

## **The Revolution in Russia** **Where it fails**

By far the most important event in the social sense, which has occurred during the world war has been the upheaval in Russia, culminating in the revolution of March and November, 1917. For the working class these events are of supreme interest and worthy of close and deep study, not only for the purpose of keeping in touch with events as they occur, but also for learning the lessons these may impart.

Just here, however, the working class of Great Britain are faced with a most formidable obstacle in the way of their gaining even a slight knowledge of the happenings, or reaching a position where a full consideration could be given to the facts of the revolution. This obstacle is the Defence of the Realm Act.

By operations of this Act the master class sift all news coming into the country, by either Press or post, and take care that only matters allowed to be published are those that suit the interests of this class in one form or another. Thus, quite apart from their ownership of the General Press, they are able to prevent groups or individuals in this country obtaining information that might be useful to the working class. In other words, the only information or statements anyone outside of government circles can obtain here is just what it suits the master class to allow them to have.

In spite of this simple and glaring fact the I.L.P. have not hesitated in to denounce the action of November, usually called the "Bolshevik Revolution," while the S.L.P. has acclaimed it as a great Socialist revolution.

Point is added to these facts by the appearance of two pamphlets written not only by Russians, but by men claiming to be Bolsheviks. Here, if anywhere, one might imagine, will be found useful information, concrete facts, detailed accounts of events, that would be useful in guiding us to a sound judgement.

Unfortunately, nothing whatever is told in either pamphlet, apart from expressions of opinion, except the statements already given in the capitalist Press, which for the reasons above must be taken with the utmost caution.

The first pamphlet is entitled: "War or Revolution," is written by Leon Trotsky, and is published by the S.L.P. at Glasgow. No date of its writing is given, but from internal evidence it was seemingly written in 1915—

before the fall of the Czar—and appears to have been originally published in America.

While claiming to be a Marxist Trotsky appears surprised at the actions of the so-called Socialist International in voting war credits and supporting the war. To any serious Marxian student this was only to be expected. The Socialist Party stands firm and solid on the line of the class war. Only here is he impregnable. Only on this basis can the workers organise successfully for the overthrow of capitalism. For years past the S.P.G.B. alone in this country, and the Marxist groups in other countries, have pointed out that sections from England, France, Germany, Italy, Austria, etc., that formed the majority of the International, either had abandoned, or had never taken up, a stand upon the class war, and were therefore really not Socialists in the proper sense of the word. Their actions when the war began and since have simply emphasised the truth of our former case. That it took this world-slaughter to enlighten Trotsky as to the real position of these sections shows how little he grasped their actual attitude before. He is equally mistaken in his judgement of events in England, for on p.16 he says:

"In England the Russian Revolution [1905] hastened the growth of independent Socialism."

Quite apart from the fact that the 1905 upheaval in Russia was a capitalist and not a Socialist movement, this statement is absolutely incorrect. A movement that is not independent cannot be Socialist, and the Russian episode had no measurable effect upon either the Labour or the Socialist movement in this country. The real break with the old compromising policy that had saturated the movement in England, took place in 1904—a year before the Russian outbreak—when the Marxists formed up in the Socialist Party of Great Britain.

Equally mistaken is Trotsky's statement on the same page that "six or seven years ago [that is six or seven years before 1915] in England, the Labour Party, after separating from the Liberal Party, entered into the closest association with it again." As every student of the history of the Labour Party knows, that party has never been out of the "closest association" with the Liberal Party since the day it formed. Just as incorrect is the phrase in the concluding section (p.27) where the author say: "Socialist reformism has actually turned into Socialist imperialism."

Reformism and Imperialism are capitalist, and can by no stretch of the imagination be called Socialist. Such misuse of the latter word, especially by one claiming to be a Socialist, is a direct assistance to the master class

in their endeavours to further confuse the minds of the working class by misrepresentation of various kinds.

