

MEMORANDUM OF INFORMATION

15

ON

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

NOTE

This issue is longer than usual because the situation is such that a larger number of reports had to be included than is normally the case. It includes further information about the Red Army, reports from Italy, the Vatican, South-eastern Europe, Turkey, Iran and Germany, together with a statement dealing with the general strategical problem.

Since the last issue the circulation has increased by over 1,500 and still continues to do so by a very considerable number each day.

"Searchlight On Europe," by John de Courcy (Eyre & Spottiswoode ; 7s. 6d.), the book to which we have referred in the last two issues, will be published on 17th February and will be available at all libraries, on application to this office, or through any bookseller. The book is built up from information contained in these memoranda with a critical commentary by the author who has travelled widely, but who has observed the unfolding of the world crisis from a distressed area in South Wales. It has an introduction by Lord Phillimore, and is thoroughly worth reading.

KENNETH de COURCY,
Editor.

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THE RED ARMY

It may be said that M. Stalin's regime first depends upon the efficiency and loyalty of his secret political agents and secondly upon the Red Army. If the loyalty of either failed, his regime would crash. Only a very short time ago it nearly did. The Kremlin's system of supervising the activities of the army is a remarkable one, and it starts with the conditions governing the entry of officers to the service. A candidate for one of the military colleges must be able to provide a record of his parents' political contacts over a prolonged period, together with those of his whole known family and connections as far back as they can be traced. It is now difficult for a non-member of the Communist Party to be accepted in most of these colleges. Young men are chosen by the local committees of the Communist Party or the Komsomol. Quite a number of entrants are picked by these committees whether or not they desire to serve in the force; that is, if the committee see a young man of good physique and moderate intelligence who belongs to a staunch Communist family, he will be selected for candidature whatever his personal inclinations. The age of entry is between 18 and 24, and candidates must have passed through a middle-school course. Each candidate must fill in a form consisting of one hundred questions. He is asked whether he has any relatives or friends abroad, whether anyone with whom he has at any time been acquainted has been excluded or expelled from the Communist Party, and whether anyone of his previous acquaintances is now in exile or has lost voting rights. No candidate who is unable to answer all the hundred questions satisfactorily is considered for entry. Each answer is checked by the secret police.

Besides the ordinary military colleges, there are special regimental schools for N.C.O's and private soldiers, whom political and military commissars recommend for promotion. Such men must possess all the qualifications required by the military colleges, and are only exempt from the age-limit clause. They must have been members of the Communist Party for at least three years and possess a special political recommendation. Candidates from city working-class families are particularly favoured. Peasants are discouraged.

Once in the army, officers, N.C.O's. and men are all subject to political supervision. The second-in-command of each unit is a political commissar. He in turn is supervised by the agent of the N.K.W.D. (Narodnyi Kommissariat Wnutrennych Dell), which has a powerful grip on every aspect of Russian life.

A political commissar, though not a military commander, is by far the most important member of each unit, and lately his influence has tended to increase. Very often the commanding officer is nothing more than a figure-head, the political agent controlling and investigating each order before it is given and carried out. There is no aspect of regimental life in which these agents do not interest themselves. The work of each officer, N.C.O. and private soldier, as well as his private life, is watched and investigated from first to last. All his movements are checked up, his family's contacts supervised, his private conversations and correspondence carefully followed. Each political commissar has a system of informers and spies in the unit to which he is attached, who report every detail of regimental life. Special attention is given to the soldiers' contacts with the civilian population. Reports are sent in about the friends they visit, the conversations they have with those friends, which cinemas and theatres they attend and which films or plays they have seen. The efficient commissar knows the average amount of liquor which each soldier in his unit consumes, and exactly who his friends are and what he talks about in private.

In addition to their political powers, the commissars have all the rights and privileges which would attach to a military officer. Each unit has a Party Committee which makes decisions dictated by the commissar over the head of the commanding officer.

