

USING RUSSIA AS A CLUB

Teutons Hope to Force the Entente to Enter Negotiations.

THREATEN IF REFUSED

Should Russia Then Agree to Separate Peace Foe Would Occupy Strategic Cities.

PETROGRAD CAN'T DICTATE

Bolshevist Rule Has Ended the Capital's Right to Speak for Russia.

BY HAROLD WILLIAMS.

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Special Cable to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

PETROGRAD, Dec. 26.—Announcement was made this evening in the Soviet of the results of the peace negotiations up to date.

Count Czernin, the Austrian Foreign Minister, accepted the Russian terms in principle. That is, he agreed to no annexations. Self-determination of nationalities he admitted only in regard to occupied territories, but with regard to internal nationalities, he said, they must be guided by the Constitution of the States to which they belonged.

He agreed to no indemnities, but disagreed with reparation, though he vaguely admitted the possibility of an international reparation fund, each belligerent power to pay for the upkeep of its own prisoners, which comes heaviest on Russia.

Count Czernin professed no great anxiety for a separate peace with Russia, and from the trend of all the conversations it is evident that the enemy only look on negotiations as a means to opening up intercourse with the Allies, with the object of securing a general peace. As if in anticipation of this, the German delegates insisted very strongly that they must have their colonies back, and would not admit the idea of a referendum among the natives, who, they said, had shown by their stubborn fighting their loyalty to Germany.

The Russian delegates agreed that Germany ought to recover her colonies, but did not seem impressed by the argument of the natives' loyalty.

M. Joffe, head of the Russian delegation, made a speech, thanking the Germans and Austrians for their attitude, and the conference adjourned until Jan. 8.

According to newspaper rumors, the situation is rather more complicated. The Germans insist on the Russians acting as intermediaries, with the object of compelling the Allies to join in the negotiations, while in the event of the Allies refusing and a separate peace being concluded with Russia the Germans would occupy strategic points in the Russian theatre of war as a guarantee.

Petrograd Seethes with Plots.

Petrograd is certainly the most interesting town in Russia now. It is seething with plots and counterplots, real and fictitious, with big and little comedies and tragedies, with turbulent passions that as often as not suddenly evaporate into chilly nothingness, the psychological vacuum familiar to readers of Dostolevsky's novels.

But that is not the immediately important fact about Petrograd. Of much more permanent importance is the fact that for Russia as a whole the spell of Petrograd is broken.

Under the bureaucracy Russia was highly centralized. All the vast spaces between the Baltic, the Black Sea, and the Northern Pacific were absolutely dependent on Petrograd. It was the keystone of the empire. Its fiat was law. It reduced the rest of Russia to its will.

It aimed to mold all the infinite variety of Russia after the chosen bureaucratic archetype, and to a large extent it succeeded. Petrograd was the capital. All the rest of Russia, including even Moscow, despite its protests, was provincial. Possession of Petrograd meant the possession of Russia.

That was why the Petrograd revolution, immediately became the all-Russian revolution. The changing moods in Petrograd have continually received belated reflection in the changing moods of Russia, but the eccentricities of Petrograd during the revolution had an unsettling effect. The provinces could not keep pace with the vagaries of the capital, and when finally the Bolsheviks captured Petrograd the situation was suddenly changed.

Capital's Spell Is Broken.

The spell of Petrograd was broken. Petrograd ceased to represent and command Russia as a whole and there began a wholly new process, the formation of local centres independent of the capital.

This is one of the results of the Bolshevik rule. Whether in effecting this the Bolsheviks have done Russia a service or disservice, whether they have only precipitated an inevitable process or whether they are ruining Russia we shall see later. I doubt the latter.

It is altogether early to judge the work of Lenine and Trotzky, those fantastic products of the underworld of our civilization. When the smoke, confusion, and passion of the conflict have cleared

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away, it is quite possible that we shall discover that their reckless iconoclasm, highly uncomfortable as it is for their contemporaries, has swept away much of the decaying inheritance of the past that was in any case doomed, sooner or later, to extinction. Anyhow, I should like to insist on a fact which is essential to the true and practical view of the present state of Russia that Petrograd no longer represents the whole country, that Russia is already decentralized.

The Bolsheviki alone claim authority over the whole of Russia, though now they are showing a tendency to admit the independence of Ukraine. As to a rupture of Ukraine with the Bolsheviki and its alliance with the Cossacks, neither is as yet absolutely definite and a formal demarkation of frontiers is not complete.

In the territory of each embryo State there are many alien areas, frequently in the form of insubordinate garrisons, Bolshevist or Ukrainian, as the case may be. There are secluded areas, too, that have attracted the attention of no authority and live their own placid, self-contained life outside the hurly-burly.

But generally speaking all these States are falling into a certain system of which the principal manifestation is that the loose Southern confederation is in a state of guerilla warfare with that shifting quantity, the Bolshevist north. It is true the transition from centralism to independent local organisms is not made so easy. Tradition and the habit of centralism with all its concrete forms is not to be broken in a day.

In Petrograd are still collected the chief central institutions, the Senate, the State Bank, and the foreign embassies. But the functions of most of these are paralyzed by the Bolshevist rule and their action is suspended. The Senate, like all the law courts, is driven underground for self-preservation. The Ministries are on strike, and as for the State Bank, as far as the Bolsheviki are able to operate it, it is serving local purposes, and the Ukrainians have been compelled to begin the issue of paper money of their own.

Assembly's Force Paralyzed.

There is a simmering attempt at re-centralization in the form of a constituent assembly, whose members are gradually assembling in Petrograd and around which agitation is growing. But the working of the Constituent Assembly is also paralysed by the Bolsheviki, and it is a question whether, even when it does ultimately meet, it will wish or try to reverse the process of decentralization. At most it will serve as a co-ordinating factor.

This, then, is the present position. It is full of extraordinary possibilities, Russian and international. It does not mean the ruin of Russia, but may, very probably, mean the recuperation and the more effective distribution of her forces, not for war, because Russia has practically ceased to be a military force in war, but for the very multifarious political developments in that new historical phase into which the war, in a sense, broader than that of a mere military contest, is now developing.

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