

# **WHAT I SAW IN RUSSIA**

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What I Saw in Russia by George Lansbury

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CALIFORNIA

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## INTRODUCTION

In this book George Lansbury shows the effects upon Russia and the Russian people of the Allied policy of war, intrigue and economic blockade. It is, perhaps, not understood clearly enough by the general public that the blockade prevents Russia from getting not only machinery and food, but that medical and surgical supplies are prevented from entering the country. As a result, while hunger is general in the large cities, involving the underfeeding of children, and the actual semi-starvation of adults, the national health in city, town and village is in desperate jeopardy.

Mr. Lansbury tells how, for instance, Allied soldiers, in common with Russian, who have fallen prisoners into the hands of the Soviet Government, have had to suffer for months from neglected wounds, and undergo major operations without anaesthetics because there were none in the country. Furthermore, without medical and sanitary supplies, diseases have become endemic in Russia, the public health of the entire nation being in jeopardy, and tens of thousands of actual preventable deaths occurring.

Mr. Lansbury, it will be noted, raises a question concerning the Red-Cross. As an international organization founded to administer relief and afford medical aid impartially wherever its services can be utilized, it has been supported by voluntary contributions from the people of the whole world.

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It is non-national, non-political, and purely humanitarian in its origin, its organization and profession. But as a fact it has ceased to be all of these, according to Mr. Lansbury, who found that, while it was active in Poland, amounting, one gathers, practically to the Army Medical Corps for the Polish Army, it has refused aid of any kind to Russia. Mr. Lansbury raises the question as to whether the people should not refuse to give it further support until the Red Cross resumes its proper functions and ceases to operate as a political and partizan agency.

Mr. Lansbury may be regarded as the spiritual leader of the British Labor movement. By temperament an intensely religious man, Mr. Lansbury is a pacifist in policy and method. His parliamentary experience, and his years of public life as Mayor of the London borough of Poplar, and a member of many governmental committees, have made him a skilled observer of governmental and administrative methods and conditions. Hence it is not surprising that this little book presents a more comprehensive view of Soviet Russia at work than any book that has yet appeared. And this in spite of the fact that a considerable part of the actual facts he presents are more or less known—although they are known, perhaps, only to those few people who have diligently searched for such odds and ends of information as have appeared in publications other than the daily newspapers and popular magazines.

For the general reading public the book will, in effect, be a revelation. There are few people who are not conscious that the newspaper press has failed to present correct data regarding conditions in Soviet Russia. Most newspaper readers say



frankly that they have ceased to read matter about Russia because it is unreliable. Hence the unusual interest and value of this little book.

Mr. Lansbury confines himself to a review of Soviet Russia and the effects upon it of the Allied and American policy. It becomes necessary to review the effects of that policy upon the Allies themselves and the world at large, and this more especially because at this writing the United States has ordered cruisers and destroyers to the Baltic and Mediterranean Seas in connection with the Russo-Polish campaign and a breach of policy between England and France towards that war.

The Russo-Polish War was opened by Poland by a deliberate and unprovoked attack upon Soviet Russia. Polish armies invaded Soviet territory. They were openly supported by France, and, although Premier Lloyd George has declared that the English Government warned the Poles that Britain would not countenance a war of aggression by Poland, there is reason to believe that powerful British influences have given at least unofficial aid to the Poles. The United States aided the Polish adventure by supplying food and munitions of war in great quantities and by an extension of credit to that government. The Italian Government endeavored to adopt a policy similar to that of the English, French and American governments, but was compelled to abandon it in face of the threat of a revolutionary protest by the Italian people. Under this pressure the Italian Government proceeded to the virtual recognition of the Soviet Government.

In the meantime, with an army estimated at 700,000 men, and equipped throughout by the

Allies and America, the Poles penetrated deeply into Russia, cooperating with forces in the Ukraine. At this writing, the Polish Army, after suffering a spectacular defeat, has recovered much of the territory lost to Russia by a successful counter-attack. At Minsk the Polish delegates have apparently been delaying negotiations for peace by all manner of means, after receiving formal announcement of unstinted French support against the Soviet Government, qualified by a suggestion that the Polish forces abstain from another wantonly aggressive attack upon Russia. Another rumor of the early overthrow of the Soviet Government is, however, apparently betraying the French and Polish politicians into a new offensive.

It does not seem to be realized that if the Soviets are overthrown, the alternative in Russia is a condition of civil war and ruinous anarchy, as opposed to some kind of absolute government, which would have to take a military form. In that lies a danger to modern civilization much more immediate than the danger resulting upon a spread of Bolshevist propaganda. A military government in Russia would never rest until it had destroyed not only Poland, but the newly-established Baltic States. The Balkans would again become volcanic, Constantinople again an occasion for war, and thereafter Imperialistic Russia and Japan would again wrestle for domination in the Far East. Long before that last stage, however, the world would have been reduced to hopeless ruin. To overthrow the Soviet may be desirable. But what follows?

During the progress of the Russo-Polish campaign, France persistently refused to have any kind

of communication with Soviet representatives, and has done all in its power to maintain the Polish armies in the field. At the same time, England opened up negotiations with Moscow through accredited representatives of the Soviet Government, the immediate purpose of the negotiations being to establish a basis for the resumption of Anglo-Russian commerce, involving the abandoning of the British blockade, and eventual recognition of the government of Lenin. Repeatedly invited by England to participate in these negotiations, France as often declined.

Following a series of conferences between Premiers Lloyd George and Millerand, during which the policy of England toward Russia was marked by constant vacillation, England resumed full negotiations with Russia, and served notice on the defeated Poles that it would not countenance Poland's war of aggression. This action was countered immediately by the French Government, which announced its continued support of Poland against Russia, and formally recognized the military dictatorship of General Baron Wrangel in the Ukraine as the *de facto* South Russian Government. Simultaneously, the United States Government issued a Note to the Italian Government asking for its views upon the entire situation, but couched in such terms as to warrant France in feeling that it had American support as against the policy of England and Italy. The French interpretation of the American note appears to have been based upon other than superficial conditions, since it has now been supported by the dispatch of American warships into the war zones.

It is clear, therefore, that the Russian question