

# The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the  
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Founded by EDWARD C. HEGELER

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VOL. XXXII (No. 12)

DECEMBER, 1918

NO. 751

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## The Open Court Publishing Company

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JA-LUO WARRIORS, WITH FEATHER HEAD-DRESS, SHIELDS,  
AND SPEARS.

Kavirondo, East Africa. (Photo by Mr. C. W. Hobley, M. Inst. C. E.,  
Assistant Deputy Commissioner, East African Protectorate.)



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## THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONARY DRAMA.

BY VICTOR S. YARROS.

AS intelligent observers are aware, the world has been witnessing a dramatic "race between war and revolution" in several countries. The war is practically over, but the revolution is far from having been liquidated. As the aftermath of the great and tragic war we have many grave and complex problems that may give our statesmen and jurists more trouble than they have apparently bargained for. The mere setting up of small and restless nationalities in the independent or "sovereign" business of government is a holiday task beside the infinitely more difficult task of insuring reasonable harmony among them and preventing them from picking quarrels with more powerful neighbors. Small, ambitious nations can become big nuisances. Federation, union for large purposes, cooperation in the interest of efficiency and economy, with ample cultural autonomy for constituent units, would appear to be the only real solution of the many national and racial problems that the war has left us as its heritage.

That the minds of sober students and earnest informed thinkers would naturally turn toward this solution, can hardly be doubted. The lessons of history, assuredly, are too plain to be misunderstood. There is no progress in disunion, disintegration, multiplication of weak, insecure states. There are no advantages to true civilization in reversion to a dead past. Even a League of Nations formed on the most liberal lines would afford no guaranty of peace and security were the newly liberated nationalities to remain severally independent, jealous of one another, walled in and legally isolated in a commercial sense. As Immanuel Kant pointed out long ago, a true League of Nations implies, among other things, complete

freedom of trade among the associated nations. Tariffs, and especially preferential tariffs, are sources of irritation and friction, and a multiplication of independent states necessarily involves a multiplication of tariff barriers and customs houses.

These ideas, to repeat, would meet with little resistance from men of vision and understanding if the world situation were not so befogged and if confusion were not made worse confounded by the revolutionary outbreaks and disturbances.

Peace has to be made, not with stable and duly constituted governments, but, in some cases at least, with fragile, unrepresentative pseudo-governmental organizations—accidents of the hour, fruits of anarchy and chaos.

Furthermore, the world finds itself in the midst not merely of political, but of social, economic and intellectual upheavals. No wonder pessimism is said to reign in high circles, despite the rather sudden ending of the war.

Now, Russia was the first of the great powers to stop fighting, sue for peace and embark upon a colossal "social" experiment. Her internal troubles and trials since the first of the two revolutions of 1917 have perplexed the Western world more deeply than those of any other country. Many have frankly "given Russia up," saying that her "psychology" is bizarre and utterly incomprehensible to a non-Slav mind. But we have to understand Russia—especially we Americans, who are to be called on to aid her materially and possibly give her sympathetic guidance as well.

In point of fact, the several acts of the Russian drama are not very difficult to interpret in the light of Russian conditions—physical, political, moral, and historical. Science bids us look for "simple explanations," particularly where human conduct is concerned. This article is an attempt to interpret the Russian revolution and its sequel without bias, partisanship or passion, and incidentally to throw light on the question of our duty and opportunity in Russia.

### 1. *The Overthrow of Czarism.*

All Russian writers of note agree that the revolution of March, 1917, was truly national, spontaneous and popular. For the first time Russians of all schools and factions found themselves "unanimous." Autocracy had committed suicide. The old regime was bankrupt, and there were none to defend it or plead for a new lease of life for it. Even the peasant millions who had venerated the "White Czar," the "little father," and had long considered him to



be their sincere if impotent protector, were reconciled to the abdication of the House of Romanov and to the establishment of a republic. Famine, cold, misery, staggering losses in the war—losses attributed not to the ordinary fortunes of war, but to incompetence, corruption, selfishness, pettiness, and actual treachery in the Russian bureaucracy and cabinet—had thoroughly cured even the illiterate peasant of his affection for the autocrat. The army welcomed the revolution. It was weary of butchery and slaughter. Too often had it had to oppose with bare breasts and arms the irresistible advance of disciplined, perfectly equipped and ably led enemy legions. The army knew that Russia could not continue to play the part that had been assigned to her. She had made terrific sacrifices and had reached the breaking point. An agricultural empire, with an illiterate people, undeveloped “pigmy” industries, a small and ignorant middle class, inadequate transportation facilities, empty arsenals, how could Russia stay longer in a war that taxed to the utmost all the technical, industrial and scientific resources of the twentieth century?

