

# The War in Russia and Siberia

Ludovic H. Grondijs

## Chapter I

### In Harbin

*At the beginning of September 1918, I left France for Siberia. While in Washington, I had several extremely interesting meetings with the French ambassador. I spoke with some people in the War Office and the State Department. I had the pleasure of talking at length with former President Roosevelt, in New York, then at his property in Oysterbay. He later advocated strong US military intervention against the Soviets. His death two months afterwards deprived his party of an independent foreign policy and left it to the impulses of domestic political struggles.*

*In Tokyo I had talks with the Minister of War, with the head and deputy head of the General Staff. The problem of Japanese intervention appeared to me in all its complications. Around Christmas, I crossed the Sea of Japan on a Japanese transport, in the company of General Takayanagui, a very cheerful guest and fine diplomat. Finally, in Vladivostok, I ventured, cautiously, into the corridor of the long Siberian adventure. Before going to see with my own eyes what was happening in the Urals – I understood that the Kolchak question would only be resolved there – I went to chat to those on the left and on the right.*

*General Horvath made an excellent impression on me: a very fine old man, a great patriot, never losing sight of the interests of a restored Great Russia. General Knox gave me the impression of a counter-revolutionary conspirator's temperament, loving the strong way, with frank character and tireless energy. General Graves, his exact opposite, sympathetic, but perhaps a little too paternal, seemed convinced that his seven thousand soldiers were in Siberia to prevent the White Guards, in their treatment of the Bolsheviks, from deviating from evangelical precepts. General Otani, an old gentleman, seemed to incorporate the best refinement and inimitable correctness of the Japanese aristocracy.*

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Harbin,<sup>1</sup> 10 January 1919.

The Trans-Siberian Railway crosses neutral China for a length of 1,400 kilometres.<sup>2</sup> The towns and lands surrounding the railway are – by a fictitious extraterritoriality, regulated by treaty – under Russian jurisdiction, which has become quite illusory, as Russian police and soldiers are not there to support it.

The Chinese garrisons have grown everywhere since the fall of Russian prestige in Manchuria. And by a singular irony of history, Russia owes the reconstitution of her government primarily to the bayonets of the fearful natives.

During the darkest moments of Bolshevik rule, the resistance of the “order” parties was organised along this neutral Trans-Siberian network. And after foreign arms had driven back the political tide, the same Chinese neutrality continued to protect the defeated parties from the reprisals of the once pursued.

#### 1. – The Town

The Russian railway station and town (the new town and the Pristan district) fall under the purview of the Russian police, much weakened in Siberia now but who have always been considerably relaxed here. Harbin serves as an asylum for Russian criminals who have managed to cross the border, and who meet freely with convicts from all countries.

In the Pristan district, the city of merchants, the most infamous deals are freely made. Oriental cunning, combined with the more skilful criminality of the Westerners, can alone explain the abundance of large sums of money.

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<sup>1</sup> More properly, Kharbin.

<sup>2</sup> From Manchuria to Pogradichnaya.



Among the many millionaires, former Bolsheviks from Russia and Siberia stand out with their deep pockets. Former presidents of military committees who had emptied the army's coffers, former revolutionary commissars who had amassed a fortune by "blackmail for execution" or by requisitioning private capital, lead a luxurious life here.

Former workers and soldiers support theatre artists. Civil servants earning 2,000 roubles a month spend 15,000. Retired officers gamble away sums of 40 and 50,000 roubles in a single evening without flinching.

The whole horde lives on disorder and protects it as their livelihood. The decentralisation of all services allows for a hundred shady trades. There is the smuggling of alcoholic beverages, which is introduced with the connivance of the customs officers. Opium and cocaine, manufactured in Persia and introduced into China following the advent of the Red regime, are brought in by civilians and soldiers who shuttle back and forth between the border towns and earn a small fortune on each trip. It is the anarchy and disorganisation of transport that causes the huge differences in the prices of basic necessities in Siberian cities. The return of order would make them disappear. The Harbin merchant party is therefore opposed to the restoration of regular services, and regards the intervention of the Allies as a plague.

