

HATCHING A WAR WITH RUSSIA

By W. N. EWER

THE "July days" of Anglo-Soviet crisis are over. There is even a theory abroad that there never was a crisis at all: that it was all begotten of nervousness and quick suspicion: that there never was any idea in the Cabinet or the Foreign Office of breaking off relations, or even of sending a "stern" note, on the Curzonian model, to Moscow.

Now in that theory, which of course has the official blessing, there is this amount of truth—that the July crisis was not in fact premeditated by the Foreign Office, nor did it ever develop to a really dangerous stage. It was premature and, therefore, abortive. The hot-heads of the Government forced it into existence, to the considerable annoyance of the cool-headed diplomats who are playing a longer and more cautious game. The recklessness of Lord Birkenhead and the stupidity of Sir William Joynson-Hicks inflamed Tory passions. The whole pack went baying and snarling on the trail. And the huntsmen had much ado to bring them to heel before they had (let the metaphors remain mixed) completely spoiled the game.

Their outbreak has been valuable. For it has served to give the whole Labour movement a sharp warning that there is danger ahead, and that at any moment the real crisis may be upon us.

Even those who doubted before can now see plainly that Anglo-Soviet relations are suffering from an acute intermittent fever, in which crisis will inevitably follow crisis, and in which any crisis may prove fatal. The tiding over of one, of two, of three, may be necessary. But it cannot be sufficient. The danger will be there so long as the abnormal and unhealthy condition remains.

Anglo-Soviet relations remind one ominously of Anglo-German relations in the years between 1904 and 1914. Then as now crisis followed on crisis (Casablanca, Bosnia, Agadir). Then, as now, in the intervals there was a continual and ubiquitous diplomatic conflict. Then, as now, there was snarling and suspicion and

a constant Press propaganda of hatred. Then, as now, the soldiers and sailors quietly got ready for the war which the diplomats were preparing.

But Anglo-German relations in those years of preparation were never so bad as Anglo-Russian relations now. Then at least the outward decencies were preserved ; diplomatic relations were normal and courteous ; there were even attempts, though abortive attempts, to reach an understanding on some of the points of conflict.

But to-day Ministers make no effort to conceal their bitter hatred of the Soviet Republic. The firebrands hurl insults from the platform which are without parallel in the history of international relations. The Foreign Secretary himself rarely mentions Russia—if it is only in answering a Parliamentary question—without a sneer or a taunt. His tone, as Mr. Ponsonby says, “has been always one of studied disdainful indifference and hardly concealed unfriendliness.” His whole demeanour is one of deliberate provocation.

There are difficult questions to be solved between the two countries. There is—for geographical reasons which caused trouble long before the Revolution—always risk of a clash of interest or of objective between the two great Asiatic powers. But the existence of these difficulties and of these risks is exactly the reason why diplomacy should be exerting every effort to smooth over the one and to avert the other. Precisely for this reason there should be close and cordial co-operation in seeking for ways and means of agreement, of understanding, where necessary of compromise.

The really dangerous thing is that British diplomacy is deliberately banging, barring and bolting the door on every possibility of an understanding. It is loud in complaints and accusations. But it refuses to negotiate or even to discuss its grievances. It is impossible to resist the deduction that it is deliberately keeping those grievances in being as a pretext for making trouble when the chosen moment comes.

Let one example, and the most serious, suffice—the question of propaganda. The accusations are as continual as they are vague. Ministers allege that they have ample evidence of Soviet propaganda—in breach of the Trade Agreement undertakings—in

Great Britain, in India, in China, all over the world. Mr. Chamberlain has even officially declared in the House of Commons that the Soviet Government is not keeping its pledges.

Now I suspect that in fact they have no such evidence at all—of a kind that they would dare submit to an arbitrator. They have no doubt a plentiful supply of documents which they know perfectly well to be forged. They have, perhaps, some which they optimistically think may be genuine. They may pretend that for Karakhan to sympathise with the victims of the rifles of the Shanghai police is anti-British propaganda, or that for Russia to sell aeroplanes to an independent State like Afghanistan is an infringement of British Imperial interests (while, of course, if Russians object to Britain selling arms to the Baltic States that is equally an indication of bad faith and sinister intention). But, if this is all they have it is a monstrous thing that on such flimsy grounds they should publicly accuse a supposedly friendly government of violating its treaty undertakings.

But suppose that this is not all. Suppose that they have, or honestly believe that they have, genuine evidence of the complicity of the Soviet Government in anti-British propaganda within the meaning of the provisions of the Trade Agreement. What then?

If the Government of this country believes that it, or its nationals, have ground for complaint against the Government of any other State than the Soviet Union, the diplomats at once get busy. They make friendly representations. They discuss the matter with the ambassador or minister of the other State. They make every effort to remove any misunderstanding. They jointly investigate the complaints and search for a solution of the difficulties.

