

A Ride in the Crimea.

By D. IVON JONES.

Having been ordered down South over the damp autumn months, the kindness of the Moscow comrades enabled me to make the trip to Crimea. Along that strip of Black Sea coast, sheltered from the North by a mountain range, of which Yalta is the centre, the sun shines warmly for a long time after Moscow is deep in snow. Here, amid scenery which they say equals the Italian Riviera in beauty and salubrity, the heroes of the revolution who are broken in health are sent for repose. Here the Black Sea belies its name, and ripples serenely blue against the steep slopes of the green hills, clothed with foliage in places to the water's edge. And here I pen these lines.

On the way down to Simferopol, where our railway journey ended, the Russian landscape in late August was an everchanging feast of green freshness here, and golden ripeness there, and brown earth further on, where no sooner is the harvest garnered than the plough begins anew for the sowing of the winter wheat, whose young seedlings just manage to show when the snow clothes it all in over the winter, to start again with the spring thaw.

Our train arrived at its destination within scheduled time—38 hours from Moscow three times a week, besides slow trains. We could have gone on to Sebastopol, the terminus, and taken a passage by sea round the coast to Yalta. But instead we were sent across country in a motor lorry with three or four other comrades, working men Communists.

It is good to be with the Communist par excellence, none other than the class-conscious working man. And what with the ride, and the scenes along the road, and the talk of the old revolutionary campaigners—old in experience but still men in their youthful prime—and the great climb over the mountain range winding up through a luxuriant forest, peering over the roadside down the steep forest slopes, far adown among the giant stems into untrodden glades, why, it was worth all the jolting as we sat on the ever-shifting freight; until at last the summit was reached, where we caught a glimpse of the sea's far horizon, blurred by the distance even in the clear Crimean air. Here we stopped at a rude hut, where a jovial Tartar prepared us a special dish of meat morsels grilled on little wooden skewers. And so we realised the vastness of the Soviet Republic, spreading out towards populations which have a lively kinship with those who are fighting against capitalist imperialism on the Bosphorus.

And what did we talk about? Conversation serious and conversation light. Tovarish Sergeef was saying how fine it was compared with a year ago to have the trains running so punctually. "Yes," agreed another, a practical metal-worker judging by his dress, but he was nevertheless afraid that it was achieved at the expense of more important kinds of transport. Still, if all other things were normal, everybody agreed that it was a very good thing. And so these working men weighed the pros and cons of Soviet economy as masters, just as you hear the bourgeois speak on the train in England about their economy, "trade improving," "business brisk," "shilling off the income-tax—very good for the country," etc., etc.

Sergeef was the humorous one. For instance, a fluff of white mist clung round the top of a distant hill against a blue sky. "Ah, somebody's left his sugar up there." Naive humour! To appreciate it you must remember that a year ago in Russia "Communism" meant a heavenly paradise where, among other things, there will be plenty of sugar—so scarce was that commodity until a few months ago.

Along the road it was noticeable how many workmen carried guns, reminding one of Moscow a year ago. We were told that although Wrangel was chased into the sea the Crimean mountains were not altogether free of White Guard bandits. And on one lorry was a Red Commander, a tall, swarthy soldier, one of the new proletarian officers of the Red Army. His rough khaki suit was relieved only by his red peak cap. He was very far from being a dandy. His top boots looked as if they had grown a part of him in long sleepless campaigns. And he

did not exercise officers' privileges, for he was the most active in handling the freight, and mending the tyres when they bust—just a working man off duty. We were told that he commanded the division which chased the Makhno bandits into Roumania, and that he was about to prepare a clean sweep of the White Guard remnants in the Crimea. Such a fine type of proletarian commander, little given to talk, no bookworm, but a proof that the working class has the elements that can rise to grapple with any situation.

After crossing the mountain, now in beautiful moonlight, and reaching a place on the seaside called Aloopka, our motor broke its wind at last. It was therefore decided to finish the remaining twenty miles by sea next morning. This little seaside place was very sleepy now, for all the aristocrats had fled from their many mansions along the coast. But when the Soviet Republic can afford it, the coast will again swarm with visitors—working men on holiday. The little port still boasted, however, of a harbour master and an assistant.

A knot of longshoremen, Tartars and Russians, and some ragamuffins were witnessing our departure. As we made to descend the ladder we were reminded that here the regime of travelling passports was still in force, owing to the more recent deliverance of the Crimea from the White Guards. And who should step out of the bunch of bystanders to examine our passports, but one of the aforesaid "ragamuffins"—the harbour master's assistant! He was a young lad in his teens, lightly clothed, bare-footed, ragged shirt. Never mind, for the time being he was clothed with Soviet authority! The Red Commander stood by, smiling, I thought, with pride at his young official. Sergeef could not restrain a laugh when asked for his pass, but instantly recollected himself and put his hand over his mouth as Christians do when they have made a sacrilegious jest! And, indeed, as the lad scrutinised my Comintern passport, reading it carefully, slowly, painfully from beginning to end, no matter who was waiting, although the Red Commander assured him it was all right—Comintern, not a Soviet pass; still, good enough, and a word to conjure with in Russia—it was enough to make one's heart warm for this dear land of hope and suffering which reposes its fortunes and its future in the hands of its youth, no matter how ragged it may be.

Yalta from the sea was a charming sight, as we saw it on that sunny afternoon, brilliantly embroidering a sweeping crescent shore. As we approached the port our sailors, in a very matter of fact manner, hoisted the boat's flag on the mast head, THE RED FLAG, to acquaint the harbour master of the vessel's nationality. And there over the Port Office we could see the Red Flag also flying. How it all makes one feel at home! And so we edged in to the quay among a lot of other fishing and coasting smacks, some loaded with potatoes and pumpkins, while a crowd of longshoremen looked on.

These people had been used to seeing different live cargoes arriving at their port in other days—very different indeed from these working men who were now arriving every day. The Crimea has very little industry of any kind, and these parts almost wholly depended upon the parasitic class of people who flocked here in the old days. And what wonder if the natives partook of the psychology of their patrons! The social revolution is the work of the town proletariat, and it draws with it other subject classes, but these latter do not always come willingly.

But even here, in a population made up largely of Tartars, the new spirit moves. A cab driver called out from the quay, "Cab, sir?" using the word "barin" ("sir" or "lord").

Some of the onlookers shouted, "No lords here now."

"No, no," said the Red Commander, who was busy chucking the baggage ashore. "No, no, no lords now!" And he was a living proof of it.

Aloopka, 17th November, 1922.