The Red Army

By V. Antonov-Ovseenny (Moscow).

The Red Army will celebrate its fifth anniversary on February 24, and we feel this a fit time to give a résumé of its history. We have borrowed largely from the excellent article of V. Antonov-Ovseenny, one of the first soldiers and one of the first heads of the Red Army. His article appeared in a work published by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Russia on the Fifth Anniversary of the October Revolution.

The name of Trotsky, who was the great organizing spirit of the Red Army throughout its period of trial, and those of other revolutionaries who led it, Vatsetis, Tukatchevsky, Kamenev, Furenz, Dybenko, Vorochilov, scarcely appear in this article; for the Red Army is essentially the creation of the mass of workers and peasants, of a mass party, and of historic necessity. We shall attempt, however, to correct this apparent omission. Ed.

Long before the Revolution . . .

Long before the Revolution the Bolshevik Party was busy organizing armed forces which were destined to support the demands of the proletariat one day. The glorious fighting traditions still retained their force from the revolution of 1905 which had prepared and made possible the worker's insurrection, and the seizure of power by the proletariat supported by the poverty-stricken peasants.

From the very beginning of the imperialist war, the more influential militants of the party formulated the fighting slogans: --transformation of the capitalist war into a civil war; from national war to class war. From the trenches to the barricades! Free from pacifist illusions, the party refused to advocate general disarmament even though it meant the secession of certain parlor Bolsheviks from the Party.

Under Kerensky.

The old army went to pieces; but out of it came the sound elements which worked towards the formation of the new Soviet Army. The struggle of the Bolsheviks to extend their influence in the army, and to organize in it disciplined revolutionary bodies, continued side by side with the work of creating the groups of proletarian fighters, the Red Guard.

The formation of the Red Guard began in March 1917, in the workshops and factories of Petrograd, and soon spread throughout the ranks of the Russian workers. Although the method of forming the Red Guard differed according to place, its organization was much the same everywhere; the instructors were always chosen from the better elements of the revolutionaries in the old army, the workers were armed by the shop committees and remained at work, devoting only a certain number of hours each day to military training.

In Petrograd, a tendency soon arose towards the military training of the entire working class and the preserving of such army contingents as already existed. That was the militia of workers formed for the maintenance of order in the city. The development of the Red Army of Petrograd was precipitated by the unsuccessful reactionary coup of General Kornilov. A unified organization and a central control were established. The unit was a battalion (360 bayonets) of 3 companies, accompanied by a group of sharp-shooters, a communication and sanitary unit and a supply section.

At Moscow the Red Guard began no serious organization until the eve of the October Revolution. On the day of the insurrection we had 110,000 guards at our disposal in Petrograd and 3,000 in Moscow.

The Red Guards were a voluntary militia which elected its own officers.

Let us mention here the most important strategic preparations for the October Revolution, for it was necessary to foresee everything.

The First Test.

On the day after the victory of the revolutionary proletariat, Kerensky succeeded, by a ruse, in making the Cossack division of General Krasnov, about a thousand cavalry provided with many batteries of artillery and an armoured car, march through Petrograd. The first contact with this enemy aroused us to a realization of the great shortcomings in our military organization. We had neither cavalry nor artillery. The Red Guard had not learned how to fight in open country. The troops of the Petrograd Garrison, being without commanders, were difficult to manage. The old head of our shock troops, Major Mouraviev, as head of the military district of Petrograd, succeeded in winning over certain officers, and established a sort of front, where the marines and the Red Guard, about 15,000 men gathered at Helsingfors, played an active part. It was they who defeated Krasnov and, sometime later, the counter-revolutionary revolt of the Junkers.

The first Soviet Forces.

A military congress, meeting in December 1917, under the chairmanship of Kedrov, studied the question of demobilization and adopted a resolution declaring the necessity of "Commencing immediately the formation of a Socialist army". The demobilization of the old army was to take place progressively and in proportion as the new army of volunteers should be recruited.

