

CURRENT OPINION

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Lenin and the Famine

A FAMINE was the last thing Lenin could afford, as he is sarcastically reminded by the *Vienna Neue Freie Presse*. Wholesale executions, the failure of communism, a wrecked diplomacy, misery in the cities—these were not pleasant, but they did not affect the personal prestige of Lenin with the peasants. But the peasant is chagrined to find that the man to whom he looked with such hope has allowed universal hunger to fill the pockets of the foreigner. The peasant in Russia can get no benefit from the demand for food because he has scarcely enough food for his own needs. The foundation of Lenin's power, his prestige with the rural community in Russia proper, has been shaken.

An exodus set in from the small Russian towns as long ago as last June. By July millions were in flight. A first impression that the tales were exaggerated is not borne out by the reports of the Vienna dailies; gathered with care. In Russia Nature herself seems to have gone dry. Great seams were opened in the earth. The streams became corduroy roads. Had there been an adequate system of transportation, food might have been rushed in from Siberia. A Moscow daily said last July that a million people were in flight across the face of the country, that other thousands were dying of cholera or of the maladies induced by chronic hunger. The little holdings of the peasant farmer were swept by the hordes as if a swarm of locusts had passed by. Here is a picture in the *London Nation* from the pen of a writer who witnessed much of what he describes and who has first-hand information regarding the rest:

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"The crops were thin, and the straw was sometimes barely two feet high. The peat in the dry bogs caught fire, and once from a low hill we saw at night ten several forest fires blazing at once. Hay was so scarce that the peasants were slaughtering their flocks, and the grain harvest in Central Russia was barely 40 per cent. of the normal. The result was not famine, but only severe scarcity. The effect, however, as many predicted, might be lasting, for seed corn was short. A second year of drought has now followed the first, but far more terrible and far more complete. It seems to have been all but universal. Everywhere the harvest is bad, and only a single Government in the whole half-continent has a fairly good yield.

"This would be serious if it were all, but it is not the worst. In one great region of European Russia, the Volga basin, the harvest is a total failure. In the burning south of this vast district, the Astrakhan Government, there is so little corn that the peasants have left it to wither in the fields; it is not worth reaping. Further north, the yield is a tenth, or, at most, a fifth, of the normal. In other words, there is enough for next year's sowing, but nothing at all for food. The population of this region numbers about 30 millions, and for a year to come it must somehow be fed from outside."

Locusts swarmed last month, villages were burning and peasants in flight were succumbing to cholera at an increased rate. They must succumb to the winter typhus if they have to stay in their indescribable camps. Vast parades of starving women and children refuse to halt even when told there is no government that can absorb and feed them. The ravages of disease threaten to surpass those of last year when, it is estimated, 10 millions succumbed to typhus. The superstitions of the peasants add to the difficulties of the

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measures. Vaccination meets with all possible resistance. Instead, the peasants plow furrows around their village, muttering incantations to keep the plague away. The men chant religious songs and the women build bonfires and leap over them naked. "The Saratov Government," according to a Berlin report, "is one vast gypsy camp of weak, starving, sick and dying people."

The effort to keep the outside world in ignorance of the extent of the suffering in Russia has failed completely. Tchicherin, the foreign minister, was afraid that if the western chancelleries realized the extremity to which the soviet commissars were reduced, they would at once become difficult to negotiate with. Trotzky had seen to it that the army was mobilized in the regions which had suffered least from the heat and the pestilence. Lenin has been so completely discredited by the ravages of the famine that it has been enough to take the administration of the internal government of Russia out of his hands. He is held responsible for the policy which has brought about a consumption of so great a proportion of the seed wheat that the fields can not be sown. For the first time since the

Bolsheviki gained power, says the Berlin *Lokalanzeiger*, Lenin is a cipher.

It begins to look as if all that will be left of Turkey in Asia Minor is a Greece spot.—Norfolk *Virginian-Pilot*.