This system has greatly hampered the work of the technical services, for it is here that the Government is not able to pick and choose as much as it would like, so that many of the technicians serving with the forces are not Communists and very often are not particularly loyal to the regime. If the Government goes beyond a certain point in dismissing them, the efficiency of the army becomes endangered. If they are allowed to work unhampered, the regime runs political risks. On the whole, rather than risk this M. Stalin has sacrificed the efficiency of his force.

Behind this direct political supervision is that of the N.K.W.D. to which we referred earlier. This is a powerful department which controls and supervises the actions of the political commissars and has its own direct system of espionage in the army. It also controls the supply of equipment and supervises the provisioning of the forces. It is divided into

special sections, each of which is independent and only responsible to a chief in the headquarters organization. Contacts between departmental chiefs and the central organization are conducted through secret channels, the nature of which is not known either to the political or commanding officers of various units.

These, then, are the means employed to terrorise the army into loyalty to the regime, but in addition another means and a very potent one is freely employed, namely, that of privilege. The officer or non-commissioned officer who behaves himself and does not get mixed up in doubtful politics is given advantages for himself and his family which no one else other than the high governing class itself can hope for, and this is a tremendous incentive to loyalty, especially as officers' and soldiers' wives—desperately afraid of losing their privileges, which make the whole difference to their daily life—naturally tend to do everything they can to persuade their men-folk to keep on good terms with the regime. There can be no doubt that loyal members of the Red Army live on a much higher standard than the civilian population. They are better off financially and from every other point of view. Their wives do not have to queue up outside shops in order to obtain food, clothes and the other necessities of life. Cheap tickets for theatres and cinemas are provided; there are special army clubs, usually in the best houses in each district. They are well furnished and provided with plenty of interesting and amusing literature. These privileges continue after an officer has left the service, provided he does so with a clean record. He is given precedence in applying for a civilian job, and has a right to the best housing accommodation available. All these privileges are, however, immediately lost in the case of a man being obliged to leave the service for a political offence. The soldier is in fact taught from the moment he enters the army that his whole fate and fortune is wrapped up with his political views. This applies not only to his chances of promotion but to his whole future and that of his wife and family. One can easily imagine how the ordinary Russian woman begs her husband to be careful, bearing in mind that if anything happens he will probably be executed or sent for a long period of imprisonment, while she will lose all her privileges, have to take her place in the food queues, and live generally the bedraggled life of the unfortunate Soviet citizen.

Wretched though the condition of the Soviet army may be, and rotten the system upon which it is built, we must not forget the tremendous power which the Kremlin has created for itself and the extraordinary difficulty which must attend the most powerful section of officers which might wish to rebel against it. Our reports suggest that nothing but the crushing defeat of a large section of that army could bring about a real revolt. It is well to remember that Russia has a capacity for standing great losses with a certain equanimity. In the first year of the Great War her fatal casualties were beyond estimate, yet in spite of the appalling toll, the complete breakdown of supplies, and the obvious corruption of a large number of officials, the final crack did not come until 1917. Once a despot is installed, his patronage is so great and the forces at his command so considerable that nothing short of a major catastrophe or a long process of disintegration can bring about a fall. If it is unwise to under-rate the power of the regime in Germany, it would also be foolish to do so in the case of Russia. Few observers doubt that the day of collapse will come, but the time is not yet ripe.

ITALY

The remarks on the Italian situation which follow should be read, not in the light of what we might desire to be the truth, but in the light of the policy which Signor Mussolini is in fact consistently following, and from which he hopes to derive definite advantages for his country.

If we may attempt to read his mind, there are two factors of cardinal importance governing his policy. The first is to keep his country out of active armed participation in the war. The second is to obtain for his country certain tangible advantages which have long been his aim, at the Suez Canal and generally in the Mediterranean basin.

