally to win the merciful surcease of death, then the question would beat on her heart: "Was it worth it? Is the Suez Canal worth it?" And someday she would answer, "No. For what does it profit me if the ship owners have the Suez Canal when all my life I will live with the screams of my nineteen-year-old boy burning to death during that endless hour?"

No, this is not the kind of a war to support atrocity pictures—on either side. Mr. Ingersoll is wrong to criticize the English censors. They know their business. Better to concentrate on power politics, better to encourage the American public to move pins around on newspaper maps, better to let them overlook the casualties.

For if the American public could translate the headlines into facts, if they could see the struggle for the Suez Canal not like a glorified football game, but in its real colors, if they could forget about military strategy and supply bases, and such like whooplas of the present war—if all those fancy trappings faded into the stark reality, then I know President Roosevelt could never dare to play with the fire of war.

For the headlines say: PLYMOUTH BOMBED. But the facts are: Sally Lumkin, aged eighteen and pretty, with her face all smashed in and her eyes blinded. The columnists write learnedly of the struggle for the Canal. But the real story of this ditch is written in the color of blood, the agony of Australians with splintered arms and legs dying in a lonely desert, the terror of a German youngster, feeling the bayonet knife cut out his life. Supply bases—and boys trapped in submarine shaken by a depth bomb, boys never to see sunlight again but to meet death with lungs bursting and eyes popping in agony. Military strategy! Every time a careless American moves a pin on a *PM* map, a thousand, ten thousand men have died, in pain passing description.

This is war, the true face of war. This is imperialist war, and men and women and children are dying, slaughtered by bombs and starved for lack of a bit of bread. This is what capitalism has brought upon the people of Europe and England and Egypt, even upon the people of Australia and India and South Africa. Yes, Mr. Ingersoll, the British censors are right. The imperialists cannot afford to tell the truth, and *PM* can scarcely afford to send out a call for bombing pictures.

For only the Communists, who fight every day of their lives for a world without war, for the brotherhood of man, only they can afford to tell the terrible true-story of the second imperialist war. The truth of this war is a weapon, but it belongs alone to the people.

# WASHINGTON HELPS THE BERLIN-HELSINKI AXIS

*The occupation of Finland by German troops and arms. Some interesting, if embarrassing questions for Messrs. Hull and Morgenthau to answer. Smoke and fire.*

FINLAND is a long ways off from the Balkans geographically, and the times when that country dominated the headlines are now ancient history. Yet time and space are readily traversed in the Einsteinian physics of modern diplomacy. Our statesmen have assured us a number of times they intend no compromise with fascism, and Mr. Roosevelt has directed the freezing of funds belonging to countries occupied by German armies; simultaneously, we have been led to believe that Mr. Welles, the Under-Secretary of State, has been negotiating improved relations with a certain great power known as the Soviet Union. On both of these scores, it is worth asking some questions about Finland.

On September 26 of last year, the world was astounded by an official dispatch from Helsinki stating that "transit of German troops on leave and of German supplies is taking place between northern Norway and northern Finland subject to certain conditions and control measures." The dispatch went on to explain that "the arrangement was modeled after that between Sweden and Germany which became effective in July. . . ."

That the actions of the Swedish and Finnish governments were not analogous was apparent to the most naive political observer. In May (not in July as the Finnish dispatch stated) at the height of the Narvik campaign, under pressure of a Nazi ultimatum the Swedish government reluctantly consented to permit the movement of German supplies and German wounded to and from northern Norway. The Norwegian roads were inaccessible at that time of the year and the coastal route was under the guns of the British navy, then in Norwegian territorial waters. In case of a refusal it was universally admitted that Sweden faced the risk of Nazi occupation. Finland's case was radically different from Sweden's. Having wrung transit facilities from Sweden the Nazis had no need of Finnish communications. Besides the Norwegian campaign was over. Britain could not spare any ships for the blockade of the coastal Narvik route which Germany preferred. But the most pertinent fact of all was that there were no intimations of a German ultimatum. Germany could not then have afforded to antagonize the Soviet Union or throw Finland into Soviet arms by hostile pressure. The first and only intimation of the passage of German troops through Finland came from the Finnish government and there were ample grounds for suspecting that it took the initiative in the negotiations which led to the "passage" of these troops.