But long before that, it was necessary to act, for there was not an hour to spare, and we were faced with immediate strategic

*) Krasnov, after having been taken prisoner and liberated upon giving his word of honor not to fight against the revolution, went at once to wage an implacable war in the south of Russia. The S.R. officer, Mouraviev was supposed to have attempted to pass over to the enemy on the Ural front in 1918 and, seeing his treason discovered, blew his brains out.
problems. We had to seize the headquarters of the old armies, to suppress the comrades who were fighting in the streets of Moscow, to establish communications with Siberia, so important for the provisioning of Petrograd.

The Military Revolutionary Committee of Petrograd, which had directed the uprising of October 25, established three com- mandant generals for this purpose in the days following: 1) The Marines from Helsingfors, together with a Lithuanian battalion placed under the command of comrade Ter-Arutunianitz. 2) The 254th Finnish regiment, a battalion of Red Guards from Petrograd named as an answer in case of Pushkin and under the command of Potapov. 3) A battalion of Helsingfors marines and the 17th regiment of Siberian infantry under the command of Midshipman Pavlov and the Commissaire Shchukine. Ter-Arutunianitz seized the General Headquarters without a fight. Potapov was not arrested and the garrison of Pavlov won its battle. The forces under Pavlov fought at length and victoriously along the Siberian roads against Dutov. On the 29th of January they took Orenburg.

The Red Guards in the Civil War.

In December 1917 the national Rada of Ukraine and the Hetman of the Don Cossacks, Kaledin, prepared to oppose us, as did the Army of White volunteers formed by General Alexeyev at Rostov on Don, where the workers' organization had been suppressed, the crimean Cossacks, who had already committed atrocities in the Crimea, and the Dmaniski, near Tiflis. The marines at Balaklava, under the command of comrade Potapov, did their best to crush the insurrection.

The transformation of the army of volunteers into a regular army was difficult because the forces of the Communist elements played an important role. The army had to be made of its undisciplined elements. A rigorous revolutionary discipline had to be imposed upon it. The creation of the Red Army was not completed until a central leadership and a central ordnance organization was created.

Difficult moments.

In September, 1918, the Revolutionary Military Council was established, and Vatsetis was appointed commander of all our forces. It was a tragic period. German imperialism held the Ukraine, the Caucasus and the Baltic provinces. Krasnov occupied the Don, was attacking the Ukraine and threatening Voroneje. In the northern Caucasus, Denekin was preparing for war with the support of the allies. The Baku was occupied by the Turks. The Checho-Slovakians held the Volga. The Constituent S.R.'s of the Transcaucasus formed an army. An S.R. directorate formed a coalition in Siberia with monarchist and counter-revolutionary elements and Mouroznak were occupied by Anglo-American forces. In Finland the Whites and the Germans had erased all traces of the Revolution. We had nothing to oppose to the regular armies that opposed us, but we were in the minority and threatening Voroneje. The “national” Directorate, driven from Ukraine by the Reds, called upon the Germans to intervene. The Roumanians threw themselves upon Odessa. But, beaten on February 23, by the workers of the city and by the Bolshevik troops at the Rostov Station, they were defeated and evicted. On March 3, by treaty to evacuate Besarabia within two months. On March 3, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed. The demobilization commenced at once while the Germans were advancing in the Ukraine. Denekin was refused to fight them side by side with us, demanded and obtained their departure from the Ukraine. At Kharkov, Barvenkovo, Svatovo, Lugansk and Taganrog we opposed the German advance; on April 7 they entered Kharkov and on May 9th, Rostov.

From the volunteer to the regular army.

