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Russian Bravery and Russian Land

By HARRY GUNNISON BROWN

While the British and Australians—with, apparently, some American help—are trying to hold back about three divisions of the German army in Egypt, the Russians are battling against some hundred times as many, plus Finns, Hungarians and Rumanians. They are fighting on despite German mechanized superiority, despite the loss (dead, wounded and missing) of about four million men, and despite the ever growing likelihood—or so it is indicated by a recent number of *Life*—that in the coming winter literally tens of millions of their people will die of disease and starvation. For German tanks have been rolling through fields where the grain was almost ripe. But though millions of Russians have thus been wounded or have died and vast areas of their richest land have been conquered and their armies, in many sectors, have been forced back hundreds of miles, the Russians fight doggedly—and bravely—on.

Various theories have been propounded to account for the collapse of France, the same nation which, in the days of its great revolution a hundred and fifty years ago, held all Europe at bay. Why not try to account for the constancy of the Russians? In the last war the French held out until the end—and victory. It was Russia that collapsed. It was the Russian soldiers who repeated the words "Peace and the land" and refused to fight longer. Why is it different now?

No doubt there are many contributing conditions. Skilled generalship, perhaps, long and careful preparation, officials more competent and more conscientious than those of the Czar. For the revolutionary government of Russia is, apparently, an efficient government. But this is not the whole story and, probably, is not the most important part of the story.

What of the fact that the land of Russia belongs to the people of Rus-

sia? What of the fact that all of Russia's natural resources, including mines, oil wells and power-generating streams and abutting land, belong to all Russians? What of the fact that the location advantages of the great cities, which all the people have produced by their activities and their choices of places to live, also belong to all?

In other countries it is not so. The natural resources belong to a comparatively few. The fabulously valuable lots in the business districts of the great cities—made valuable by community growth and development—belong to a few. To those relatively few the millions must pay billions of dollars, year after year. And for what? For permission to make use of sources which nature gave. For permission to enjoy location advantages of which not landlord owners but community growth and the activities of all are the cause. For permission to labor in what is euphemistically referred to as their "own" country, in those areas where labor is reasonably productive. And for permission to live on the earth conveniently near where they have to work.

Only the economically unsophisticated—who of course do not realize how acutely they need to study the land question—will confuse, in this discussion, a charge for permission to use the earth with a charge for use of buildings and other capital which men have produced by their work and their saving!

The Russians have indeed reason to fear that conquest by the Germans would re-introduce landlordism into Russia. They have had, since their revolution, reason to exult in their freedom from this curse of all the ages. Who will venture to assert that the great masses in Russia have no appreciation of this freedom from landlord exploitation? Who will venture to say that the bravery, the constancy and, even, the bitterness, of their fight against the

would-be "master race" are altogether unrelated to this great privilege which only the Russians of all the world's civilized nations enjoy? Who will say, just because their leaders are careful now not to offend the British and us, their allies from whom they hope for a "second front," by comments on the landlordism from which our masses still suffer,—who will say that these leaders and their people are not keenly aware of this good fortune?

I am no blind admirer of the socialist economic ideal or of the socialist state. I know of and have written of its inevitable regimentation. I have commented, over and over again, on the failure of socialists to stress the distinction between capital and land, a failure like that of conservatives who, however, persistently oppose the use for all the people of geologically produced and community produced land values. For my own country I do not desire the socialistic system,—most certainly not, unless the conservative defenders of "capitalism" must inevitably prevent those needed reforms in it, and especially the basic reform of socializing the rent of land, without which the so-called free enterprise system must forever be wickedly exploitative of common folks. I believe the system of free enterprise, the competitive, voluntary choice system operated through the lure of price, has—or could have—very real advantages.

But this does not keep me from realizing that, along with institutional changes which seem to me unnecessary and economically undesirable, the Russians have introduced a great and fundamental reform, viz., the ownership of the land by the people who—as a nation—live on and from it. No landlord can force the people to pay him for location advantages that the people themselves have produced. No private owner, as lord of the land, can make the people pay

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for his permission to work on it and live on it and, out of this exploitation, perpetuate a long line of proud aristocrats who think of themselves as superior human beings just because they are thus parasites on the workers.

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