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WHAT ABOUT RUSSIA NOW?

"There is the democracy of your Socialists"; "Substituting one tyranny for another"; "Bolshevik autocracy"; "What about Russia now?"; such are the cries that assail us.

And what have we to answer? Firstly, that all Press news and comments must be received with critical caution and reserve, because they have passed through the censor's hand, and usually come from anti-Socialist sources in the first instance, and because all our great dailies are opposed to Socialism.

Now let us consider what the Bolsheviks have done. In the decree for the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, as transmitted from Petrograd by the Bolshevik Agency, the Russian Socialist Government says:—

"The old bourgeois parliamentarianism has seen its day that it is unable to cope with the tasks before Socialism."

It points out that the Soviets or Councils of Workers', Soldiers', Sailors', and Peasants' Delegates have been from the first the organs of the Revolution. The decree declares that the Revolution

"created the Soviets as the only organisation of all the exploited working classes in a position to direct the struggle of these classes for their complete political and economic emancipation."

It may be said with equal justice that the Soviets created the Revolution. They sprang into being at its outbreak, they carried through the deposition of the Czar in March, and every subsequent advance has been initiated by the Soviets. It was the Soviets which initiated the famous formula, "No annexations, no indemnities, the right of the peoples to decide their own destiny." This formula they forced upon the unwilling Kerensky Government, securing its formal acceptance, but not its loyal adoption.

In their brief terms of office, Rodzianko, Miliukoff, and Kerensky each strove in their turn to resist and restrain the power of the Soviets, and the Bolsheviks, who now form the Government, consistently worked to make the Soviets all-powerful. The Bolshevik decree now explains:—

"During the first period of the Revolution the Soviets increased and multiplied. Perceiving the illusion of an understanding with the bourgeoisie and the deceptive Parliamentary organisations of the democratic bourgeoisie, they arrived at the solution that the liberation of the oppressed classes was an impossibility without a complete rupture of every kind of understanding. Therefore the revolution of October arose."

All this we have watched with interest, observing the strong support which the trend of events in Russia has been lending to those, calling themselves Syndicalists, Industrial Unionists, or simply Marxian Socialists, who interpret the great teacher's doctrines from the industrial standpoint, who believe that Parliaments as we know them are destined to pass away into the limbo of forgotten things, their places being taken by organisations of the people built up on an occupational basis. The failure of the elections for the Constituent Assembly, even though decided by an adult suffrage ballot, to return members prepared to support the policy of the Soviets is strong evidence that the industrialists have found the true path.

But why did the Bolsheviks, desiring the Soviets to be all-powerful, agree to the summoning of the Constituent Assembly; why did they push the elections forward? Would it not have been more logical to refuse to agree to the elections and to declare the Soviets all-sufficient? If the Bolsheviks hoped by the elections to demonstrate to the world that the capitalist parties have no following in Russia, they have done so very effectively, for, as the "Manchester Guardian" testifies, the Cadets (or

Liberals; no Parliamentarian now calls himself Conservative in Russia) have secured only 14 seats in the Assembly, and "but for proportional representation might have had not a single one."

It may be that the Bolsheviks desired by means of the meeting of the Constituent Assembly and its dissolution, to divide definitely and clearly in the popular mind, the politicians who are in favour of Socialism, but do not want to have it in their time, from those who are, like themselves, striving for its immediate establishment. It may be that the Bolsheviks have been disappointed in the elections, that having faith in the desire of the Russian people to secure peace and the enactment of the maximum Socialist programme, they believed that a majority of those prepared to carry out this programme would be elected. This view is borne out by the statement in the decree that:

"the people who voted for the Revolutionary Socialists were unable to distinguish between the Revolutionary Socialists of the Right, partisans of the bourgeoisie, and the Revolutionary Socialists of the Left, the partisans of Socialism."

In the old days, when those whose outlook was Socialist, Radical, Liberal, even what would be thought Conservative here, united in demanding the overthrow of the Czarism, professions of sympathy with the workers and their emancipation were not put to the test in Russia. Little wonder, then, that the Russian workers should have failed to probe to the depths of lying cynicism, in doing lip-service to reforms they do not intend to be enacted, to which politicians will descend, in order to catch votes. Is not this phenomenon the abiding curse of elections here, though our people have had a long experience of elections? We are not conversant with Russian election procedure, but undoubtedly in all countries persons of leisure, who are possessed of money to advertise their candidatures, have an advantage over poor men and women who have to work for their living.