The task was a difficult one; but the Soviet power mastered it at once. On the 28th of January 1918, a decree on “The formation of a socialist army” was passed. On February 23 it was in force. The Pan-Russian College for the organization of a Workers' and Peasants Red Army, an army of volunteers, was established. An extensive campaign of propaganda with the aid of the soviets and the military committees. But propagandists and instructors were lacking. It was necessary to create special courses (at the end of 1918 there were 16), and to produce a special literature. An appeal to the workers was distributed in 450,000 copies. In February began the organization of a school for Red Officers. On the 25th of February we had already 5,500 voluntary enlistments in Petrograd. On April 1, we had about 25,000. On April 29, the Moscow district numbered 19,000 volunteers. A total of 100,000 men enlisted in two-and-a-half months.

But could we confer the defense of the revolution upon volunteers? We began to prepare the measures necessary for the establishment of a regular army. A decree of April 8, 1918, created the Red Army. The Commissariat of War, charged especially with the duty of taking a census of all workers capable of bearing arms, and to give elementary military instruction to the entire working class population. The decree of May 29, made this instruction compulsory. On July 9th, the Fifth Congress of Soviets proclaimed, “The duty of all able bodied citizens between 26 and 40 to take part in the defense of the Soviet Republic”. The bourgeois population was to be employed behind the lines. The resolution of the congress said—

“Surrounded by enemies, face to face with counter-revolution and foreign intervention, the Soviet Republic must create a strong army, which will defend the power of the workers and peasants until the day when the work of the world shall be finished. The final blow to militarism, and will realize the peaceful cooperation and fraternity of all peoples.”

At this moment the Checho-Slovakian revolt was at its height, demonstrating every day the inadequacy of our first military formations.

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The employment of technicians from the old army was of
great service to us and old officers and men to us also have
come one with us. Treason has certainly been frequent among
them, but the treason of entire bodies has been quite exceptional.
In spite of all this, victory has demanded the extension of all
courts, and exacted immense sacrifices. It was an adminis-
trative and economic rather than a military victory. At the end
of 1920, we had 5,500,000 men under arms, who had to be fed,
clothed, equipped, to be distributed along a front of 8 to 9 thousand
kilometres in length, and often to be transported from one end of
the country to the other. And yet, the army has never experienced
the provisioning crises customary under the Tsar's and
Kerensky's regimes.

In this struggle, the transports accomplished a formidable
task. In October 1919 and November 1920, 4,866 military
trains were put into service. The one mission of the trains at
that time is evident. We had believed the Polish army more dis-
organized than it really was; we had overestimated the revolu-
tionary preparedness of the Polish proletariat; we had misjudged
the possibility of a awakening of the nationalist spirit in the
peasant masses of Poland. My main opinion is that we were
wrong to direct the Budienny army against the enemy group
operating in the south of Kiev instead of throwing it upon
Warsaw. One other great strategic fault was the weakening of
our right wing. The German government, which was aware that
the enemy took advantage of all our errors, concentrated its forces
in the radius of Ivangozor, broke our center and attacked the
flank of our right wing which had advanced too far. The
steering wheels held our positions in the September
retreat redeemed a part of our responsibility.

The end of the Polish campaign gave us an opportunity
to return to the attack against Wrangel. In the end of December,
1921, the entire Crimea was in the hands of the Reds, for the
impassable positions of Perekop, poorly fortified, had not stopped
the advanced Wings, sailing with the remnants of the Russian
bourgeoisie in ships stolen from Russia, hoisted the French flag
on the way to Constantinople.

The civil war was ended. The Finlad adventure in
Karelia, at the end of 1921, was disposed of without much trouble.
A little later, the companies of Boulak-Balakhevitch, let loose
upon us by the Polish and French, were crushed. At last in
December, 1922, Vladivostok was taken.

