

EN ROUTE TO THE URALS. II

BY GEORG CLEINOW

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(BERLIN STINNES DAILY)

ON Tuesday, September 12, at eight o'clock in the morning, the Fiodor moored at Kosmodemiansk, the principal river-town in the 'Autonomous Cheremiss Territory'; the same noon we stopped at Cheboxary, the capital of the 'Autonomous Chuvash Territory'; and shortly before midnight we reached Kazan, the capital of the 'Autonomous Tatar Socialist Soviet Republic.' All day long, therefore, we were traveling through Federated States of the Russian Socialist Federated Republic.

I must confess that, if I had not had a political map of new Russia lying on the table before me, I should hardly have known that these new political entities existed. All Russia, including the steamer Fiodor, was full of Tatars. I could tell the Cheremisses and the Chuvashes by the finely embroidered headdresses of the women and the remarkable beauty of the children. But that exhausted their political differences as far as I observed. Everybody talked Russian. Coachmen and peasants abused each other in Russian.

Except for the Tatars, who are Mohammedans, all are Christians who wear a cross hanging from a little ribbon around their necks, and make the sign of a cross every time a church spire appears in the distance. Naturally these little formalities do not prevent many from clinging to their heathen superstitions and even from belonging to secret sects formerly persecuted by the Government.

Externally Kosmodemiansk and Che-

boxary, with their sixteen and fourteen Russian churches respectively and their Russian signs, produce exactly the impression of any small Russian town. Their location on the lofty banks of the Volga, and the fertile, thickly settled districts that lie behind them, give both some importance as commercial centres. The freedom their inhabitants enjoy to work out their own fortunes, unhampered by Church and police, may eventually give birth to intellectual and literary interests. But as yet the people are fully occupied with their primitive trade in country produce, and nationalist and linguistic movements amount to little.

To judge from what we could see of the labor and life along the shore, the country was sound and prosperous. The inhabitants looked well fed and well clad in their linen smocks. At every landing was a crowd of vendors, eager to sell us produce of the country, especially apples. We saw everywhere long columns of peasant carts hauling grain to the Government tax-depositories. On the river we passed many peasants rowing or towing little boats of apples to the nearest market. There are no local handicrafts as far as we could discover. No one tried to sell us leather goods, carvings, basketry, or linens. In fact the country is still exhausted by the World War, the civil war, and the drought. What we saw was the first stir of reviving prosperity following a good harvest.

One result of the general neglect of public services since 1914 is the danger-

ous condition of the channel. During the night we grounded twice, and I could hear the sailors calling the soundings for hour after hour. On several occasions we passed steamers that were stuck fast, among them the *Leo Trotskii*, which naturally made an opening for bantering comments. The *Alexandr Griboedov*, which was preceding us, delayed us for almost two hours by grounding in a narrows. We passed steamboats, sailboats, and barges stranded on the bars, which had been completely plundered by river robbers. During our whole trip from Nizhni to Kazan, nearly eight hundred miles, I saw only two barges in actual service, although two hundred might well be employed.

But the decline of the Volga river traffic is not important until the tributary territory has a surplus to ship. Four fifths of the Volga steamers are laid up not so much for want of repairs as for want of freight, and the number of sailboats and barges in use is only five per cent of what it was in 1914. During the summer and autumn of 1922 no boats were operated on the tributaries to the Volga; not even on the *Vetluga*, a river that serves as the outlet for one third of *Viatka* Government. Instead of the twenty large steamers that used to leave Nizhni daily and the twenty that arrived daily at that city, there are only four at present. Between Nizhni and Kazan the decline in traffic is not so noticeable, because Nizhni still has some trade as a transshipping point and because there are no large industries along this portion of the river. Where there were once manufacturing establishments, as for instance at *Gorodets*, the state of ruin is much more obvious.

During our passage through the *Tatar Republic* I was vividly reminded of a bit of advice that *Karl Radek* gave me last February when I started on

my first trip to Soviet Russia. He said:—

‘Don’t go around questioning educated people. Read our newspapers, and when you find something you want to know more about ask one of our leading Communists, or, better still, go and see for yourself. Other people do not understand us. Even our old comrades, who left us in 1917, do not understand us. Otherwise they would not have left us. You cannot make revolutions with kid gloves on.’

I had my own idea of *Radek’s* advice at the time, and did not follow it. I asked questions everywhere. But I must acknowledge that *Radek* was right. It is no use seeking information concerning conditions and institutions from a man who is utterly opposed to them or who is a failure under them. The tragedy of the Russian intelligentsia lies in the fact that they were too weak to control and guide the *Bolsheviks*, and that they cannot understand them. I met a few exceptions among the highly educated classes — men who were not Communists, but who were devoting themselves with self-sacrificing loyalty to the service of their people under the conditions that fate imposed upon them. They talked objectively and dispassionately of Russia’s condition. In one case an eminent economist defended many *Bolshevist* policies, and explained why they were necessary and wise under existing circumstances. But when I asked his permission to quote him in my letters, and urged that this would help to conciliate all sections in Russia and strengthen confidence in the Soviet Government in Germany, he indignantly refused, saying: ‘I would not help the . . .’

