Voline
Letter From Russia
1930

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The Russian Revolution has just entered its thirteenth year, a lapse of time sufficient for a social upheaval, even one of this scale, to prove itself.

What, then, is the current status of the country of "the most formidable" revolution? This question constantly occurs to a multitude of people, of all tendencies and social conditions who, drowning in the most varied and contradictory information end up by losing any hope of arriving at an exact notion of things there. Even our comrades are not always immune to fantastic rumors that they all too often don't know how to reply to with rigorous and documented facts.

In a series of more or less regular articles we will attempt to provide readers of "La Revue Anarchiste" with as precise information as possible on the true situation in the USSR, among others the political, economic, and social situation. We will gather this information exclusively from primary and unarguable sources: Soviet newspapers ("Izvestia," "Pravda," and others), letters from our correspondents…

Before beginning these articles we would like to recall for our readers a few essential facts of the Russian Revolution on the occa-

sion of its twelfth anniversary. This review will doubtless be useful to all those interested in the subject. In addition, it will serve as a basis for all we will later have to say.

The revolution's beginnings completely confirmed the theses and predictions of the anarchists. In fact, it was neither a party nor a political nor any other type of group that began or led the revolution. It broke put spontaneously with a general and decisive uprising of the working masses that ended up dragging the parties along in their train (February-March 1917).

Two parallel processes became immediately clear, as has been the case in all revolutions of vast scope. On one hand there was the groping around, the questioning, and the efforts of the popular masses who wanted to continue the revolution, to take it down the wide road of free popular activity with grand social realizations in sight. On the other hand there was the hasty rallying of all kinds of political elements seeking to take the revolution down the political road, thus establishing a new government and liquidating the free popular movement.

The political current initially arrived at the formation of three consecutive governments, none of which was able to resolve the gigantic problems of the revolution or satisfy the aspirations of the working masses. In order, they were the governments of the bourgeoisie and the agrarians (Miliukov, Prince Lvov), that of the "coalition" (with Kerensky), and finally Kerensky's socialist government (March- October 1917).

In the meanwhile the country continued to suffer. The problems of the revolution remained open. All the governments promised the prompt calling of the Constituent Assembly along with many other things. But all found it impossible to keep their promises. In these conditions another political group came from the shadows and, strengthened by the march of events, undertook the fight for power. This was the Communist Party (Bolshevist).

At the same time the free activity of the masses became more pronounced. The soviets, the factory committees, the newly formed

unions worked without cease. The insurrection of July 3, 1917 was one of the manifestations of that nascent force.

From the beginning the anarchists sought to support this popular current, to give it their disinterested assistance.

When the Kerenesky government was definitively discredited the great question arose: what was to be done? Bring down this government and put in its place a Bolshevist government, as the Communist Party preached? Or push the revolution towards new economic and social horizons so that the masses, strengthening their action, definitively make themselves masters of the situation and make the Kerensky government disappear without replacing it by another? (This was the thesis of the anarchists.)

It was the first current that carried the day. The masses gave their confidence and their assistance to the Bolshevist Party. They assisted it in conquering power in the hope that this new "proletarian" government would finally know how to solve the problems of the revolution. Two key reasons explain the lack of success of the anarchist idea: 1 — The weakness of the anarchist movement (in number and coordination); 2- The absence in the country of a worker's movement organized before the revolution. The insurrection of October-November 1917 won out over the Kerensky government. The Bolshevists were installed in power. They organized their so-called "proletarian" state.

The only problem they were then able to resolve — and this under the pressure of the masses — was the abandonment of the imperialist war. As for the rest, they demonstrated an impotence equal to that of the preceding governments (the agrarian problem, labor problem, financial problems, etc., etc.) But — and this is the essential — in order for the masses to become aware of this they needed more time than they previously had. And when they finally understood their error and undertook a desperate struggle against the impotent new power it was too late: the government, having organized in advance its forces of resistance and defense, the popular movement was definitively crushed (the Makhnovist movement,

the Kronstadt uprising o f 1921, etc.) During this same period the anarchist movement was obliterated.

Nevertheless, the sterility of Bolshevist activities and their results forced Lenin to retreat. In the face of a threat of a wide-scale movement he proclaimed the New Economic Policy (NEP) and granted a certain freedom to the economic activity of the population.

Alas, the very meaning of that "freedom" was completely falsified. Instead of a free creative activity on the part of the masses it meant freedom for certain individuals to engage in commerce and enrich themselves. The NEP sparked new growth for the bourgeoisie and at the same time a formidable state bureaucracy and bourgeoisie were formed. In the midst of all this, Lenin died (1921).

And so in 1921, at the time of Lenin's death, four years after the October Revolution, two facts of a primordial importance became clear:

1. The most left wing, the most advanced, the most revolutionary government showed itself to be powerless to resolve, in its "proletarian state," the problems of the social revolution. This powerlessness led to an economic and social situation so deplorable that the only means of escaping it was that of that of giving breath to a half-suffocated private capitalism;

2. The true revolutionary movement — that of the masses in full social action — having been completely stifled a new murderous bureaucracy, as well as a new state bourgeoisie, avid and cruel, were formed and established on the backs of the workers, now crushed and exploited more pitilessly than ever by this new caste of owners. It should be noted that these results also perfectly confirm the theses and predictions of the anarchists.

We are reaching the end of our rapid review.

We know that Lenin's dictatorship was little by little replaced by that of Stalin, who is now the grand master of the USSR.

What is more, the general situation that we have just described logically gave place to two principal phenomena: to the formation within the Communist Party of a so called "left" Opposition which, disgusted by the current state of affairs, seeks a solution in the total suppression of the NEP as well as other un-realizable measures as well as to the birth of a so-called "Right" current, whose partisans — also Bolsheviks — horrified by the complete ruin of the country want to strengthen capitalist restoration (especially in agriculture) as the sole means of salvation.

As for Stalin himself and his immediate entourage, these men are attempting to fight against the two "extremes" while all the while striving to maintain the status quo and to tack between the principles of communism on the one hand and the pressing need to make concessions to the needs of the hour on the other.

In the meanwhile, the country — whose vital forces remain tied up and whose working population is deprived of all freedom, of all initiative, of all means of action — falls deeper and deeper into an abyss of unparalleled misery…