

THE LITERARY DIGEST

May 12, 1923

THE RUSSIAN PRESS ON FAMINE CONDITIONS

INDIGNANT ACCUSATIONS OF TRICKERY in dealing with the grain supply, which have been launched against the Russian Soviet Government by American and European editors, who were amazed to find that Russia was exporting grain in the midst of a new famine, are not particularly noticed by the Moscow press, which, however, in such journals as the Moscow *Isviestia* and the *Economicheskaja Gizn* feature reports of starvation in the Volga provinces, in Southern Ukraine and in the Crimea. But a pro-Bolshevik Russian daily, which is published in Berlin, *The Nakanune*, informs the world that "it is only the surpluses of grain in provinces that have been free from famine which are being exported to foreign countries," and it adds that "the transportation of this stock to the famine-stricken areas is either impossible on account of numerous shipping difficulties, or because it would be disadvantageous to the State Treasury." This newspaper goes on to argue that it may be wiser to sell grain in foreign markets in order to import equivalent quantities by routes leading directly to the famine-stricken regions, than to attempt to ship it from one section of the enormous country of Russia to another over half-ruined railways.

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This argument is rejected, however, by anti-Bolshevik journals, which assert that grain is being exported simultaneously via Finland, the Baltic Sea and Black Sea ports, that is to say, along the only lines that can be used for its importation from abroad. "The grain is exported," says the Liberal *Poslednia Novosti*, (Paris) "not only from the central and the northern provinces, which are better off than the rest of the country, but also from the South, through Odessa and Rostof, that is to say, cities situated in the immediate neighborhood of the famine-stricken areas." The anti-Bolshevik democratic daily *Dni* (Berlin) goes further, asserting that no excuse can be found for the exportation of grain, even through the Baltic ports. Speaking about the arrival of the first steamers bringing grain from Russia to Kiel, this journal says:

"These 'surpluses' arrived from Petrograd, that is to say from the center of an area which, according to the Bolshevik sources, is confronted with the menace of famine and in which the price

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of grain increased by 530 per cent. in the course of the last five months. . . . The people of this area, which comprises the provinces of Petrograd, Novgorod, Tcherepovietzk and Pskof have been living since the fall of 1922 on bread made of 50 per cent. of different substitutes, the core of pine-trees included. Thus, the food conditions in this area are satisfactory only



inasmuch as its inhabitants do not eat one another, and the cases of death from starvation are numbered by the hundred instead of by the thousand."

Meanwhile, we learn from anti-Bolshevik writers, that the quantity of grain exported is not so small as to be without effect on the general food situation of the country. According to Soviet sources, it will reach in April about 20 million poods. A pood equals 36.07 pounds. Some of the responsible Soviet leaders themselves have realized that the exportation of such quantities of grain is wrong. Thus, for instance, Mr. N. Ossinsky, the Under Secretary for the Commissariat of Agriculture, stated on August 11, 1922, in the *Moscow Pravda*, that "in estimating the yield of crops for the current year we have been too optimistic. The reports on the condition of crops have brought about in the cities too hopeful expectations. Talk is being

heard about large exports of grain abroad. Calculations are being made as to how many hundred million poods of grain are available for the purpose of trade and how many tens or hundreds of millions of poods can be exported. Such ill-balanced optimism is entirely out of place. If next year we have good crops again, the export of grain will become possible, but at the present time we would be able to export only small quantities of grain for the purely demonstrative purpose of showing what Russia will be able to do in future, and nothing more."

We are told by the anti-Bolshevik writers that the quantities of grain actually exported from Russia can be considered in no way as "purely demonstrative." They are small as compared with Russia's pre-war exportations, but one must take into consideration the fact that the yield of crops was in 1922 also much smaller than the average pre-war yields. In the *Russian Economist Journal*, published in London by the Russian Economic Society, an attempt is made to estimate the total amount of grain produced last year by Russia. Basing its calculations on an exhaustive study of official Soviet statistics, this organ comes to the conclusion that the amount did not exceed 2 or 2.2 billion poods (a pood equaling 36.07 pounds) as against 3.7 or 3.8 billions of pre-war production on the same area. This means, it says, that Russia's population, in the course of the agricultural year 1922-1923, is short of from 540 to 740 million poods

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A GERMAN THRUST

"How Lenin and the Soviet Government ended the famine."

of grain. It is natural, we are told, that under these conditions the exportation of millions of poods abroad can not be without effect on such provinces as did not yield this year enough grain to keep their inhabitants alive.

