

Sir W. Seeds to Viscount Halifax.—(Received January 5, 1940.)

Moscow, December 20, 1939.

(No. 365.)

My Lord, WITH reference to my despatch No. 351 of the 7th December describing the course of events which culminated in the Soviet invasion of Finland on the 30th November, I have the honour to report that, while during the first few days of the hostilities the Soviet press was full of eye-witness accounts of the fighting, and much was made of the alleged support given to the puppet Finnish National Government by Finnish soldiers and civilians, these accounts of the war disappeared from the newspapers on the 5th December, and all efforts to publish evidence of Finnish support for M. Kuusinen were abandoned on the 11th December. Since the 5th December news of the war in Finland has indeed been confined to a brief daily communiqué issued by the headquarters staff of the Leningrad Military District. The explanation of this is not far to seek in view of the resistance, apparently unexpected, opposed to the Soviet troops, and in view also of the fact that, the longer the Finns resisted, the less possible was it to claim that the puppet Government enjoyed wide support in Finland.

2. Events have indeed proved that the invasion of Finland, though planned on the German model, was not executed with totalitarian efficiency, and was in a large measure improvised after it had become clear that the Finnish Government were not prepared to yield to bluster and intimidation. Evidence of the date on which it was decided to set up the puppet Government and to manufacture the incident which was to precede the invasion is provided by a map showing the territory to be exchanged under the terms of the Mutual Assistance Pact between the Soviet Union and the "Finnish Democratic Republic." This map, of which I enclose a copy, was issued on the 4th December. It is, however, marked as having been sent to the printers on the 1st December, the date on which the puppet Government was established and a day before the pact was signed. The preamble to the pact, it will be remembered, stated that the negotiations between M. Kuusinen and M. Molotov were conducted on the 2nd December.

3. I am assured on good authority that M. Potemkin, the Vice-Commissar for Foreign Affairs, and Marshal Voroshilov made independent statements at the beginning of the war that it would last four days. Two or three days ago an official of the Press Department of the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs informed a foreign journalist that he expected the war to continue for another month. Whatever reliance can be placed on this estimate (and it may be assumed to be optimistic), there are few military laurels for the Soviet army to lay at the feet of Stalin on his 60th birthday to-morrow. From all accounts, indeed, the Soviet forces have suffered heavy losses, and, according to a reliable eye-witness, the schools in Leningrad have been converted into additional hospitals. A Soviet doctor in Leningrad wrote the other day to a friend stating that in his "section" he had to deal with 400 wounded daily. One of the most curious features of the war news during the first few days were the scandalised reports in the Soviet press at the temerity and utter shamelessness of the Finns in sowing land mines, shooting out of trees and burning houses when retreating.

4. It is widely rumoured in Moscow that the German Embassy were not informed of the intention to invade Finland until 7 p.m. on the 29th November, and that they have since expressed profound indignation at this unheralded aggression on the part of the Soviet Union.

I have, &c.
WILLIAM SEEDS.

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