The second pamphlet was written by M. Litvinoff in March 1918, but it adds nothing to our knowledge of affairs in Russia, as it simply consists of a selection of the statements that have appeared in the capitalist Press of this country. In some instances these statements are exceedingly useful against agents of the master class like Kerensky, and we have used these admissions ourselves in the *Socialist Standard* when Kerensky was in power. Some of the other statements are significant in their bearing on the actions of the workers in Russia in a manner unsuspected of Litvinoff.

One feature of extreme and peculiar importance in these movements is treated by both the above writers in exactly the same manner, i.e., with silence. This feature is the economic and social position of the working class in Russia. For a matter of such importance to be neglected by both writers, shows either a lack of knowledge of the Russian situation or a deliberate attempt to conceal such knowledge from their readers.

As two such Russians are either unable or unwilling to supply this information the only thing left is to take that available before the war and try to apply it to the solution of the present situation. Clearly this can only be a provisional judgement while awaiting reliable news of the revolutions and of the present position of the workers in Russia.

Even to-day Russia is largely an agricultural country, some authorities stating that 80 per. cent of the population are engaged in that calling. Their system, however, has certain peculiar features that would take a large volume to describe.

In the main the agricultural population is divided up in village groups or communities largely based on what is called the "Mir." Each peasant is allotted a certain amount of land, depending on the number of his family. The holdings are changed periodically so as to prevent any one individual retaining the best land. If the population increases beyond the limits of the land controlled by the "Mir," a group forms up and moves out to new lands in a manner so well described by Julius Faucher in his brilliant essay on "The Russian Agrarian System." As this group is related to the old "Mir," communication and intercourse are kept up and a division of a race may have a whole series of villages spread out over a certain area, and having a more or less loose connection with each other. The land, however, is not *owned* by the village group. In the ultimate it is owned by the Czar in his capacity as "Father of the People" though large number of estates have been granted to the Nobles for their military and other services rendered to the Crown.

This ownership, whatever particular form it may take, is admitted by all the "Mir" by the payment of a charge for the land, usually termed a tax. This tax is paid to the Noble where he holds an estate and to the Czar where the latter is personal owner.

Into the developments, complications, abuses and rogueries that have resulted from this system we have not the space to go. One illustration can be found in Carl Joubert's *Russia as it really is* and Stepaniak in his *Russian Peasantry*, has given a masterly description of its workings. It will be sufficient to point out that apart from minor modifications three broad divisions have developed.

In the wild forest regions of the North, the people are still in the upper stage of Barbarism, being a mixture of hunters and pastoral workers, who know practically nothing of the affairs of the outer world.

In the middle regions the spread of the use of money and the effects that follow have resulted in more modern methods of working the estates. Owing to the heavy tax imposed large numbers of peasants have been unable to pay this charge after a poor season, with the inevitable result that they fall into the hands of money-lenders—who in numerous cases are actual members of the "Mir"—or they have to give up their holdings and either work for the money-lender or drift into the towns in search of work.

In the South or "Black Belt" region, largely owing to the fertility of the soil, old-fashioned methods still persist and the peasants make desperate struggles to retain their holdings, but were slowly losing their grip before the war.

The abolition of serfdom on private estates in 1861 and on the Czar's estates in 1871, was loudly announced as a great emancipation of the peasants. Under these decrees the peasants were supposed to be placed in a position where they could purchase their holdings, either individually or as a village group or Mir. The Nobles, of course, still retained the bulk of the estates granted to them, and it was intended that the big landlords would be balanced in the social system by the large number of small owners or peasant proprietors that would be sure to follow the great act of "emancipation". In the vast majority of cases, of course, the whole thing was a fraud and the landlords and moneylenders being the only ones, as a rule, able to purchase land, we have the paradox that the measure introduced to extend peasant proprietorship has resulted in the concentration of large estates in fewer hands than before. This has increased the number of landless peasants which recent estimates have placed at about one-third of the agricultural population, while

even those who favour the system do not claim that more than another third have become owners of the land, either individually or through their village groups.