The Red Fleet.
The role which the red fleets played in the revolution
cannot be passed over in complete silence. All the seas were
closed to them. In 1918, Germany caused us to recall our Baltic
fleet from Helsingfors and Revel,—to Cronstadt. This fleet was
powerless, in part, because of the lack of fuel. As for the Black
sea fleet, one part had been destroyed at Novorossisk in order to
escape with the remainder and the other had been delivered
overby Wrangel to France.
The ships, then, were of little service. But the sailors
rendered very important service indeed. They have fought
everywhere, in all parts of Russia. Thanks to them it had been
possible to form many flotillas totalling up to more than 2,000
vessels manned by 45,000 men. The voigb flotilla distinguished
itself against Kolichak. That of the Caspian Sea terminated its
brilliant operations on May 18, 1920, by the capture, at Enzel,
of the last boats of Denikin and the English.
The Baltic fleet has not remained inactive. In December
1918, it attacked Revel, losing two torpedo boats. Later, when
blockaded by the English fleet in May, 1919, it kept its head and
slipped by with its small boats. On the 13th of June of the same
year, the Baltic sailors took possession of the fort of Kransnia
Goels, which had been treacherously surrendered to the Whites.
In the course of the operations of this period, we lost a cruiser
and a training ship. The Red Fleet did its share towards the
brushing of Yudenitch. Its total loss against the English was:
one cruiser, one training ship and five torpedo boats. The English,
according to their own information, lost in that period, two
cruisers, one torpedo-boat, one submarine, three motor-boats and
two burners.
The Experience of the Red Army.
At the beginning of our campaigns we have had to give
way, almost invariably, before the superior technique and training
of our adversaries. Almost always we have needed time to
recruit and to learn how to counter-offer. We have lacked
discipline and a clear conception of our work.
We have had to send into battle, forces poorly trained and
imperfectly unified. Naturally, they have not held their ground.
But after some weeks of political work and of organization,
they have developed into well-knit units.
The 5th Anniversary of the Red Army

By L. Trotsky.

We leave our first 5 years behind us, enriched with a wealth of experience. What are the most important conclusions to be drawn from these experiences? What have been our greatest successes, our gains, and above all, how has our weakness? Without recognizing our own weaknesses we can make no progress.

Our victory has been due to the unlimited self-sacrifice of the millions of vanguard, and to the inexhaustibility of our reserves of peasants. Our army retains these two advantages. The peasant reserves are brought forward to an ever increasing extent by the workers' vanguard, and the political level of this vanguard will—we hope—steadily improve. But these two premises of our victories are, without doubt, entirely non-military in character. They are rooted in the social nature of the Soviet power, in the class qualities of the proletariat. The Red Army of the past five years represents the first crude attempt to utilize these, our great advantages, for military purposes. We have the result before us: we have maintained our position. But at what price? At the price of the greatest sacrifices. But the art of war, like every other art, consists in attaining results with the least possible effort, or, as Suvarov said, with little blood.

Without enthusiasm and self-sacrifice, there can be no war and no victory; but we can only speak of an army as such, when these qualities are properly organized and skillfully utilized. We are not lacking in enthusiasm, devotion, or equipment. When the mass of reserves, or the self-sacrificing heroism of our soldiers, in the future, we shall still need the masses as well as the heroism. But these must be supplemented by good training and technique.

These are the two main points to which we must devote our efforts during the coming five years: personal and collective training, and war technique. We have reduced the army to 600,000 men. Having regard to the size of the country, the number of the population, the extent of our frontiers, and the number of our possible enemies, such an army is really no army, but merely a military staff. But this fact involves the task of bringing this army—as regards training and education—up to the level of a military staff. This group must have excellent division commanders at its disposal, and the subordination commanders, thoroughly trained in every respect, must form the links in the chain of gradual education of all our soldiers to the level of the earlier non-commissioned officers, adapted of course, to the new conditions and new structure of the armed forces. This is no Utopian idea. Our youths—not only the workers, but the peasants—enter the army with a greatly increased receptive capacity. And old soldiers look on in amazement at the rapidity with which the Red Guard recruit learns, as compared with the recruits of the Tsarist army. The mass of the soldiers learn, the increased mental plasticity of the masses of the people, this is the greatest achievement of the revolution up to now. And on this achievement we can build upon our structure in all spheres, the open system of pre-military training, combined with a sensible system of training and education within the army itself, is bound to lead, within a few years, to a mighty enhancement of efficiency throughout the army, and render it capable, in case of necessity, of absorbing millions of mobilized men at a moment's notice.

