

## Germany, the Liberator

By LUDWIG LORÉ

How quickly the human mind forgets! For should we otherwise have believed the peace protestations of the German Government and the assurances of German government socialists? Should we otherwise have allowed them so completely to lull our suspicions that we forgot the things that had gone before, that the disclosure of German imperialism in all its shameful nakedness, that the true significance of its role as "liberator" of the Baltic Provinces should strike us like a bolt from the clear blue sky?

How was it possible that we should have forgotten the words of the Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg, when he declared in the Reichstag on the 5th of April, 1916: "Even Mr. Asquith has emphasized the principle of nationalities. If he does this, putting himself in the place of an unconquered and unconquerable nation, can he really assume that Germany would ever return to the dominion of reactionary Russia the peoples between the Baltic Sea and the Swamps of Volhynia, whether they be Poles or Lithuanians, Balts or Letts, that Germany and its Allies have liberated?" In the same speech the Chancellor showed that the German nation would have to recreate boundaries in the East.

In September, 1914, the psychologist Professor Wilhelm Wundt had demanded the liberation of the Baltic Provinces. And Ernst Haeckel, whom the war has shown to be little better than a small minded chauvinist had spoken in the same year in a similar tone. Then came the victories on the Russian front and the occupation of Courland. In May, 1915, petitions were circulated by the six great German manufacturers' association with the active assistance of the ever servile German professors. The literature on the Baltic question became more and more voluminous, until finally the official leader of the German nation took an open stand on the side of the "liberators."

On the 12th of December, 1916, the German Chancellor sent up the first dove of peace. Germany desired an honorable peace. It made no demands from other nations, but insisted, equally, upon the inviolability of its own possessions. It was left to the world to interpret the German declaration. But on the very next day Professor Hans Delbrueck, the famous historian and editor of the "Preussische Jahrbücher," published an article in the "Tag," in which he declared the German peace proposals to be a stroke of genius, and acceptable to every nation of Europe. But then he added: "I will not go into detail, but will only say that I can see but one factor that will probably arouse violent opposition, upon which we, nevertheless, must absolutely insist. That is Courland."

In a meeting of the "Unabhängigen Ausschuss für einen deutschen Frieden," on January, 1917, the conservative Reichstags-deputy, Count Westarp, declared, amid general applause, that Germany needs new farmland in the East for colonization purposes. He declared Courland to be a more valuable war aim than the independent Polish Kingdom. The national-liberal leader Fuhrmann in the Prussian Diet declared in February, 1917: "A statesman who would emerge from this war without Briey, Longwy, without Belgium, Courland and Lithuanian possessions, would go down as the grave digger of German power and German greatness."

At that time, only Courland was in German hands. Livonia and Esthonia had still to be overpowered. Dr. Paul Rohrbach devoted a special brochure, "The Struggle for Livonia" to this noble purpose and was seconded by Dr. Richard Pohle. Indeed the latter outlined, in the 12th of January number of the "Deutsche Politik" a plan for the subjugation of Russia by separating it from the Baltic Sea. Russia's weakest point, he declared, is on the shores of the Baltic. It is here we must concentrate our forces to cut off Russia from the rest of Europe. And today Germany is acting according to this plan.

The Baltic Provinces must become German—on this all were agreed. The word "liberated" served merely to cover up a disgraceful piece of imperialistic robbery.

But what were the Germans to liberate? How numerous is the German population in the Baltic Provinces? These provinces, Courland, Livonia and Esthonia, cover an area of 90,000 square kilometres and, according to the census of 1897, have a population of 2,386,015. Divided among the various nationalities there are 1,070,295 Letts, 884,553 Estonians, 165,627 Germans, 128,789 Russians, 62,686 Jews, 36,657 Poles, 23,211 Lithuanians and 14,897 of other nationalities.

The masses in these provinces are the Letts and the Estonians. The Germans and the Russians are but a small percentage of the whole population of Courland: The Germans 6.9%, the Russians 5.4%. In the country districts the Letts make up 95% of the agrarian population. The Estonians occupy the government of Esthonia and North Livonia to Walk. The Letts live in South Livonia and in Courland. Besides, there are approximately 400,000 Letts in three counties of the Government of Vitebsk that border upon Livonia and Courland. Considering that the population has increased materially since 1897, the sum total of Letts will amount to about 1,800,000, of Estonians 1,200,000, of Germans 180,000.

Even in the cities that are generally regarded as German, the German population is in the minority. In Riga, for instance, in 1897, the Germans made up only 23.8% of the total population, in 1913 only 13%; in Libau in 1897, 18%, in 1911 11.5%, in 1913, 9.7%. There is not a single city in these provinces in which the German population makes up even one-third of the total population.

The Baltic Provinces, therefore are not German country. Not only in the agrarian sections, but even in the cities the German population is in the decided minority.

