

LAND OF ETERNAL FIRES

So the Little Republic of Azerbaidjan Is Called—Its Territorial Dispute with Armenia

AZERBAIDJAN, the "Land of Eternal Fires" of the ancient Persians, independent or semi-independent for many centuries, then for a hundred years crushed into submission to the iron yoke of the Czars of all the Russias, only to rise again after the Russian revolution, is one of the most interesting of the various small republics that have arisen from the wreckage of the world war.

Occupying 94,000 square kilometers in Southern Caucasia in the twilight zone between Armenia and Georgia, and bounded on the south and east by Persia and the Caspian Sea, the Republic of Azerbaidjan, born on May 28, 1918, claims a population of about 3,500,000, of whom some four-fifths are Moslem Azerbaidjanians proper, and the others Armenians, Georgians, Russians, Jews, et al.

The young republic declares, in an elaborate statement prepared by its delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, that its natural boundaries extend all the way across the Caucasus to Batum on the Black Sea and that its population, under the law of self-determination, would amount to nearly 5,000,000, and its territory to 150,000 square kilometers. Its spokesmen also admit that they hope to see the day when the adjoining province of northwest Persia of the same name and practically the same ethnographic makeup will be allowed to add its 2,000,000 inhabitants to the Azerbaidjan Republic.

On Sept. 25 a report received in Paris by the American Red Cross said that Colonel William Haskell, High Commissioner for the four Great Powers in Armenia, was negotiating with the Secretary of State of the Azerbaidjan Republic with the view of submitting to the Armenian Parliament a treaty transferring some Armenian territory to Azerbaidjan in return for the withdrawal of Kurdish and Tartar troops from the eastern and southern fronts of Armenia. In a statement given out here on Sept. 17 by the American Committee for the Independence of Armenia, headed by James W. Gerard, urging American aid to prevent further outrages upon the Armenians, it was asserted that "3,000,000 Azerbaidjan Tartars, who are the tools of the Turks," were working hand in hand with 2,000,000 Georgians to help the Russian Bolsheviks and the Turks. In their statement given out in Paris last summer the representatives of Azerbaidjan insisted that they had fought the Bolsheviks and driven them from Baku, with the aid of Turkish regulars, and accused the Armenians of playing the rôle of Bolsheviks for the purpose of seizing territory naturally belonging to the Azerbaidjanians.

It was from the abundance of natural gas and mineral oil found in the Caspian section that the "Land of Eternal Fires" took its name, and the inhabitants proudly boast that, like these fires, their spirit of independence has never been quenched, even during the period from 1825 to 1917 when the Russian Government was doing its utmost to wipe out the language, religion, and customs of that part of its empire. One thing the Russians did do thoroughly: they succeeded in making the geographers and encyclopedists of the world believe that no such territorial division as Azerbaidjan existed under the Czars, so the name is only found in books of reference as applied to the northwest province of Persia. This part of ancient Azerbaidjan, overcome by the pressure of circumstances, recognized the sovereignty of the Shahs in the seventeenth century. The Azerbaidjanians, a people of the Iranian race gradually absorbed by the Turks, deeply resent the Russian Government's classification of them as Caucasian Tartars.

According to the data contained in the statement made public in Paris by the new republic's representatives, Azerbaidjan, together with Georgia and Armenia, broke away from Russia after the Bolshevik revolution of Nov. 7, 1917, and organized the Federated Republic of the Caucasus, which was proclaimed at Tiflis on April 9, 1918, by an assembly of 132 members elected on the basis of universal suffrage laid down for the elections to the All-Russian Constituent Assembly. This Federation proved weak, however, and on May 26 Georgia withdrew and organized as an independent republic, quickly followed by Azerbaidjan and Armenia. The Azerbaidjanians assert that in the region of Erivan they were raided and slaughtered by Armenian bands without any action being taken by the Federation.

As soon as a Ministry of twelve members had been created the Government, located provisionally at Elisabethpol, moved toward ridding the natural capital, the great oil port of Baku, of the Russian Bolsheviks. Early in the Spring there had been clashes in Baku between the Bolsheviks and the Azerbaidjanians, and on March 17 a four-day struggle began which resulted in the killing of

about 12,000 persons, many of them women and children, and the total defeat of the Moslems by the Bolsheviks, assisted, according to the Azerbaidjan representatives, by Armenians eager to help wipe out their old enemies and seize their lands. In organizing its forces for the capture of Baku the Azerbaidjan Government asked aid from Georgia, but the latter republic had trouble enough in fighting off the Bolsheviks from its borders, so the Ministry at Elisabethpol finally called for the help of the Turks. The latter rushed to the succor of their brother Moslems, the Bolshevik army advancing upon Elisabethpol was driven back, and Baku was invested and captured after a two months' siege.

Once in possession of the capital the Azerbaidjan Government sent a mission to the Persian town of Engeli to invite General Thomson, the British commander of the allied troops in that territory, to enter Baku. On Nov. 17, 1918, the allied forces entered the port, were received with great ceremony and acclaim, and shortly afterward General Thomson issued a statement to the inhabitants assuring them of the benevolent intentions of the Allies, and enjoining them to support the Azerbaidjan Government.