## 2. – The Railway.

With the exception of the Japanese divisions, which are generally kept together, the Allied troops are scattered along the railway in penny packets and, shaken by the general disorder, participate in abuses. On the other hand, the railway officials continue to intentionally disorganise their service. The anarchy is such that the grandest official orders, the most imperative military necessities, can break down against the ill will of a very minor official.

The transport of goods wagons in Siberia, officially suppressed since 23 December in favour of military transport, continues with the same regularity. The stationmasters and the Russian and Allied officers, having more room in the wagons than needed for military articles, all obey the principle of "*Tolko douraki nié imiéout diénég tiépiér*".<sup>3</sup> They sell cars to the merchants at prices which increase as the transport to Siberia promises more advantages. The price of a wagon varies from 20 to 50,000 roubles for a trip to Irkutsk; to this must be added an insurance premium against confiscation by the Russian garrisons located on the line.

Once the wagon has been bought and filled with foodstuffs for Siberia, the ill will of the station master and the officers is eliminated. But one small official, in charge of checking the wagons, may refuse it as "unfit for transport". 200 roubles will dispel his doubts. To prevent the car from staying in the station indefinitely, a permit from the station master or the official of the day is needed to have it hooked up to the one train a day that leaves for Siberia: 1,000 roubles. Stowage-men and mechanics now have the right, but not the obligation, to hook the wagon: 50 roubles for each.

Once the wagon is gone, the trader's risks remain considerable. It can be requisitioned by a *Semenovets*<sup>4</sup> or declared burnt by a chief transport officer, and in both cases sold to merchants on the sly. In order for the Harbin merchants to continue to run such risks, they must gain immense profits, which can explain the rise in prices as one moves away from China. Sugar costs 90 kopeks here and 20 roubles in Omsk, packets of twenty cigarettes cost 1 and 10 roubles respectively.

Venality runs through all spheres. "We have come to the point," Mr. Stevens tells me, "that the situation cannot get any worse."

We find the ticket office closed: with no more seats available. But by entering through a back door, and paying four times the fare, you get a one. The driver vehemently refuses to let you carry your luggage in advance into the coupé you have reserved for yourself. Ten roubles, and he smiles obsequiously. The mechanics, irregularly paid, speed up, slow down, extend or shorten the stops at the stations, at quite reasonable prices.

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<sup>3</sup> Only fools these days don't have money.

<sup>4</sup> The garrisons from Vladivostok to Verkhneudinsk [Ulan-Ude] do not recognise Admiral Kolchak. They obey only the regional boss, Ataman Semenov.



With the exception of the French and Japanese, who are strictly controlled by their missions, and moreover are also governed by traditions contrary to any kind of trade, Russian and Allied officers indulge in the traffic. That brings reproach from the traders, with whom they are competing, and weighs on the military intervention.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. – The Stock Market and Politics

The Harbin Stock Exchange is the only one in Siberia where prices and values follow those of foreign markets. Harbin's finance and trade thus have a profound influence on Siberian trade – and politics. These Russian and foreign merchants, whose eyes are constantly fixed on the theatre of the civil war, form a third political group, essentially neutral, as independent of the patriots as of the Reds. They are without conviction, and are busy buying and selling for others, as they please. Their shady gang – all the more dangerous because the modern world recognises a sort of honourability in them – has no pronounced sympathy for Bolshevism, which does not seem to offer them enough security for the exercise of their profession. But the Kolchak-Semenov regime and the intervention of the Allies, which the patriots implored and the foreign traders acclaimed (certainly not for moral reasons) meant for the Harbin merchants the re-establishment of any order that was less profitable than anarchy, and the intrusion of a trade that threatened to drive them out of the Siberian market.

It goes without saying that among all these traders, who had come in impressive numbers, there is no interest in national concerns. Those in Manchuria and Chita, living in symbiosis with the officers, are linked to the patriots and looked favourably on the Japanese, whose presence guarantees them stability for their military sponsors. Here, a few hundred kilometres from Chita, personal interest dictates a different policy: a weak Russian government at their mercy and distance from foreign control. As they move up and down the social ladder, as they have more or less solid ties to finance, these Melmoth souls float towards broad-minded patriotism, or outright treason.