The local affairs of the Mir are managed by the open general meetings, and these meetings elect the Elder or Mayor, who is the spokesman and delegate before the authorities. As stated above, the moneylender of the village is often a member of the Mir, and owing to his economic hold on the peasants he is often elected as the Elder.

It was, and is, people of this type that Kerensky represents. The Mir, of course, is under general Government control, usually through a "superintendent" or police officer.

In the Western area and the Southern Oil Belt industrial towns of the usual capitalist type, have developed in late years, and contain a number of genuine proletarians or wage slaves.

Is this huge mass of people, numbering about 160,000,000 and spread over eight and a half millions of square miles, ready for Socialism? Are the hunters of the North, the struggling peasant proprietors of the South, the agricultural wage slaves of the Central Provinces, and the industrial wage slaves of the towns convinced of the necessity, and equipped with the knowledge requisite, for the establishment of the social ownership of the means of life?

Unless a mental revolution such as the world has never seen before has taken place, or an economic change has occurred immensely more rapidly than history has recorded, the answer is "No!"

And it is extremely significant that neither Trotsky nor Litvinoff say a single word on this aspect of the situation. In fact, as far as one can judge, the best, but all too brief, account of the present position in certain parts of Russia is given by Mr. Price in his articles in the *Manchester Guardian* during November and December, 1917.

Leaving aside the subsidiary differences in the economic positions of the different provinces, the one great fact common to the mass of the peasantry is their desire to be rid of the burden of the tax they have to pay for their land, whether to the local lord or to the Government, so that they may gain a livelihood from their holdings. This applies to both the individual and the group holders. Hence the peasants' movements are not for *social ownership*, but merely for the abolition of the tax burden and their right to take up new land as the population increases. In other words, they only wish to be free the old system of individual or group cultivation from governmental taxes and control.

The agricultural and industrial wage-workers would be in a similar position economically as the same class of workers in Western Europe, if allowance is made for the lesser capitalist development of Russia.

What justification is there, then, for terming the upheaval in Russia a Socialist Revolution? None whatever beyond the fact that the leaders in the November movement claim to be Marxian Socialists. M. Litvinoff practically admits this when he says (p.37):

"In seizing the reigns of power the Bolsheviks were obviously playing a game with high stake. Petrograd had shown itself entirely on their side. To what extent would the masses of the proletariat and the peasant army in the rest of the country support them?"

This is a clear confession that the Bolsheviks themselves did not know the views of the mass when they took control. At a subsequent congress of the soviets the Bolsheviks had 390 out of a total of 676.

It is worthy of note that none of the capitalist papers gave any description of the method of electing either the Soviets or the delegates to the Congress. And still more curious is it that though M. Litvinoff says these delegates "were elected on a most democratic basis", he does not give the slightest information about this election. This is more significant as he claims the Constituent Assembly "had not faithfully represented the real mind of the people".

From the various accounts and of the capitalist Press (and, as stated above, M. Litvinoff does not supply us with any other information) it seem the Bolsheviks form the driving force, and perhaps even the majority, of the new Government, sometimes called the Soviet Government and sometimes the "Council of Peoples' Commissaries". The Soviet Government certainly appears to have been accepted, or at least acquiesced in, by the bulk of the Russian workers. The grounds for this acceptance are fairly clear. First the Soviet Government promised peace; secondly they promised a settlement of the land question; thirdly they announced a solution of the industrial workers grievances.

Unfortunately various and often contradictory accounts are given of the details of this programme, and Litvinoff's statements are in vague general terms that give no definite information on the matter. Until some reliable account of the Soviet Government's programme is available detailed judgement must remain suspended. That this mixed Government should have been tacitly accepted by the Russian workers is no cause for surprise. Quite the contrary. They (the Soviet

Government) appear to have done all that was possible in the circumstances to carry their peace proposals. And we are quite confident that if the mass of the people in any of the belligerent countries, with the possible exception of America, were able to express their views, free from consequences, on Peace or Continuance of War, an overwhelming majority would declare in favour of Peace.