As a representative body, an organisation such as the All-Russian Workers', Soldiers', Sailors', and Peasants' Council is more closely in touch with and more directly represents its constituents than the Constituent Assembly, or any existing Parliament. The delegates to the All-Russian and local Soviets are constantly reporting back to and getting instructions from their constituents; whilst the Members of a Parliament are elected for a term of years and only receive anything approaching to instructions at election times. Even then it is the candidate who, in the main, sets forth the programme, the electors merely assenting to or dissenting from the programme as a whole.

When the Revolution began and the Soviets arose, the Bolsheviks formed the minority. Even up to the early days of Kerensky's Premiership they held but one-third of the voting strength, but opinion has been moving fast in Russia, and some time before the October Revolution the Bolsheviks became the majority party in the Soviets. Those who actively promote the work of the Soviets may comprise the more advanced sections of the workers, but it is probably true that what the Soviet says to-day the mass of the Russian people will say to-morrow, and, as is the case with representative bodies of workers here, the Soviet committees, no doubt, are often pushed on by the rank and file. The Soviets, as delegate bodies, are able to respond swiftly to the changing feeling of those they represent.

But some people complain that the Soviets only represent the working classes; if they are to rule, the opinions of other classes will be ignored. Yes, that is so; and that is what the Bolsheviks desire.

To those who object, we need ask but one question: "Are you a Socialist?"

If you are not a Socialist, of course you object to a system which gives all power to the workers; we understand the ground of your objection and realise that until you are converted to Socialism your objection cannot be overcome.

But, if you are a Socialist, you must recognise that under Socialism everyone will be a worker, and there will be no class save the working class to consider or represent. Under Socialism no one will live on profits and dividends drawn from the labour of others; there will be no leisured classes.

But for the present the so-called "middle and upper classes" are much in evidence in Russia, and, as usual, they appear to be noisier and more exacting than their numbers warrant. The capitalist Press, of course, gives them its chief attention, though Mr. Arthur Ransome has admitted that they have been guilty of sabotage and counter-revolutionary intrigues.

But what are the next steps which the Bolsheviks propose to take towards Socialism? How do they intend to deal with those who have not yet joined the ranks of the workers? The Central Executive Committee of the Soviets has drawn up a scheme which it submitted to the Constituent Assembly, and which the Constituent Assembly refused to ratify. The following points from the scheme have reached this country:—

SOVIETS' DECLARATION OF RIGHTS.

"The Constituent Assembly resolves that Russia be declared a Republic of Councils of Workmen, Soldiers, and Peasants. Central and provincial power appertains to

these Councils. The Republic of Councils of Workmen's, Soldiers', and Peasants' delegates is formed on the basis of a free alliance of free nations, constituting a federation of National Soviet Republics."

"Art. 2 declares as abrogated the right of private proprietorship. The land on the surface and underground and all that it contains is declared to be the property of the State, as well as forests and other properties of the kind."

"The principle of obligatory work for all is laid down. "The arming of the working classes, the disarming of the leisured classes, and the organisation of a Red Socialist Army of workmen and peasants are announced."

"Art. 3 approves the Soviet policy for a democratic peace on known principles, and endorses the Soviet decree repudiating all Russian loans."

"Art. 4 says:—'Having been elected on electoral registers drawn up before the October Revolution, and before the people had begun to organise a Socialist society, the Constituent Assembly considers that it can in no way oppose the power of the Soviets. At the moment of the decisive struggle of the people against those who exploited them the latter can find no place in the governing body. Power must lie exclusively in the hands of the working classes and their representatives, the Soviets.'"

Other points in the programme are reported by "The Times" to be the transfer of factory control to the workmen, the taking over by the government of all banks, the abolition of the right to inherit property, the ratification of Finland's independence, withdrawal of troops from Persia, freedom and self-determination for Armenia. Many of these reforms are already in process of accomplishment.

People protest that it is unfair for the Bolsheviks to seize the land and factories without compensating those who used to own them. But, under Socialism, would merely be to give them a pensated, since to compensate them, whether in cash or in kind, would merely be to give them a title to live without working on the labour of others, a thing which is incompatible with the organisation of society on a Socialist basis. If the dispossessed landlords and capitalists are too ill or too old to work, they will be cared for by the community like other old and infirm persons. If they are able to work, of course they must work like the rest of the world.