Large groups of traders – without making a direct appeal to the Reds, after the previous failure – view with sympathy the riots and insurrections against which the Omsk government is struggling, and the difficulties which the foreigners are encountering. Agents, whom they encourage and support, keep a continuous flow of people going back and forth along the Trans-Siberian Railway to Tomsk and Omsk, and help foment unrest in the new Russian army. I met one of these young agents at the home of a Jewish intellectual, who happily recounted the progress of Bolshevik (or left-wing Socialist-Revolutionary, which amounts to practically the same thing) propaganda in the Siberian Army.

With regard to foreigners, the opinions of the businessmen vary, as they consider interests of a more or less general nature. It may be said that Russian circles fear the American effort above all, and that Jewish circles oppose Japanese intervention most vigorously.

Here are the opinions of the chairman of the Harbin Stock Exchange Committee, a man newly converted to Orthodoxy, and who was specially recommended to me by the chief priest of the Church of Saint Sophia.

“The Americans and Japanese want to bring in their goods, to exploit the country, to immobilise Russian trade. The Americans are especially dangerous. Having come out of the war having lost almost nothing, they can indulge in trade. They are not democrats – as they would have us believe by their proclamations – but infatuated bourgeois. It is not true that the Allies have restored order here. The opposite is true: whenever Russian patriots have established a proper system, foreigners have come in – the Czechs after Semenov, the Japanese after Kalmykov – taking credit for the operations, but doing nothing for us but occupying the railway, and diminishing its output. Our army is strong, and soon the day will come when we can say to the Allies, ‘We don't need you any more, get out of here.’”

So says M. Vodianski, a new convert, a recent patriot, and above all a merchant.

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<sup>5</sup> Consignments entrusted to certain groups of Allied officers are for the most part looted, if one relies solely on their honour. Boxes containing articles for personal use, which I had sent from America, only ever reached me opened and shamefully plundered – and this was the rule! But it was the fashion to accuse just the Russians of these misappropriations.



Jewish circles in China, and especially in Harbin, are strongly influenced by the American effort, which is carried out almost exclusively through American Jews. The Russian Jews, who are very well connected with American finance in China and Siberia,<sup>6</sup> exhibit an extreme Japanophobia. This can only be partly explained by the invasion of the market by Japanese manufactures. The articles in the press – exclusively in the hands of Israelites – are generally of a violence which must be attributed to the difficulties of the Jewish commercial genius in subjugating Japanese society. The Japanese military, so honourable and measured; the Japanese code of honour, so opposed to the immorality of the mercantile; are, to say the least, contrary to their convictions. The Japanese Empire, jealously guarded by a highly nationalistic government against the encroachments of all internationalist efforts, escapes, perhaps alone, the schemes of high finance. In Siberia, the Japanese do not want to be satisfied with an exclusively military glory, by letting the fruits of their sacrifices be reaped by their allies. They want to assure that their merchants and industrialists gain in proportion to their country's efforts. By isolating themselves and distrusting the immense financial enterprises engineered in America and Europe, they attract antipathy to their agents in China.

#### **4 – Big and Small Bolsheviks – a Jewish Issue**

The importance of Jewish co-operation in the Red regime has sometimes been exaggerated. Neither in Russia nor in Siberia can they be blamed for having followed some kind of vast conspiracy against Russian society. They played an exceptional role everywhere, but with very little premeditation. In short, they merely accepted the functions for which the revolution, having reached a certain stage of its development, found them suitable. They allowed themselves to be sucked into the vacuum left by the disappearance of the “intelligentsia”, but so uniformly, with such a conformity of disposition and talent, with such a remarkable spirit, and such a natural solidarity, that it has sometimes been thought necessary to explain this broad harmony of their whole as the result of a plot.

What confounds the observer, on the contrary, is the constant concern for their own interests combined with an inexplicable political indifference on the part of a great majority of the Russian Israelite subjects. I did not believe in Semenov's political talent until I observed the battalions of Jews he mobilised. Without exposing them to fire (he believes them to be unsafe in the front line), he has secured their support by inviting them to participate, albeit nominally, in the privileges and duties of his regime. Wherever an established government, Red or White, seems insecure, the Israelites have rarely been willing to take sides. We have seen them go through several consecutive regimes, always getting richer, protected by all the rulers they have made share in the profits of their business.