The Baltic Provinces are at the present time economically and culturally undoubtedly the most highly developed part of Russia. In the last 50 to 60 years the Baltic Provinces, particularly their Lettish parts, have developed into a modern capitalist country. Intensive agricultural cultivation goes hand in hand with highly developed industrial and commercial acti-

vities. In 1910, 114,800 workers were employed in 782 factories, producing goods valued at 796,726,000 Rs. These products were exported almost exclusively into Russia. The Baltic harbor cities of Riga, Libau, Mitau are the outlets of the great North and Central Russian Hinterland.

The rapid growth of the Baltic cities is a direct outcome of this industrial development. Thus, in a few decades, Riga has developed into a modern city with 530,000 inhabitants. Dvinsk and Libau have 100,000, Mitau and Windau 32,000 inhabitants.

Their favorable geographical situation was partly responsible for this development. In the economic development of Russia, Lettland plays the role of the industrial Vorderland and serves moreover as a trading and commercial centre for a part of the great Hinterland of Russia. Culturally the country is on a high level, not only higher than any other Russian province, but even higher than that of the Austrian ally of its "liberator." In 1897, 79% of the inhabitants were able to read and write. The illiterate in these provinces are mostly the Jews, Russians and Lithuanians. The Germans, Letts and Estonians are usually literate. And since then conditions have improved to a marked degree. It is noteworthy, that of 2644 noblemen between the ages of ten and sixty, 252, i. e. 9% were unable to read. Among the Lettish farmers of the same age there were only 6.5% analphabets.

The German minority is the ruling class in the Baltic Provinces. In the agrarian sections they are the nobility, the great landowners, in the cities they make up the manufacturing and commercial classes. The Letts and the Estonians are the farmers and farmworkers, the small tradesmen, the factory-workers, and the professionals in the cities. To be sure, there are also Lettish and Esthonian landowners and factory-owners, but they form an exceedingly small minority.

The German nobility that has not been clamoring for liberation for the past two centuries, has been the most dependable support of the Czarist government. Nothing was too low, nothing too brutal for this junker-gang, they were the most subser-

vient tools of the Russian aristocracy. The large landholders, moreover, are a powerful political factor. They hold a number of medieval political privileges and are the sole rulers in the provincial Diets. The Baltic nobility is on a level with its brother in Prussia, it belongs to the cast of overlords who thrive only in an atmosphere of brutal suppression.

But we must not be too unjust to the Baltic nobility—after all it is not much worse than the Baltic-German bourgeoisie, which also has become in the decades that have passed, thoroughly reactionary and conservative. The German bourgeoisie has always shown a remarkable affinity with the Russian bureaucracy.

The masses of the people are staggering under a double yoke, that of the junkers and that of the Russian bureaucracy. The former are the exploiters, the latter the political and national oppressors. And here it should be remembered that the German nobleman was frequently a Russian official as well, and active in both capacities.

The Letts and the Esthonians, particularly the latter, have developed culturally very rapidly in the last two decades. Political and social questions play an important part in their existence. A spirit of democracy has taken complete possession of these nations and as the foundation of this democracy was the movement of the modern proletariat, the Lettish Social-Democracy has become the spokesman of the Lettish people in the fullest sense of that term.

The important work done by the Lettish Social-Democracy in the Revolution of 1905 is well known; and not less notorious is the shameful role that was played by the Baltic nobility in the counter-revolution. Never has a national group so degraded itself as did these German Balts, never has a small people deserved greater honor, shown more remarkable bravery and fidelity to its principles than did the Lettish Socialists.

The punitive expeditions of Rennenkamp and Co. alone shot 1200 Letts without trial or investigation, and thousands were exiled for their political faith. To be "freed" by such scoundrels and their ilk in Germany is bitter indeed.

Nothing lies further from the Letts than the desire for a union with Germany; industrially and politically they belong to Russia, to the Free Russia, which they have helped to build up and to create, to the Russia for which they have bled and suffered.

The statement of the German chancellor that Courland and Lithuania will be granted self-government will nowhere meet with serious consideration. The Baltic Provinces are necessary for the political strengthening of the conservative junker element, and for the imperialistic interests of capital, and they will be blessed with a system of self-government closely resembling that of the former kingdom of Hannover and the grandduchy of Brunswick. They are to become vassal states—not even of Germany—but of Prussia.

This makes the fulfillment of the demands made by the Letts of the Russian government impossible at the very outset. On the contrary, the very oppression against the Letts so vehemently protested in Russia, will come, in an aggravated form, under German "self-government."

In the Revolution of 1905 that was forcibly crushed by the German Baltic junkers and the Russian bureaucrats the Letts demanded:

1. Abolition of the privileges of the Baltic nobility.
2. Abolition of forcible rule and oppression at the hands of the Russian bureaucracy.
3. Introduction of democracy in all social-political institutions.
4. National equality and political self-government within the Russian nation.