The revolution, then, came because Russia needed and demanded peace and bread. The masses of the people were not interested in mere politics; as has well been said, the Russian people do not “think politically, but economically.” The first provisional government was expected to grant the people the blessings the czar had been unable to give—peace and bread. It was, however, unequal to the situation. It lacked moral authority. It was too conservative and moderate for the period. It had not the courage to inform its foreign allies in positive terms that Russia was practically out of the war and that the renewed “offensive” expected of her was impossible.

The first provisional government was a government of gentlemen, of cultivated and westernized men, of professors, diplomats and administrators. The workmen, the soldiers, the sailors, and the peasants in the villages were not in the mood to listen to the gospel which this government preached,—the gospel of patience, of moderation, of sweet reasonableness, of loyalty to allies, of strict observance of covenants that had been made by the czar. They insisted on immediate relief and reform. The provisional government undertook many admirable things, but it could not give the people peace or bread. It begged for time, and begged in vain. The real power was in the hands of the militant, mercurial committees of soldiers, sailors and workmen, and these committees distrusted the provisional government and hampered it in every

direction. They soon made the position of the government untenable, and it had to resign. It had to make way for a more radical and more representative government.

## *2. The Kerensky Cabinets.*

After the fall of the Lvov government the central council of soldiers' and workmen's delegates had the opportunity to take the reins of government into its own hands. It hesitated and declined. It professed its readiness to support another coalition cabinet and work with it so far as it might approve of its policies. Kerensky was the logical choice for premier in a new cabinet. He was a socialist, a popular orator, a favorite with the trade unions, a former agitator against autocracy. Even moderates urged him to take the premiership. He was not a man of action or of mental vigor. He was not a statesman or an administrator. But he had personal magnetism, and it was hoped that he would by persuasive oratory and tactful private negotiations manage to induce socialists, individualist radicals and liberals to work together amicably and preserve a semblance of discipline and order in the army and in the country.

Kerensky was obliged to make many successive changes in his cabinet. He sought to placate the extremists without alienating the moderates. He played the ungrateful role—doubly ungrateful in Russia, where compromise is treated as sin—of opportunist and Fabian. His chief duty was to pave the way for a constituent assembly. He and his associates did not feel that they had any legal or moral right to settle momentous, knotty and serious questions—least of all the question of land tenure. They knew the peasants' attitude toward the land question. They knew that immediate expropriation of landlords without compensation was a popular doctrine, and that this doctrine was being disseminated by a section of the Social Democratic party of Russia—the Bolsheviks (who have become so notorious since). But they would not or could not use force against these agitators—even when some of the latter were openly accused of accepting enemy money and carrying on propaganda that happened for the moment to suit enemy purposes. The Kerensky government argued that free speech and free assembly were too sacred and inviolable to the revolution to be infringed upon even in a critical and anxious hour. They were determined to be consistent and logical. They would not do the cruel things which they had condemned the czar for doing. The agitation they

would not, and perhaps could not, check, the agitation of the extremists who talked to the peasants and soldiers in terms they could understand, finally proved to be the undoing of the Kerensky government. It fell because it was too conservative for the left and too radical for the rightist parties. It fell because it was feeble, uncertain, divided against itself, and practically impotent. Like its predecessor, it had failed to give the masses either peace or bread. It had failed to summon a constituent assembly, and it had failed to impress the Allies with the desirability of encouraging the movement for "a negotiated peace," of promoting inter-belligerent conferences of radicals, laborites and socialists, and formulating definite peace terms. Kerensky was not as frank with the Allies as he might have been, and it is doubtful whether they ever fully understood the Russian situation before the victory of Bolshevism. On the other hand there is reason to think that the Allies resisted unpleasant explanations and shrank from looking the facts in the face so far as Russia was concerned. They thought that a Kornilov, or another stalwart patriot and soldier, could suppress revolutionary pacifism and reestablish the eastern front. They stressed Kerensky's weakness too much, and could not bring themselves to believe that elemental forces, beyond the control of any "strong man," had been unchained and let loose in Russia. They mistook a mass movement for an insignificant revolt. They indicted individuals for acts or omissions which, at the time and in the circumstances that existed, could not possibly have been avoided. Russia after the revolution was out of the war and intended to stay out. Even the Cossacks refused to support a pro-Ally, pro-Patriotic movement.