There are only a few people of lesser rank who have made the wrong calculations. In Siberia there are petty Israelites whose energy and intelligence had made them stand out in the first revolutionary meetings, and whom the prospect of unchecked power and unbounded success had seduced. Moreover, these disinherited people of the old regime, exhilarated by unhopd-for acclamations, attracted by the hope of dazzling vengeance, have burnt their wings everywhere.

One such is Arkus, an apothecary boy from Harbin, a minor person, of not much intelligence, but lively and noisy. He was a nobody, but he came to the fore as soon as the Bolshevik movement began to take shape in Harbin. The soldiers noticed him: he had the same “thirst for freedom” as they did, and he was easy to talk to, ambitious, violent, and not a Tsarist. Too turbulent for the liking of his co-religionists, and too unwise, he was disowned, but he could console himself: the Revolutionary Committee in China borrowed all its strength from the Israelite element, as it did in other places. With a Russian president in charge – as elsewhere – the Israelites Arkus, Slavin, Maïoffes, etc., were the soul of the movement. The soldiers appointed Arkus to the important post of chief of police. He exchanged his filthy shirt for a brand new uniform, and walked around with a large automatic pistol which he put would constantly put under the nose of the bourgeois. He arrested a fair number of “suspects”, extorted money from “capitalists”, and had a considerable entourage. But suddenly one day the two thousand Russian soldiers, on whom his power rested, were disarmed by Chinese

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<sup>6</sup> Of Russian interpreters employed by Engineer Stevens' American mission, a mission with broad financial aims, at least 90% belong to the Jewish religion. I give their names in another chapter. Sympathy for the “democratic” policy of the mission, and a secular aversion to service, are part of the reason. On the other hand, these people all come from business backgrounds, and are interested in the American work.



soldiers. President Routin, his aides, Slavin, Maïoffes, etc., were able to escape. But all eyes were on Arkus. An outraged city did not allow him to escape attention. He was arrested and taken by some compliant Chinese soldiers to Manchuria, where Semenov had him whipped and shot.

The head and members of the Jewish community confirmed this information to me. The first, Mordokhovich, a vodka-maker, with a wise face and a venerable and intelligent appearance, complained in his deep and gentle voice that so many young Israelites had been carried away by Bolshevist ideas.

“The blood of so many of our poor co-religionists who have been killed over the last months in Galicia and Poland is on their heads. We warned them not to concern themselves with these harmful doctrines which are none of their business. All sorts are getting involved, but our people are being made to pay more for this fault than those who have seduced them (!). And again, the most guilty are renegades, who have taken Russian names, who have betrayed the faith of their fathers, internationalists who deny every link with us, and against whose actions we protest.”

I reply that the sentiments he professes do him credit. But the Israelites who meddled with Bolshevism in Siberia were so seduced that without them this movement could not have lasted in any place. The former president of Vladivostok, Krasnoshchokov, the Goldbergs and Goldsteins of Irkutsk were not victims but facilitators. If some of the big movers of Jewish Bolshevism have been disbelievers, they must have been forgiven for this apostasy long ago. No synagogue in Russia or Siberia has been defiled, the Jewish “bourgeois” have been treated with extraordinary gentleness everywhere. Those who have just crossed the border again are travelling with valid passports, and have saved a large part of their fortune. One cannot help supposing that they are rendering very important services, since their participation seems to have been bought with considerable privileges: the “White” armies never meet any of them in the front line, and the dead and wounded who are picked up on the battlefields are almost without exception Russian “*duraki*”<sup>7</sup>, whose servitude has changed its name, not its character.