Two of our observers have been in Rome since the last issue was published, and they have had informal conversations with a considerable number of responsible Italians and with circles closely connected with the Vatican. The political situation is interesting. The recent state visits exchanged between the Quirinal and the Vatican were of much significance and emphasize the community of interest which at present exists between Italy and the Holy See. The appointment of Mr. Myron C. Taylor as Mr. Roosevelt's personal representative at the Vatican brought another significant factor upon the scene. There is a strong body of opinion in Italy, at the Vatican, and in the United States, which is in favour of urging the belligerents to arrive at a compromise, even though the differences between them must

be fought out at a later stage. At the same time there is a reluctance to take the initiative in producing or suggesting peace proposals, and it would be officially denied at the Holy See, in Washington, and in Rome, that any peace move was contemplated. There is a particular reluctance to discuss the situation with British observers. There is probably a rather closer contact with Berlin and Paris. An impression has gained ground in Vatican and Italian circles that Great Britain is intransigent, and that any preliminary moves must be made without Great Britain becoming aware of them. That, at least, is the impression which intelligent observers cannot fail to gain.

The desire for a compromise in the present European dispute is based upon the fear that prolonged stalemate will lead to a social upheaval in all the belligerent countries with the possible exception of Great Britain, while the active prosecution of war in the west would cut the fine thread by which civilisation now hangs, and neither of these alternatives appeals either to the Roman Church or the Quirinal, and both cause grave apprehension in Washington. It is held in these circles that though a compromise would no doubt leave Germany in a position of great strength, the Allies have achieved such immense prestige as a result of their display of strength on the seas, and the obvious adequacy of their defences on the Western Front and in the air, that world opinion as a whole would not regard a settlement which included the restoration of an independent Poland as a complete success for German arms. On the other hand it is admitted that such a compromise would leave Germany in a very strong and in some respects a commanding position in certain parts of Europe. This fact, however, some observers argue, would automatically incline Italy to move towards something not at all unlike the original Stresa position, provided her claims against the western Powers were satisfied. This view was expressed in very high quarters.

Italy's position at present is essentially one of non-belligerency, and not of neutrality. She does not regard herself as disinterested in the struggle, and is therefore not neutral. She is a revisionist Power, with claims against the Allies, the chief of which relate to the administration and control of the Suez Canal. The difference between Italian and German policy is one of method, but both are revisionist Powers. Consequently there must be no undue optimism as to the position of Italy in the event of prolonged hostilities.

British prestige in Italy is very high indeed, and a majority of the Italian people are friendly to the Allies and dislike Germany. Amongst the younger members of the Fascist Party, however, there is a certain amount of pro-Germanism. Conversation on the subject of the rival merits of the belligerents is very free and open. No attempt is made to suppress it. The Russo-German accord has shocked all the conservative elements, while a vast majority of the public are wholly sympathetic to Finland in her fight. This sympathy is expressed in different ways. The Finnish Minister has received many valuable gifts and letters of encouragement, and there has been a stream of young volunteers. Our observer saw a good many of them register at the Legation. They are genuine volunteers and come from all classes of society. The Italian public is honestly and thoroughly anti-Bolshevik. It would be dangerous to assume, however, that this fact will necessarily have a decisive influence upon Signor Mussolini's foreign policy. It cannot be assumed because he allows these manifestations of friendship for Finland to take place that Italy's future role is cast. He is a great believer in letting public opinion have a run for its money. He regards it as essential to any Italian regime. In a curious way he is very liberal. There are no concentration camps in Italy, bursting with political prisoners who have expressed minor criticisms of the regime. On the contrary, although there have been several cases recently of the police arresting people for expounding views hostile to the Government, in each case the offenders have been immediately released on Signor Mussolini's personal order directly he heard about the incident. This is very much talked about in Italy and of course appreciated. The present public outcry over the Finnish question must not be taken as conclusive evidence that Italy will in no case associate herself with a Power in alliance with Russia: Mussolini may be just simply giving the public its head for a time. The final decision rests with him alone, and he is steadily preparing the people to accept his judgment whatever it may be. His position is so strong and his popularity so great that almost anything he says will go.