Another dispatch from Helsinki stated that "German troops landed at Vasa, Finnish port on the Gulf of Bothnia. The number of German troops landed was not known,

## WHAT THE TROOPS MEAN

OUR article by Walter Broad had been in type for some time when the American press featured the *Pravda* dispatch reporting the arrival of some 12,000 fully armed German troops in Finnish ports. As our author indicates, these troop movements have been going on for some time and actually constitute an occupation of Finland.

The American press discusses these events in terms of Soviet-German relations. Some columnists speculate that the USSR is being outflanked in the north; some editors hold their breaths in the hope that Finland might become a scene of Soviet-German conflict. New MASSES has been pointing out to its readers the very real potentialities of worsening relations between the USSR and Germany in the Near East; but we would advise strongly against accepting the very simple interpretation of an imminent Soviet-German clash. Ribbentrop may again be circulating tales that Hitler would tackle the USSR in return for a truce with Churchill.

The chief immediate explanation for the Nazi troop arrivals seems to lie in the Finnish internal situation, as well as the relations between Finland and Sweden. In the past year, Finland has experienced a very acute political crisis—arising out of the problems of the disastrous adventure against the USSR. Last summer, the Society for Friendship with the Soviet Union made great gains in influence and membership. Even severe governmental repression was not able to stymie the growth in circulation of the left-wing press. Economic conditions are bad; there is no work for the loggers and paper mill workers; the farmers are suffering acutely while the news of reconstruction in the Karelo-Finnish Soviet Republic and the Baltic Soviet republics naturally makes a powerful impression. Moreover, the 280,000 people who were forcibly evacuated from their homes in the Karelian regions have been left stranded. The big landowners resist any thought of yielding their land. The aristocracy in Finland is Swedish, and has traditionally held the Karelians in contempt. Feeling itself insecure at home, the governing coalition has therefore steadily veered toward rapprochement with Germany; in part, that explains the arrival of Nazi troops. According to the Swedish Communist paper, *Ny Dag*, an effort is also being made to involve Sweden in a military alliance with Finland—under Hitler's auspices—the sort of alliance which the USSR strongly criticized when it was first proposed last spring. The most reactionary Swedish circles look favorably on the idea. But the main groups are wary, especially since in Sweden also, the working class, despite the Social-Democratic leadership, is stepping forth to demand friendly relations with the USSR.

but whatever the number it was reported they would be followed by others later." Strangely enough the German soldiers supposedly on leave from northern Norway were landing in Finnish ports and proceeding inland instead of embarking from them on the way home to Germany. Since then there have been continual reports from Scandinavia which indicated the Reichswehr had made quite a habit of "passing" through Finland. It seemed also that the Nazis made a habit of stopping on the way in such strategic places as Vasa, Rovaniemi, Ivalo, Tornea, and other places of recent fame where they were stationed in permanent barracks. These reports were lent more than a semblance of truth by an official statement of the Finnish government (*New York Times*, Sept. 29, 1940): "After the first seven shiploads of uniformed German soldiers debarked at Vasa to proceed north into Norway in virtue of the Finnish-German transit agreement, the Finnish government issued a decree proclaiming Abo, Vasa, Kemi, Uleaborg, and Tornea as prohibited areas, access to which henceforth will be possible only with special police permits." The dispatch points out that "the coastline from Abo to Tornea completely covers the Finnish side of the Gulf of Bothnia," and adds disingenuously that "Abo is forty miles from Hangoe, now an important Russian naval base."

It has remained for Ludwig Lore and the *New York Post*, both certainly no friends of the Soviet Union and no enemies of Finnish "democracy," to call public attention to the present plight of little Finland. Said Ludwig Lore in his *Post* column recently.

. . . it takes more than arms and physical endurance to resist the new aggressor who is slowly but persistently robbing the Finnish people of their hardwon freedom. It began when the Finnish government, yielding to Nazi threats, permitted German troops to pass through its land to Norway. Today, sailors returning from the ice free port of Petsamo report that the great Arctic highway which leads to that city from Rovaniemi, the northernmost railway station in Finland, is always crowded with German troops. German troops are stationed in Ivalo, the largest city in that district, and in the great winter sport hotel in Rovaniemi German officers are living a carefree life as they wait for developments on the northern front. The Finns themselves who live in that area are suffering real want. It is almost impossible to buy food anywhere. In Petsamo ships leaving for the United States are examined by German army inspectors. Passenger lists must be submitted to Nazi officials for approval. All over northern Finland the roads have German signposts.

Why the Finnish government, which was willing to sacrifice the lives of tens of thousands of Finnish workers and peasants to