### 3. *The Bolshevik Dictatorship.*

Lenin, Trotzky and their associates—none of them "workmen"—had little difficulty in wresting power from the Kerensky government. They did not lead the masses—they followed them; they voiced the people's insistent demands for peace, bread and land. They had audacity and the courage of their opinions. They were Social Democrats, followers of Karl Marx, and they subscribed to the economic interpretation of history, or "historic materialism." They had no respect for what they called "bourgeois shibboleths." They had no interest in political ideals and cared little about mere forms of government. Religion and morality meant nothing to them; the social revolution would bring forth its own religion and morality. They believed in the gospel of the Communist Manifesto, did not flinch from expropriation and confiscation of property, and were

prepared to use any means that might prove to be necessary to the realization of their supreme end.

Their first duty, as they rightly enough conceived it, was to end the war and give Russia the opportunity of turning to internal problems and revolutionary reforms. They did not *prefer* a separate peace; they served what to them seemed quite sufficient notice on the Allies that a general peace must be made forthwith on the basis of the Soviet formula, "No annexations; no indemnities; self-determination." They gave the Allies time, while warning them repeatedly that Russia might be compelled to desert them and conclude a separate peace.

They expected that the German Socialists and trade unionists would come to their aid in the final phase of the peace negotiations and force the Berlin government and the German high command to grant Russia fair and reasonable terms. They did much to shape and influence labor sentiment in Germany and Austria-Hungary, and they expected to reap immediately the fruits of their bold and thrilling ideas. They thought they had so thoroughly prepared the soil of Europe for revolution that even the German kaiser and his generals would not dare propose to Russia's Socialist government oppressive and humiliating terms.

When they finally signed the Brest-Litovsk treaty they did so because the anticipated help was not forthcoming and because they felt sure that revolution in Western Europe was only delayed. They signed a treaty that, they said, gave them a breathing spell, a chance to organize a "red" army, and the infinitely more important opportunity of abolishing the old economic order and establishing genuine socialism in what remained of the Russian empire. They candidly said that they could afford to give up Poland, the Ukraine, the Baltic provinces, and much more besides, for an uncertain period, provided they were left free to make their historic experiment in Marxian socialism in the interior of Great Russia.

The Bolshevik leaders called their successful rebellion against Kerensky and his coalition cabinet "the social revolution." They planned to expropriate the expropriators, to seize the land, the mines, the banks, the factories and the other capitalistic establishments, and to transfer these to the people. They did not actually believe that the peasant and proletarian masses were "conscious Socialists," converts to Marxian socialism; but they believed that the people's sufferings and discontent, and the peasants' land hunger, would enable them to take advantage of the situation. They meant, in short, to use the irresistible demand for peace and bread as a

stalking horse for the introduction of the type of Socialism they had long advocated and dreamed of.

But what of the middle classes, of the non-socialist parties and groups, of the milder socialists who were opposed to confiscation, terror, and repudiation of national debts? Would these surrender, or fight Bolshevism?

The answer was—the *dictatorship of the proletariat*. Lenin and Trotzky declared that all the counter-revolutionaries, whether noble, bourgeois or former foes of the czar and his regime, would be ruthlessly suppressed. The rule of the people was the goal in view; but the rule of the urban proletariat, led by a few Marxian socialist intellectuals, was *the indispensable preliminary stage*. History justified the dictatorship, they claimed. Revolutions cannot be peaceful or beatific. Sentimentalists, rhetoricians, academics, fair-weather radicals were as dangerous to them as the reactionary Bourbons. All enemies must be crushed. There could be no compromise with weak-kneed reformers. Past services and claims must be treated as negligible factors. The success of the social revolution must not be jeopardized by ideology or weak concessions to "bourgeois virtues." Russia was the pioneer, the pathfinder, and at any cost must achieve the great objective. The other nations would follow in her footsteps. Russia was not perhaps quite ready for socialism, but there are such things as "leaps" in the history of human progress. The minority was ready for the leap, and once made, there could be no turning back. The majority would *subsequently* be educated and converted.