The second task is that of technique. What are our prospects in this direction? Tsarism equipped its army to a very wide extent, by calling in the aid of foreign techniques. This was in the nature of things: as Tsarism itself was a member of one of the groupings of the so-called balance of power in Europe. But the bourgeoisie regards us—and not without reason—as a wedge which undermines and destroys all equilibrium in the capitalist world. Consequently we can by no means reckon on the direct co-operation of capitalist Europe or America in the matter of our war techniques. Thus our own exertions are of the greatest importance. War techniques depend on general economic technique. This means that miraculous advances in the science of armaments, and of the whole equipment of the army, are not possible. But with the existing technical equipment, a systematic utilization of the available forces, and a gradual improvement. This however, by no means excludes the possibility of our attaining great success within a very short time, at least in some of the most important directions. After a period of sharp retrogression, the whole economics of the Soviet republic are awakening to new life, and making the advance of industry and agriculture. This process of improvement will be extremely slow at first, with unavoidable interruptions and fluctuations. It is our duty to place our war industry under particular favorable conditions—naturally without detriment to economics, as a whole—and to place in the foreground those branches of war produce which are of the utmost importance to us at the present time.

There is no doubt whatever that one such branch is aviation. The whole country must devote its concentrated attention during the next few years to this class of armaments, and to this branch of industry. This is the more possible as, in the sphere of aviation, purely military requirements are closely and immediately connected with the economic and cultural interests of the country. Aviation is the most efficient and newest means of overcoming distances. Its future is boundless. And it is necessary that our young people be thoroughly possessed by the idea of the development and the wide possibilities of aerial transport. Our technicians, instructors, poets, and artists, must take care of this.

We have no need of the tasks which will confront the army during the next 5 years. No one will reproach us for attempting to look too far into the future. It is perfectly evident: we shall still require the Red Army at the end of a year, at the end of two years, at end of five years. After the present comparative stagnation the revolutionary movement will accelerate its speed. But even then, there is not the least doubt, that the epoch of imperialist wars and revolutionary convulsions will not last merely for months or years, but for decades, and that the world will be convulsed again and again, with ever increasing violence, and with short pauses for breath. But since this is so, we must seriously prepare ourselves for a lengthy task. Our working program for the coming years, which arises out of the events of yesterday and in the conditions of to-day, is to supplement enthusiasm by art, and numbers by technique. We shall then be victorious with fewer sacrifices.

The Executive Committee of the Communist International greets the Red Army

The Executive of the Communist International sends its heartiest fraternal greetings to the Red Army, to the sole armed force in the world beginning its sixth year in defence of the workers' and peasants' power.

The whole world of exploiters hates you, warriors of the Red Army! But they tremble before you, for they know that you are ready to defend the proletarian revolution in every country, that you are an army of the international proletariat. The oppressed workers of all countries utter your name with great love and reverence; the oppressed peoples of all countries hope that the day will come when columns of red warriors will arise and overthrow the power of capital all over the world.

The 6th year of your existence, in which the storm clouds of war are again gathering over the world, in which the Entente has again made war the order of the day by the occupation of the Ruhr, in which the Fascists of Italy, Poland, and other countries are rattling their sabers this year, shall be a year in which the sentiments of brotherly attachment between the workers of the whole world and the Red Army of Soviet Russia, will become more firm rooted than ever before.

May the profound attachment between the rank and file of the Red Army and their leaders be strengthened! May the feeling of great responsibility grow stronger and more active in every warrior in the Red Army. May the preparation, the training, the readiness to spring to the aid of Soviet Russia, to defend the brotherland from the attacks planned by its enemies, become more complete.

Long live the armed force of the Communist World Re-

The Executive of the Communist International.