The *Poslednia Novosti* (Paris) points out that, according to the Moscow *Isvestia* Mrs. Kamencff, who recently returned to Moscow from an extensive trip in Europe, stated in an official report to the Central Committee of the Russian Relief Administration that "public opinion in European countries is unwilling to support efforts to relieve the famine sufferers because information available in Europe with regard to food conditions in Russia is so confusing and contradictory." No wonder, says this journal of Professor Miliukoff, that Europe does not believe in the Russian famine since Russian grain has reappeared on the European markets. Meanwhile, the Samara correspondent of the Moscow *Isvestia* writes under date of February 15 as follows: "The relief work does not cover the immense grain needs of the population. We require a new and uninterrupted stream of relief resources. This will be, however, possible only in case every honest citizen says to himself: 'The famine and its consequences are not over. All resources must be mobilized in order to combat these disasters.'" Professor Miliukoff's newspaper believes that the exportation of grain and the statements to the effect that this year Russia has produced enough to feed her own population are the reasons why the relief work of foreign organization in Russia has dropt off. The paradoxical situation created by the exportation of grain from Russia is brought out by the *Rul* (March 17, 1923), a Russian Liberal daily, published in Berlin, which declares:

"From a business view-point things have come to absurdity. If grain is exported from, and at the same time imported by, different relief organizations into Russia, it is clear that money spent for transportation thereof is wasted uselessly. It would be simpler to buy grain destined for exportation from Russia from

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the Soviet Government before it has left the country and to ship it to the famine-stricken areas. In other words, a business-like solution of the question demands that money spent by philanthropic organizations should be sent directly to the Soviet Government, thus recompensing the latter for its consent not to deprive its own citizens of bread. . . . It is recognized by everybody, including the Soviet Government, that the economic degradation of the country is one of the main peculiarities of the Soviet régime. The sinking level of economics, education and administration can not accommodate the usual number of population; a part of it must either migrate from the country or die. Migration is impossible; so they must die. To this the Soviet Government has acquiesced long ago. . . . It is confronted with the problem of settling and fortifying itself on a lowered level, which includes also a decrease in the population. It is in keeping with these principles that it builds its schemes."

As was said above the Soviet press does not give any explanations with regard to the exportation of grain from Russia. But it is interesting to note that the Moscow *Isvestia* published lately a few articles trying, as it were, to ascribe the work of the American Relief Administration to considerations other than the charitable desire of the American people to relieve the Russian famine sufferers. Such, for instance, is an article by Mr. L. Krassin, the Commissary for Foreign Trade and the Commercial Representative of the Soviet Government in London, in which he says that the efforts displayed by the American Relief Administration in Russia have always been to his mind, "an inexplicable enigma." "It is true," he goes on, "that this enterprise might be explained with some probability by Mr. Hoover's desire to retard, by the exportation of certain quantities of American grain, the rapid decline of the prices of agricultural products in America, as well as to give some work to the American shipping and navigation companies, thus helping them to emerge from the crisis into which they were thrown by the war. But this is not sufficient to justify the interest displayed by America in Russia, the interest which found expression in the work of Hoover's organization and in the visits of some prominent Americans to Russia." In the rest of his article Mr. Krassin does not say one word of the relief work which is the main purpose of the American Relief Administration. Instead of this, he tries to prove that America is vitally interested, from a purely selfish view-point, in the restoration of Russia's normal agricultural production. A day will come, he contends, when the United States will become an industrial country par excellence and will need grain from outside. Russia is the only country which might supply it with cheap grain. Consequently, he asserts, Americans are bound to help Russia if they want to help themselves.

Meanwhile Moscow dispatches inform us that following a conference between Colonel William Haskell, head of the American Relief Administration in Russia, and his district superintendents, it is expected that this American organization will withdraw from Russia. As quoted by one correspondent, Colonel Haskell said: "We came here to feed the people, not for politics, and now that our job is done, we will go." Colonel Haskell explained to the newspaper men that after spending some \$70,000,000 in Russia the Relief Administration finds that the famine is over and there is no reason to return. Furthermore, it is stated that the Soviet Government has confiscated church treasures of the net value of about \$5,000,000, and the purpose in seizing these was announced to be famine relief. Colonel Haskell also declared that the Russian crop prospects are excellent, and that the Soviet Government is selling wheat abroad.

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Serge Ivanoff

A HOME SCENE IN SOVIET RUSSIA

"All the other members of the humble household are dead."

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