The seizure of British ships by American prohibition-cruisers is an instance that comes at once to mind. There was no flinging about of hot words, no bandying of insults, no waving of the flag, no talk of ultimatums. The matter was quietly settled by amicable discussion—because there was the will to settle.

But there is no will to settle with Russia. The Government does not want to stop propaganda : it wants to use the accusation of propaganda as a political weapon.

Therefore, while it makes loud public complaint, it does not lift a little finger to get its grievances remedied.

The promise was made, after the 1923 crisis, that, if there was any further ground for complaint, it should be brought in friendly conversation to the notice of the Soviet representative, with a view to an amicable arrangement.

That promise has not been kept. Ministers swear that they have evidence of violations of the agreement. Their complaint should be made, not clamorously from the housetops, but quietly to Mr. Rakovsky. But this is not done.

This is, of course, a breach not only of the understanding of 1923 but of the spirit of the provision of the Trade Agreement which lays down that in the event of either party believing that the propaganda provisions have been infringed, "the aggrieved party shall give the other party a reasonable opportunity of furnishing an explanation."

No such opportunity is given. No definite charge is made. "I cannot think," says Mr. Chamberlain in the House, "that I am called upon to give details of particular occasions." "We never give positive proof. Why should we?" says his Under-Secretary.

It is a remarkable point of view. Here we have the two responsible Ministers deliberately and publicly making the gravest charges against a Government with which our relations are supposed to be friendly and then blandly declaring that they have not the slightest intention of producing the smallest scrap of evidence in support of their statements. One must conclude either that they are off their heads or that they are deliberately endeavouring to foment a quarrel, that the British Government does not want normal relations to be established, does not want misunderstandings to be removed, does not want grievances to be redressed. One may add that its use of passport regulations to sabotage the work of the Russian commercial organisations, and its obstinate refusal to include Russia in the scope of the Export Credits scheme, suggest that it does not want Anglo-Russian trade to develop. Mr. McNeill's speech in the House last month is a strong confirmation of this.

The whole attitude of the Government in fact makes it clear that British diplomacy is directing its energies not to improving relations between the two countries, but to preparing for an open

rupture. Grievances are being accumulated in order that they may be produced at the chosen moment in justification of some aggressive action.

But, comes the obvious question, if the Foreign Office is working for a break why did it hang back in July when the firebrands of the Cabinet were clamouring for a bag and baggage expulsion of Rakovsky and all his colleagues ?

The answer is as plain as the question was obvious. The Foreign Office hung back because—even apart from the Labour opposition at home—it did not consider the moment opportune. Action was counted premature, because the diplomatic preparations were not complete.

It is the wise tradition of British diplomacy to furnish itself with allies before embarking on open conflict with a rival. And it is now the primary—but as yet uncompleted—task of our diplomats to build up a formidable combination against Russia as an essential preliminary to a rupture. That is in this case a doubly necessary precaution. For a single-handed break with Russia would merely have the effect of transferring to Berlin or Paris, to Milan or New York a great block of Russian trade now done with London. It would damage Great Britain far more than it would damage Russia. But if all the big industrial powers broke off relations simultaneously, Russia's foreign trade would be strangled, a blockade would be automatically established, and none of our trade rivals would be able to pick up the commerce which we should be deliberately sacrificing.

Therefore the purpose of British diplomacy is, before forcing a rupture with Russia, to align against her all, or as many as possible of the Powers, to break down her friendships, to strengthen all elements hostile to her, to isolate her and expose her to an encircling attack. Given the premises, such a policy is the merest common sense.

Challenged, the Government will, of course, deny that any such policy is being pursued. But that denial will meet with polite incredulity in every Chancellery in Europe. From Rome to Reval, every diplomat, in his calculations, assumes as axiomatic that British policy in 1925 is as definitely motivated and shaped by hostility to the Soviet Union as it was motivated and shaped, in the

years before 1914, by rivalry with Germany. And the majority take it more or less for granted that the result will be the same.

Twice Mr. Chamberlain has made direct and rather crude attempts at securing joint action by the Allied Powers against Russia. The first was at the Rome meeting last December, the second was that pretty plan (of which its authors were singularly proud) of a joint demand for the expulsion of the Comintern headquarters from Moscow. Each broke down because of the reluctance of France and the definite opposition of Italy.

The next step was the Pact proposal, emanating from Berlin, but inspired from Downing Street.

Its ostensible purpose is to restore peace to Western Europe. Its real purpose in the eyes of Downing Street is to separate Russia from Germany, to destroy the work done at Rapallo, to isolate the Soviet Government in Europe. That, at any rate, is the view of the Quai d'Orsay, of the Wilhelmstrasse, of the Belvedere, of the Consulta, as well as of the Kuznetsky Most.