We have reason to believe that the Italian Government by no means regrets the popular disapproval of Russia because it gives Italy a greater bargaining power in relation to Germany, and makes it possible to insist that Russia's interest in the Balkans must be confined to the Bessarabian frontier. This limit, quite apart from any question of Bolshevism, is necessary in Italy's strategical interests. Her policy in the Balkans

generally is one of extreme caution, and our observer is not of the opinion that she is likely to become involved in hostilities with Germany or Russia over spheres of influence in the South-east. Differences necessarily exist, but they are unlikely to become acute at present.

THE VATICAN.

The new relations between the Quirinal and the Vatican are not only significant in connection with the common desire for a compromise between the belligerents, but bear a relation to the Vatican's growing anxiety about the more general trend in Europe. Most of the influential cardinals, like the Pope and the Secretary of State, are Italian, and they have an inclination towards close collaboration with the secular power in Rome if that is possible on any reasonable and honourable terms. There is a feeling amongst many influential statesmen at the Holy See that so great is the deterioration of the Church's influence in Europe as a result of the spread of Russo-German influence that a state of acute danger already exists. In such circumstances, therefore, the Vatican inclines towards associating its welfare more closely with the fortunes of Italy, with the object of influencing the Government to take up a permanent stand against any further encroachments of the paganising influence of Russia and Germany. How far Signor Mussolini is prepared to fall into line with this policy it is most difficult to assess. Our observer has come to the conclusion that we are not at present in a phase when it is likely that the Vatican will find it easy to use the secular power of Rome as an instrument of its policy. On the contrary, if really close collaboration is to continue it will be the Vatican which will be the less influential partner. Many of the younger priests have of course received their education under the Fascist regime and are admirers of the Duce. Their number grows yearly. Those cardinals who are in favour of the Church associating itself more closely with the regime have considerable support, therefore. Other elements in the Vatican fear that too close an association with Rome may alienate American Catholic opinion in the event of Italy's foreign policy not following the line to which any section of the Christian Church ought always to be committed. Nevertheless, the steady deterioration of the Vatican's influence in Germany, the virtual disappearance of the Church in Poland and the ever-growing dangers which it has to face elsewhere encourages those in favour of an association with the Fascist Government of a very much closer nature than heretofore. Although the cardinals, like their predecessors, still think in centuries and look far beyond immediate issues, a steadily growing anxiety is very perceptible, and one of the results is a compelling—almost overmastering—desire to arrest the deterioration by any legitimate means and to use the respite for entrenching more firmly the forces of order. It is easy to see how pressing and acute is the problem which faces the Holy See. It may well become graver yet.

THE DANUBE AND BEYOND

ROUMANIA AND YUGOSLAVIA

The situation in South-eastern Europe is one of great complexity. There is, unhappily, a lot of loose talk upon which hopes are built for which there is no foundation. There have been rumours lately that a neutral bloc is in the process of creation for the collective resistance of aggression. For this there is no ground at the moment. It would be idle to pretend that present conditions are favourable for such an achievement.

The principal dangers at present centre around Roumania and Yugoslavia. The former country labours under international embarrassments and the latter is disturbed by internal dissension. Either country may become a cause for acute anxiety at any time. The Serb-Croat settlement in Yugoslavia is not working too well. Officials are using their new powers for paying off old personal grievances, while extremists who want more than was accorded are in touch with foreign powers. In Serbia Communist propaganda is rife. Russian newspapers have a fairly widespread sale and the Communist movement is quite serious in many districts and amongst the students. The Government is doing everything in its power to bring about a better spirit, and great credit is due to the Prince Regent who has spared no effort to unify his country and increase its strength; but the forces contending against him are strong and sometimes almost overwhelming. If internal difficulties become greater, outside Powers may take a hand, to the detriment of the Balkans as a whole.