And then there is, among the group of malcontents, a whole class of individuals who gravitate towards Bolshevism, by the weight of their origin or their social ambitions, without belonging to it. Driven by feelings of revolt, with restless minds and without doctrines (thought requires conviction), they are condemned to be in opposition, always and everywhere, by dint of wanting to be something. These are the Socialist-Revolutionaries of the left. Under the Bolshevist regime – which is a system of order and authority – their sympathies turn to liberalism, and they have regrets about the old Russian society (the freest that ever existed). But domination inevitably slides from one extreme to the other. As soon as the sabres and spurs tinkle on the pavements again, their activity is animated by a jealousy of caste privileges and a repugnance against force, which was the soul of the revolution. Former political prisoners or their descendants, poor students, ambitious Cossacks, they watch every regime, try to discover its weaknesses, and attack it as soon as it fails. One can therefore correctly say that Siberia, which is recalcitrant against every authority, even that of a simple police officer, but perfectly willing to accept any power capable of maintaining itself, is Socialist-Revolutionary. Perhaps it is not always possible to make sense of the left-wing Socialist-Revolutionary programmes, but it is always interesting to observe them: the virulence of their party indicates the weak state of the government.

## 5 - Opinions of a Patriot

In Harbin there is a large group of people who have an interest in opposing the restoration of order by the Allies. Traders, left-wing Socialist-Revolutionaries, former commissars who had survived; all were ideally placed in neutral territory on the only route of communication between the Omsk government, its armies, the foreign missions and the Pacific bases. From here vast propaganda against military discipline, which is the *bête noire* of all revolutionaries, is spread. Thousands of alarming rumours are manufactured there, which cross Siberia, even to the most remote hamlets and *stanitsas*. There is not a single note in it that strengthens the morale of the population. All the talk of revolts in the new army, of serious disagreements between the Allies,

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<sup>7</sup> Fools/dopes.



of major uprisings in the provinces, keeps the citizens on edge and prevents the consolidation of convictions shaken by a thousand contrary experiences.

Acting from a hundred different motives, the malcontents are generally agreed on the eminent qualities of the young Siberian Army. Its soldiers are brave and patriotic, all its officers do their duty. And this assessment is yet another way of protesting against Allied intervention.

On the contrary, the *Kadet*<sup>8</sup> party in Manchuria shows that the relative order which now prevails in Siberia is hardly at all the result of the Russian detachments, small and not yet properly grouped. It is certain that the retreat of the foreign forces would immediately lead to the return of anarchy.

The leader of the *Kadet* party, Mr. Tichenko, mayor of Harbin, explains his opinions to me as follows:

“When we signed, on 18 June last year, a request from the citizens of Harbin to the Allied governments to come to the aid of Russia, we thought above all of France and England, and thus allowed ourselves to be inspired exclusively by considerations of a patriotic order. We need a foreign army, and it is obvious that neither France nor England have any designs on Siberia. Exclusive help from French arms would be most agreeable to us: French policy has never been a rapacious policy, the present French mission is the only one not accompanied by financial advisers.

“But it is obvious that we can only count on the Japanese and the Americans. The commercial party in China is for the latter, firstly because American financiers approach transactions with ours more easily, and also because the conditions under which the armed intervention of the Japanese is carried out allows Japanese traffickers considerable ease, and because the Japanese army supports Semenov, who is not very popular among our traders.

“As for us, who place ourselves exclusively from the patriotic point of view, we prefer Japanese aid. Japan has been absolutely correct during the war. Its policy is self-interested – like the policy of all self-respecting governments – but clear and lucid. This American intervention, set up as a business, frightens us: the Red Cross in front, is generous with the help of clothes, but only to railway officials, whom the United States wants to take over. Then their soldiers spread proclamations everywhere, offering to help our citizens found a republic like theirs (without asking whether this one would be suitable for us). All of this seems worrying to us. For both Americans and Japanese, the national character is too far removed from our own for us to feel entirely at ease with them. We are allies of France and England, not only militarily, but because our civilisations are similar. We have nothing to learn from America or Australia, civilisations which are so incomplete, or from Japan, a civilisation which is profound but different from our own. But we believe that we could easily find common ground with Japan. Our military admires theirs so much that our defeat has left no bitter memories among those who fought against them in 1904. Their troops conduct themselves in an excellent manner everywhere. There are very few cases of misconduct among the soldiers, and the officers do not take part in the shameless trade in which most Russian and foreign officers indulge.”

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<sup>8</sup> The Constitutional Democrats, the Kadets for short, were a moderate right wing group. Many Whites were sympathetic to them.