The Azerbaidjan Parliament is composed of 120 members elected by universal suffrage, this being apparently the first time that Moslem women have taken an open part in choosing public officials. Among the deputies are twenty-one Armenians, ten Russians, and representatives of the Poles and Jews, as well as of the other races in the republic. This Parliament is supposed to arrange for a Constituent Assembly, which is to lay down the basic laws of the nation. The President chooses the Premier, who, in turn, picks his Ministers, all of whom are responsible to the Parliament. There are to be at least one Russian and one Armenian in the Cabinet.

The army is said to consist of 50,000 well-drilled men. The national budget for 1919 is put at 665,000,000 rubles, with expenditures and receipts evenly balanced. The principal source of income is expected to be the taxes on the output of petroleum.

Although the representatives of Azerbaidjan were received at the Peace Conference, where they made a plea for independence and membership in the League of Nations, offering to assume their proper share of the old Russian debts, nothing appears to have been formally decided regarding their status as a fragment of the one-time Russian Empire.

Following is the text of the treaty recently negotiated between the republics of Georgia and Azerbaidjan for mutual defensive purposes:

(1) The contracting States bind themselves to resist conjointly, and with all the armed forces and military means at their disposal, all attacks menacing the independence or the territorial integrity of one or both of the contracting republics.

(Remark.—This paragraph does not relate to disagreements that may arise with regard to the not yet terminated frontier delimitations of the Transcaucasian republics.)

(2) If any of the neighboring States, in the course of hostilities begun in accordance with Paragraph 1, attack either or both of the allies for the purpose of settling the question of the disputed frontiers by means of arms, such State or States are to be considered as belligerents.

(3) This treaty is purely and exclusively of defensive character, and if one of the contracting parties declares war or begins hostilities on its own initiative and without first consulting its ally, the other party is free as to the participation in such hostilities.

(4) The contracting parties agree to regulate all the conflicts which may arise between them through the question of frontier delimitations by mutual consent or by arbitration, such decision to be definitive and obligatory for both parties.

(5) This treaty is to be valid for the duration of three years. Each of the contracting parties is entitled, before the expiration of this period, to announce, with a year's notice, its desire to renew or denounce it. In the latter case, the treaty loses its power only after the expiration of the fixed period.

(6) The contracting parties agree to act and conduct diplomatic negotiations in solidarity with a view to safeguarding the independence and the sovereign rights of both States.

(7) In the case of hostilities begun in accordance with Paragraphs 1 and 2, the contracting parties bind themselves not to conclude a separate peace.

(8) The contracting parties agree not to conclude any military conventions with any other State without preliminary mutual consent.

(9) If, before the expiration of the period stated in Paragraph 5, a League of Nations guaranteeing the independ-

ence and the inviolability of the frontier of its member States, shall be constituted, this treaty ceases its existence from the date of its contracting parties becoming members of the said League of Nations.

(10) The Third Republic of Transcaucasia-Armenia is given, from the date the treaty has been officially presented to its Government, two weeks' time to consider and sign this treaty.

(11) The exchange of ratifications is to take place at Baku two weeks after the signing of the treaty.

(12) The present treaty is written in two original copies. [Here follow the signatures.]

The Constituent Assembly of Georgia on June 22 unanimously ratified the treaty.

FIRE HAZARD FROM OIL.

GROWING danger of destruction by fire of shipping, docks, wharves, piers, warehouses, and other waterfront property, due to the discharge of oil into the tidal waters of the Harbor of New York and its adjacent or tributary waters, has led the New York and New Jersey Dry Dock Association, which is composed of concerns engaged in ship repairing at the Port of New York, to take the matter up with the Chief Engineer's Office of the War Department, Washington, D. C., the Supervisor of New York Harbor, and the New York City Fire Department. The United States Shipping Board has notified the masters and chief engineers in charge of its vessels not to permit the pumping of oil into the tidal waters.

On June 29, 1888, Congress passed an act to prevent obstructive and injurious deposits within the harbor and adjacent waters of New York City, by dumping or otherwise, and to punish and prevent such offenses.

When cleaning tanks or bilges of vessels, oil is pumped into the water and circulated by the tide at piers, docks, shipyards, and other waterfront property. It appears that the discharge of oil into the water is invariably done at night, making it difficult to detect the offender.

Very often a thick layer of oil is observed on the surface of the water at ship repair yards. A lighted match, or cigar, or a red hot rivet dropped into the water would be sure to cause a serious fire. Several fires have already occurred at the repair yards in Brooklyn, resulting in the damage of vessels, property of the yards, and in the death and injury of workmen. The clothes and tools of workmen in these yards are also subject to destruction by fire. The floating drydocks of one repair yard were so thoroughly covered with oil that all the keel block lines and bilge block lines, which it is essential should be in good condition for the safety of ships, were rotted completely.

The oil should be disposed of in some other manner than discharging it into the tidal waters of the harbor.

The New York and New Jersey Dry Dock Association is urging the passage of an amendment to the city ordinance on the subject which will stop the practice, and the ordinance will be introduced into the Board of Aldermen this week.

It is suggested that the oil be put into a receptacle, and that the scows employed by the City of New York or by contractors for removing refuse matter shall be required to receive such oil for dumping at a proper place.