After the world war broke out the Letts again reiterated these demands, national freedom, national equality and self-government being even more prominently emphasized than before. The Lettish people have never sought the solution of their national problem in a separation from Russia, but in its democratization. Their struggle has always been directed against Russian reaction, not against Russia as a state. Nowhere have the Lettish people advocated separation from Russia, at no time has it raised its voice in favor of German annexation. Every statement to the

contrary emanating from German press agents is based upon lies and falsifications. The entire Lettish people was as one in its opposition against a German war of "liberation." The Committee on Foreign Relations of the Lettish Social-Democracy, in 1915, protested against the German plan of annexation and the Lettish Committee in Switzerland likewise denounced the speech of the German Chancellor that we have quoted above in the name of the Lettish people.

Just before the occupation of Riga the fifth congress of the Social-Democracy of Lettland, meeting in the palace of Riga, adopted a resolution concerning the future fate of the Lettish nation. The resolution contains the following main declarations:

"The fifth congress of the Social-Democracy of Lettland fundamentally recognizes:

1. That the free development of capitalism and the interest of the proletarian class struggle demand the political autonomy of large territorial units;

2. That this inevitable historic and capitalistic tendency must be founded upon a strictly democratic basis: democratic centralization.

"In view of the peculiar conditions in Russia—the fact that Russia has only just freed itself from bureaucratic centralization; the largeness of its territory; its enormous population (170,000,000) and the large number of separate nationalities within the Russian nation (over 100); the fact that the industrial and cultural development and the percentage of the proletariat in Russia is smaller than in Lettland—in view of all these facts the Congress of the Lettish Social-Democracy finds itself under the necessity of modifying the generally recognized principle of democratic centralization.

"The Congress recognizes the dangers that an extreme separatist policy bears for democracy, and therefore favors an intimate union with Russia, demanding, at the same time, the fullest democratization of Russia. In consequence of these fundamental considerations the Congress has adopted the following resolutions concerning the future of Lettland:

"In the interest of the Lettish proletariat the fifth Congress of the Lettish Social-Democracy stands most emphatically for a unified, undivided Lettland (i. e., a unit comprising Livonia, Courland and Latgale, the Lettish portion of the Government of Witebsk) and categorically demands Lettland's political autonomy, i. e., full local control in all industrial, political, and administrative questions.

"However the war may end, the fifth Congress of the Lettish Social-Democracy, moved, above all, by the interests of the Lettish proletariat, demands the absolute unification of Lettland. The Social-Democracy will guard the unified Lettish nation from being sacrificed to the imperialism of the world powers.

"The Social-Democracy of Lettland demands that the decision over the future and the international position of Lettland remain alone with the inhabitants of Lettland. Every attempt to gamble with our fate will meet with the most determined and most bitter opposition of the Lettish Social-Democracy."

This attitude is the natural outgrowth of the historic past, of the economic conditions of the present and the political outlook for the future of the Baltic peoples. They have accumulated a hatred against the Baltic nobility that is as bitter as it is justifiable; a hatred so intense that they would certainly refuse to submit to a new brand of junker rule. Their present economic interests bind them indissolubly to Russia, while the political development of Russia, its political maturity, its proven revolutionary fighting spirit have always assured the Lettish people that Russia will be politically democratized more rapidly and more thoroughly than the German working-class under the infamous leadership of Scheidemann, David, Lensch and Legien. The Lettish Social-Democracy has not suffered and fought for years for the privilege of living as subjects of the third class under Prussian rule, to labor as productive farm hands for Prussian junkers, to die as useful troops in future wars of German imperialism.

The Federated Russian Republic as conceived by the Bolsheviks, and in the aspirations of the Finnish revolutionists, as it was

and is demanded by the Socialists of every other national group of Russia, is and must be the aim of the Lettish, Polish, Lithuanian and Esthonian Socialists.

\* \* \*

It is the fate of every great world empire, that it carries in its body the germs that will cause its own destruction. The population of the Baltic Provinces are neither the priest-ridden folk of Alsace-Lorraine, nor the ignorant, downtrodden Polish masses of Upper Silesia. Will the Hohenzollern be more successful in subduing a people that even the Tsar, with all his ruthlessness, could never succeed in taming, especially since the decree of economic development of Germany at the outset makes the application of old Russian methods impossible?

The revolutionary movement of Greater Germany will acquire in the Baltic proletariat a tried, trained, self-sacrificing body of fighters that knows no compromise with bourgeoisie and government-bureaucracy.

When the Socialist Letts, Esthonians, Lithuanians have become a part of the German Social-Democracy there will be no suspension of the class-struggle, no civil peace in Germany.