The group of masterful men that held these beliefs assumed power with the support of armed guards, embattled urban workmen, and hosts of disinherited and vindictive peasants who had not forgotten the cruelties of the *ancien régime*, the burdens of the czar's tax system, the exactions of the corrupt officials and the tyrannical agents of the secret police. The soviets throughout Great Russia gravitated toward Bolshevism, for it meant little, if any, interference with them and immediate seizure of the land that belonged to nobles, capitalists, the church or the crown. A reign of terror ensued. Every "bourgeois" was under suspicion. How many men, women, and children the Bolshevik regime has slain or starved to death, the world does not yet know. But that anarchy and civil war have held sway throughout Russia, and that Bolshevik troops have had to fight whole sections of the dismembered empire, are notorious facts.



#### 4. *The Bolshevik Failure—the Causes.*

At this writing the Bolshevik government is still nominally in the saddle, but its collapse is foreseen and generally anticipated. Even Lenin tacitly admits that his great adventure is likely to end in smoke. He has not brought internal peace to Russia. He has not restored normal conditions. He has not averted famine and has not started the wheels of industry. The "leap" has not been made. Ukases and decrees on paper are not enough to carry a people over a chasm and settle them securely under a new system of laws and institutions.

Why Lenin and Trotzky have failed, and were bound to fail, may be explained in a few words. In the first place, they did not give the people the external peace they had promised. The treaty of Brest-Litovsk angered many Russians, who continued to regard Germany as an enemy. Moreover, it brought them the Czecho-Slovak complications and, eventually, intervention by the Allies and the United States.

In the second place, the Bolshevik government did not bring internal peace, concord and rehabilitation. Province after province, district and center after district and center seceded, repudiated the Lenin regime. Some districts set up other governments and opened negotiations with the Allies. Russian exiles in Europe and America carried on active propaganda against Bolshevism and Soviet rule, denouncing them as tyrannical beyond anything ever attempted by the czar, utterly anti-democratic and hopelessly incompetent and "crazy." In the parts of Russia which the Bolshevik executive claimed to control and govern every former landlord, including the richer peasants, every former owner of property, every "bourgeois," and nearly every non-socialist intellectual was known to be bitterly anti-Bolshevik at heart. Thousands of trained men went on a strike and declined to work under the mediocre or ignorant appointees of the Bolshevik soviets. This led to reprisals, to "pogroms" directed against the intellectuals. Russia could not resume normal life without the energetic and earnest aid of every intelligent son and daughter. True, these educated and trained men and women numerically constitute an insignificant element of the whole population; still, as Lenin has admitted, Russia cannot produce, trade, exchange, transport, finance her industries and commerce without this small element. If it is striking against and boycotting Bolshevik rule, that rule must collapse.



And what after such a collapse? The answer of anti-Bolshevik Russians of all schools and parties is that the Bolshevik ministry must be replaced by a truly national, representative government, and that a constituent assembly should be convoked without further delay to give Russia a stable and genuinely democratic government. This is the alternative program. A constituent assembly elected under a system of universal, equal and secret suffrage would have the authority to speak for Russia and to act for her. No dictator has such authority, no matter how benevolent and altruistic and self-sacrificing he may be—or imagine himself to be.

### 5. *Is the Soviet System "Superior"?*

There are, however, men and women in England and America who assert that the Bolsheviki are more democratic than their opponents; that they have evolved a higher form or type of popular government; that the attacks on them betray narrow, provincial, prejudiced minds, and that, even if they fail, the future is bound to vindicate them. It is asserted that Europe and America have crude, outworn, unjust systems of government, while Bolshevism has blazed the way to a fairer and nobler form. Let us examine these claims. Let us ask just on what basis of fact or principle they rest. What is the essence of the Soviet form of government?

Let Lenin himself, the acknowledged intellectual leader of Bolshevism, answer this query. In an elaborate and powerful address which he delivered at Moscow some months ago Lenin said on this crucial point:

"We introduced and firmly established the Soviet republic—a new type of state—ininitely higher and more democratic than the best of the bourgeois-parliamentary republics. We established the dictatorship of the proletariat, supported by the poorest peasantry, and have inaugurated a comprehensively planned system of socialist reform."

These two sentences, if they mean anything, mean that a dictatorship of the city workers supported by the poorest peasants is infinitely higher and more democratic than a republic based on universal, equal and secret suffrage, on the doctrine of majority rule arrived at by free and tolerant discussion. What reasonable radical can subscribe to this notion?