As is admitted by the various sections of the capitalist Press, the Soviet representatives at the Brest-Litovsk Conference stood firm on their original proposals to the last moment. That they had to accept hard terms in the end is no way any discredit to them, but it was a result of conditions quite beyond their control. If they had done no more than this, if they had been compelled to give up office on their return, the fact that they had negotiated a stoppage of the slaughter and maiming of millions of the working class would have been a monument to their honour, and constituted an undeniable claim to the highest approbation of the workers the world over.

Of course the capitalist Press at once denounced the signing of the Peace treaty as “dastardly treachery”, and so on. We can quite easily understand that the agents of the foulest and most hypocritical ruling class the world has ever seen, steeped to their eyes in their own cruel treacheries, should have been astounded at the Soviet Government keeping its pledge to the Russian people, instead of selling them out to the Allied Governments.

Then follow the usual stereotyped “outrages” and “crimes” that the master class agents never fail to provide when an opponent dares to stand in their path. Unfortunately for these capitalist agents, their own correspondents are allowed to move freely over the country, and often “give the game away” by describing improvements both in ordinary administration and economic conditions under the new rule. And Mr. Litvinoff scores neatly here over the capitalist Press by comparing the alleged “outrages” with the actions of the master class against the workers after the fall of the Paris commune. A still more striking illustration is given by the Mr. Price from Russia itself, in his article in the *Manchester Guardian* for November 28<sup>th</sup>, 1917, where he describes the cold-blooded slaughter of 500,000 Khirgiz Tartars by the Czar’s Government in 1916. And he caustically remarks: “While Western Europe has heard about Armenian massacres, the massacre of the Central Asian Moslems by the Tsar’s agents has been studiously hidden.”

Indeed, if the Soviet Government *were* to start on a campaign of deliberate slaughter, it would take them many busy years to even approach the huge number of victims of the last Czar’s reign. But so far all the

evidence points to the allegations of Bolshevik butcheries being but a tissue of lies fabricated to suit bourgeois purposes.

And what of the future? It is impossible to offer any close forecast in the face of our lack of knowledge. We do not know what the Soviet Government has promised the peasants. We are ignorant of what measures they are putting into operation to solve the complicated land question. Despite the existence of the Mir organisation it will be easier for the Russian government to arrange for the management of the factories and industries of the towns than to settle the various and widely divergent, detailed demands of the peasants of the different provinces. There is no ground whatever for supposing that they are ready or willing to accept *social* ownership of the land, along with the other means of production. Are the Bolsheviks prepared to try to establish something other than this? If so does it not at once flatly contradict M. Litvinoff’s claim that they are establishing Socialism?

And grim shadows are spreading from both sides. On one side the Germans are trying to exploit and plunder as much as possible why they have the chance; on the other side the Japanese, assisted by British and American forces are entering on an exactly similar expedition, with the same objects in view. Also it has been reported that the Allied forces landing on the Murman coast are either under the command of or are accompanied by a notorious Czarist officer, General Gourko, who is working hard for the restoration of the Romanoffs.

With the mass of the Russian people still lacking the knowledge necessary for the establishment of socialism, with both groups of belligerents sending armed forces into the country, with the possible combination of those groups for the purpose of restoring capitalist rule, even if not a monarchy, in Russia, matters look gloomy for the people there. If the capitalist class in the belligerent countries succeed in this plan, the Soviet Government and its supporters may expect as little mercy as—nay, less than—the Khirgiz Tartars received. It may be another Paris Commune on an immensely larger scale.

Every worker who understands his class position will hope that some way will be found out of the threatened evil. Should that hope be unrealised, should further victims be fated to fall to the greed and hatred of the capitalist class, it will remain on record that when members of the working class took control of affairs in Russia, they conducted themselves with vastly greater humanity,

managed social and economic matters with greater ability and success and with largely reduced pain and suffering, than any section of the cunning, cowardly, ignorant capitalist class were able to do, with all the numerous advantages they possessed.

(August 1918)