It is a view which constantly finds expression in the European Press.

"The anti-Soviet bloc of which the London Cabinet is thinking must include Germany if it is to be complete," says the *Action Française*, "that is the real meaning of the Pact, its secret and profound *raison d'être*."

"British policy," says the *Gazeta Warszawska*, "is directed by the clearly established tendency to align Germany against Russia. The struggle over the Pact is, for England, a war against the Treaty of Rapallo."

"England's plan," says the *Vossische Zeitung*, "is to cast a ring round Moscow from the Baltic to the Black Sea."

These are representative extracts, which could be duplicated over and over again. It is only in England that the British Government's professions of single-minded concern for the peace of Europe are taken seriously.

Now the Pact plan, which seemed so simple in the conception, is proving unexpectedly difficult in the working out. For Germany—as the Poles warned Mr. Chamberlain at the very beginning—wants a high price for her complaisance. And that high price, if paid at the expense of France and Poland (and the Foreign Office

is a firm believer in vicarious sacrifice), may forfeit the co-operation of those two very essential Powers. At the time at which I write M. Briand is calmly suggesting to Mr. Chamberlain that if France is to take a hand against Russia, Great Britain must accept in its entirety the French thesis on the Pact; while Mr. Chamberlain realises uneasily that if he does this bang goes his hope of roping-in Germany and breaking the Rapallo understanding. Coalition building is a hard task and the Governments of Europe show a most reprehensible disinclination to subordinate their own purposes to the requirements of Great Britain's Imperial policy.

The small Powers have been as troublesome as the large. As a complement to the Big Power group, Mr. Chamberlain has worked energetically, if unimaginatively, for the re-establishment of Clemenceau's *cordon sanitaire*, for an alliance of those border states, which by closing their frontiers could, with the aid of the British fleet, shut down a *de facto* blockade on the Soviet Union, and which are the natural and, indeed, only bases from which to conduct hostile operations in Europe for the weakening of Russia in Asia.

The reluctance of Poland, for various reasons, to enter into the scheme broke it into two halves. And British diplomacy, weak at Warsaw, has been driven to conduct separate campaigns in the Balkans and in the Baltic.

Neither, so far, has been over-successful. Every attempt to bring about a Balkan entente has broken down on the Macedonian question. Both the Serbian and the Bulgarian Governments are willing enough to gain sympathy and support from Downing Street by talking enthusiastically about the fight against Communism. But neither of them is in the least prepared to shake hands with the other.

The Bulgarian Government damns the Agrarians as "tools of Belgrade" and is far more afraid of Serbian than of Soviet conspiracies. The Serbian Government says that the first step to an Entente must be the suppression of the Macedonian organisation—everybody, of course, knowing perfectly well that if the wretched Tsankoff did try to suppress Messrs. Protogueroff and Co, "the horse would blow first." The Serbo-Greek squabble over Salonica, Rumano-Bulgar troubles over the Dobrudja, the hatred of the

Rumanian royal family for the Greek Republic, all add to the complexities of a situation in which Mr. Chamberlain's diplomatists flounder rather helplessly.

Therefore it is that, rather despairing of the Balkans, where even the Sofia Cathedral outrage failed to secure the desired solidarity—most Bulgarians obstinately regarding it still as inspired not from Moscow but from Belgrade—Downing Street has tended of late to concentrate its attention rather on the Baltic.

Finland, Esthonia, Latvia, Lithuania. Here was an excellent opportunity for an able diplomacy.

With Esthonia and Latvia the game was comparatively simple. Financially they are already under British influence. Psychologically their Governments are conscious of instability, intensely afraid of their powerful neighbour. If England would guarantee their frontiers against invasion and their institutions against revolution, if she would be lenient in the matter of their debts, obliging in the matter of new loans, if she would furnish them with plenty of munitions, if she would spend money lavishly on a new naval base at the entrance to the Gulf of Finland, why then the Esthonian and Latvian Governments were prepared to be Mr. Chamberlain's obedient servants.

So far so good. But the Baltic plan needs more than Esthonia and Latvia. Alone they would be no asset but a big liability. For a Baltic bloc to be adequately troublesome to Russia it must include at least Lithuania and Finland—with, if possible, the Scandinavian countries in reserve behind Finland.

Now the luring of the Scandinavian countries has proved more difficult than was foreseen. Finland will take no risks unless assured of complete and effective support from Sweden. And Lithuania, considerably to the annoyance of the Foreign Office, is definitely unwilling to take her place in the ranks of an anti-Soviet combination. At an adequate price she might do so. But the price would be Vilna. And that—given the relationship of Britain to France and of France to Poland—is wildly out of the question. The naïve idea—emanating either from Downing Street or from the British Embassy in Berlin—that Poland might cede the Danzig corridor to Germany and Vilna to Lithuania in exchange for Memel has been laughed out of court.