In the same address Lenin continues, more explicitly:

"The Socialist character of the Soviet democracy consists first in this: that the electorate comprises the toiling and exploited masses; *the bourgeoisie is excluded*. Secondly in this: that all

bureaucratic formalities and limitations of elections are done away with; that the masses themselves determine the order and time of elections and with complete freedom of call. Thirdly, that the best possible mass organization of the vanguard of the toilers—of the industrial proletariat—is formed, enabling them to direct the exploited masses, to attract them to active participation in political life, to train them politically through their own experience; that in this way a beginning is made, for the first time, to get actually the whole population to learn how to manage and begin managing.”

In other words, the Soviet form of democracy is higher and better because it disfranchises the middle class, because it disfranchises the richer peasant who shares the sentiments of the middle class, and because it puts supreme control in the hands of the city workers. Further, the Soviet form is higher and better because it dispenses with all formalities in elections and enables a mass meeting, or a tyrannical chairman pounding a gavel, to declare this or that group of persons elected to this or that set of offices. Secrecy, uniformity, precautions against fraud and force in elections are “bourgeois” fancies, and their abandonment insures more certain and direct rule by the people!

Of course, all this is grotesquely absurd. Yet there are self-styled radicals and progressives who extol the Soviet type of “democracy” and ask us to copy it, or at least devoutly worship it as an ideal, if we are too imperfect to realize it.

The Soviet form of government is neither democratic nor rational. It is government by accidental groups, by disorderly assemblies, by haphazard arrangements. It is government by usurpers and pretenders who may or may not choose to obey a dictatorship of the so-called proletariat, which in turn is led by a small group of remorseless non-proletarian dogmatists and social bigots.

Some superficial apologists for the Lenin regime find some hidden beauties in the fact that the Soviet government, whether local, provincial or central, is a government of people who “work together” instead of a government of people who happen to live in a given area or who think alike! Now there may be some advantage in basing representation on occupation, profession, calling, instead of on mere population. But what has this to do with the disfranchisement of those who “work together” as “richer peasants,” or as “bourgeois,” or as non-socialist intellectuals? And what happens when those who work together disagree and think separately? In point of fact, the Lenin form of Soviet government is a despotic government of certain people who think alike and who disfranchise

and suppress all who venture to differ with them and to have other ideas of social and economic organization. It is not a higher form of democracy, but a lower form of tyranny.

Russia had such institutions as the Mir—the village commune—the Zemstvo, and the city electorate to build on. The czar's suffrage acts were illiberal and undemocratic, and the revolution extended and popularized them. Proportional representation was adopted to protect minorities. Local, provincial and national institutions could have been firmly planted on the thoroughly democratized suffrage, and the majority would have ruled within constitutional limitations. The Bolshevik faction destroyed democracy, scornfully rejected majority rule, and established a dictatorship of a small class in the name of "the social revolution" that was to bring forth a perfect democracy. The experiment was as indefensible theoretically as it was futile, needless and impossible practically. In Russia, under a democratic government, the workers and peasants would have controlled any assembly, any parliamentary body. The land problem, the credit problem, the problem of industrial control, would have been solved conformably to the wishes of the great majority—workers and peasants. The minority, the bourgeoisie and the intellectuals would have been outvoted on every definite issue. But—they would have had the rights of freemen—the right to express opinions, to agitate and educate, to seek to influence and win over the majority. They would have had their day in the court of public opinion. They would have had no ground for complaint. As it is, they are deprived of all political rights, all voice in government, simply because they might have proved too persuasive, too eloquent, too successful in debate. Their "side" was not wanted. They could not be permitted to talk or to vote. The people must follow the proletariat vanguard and Lenin. They cannot be allowed to choose. And all this is "higher democracy"!

These bedlamite ideas have happily been assessed in Germany and Austria at their true value. The Social Democrats of Western Europe have fortunately little sympathy with Bolshevism and have regarded Russia's recent experiences as warnings or deterrent examples. The principles of democracy and liberty are rightly understood in the radical circles of Germany and Austria, and the danger of Bolshevism in those countries was greatly exaggerated after the abdication of the autocrats and the establishment of a provisional Socialist government. Russia must learn from Europe and America what democracy is. She is learning now. She is not lost.