Roumania's problems are well-known. Three of her neighbours have territorial claims against her, namely, Russia, Hungary and Bulgaria; Germany is profoundly interested in her resources; and she is far removed from her western Allies, while the effectiveness of Turkey

as an ally may be limited by that country's reservations vis-a-vis Russia, a factor which also imposes limitations upon the effectiveness of Franco-British help to Roumania. The possibility of Russian aggression, at the instigation of Germany, is an ever-present danger.

The situation is not improved by the disastrous miscalculation of so many Balkan statesmen, in supposing that Russia and Germany are acting against each other rather than in concert. This has led to a fruitless effort to play off the one against the other, instead of a concentration of all efforts upon consolidating Balkan relations in resistance to aggression. History will show that the popular misconception about the nature of Russo-German relations so prevalent directly after the partition of Poland and still lingering in some minds has been one of the most disastrous in the history of Europe. Balkan countries basing their policy upon a fatal misunderstanding of the facts have wasted previous months and are now awakening to realities, perhaps too late.

Although serious crises may very well occur in Yugoslavia, nevertheless it is around the Roumanian question that the most important events will shape themselves. It cannot be too clearly stated that the dissolution of that country as a result of Russo-German pressure without the Allies being able to give effective help would change the whole course of political and military events. It would lead to the liquidation of Franco-British interests in South-eastern Europe, and bring into question the value of Turkey's understanding with her western Allies. Further than that it would emphasize before the whole world the nature of Russo-German relations and effectively secure an already vital source of supply for Germany, the richness and value of which no one can underrate. It would mean that Germany, far from being surrounded and isolated, would have an open unrestricted back-door, the creation of which would minimise the effect of the Allied blockade. Militarily the situation would also be well on the way towards a most important development, namely the shifting of the potential theatre of war right into the Middle East—which would not necessarily be to our disadvantage. In another part of this issue we give some information contained in a special report from one of our observers who has been inside enemy territory recently; a high German military authority discussing the strategical situation with him made some very illuminating remarks about the Near and Middle East which are worth quoting. Our observer's cover was, of course, pretty good. The German officer said:—

“ We are aware that the British and French would like to transport the theatre of war to the Near East. We know they would have all the advantage there—wonderful strategical positions, a well-trained army, undisturbed flow of supplies and troops. . . . We also know very well that a German Expeditionary Force would have to face great difficulties when marching through south-eastern Europe. To begin with, Italy would not consent to a transit via Hungary; then, lines of communications in the Balkans are rather poor; motor roads are in a shocking condition for the most part of the year. No, my friend, we would not do that to favour the Allies. . . . ”

The Germans may not want to fall into this trap, but even if they have successfully organised the whole area which they are now busily isolating, in the fullness of time they will be compelled to strike at Great Britain's main strategical position in the Near and Middle East, unless of course they are prepared to abandon their major ambitions. So long as Great Britain commands the Eastern Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf, Russia and Germany, however strong, will have failed to achieve paramount world power. This, of course, the Germans know very well and they would give a lot to induce us to fight them on the wrong territory, at the wrong time so that they need not face the ordeal they fear most.

Roumania is, of course, well aware of her dangerous situation, and in order to postpone the evil day as long as possible she has made great concessions to Germany. Although she was part of the Peace Front she did not feel disposed—nor indeed had she the power—to intervene on behalf of Poland when that country was invaded. Since the outbreak of war, she has made even further concessions to the Reich of a very important nature. She has, of course, the advantage of knowing that Germany will handle the problem of south-eastern Europe with great delicacy and caution. The last thing the enemy wants to do, if it can be avoided, is to destroy the immediate productive capacity of these rich territories.

The new agreement just concluded between Germany and Roumania enables the Germans to increase their purchases of oil, grain and timber on excellent terms. The Roumanians have agreed to a currency arrangement which amounts to a 20 per cent devaluation of the Lei. The new rate came into force on 1st January, fixing the exchange at 49 Lei to 1 Reichsmark