Again, it is called unfair that the workers should be armed and the leisured classes disarmed, but surely, in view of the civil war which the leisured classes are carrying on against the Socialist Government, this is not an unnatural precaution. The counter-revolutionaries are fighting for the power to continue the slavery of the working classes: Is it surprising that the Socialists should take steps to prevent it? We regret that the resort to force should be necessary in order to establish the Russian Socialist Republic, but capitalism has been maintained by force all over the world for many weary generations past: it is not surprising that some force is required to repel the attack of its adherents, who are fighting desperately for its very existence.

Therefore do not say that the news from Russia is bad because, in the stress of the great struggle to establish Socialism, the Russian Socialist Government fiercely assailed and hardly pressed by capitalism and its minions both at home and abroad, has found it wisest to break with the Constituent Assembly, and to confide the direction of its policy to the democratically constituted organisations of the workers, instead of to an Assembly to which the wiles and craft of politicians has admitted a large proportion of capitalist wolves clothed in the bright promises of the Socialist lamb.

Let us rather rejoice that the Socialist Government still holds its place, and still, brave and steadfast, fights for the emancipation of mankind. Are you a Socialist? If so, firmly support your Russian Socialist comrades in their hour of peril. Cast off the cowardly doubts that are so industriously sown by those who are responsible for this present great world-massacre for capitalist ambitions, and who are always prepared cold-bloodedly to starve or forcefully coerce the workers of any country in the interests of capitalism.

At Brest-Litovsk the Russian delegates, by their firm adherence to the principles of a democratic peace, have induced the Germans to move from a refusal to evacuate the Baltic Provinces of Russia and Russian Poland on the ground that the peoples of these territories have already expressed their desire for German protection; to an offer to supplement the manifestations of the privileged section, on which the German claim was based, by elections on broad lines. The Russians have moved the Germans from a haughty refusal to discuss the conditions under which the will of the people shall be ascertained and the evacuation of occupied territories shall take place, to excuses that whilst Russian territories can be safely evacuated on the conclusion of a separate peace, territories which are to be severed from Russia cannot safely be evacuated prior to a general peace, lest fighting again break out therein. The force of just demands openly made by Russia has wrung from the German negotiators a promise that the occupying troops shall be reduced to the minimum necessary to maintain order, and that the troops shall exercise no political pressure or activity, also that the refugees who fled before the invaders shall be enabled to return when the vote is taken. But the Russians still unswervingly demand a referendum and the complete withdrawal of the armies of occupation, refusing to allow any encroachment upon the liberties of the people.

(Continued on p. 933, col. 3.)

Unfortunately the Ukrainian delegates have not followed the Bolshevik example. Trotsky bitterly reproaches them for entering into secret negotiations with the German Capitalist Government and for refusing to give any account of the proceedings to their Russian comrades whose negotiations are all made public. Trotsky appeals from these delegates of the Ukrainian Rada, which is still dominated by capitalist ideals, to the Ukrainian masses, imploring them to safeguard the interests of democracy. Meanwhile the Germans announce triumphantly that peace with the Ukraine is practically assured.

Yet when the Bolsheviks first came into power the British capitalist press sought to make it appear that the Bolsheviks were pro-Germans and the Ukrainian counter-revolutionaries were fervent supporters of the Allies.

The "Manchester Guardian" now complains that the Ukrainian delegates are showing themselves ready to make a separate peace "without any scruples as to its democratic character. The "Guardian" has to admit that the policy of the "Moderate" Russians, who oppose the Bolsheviks, is as much a peace policy as that of Lenin and Trotsky; but that, whilst all the Russian parties now respond to the popular desire for Peace, the Bolsheviks alone can be depended on only to conclude a peace in accordance with democratic principles.

The "Guardian" and other Liberal newspapers are perpetually counselling our Government to express sympathy with the democratic aims of the Russian Revolutionaries and with the democratic aims of British Labour; but such organs advocate merely the lip-service of democracy. They do not insist that the Allied Governments shall bring their aims into conformity with those of the Russian Soviets; merely that they shall verbally state that they are equally democratic. Such hollow professions, unbacked by deeds, from the members of any foreign capitalist Government could no longer affect the situation in Russia. We believe that ere long they will cease to affect the situation here.

E. SYLVIA PANKHURST.