Therefore—as M. Meirowicz, making a virtue of necessity, has hastened to assure the Warsaw press—an Esthonian-Latvian-Lithuanian combination is out of the question for the moment. The hope that by dropping Lithuania Poland may be brought into the combination is a faint one. Mr. Chamberlain is left with Esthonia, Latvia and a dubious Finland.

That, and a Pact negotiation whose issue is still on the laps of the gods is, so far, the net result of nine months' diplomatic intrigue in Europe. Not, on the whole, a creditable performance, even when one takes full account of the difficulties..

Simultaneously with the European policy, the Asiatic policy of the British Government has, of course, been directed to the same end. China is far too big a subject to be discussed here and now : but the anti-Soviet inspiration in our policy is obvious at every turn. In Persia there has been considerable success. The Government and the Anglo-Persian Oil Company between them have secured an ascendancy at Teheran which is very notable. To achieve that ascendancy we have ruthlessly sacrificed our "faithful ally" the Sheikh of Muhammarah, who has lost his power and is likely at any moment to lose his life. In Afghanistan we have been far less successful. The Amir has not forgotten 1919. As to Iraq and the Mosul problem, it would be foolish to attempt to foretell the issue of this month's intriguing at Geneva. But one may note that the British claim for a military foothold in the Hakkari mountains is motivated by strategic considerations which are concerned with the probabilities not of a Turkish but of a Russian war. It is the old problem of North Western India—the search for a "scientific frontier," not against the immediate neighbour, but against the Great Power whose borders are only a hundred miles or so to the north.

Search British policy where you will—in China or in Mesopotamia, in the Balkans or on the Rhine—its guiding motive is the same, preparation for a struggle with Soviet Russia. The diplomats seek to isolate the enemy and to build coalitions against her. The soldiers prepare "scientific frontiers." The sailors look for naval bases—the Aaland Islands or Oesel in the Baltic, Constanza or Mangalia in the Black Sea. (The new cruisers are of the precise tonnage—10,000 tons—allowed in the Black Sea under the

Straits Convention.) The politicians keep up an incessant propaganda of hate.

The portents are plain to read, as plain as—*mutatis mutandis*—they were in the days of Agadir or the Bosnian crisis. Imperialist Britain is getting ready for a fight to the death with Soviet Russia. That fight will come, maybe next year, maybe the year after, maybe the year after that, but quite certainly and inevitably, unless in the meantime Imperialist Britain becomes Workers' Britain.

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Our Reprints

We remind our readers of the pamphlets that we issue from time to time as reprints from our pages. These include "The Diplomacy of Mr. Ramsay MacDonald," by U.D.C. (Threepence), "Problems of the Labour Movement," by P. BRAUN (Twopence), "The Burning Question of International Unity," by A. A. PURCELL (One Penny), and "Face-Pidgin: the Chinese Struggle," by TIEN SEN SHIAO.

THE EMPIRE LABOUR CONFERENCE

By MAURICE SPECTOR

THEY called it the " Commonwealth " Labour Conference on the principle of the clever ostrich which sticks its head into the sand and believes its pursuers outwitted. But an Empire, five-sixths of whose inhabitants are subject to capitalist exploitation, and which is maintained by sheer military coercion, does not become a " commonwealth " by a little sleight of hand. This initial camouflage was bound to set its imprint of insincerity on everything that followed, atmosphere, agenda and proceedings. Invitations to participate in the Conference had only been sent to the " kosher " Labour parties of the Empire, of course. But in case some black left-wing sheep should manage to be on the delegations nevertheless, due measures were taken to prevent any unpleasant publicity. It was decided that only the Chairman's address, from day to day, would be made public; the rest of the proceedings were shrouded in diplomatic secrecy. At the end of each session a sterilised official report covering about two foolscap pages was issued, containing nothing that could hurt the feelings, say, of the Royal Family. Finally it was decided that no resolutions should be passed.

The Conference was a hang-over from the days of the Labour Government and its policy of Continuity. It was conceived to demonstrate to the British bourgeoisie that Labour was quite as safely imperialistic (and " fit to govern ") as the Tories, only more so—and to mobilise Labour opinion in the Dominions for the imperial, foreign, and war-policies of the Labour Government. Provincials far-removed from the metropolis and Real-Politik are notoriously backward and it would be embarrassing for the Ramsay MacDonalds to have Labour in the Dominions take their professions of " pacifism " seriously. In his key-note speech welcoming the delegates, MacDonald made all this quite clear. " There seems to be an assumption in this country," he declared, " that the Tory Party, the party of Reaction, is the only party that cares anything