A reader will readily see how such experiences — and I might multiply them — confuse the visitor; how hard it is to get at the facts when you do not share the faith of the Communists and

yet are forced against your will to admire the vigor with which the Soviet Government runs the community. What is the source of this vitality? It cannot possibly be the terror — mere intimidation. The people I see throughout these broad territories are altogether too free and self-assertive for that. My conversations with the people on the steamer related to everyday matters like taxes, housing conditions, and crops, and gave me little cue to the real sentiment; for it is hard to form opinions from such a tangle of detail. So I decided to land at Kazan, where we were to stop about four hours, and talk with some chance acquaintance there.

I hired a coachman who for three hours drove me about the city, which was slumbering under the starry night. He was a shrewd old Tatar. He refused a drink of excellent brandy that I offered him, but deigned to tell me the story of his life. He was a so-called 'baptized' Tatar, which means that his parents sold him to a Russian missionary for a few rubles when he was fourteen years old — sold him and his soul. He summed up his religion in the statement: 'Either there is one God or no God. Only those people know life who believe in one God. The Russians are fools, or else they are deceivers who think other people fools. *Och, arina, kakia arina!*'

I could not understand until he explained that he was calling the Russians 'stupid beasts.' *Arina* is the word the invading Tatars applied to the Votyaks when they first poured over the Urals eight or nine centuries ago. The Votyaks were forest nomads and hunters, and the Tatars looked down upon them. To-day *arina* has come to be, in the Tatar language, an expression of unfathomable contempt.

My coachman despised the Russians because they worship holy pictures.

When I asked him if he believed in God, he answered that he was a Socialist; and when I asked if things were better under Socialism than in the old days, he replied: —

'It will be better. Every man can believe what he wants to, and what seems best to him. The wisest men will rule, no matter what their race, instead of the stupid who ruled us before.'

The last comment expressed his opinion of the men who led Russia into the war. This old Tatar praised the Soviet Government chiefly because it was trying to educate the masses to have opinions of their own. I objected: 'But they have ruined trade and destroyed the merchants.'

'No matter,' he replied. 'New merchants will come, who will make money not only for themselves but also for other people who do not know how to make money.'

His primitive Socialism was combined with a shrewd understanding of leading local characters. He praised highly a Tatar wholesale merchant whose name I have forgotten, and a certain Russian, Stahiev, who used their money for the benefit of the community.

Stahiev hated foreigners. Indeed the common people had such a violent hatred for 'foreigners' after the war that they have even burned their beehives when they raided their estates. When I cautiously asked who was responsible for the devastation at Kazan, my driver replied: 'The Russians.'

'So?' I said. 'The Bolsheviki?'

'No, our Soviet consists entirely of Tatars. It was the generals who destroyed Kazan. If it had not been for the generals, we should have gotten along much better.'

On the whole it was an interesting conversation. I sat on the driver's seat beside the dirty old Tatar, and we

talked about Germany, the war, and the condition of the laboring people, while his horse picked his way leisurely over the broken pavements. The starlight from a cloudless heaven shed a faint radiance over the city. My old driver had a sense of beauty and pointed out to me with appreciation the finer views, the old churches with their sparkling domes, and the mosques.

Kazan lies upon several hills, so hidden that the town is not visible from the Volga. Therefore the effect was very impressive when we reached the first heights above the river and caught sight of the broad expanse of black gardens, white walls, green roofs, and gold and silver domes, extending into the unknown reaches of the night beyond.

WILL YOU HAVE ANOTHER HEAD?

BY X. Y. Z.

[The recent successful transplanting of insects' heads, reported from Vienna, which we noticed in the Living Age of January 20, naturally proves irresistible material for the satirist.]

From *Pester Lloyd*, February 2

(BUDAPEST GERMAN-HUNGARIAN DAILY)

HE was one of the stupidest ward politicians in Central Europe. I should say the stupidest in the profession, were there not so many rivals for that honor. I grant him this, however: he was vaguely conscious of his deficiencies, although he was far from realizing what a paragon he was in every field of ignorance. He could make speeches that won the ready plaudits of the mob, and was an adept at ringing the changes on the well-worn slogans of politicians; but neither faculty showed powers above those of a well-trained parrot. He merely repeated by rote sentences that he had heard from others, and aped the gestures of more graceful men. He had an uncanny knack for following the crowd, and, with incomparable laxity of principles, he espoused any cause that promised profit. Yesterday he was a passionate Communist; to-day he is an inflexible reactionary.

Finally, however, familiar political phrases and methods began to pall upon him, and he was dimly conscious of a craving for something new. His friends seriously disapproved this tendency, and when rumor got about that the unhappy fellow was trying to learn something and to circulate some new idea, he discovered for the first time what an asset stupidity is in some careers.

None the less, being an obstinate fellow when once started, he decided to persevere and at least to acquire a little education. This was the situation when one day a serious, long-haired, solemn-looking individual in spectacles called upon him and said:

'I have been following your public career with attention for a long time. I know that you never went to school—'

'I was graduated with credit from