

THE GREATNESS OF RUSSIA

The Land the Root Cause of the Revolution

By H. N. BRAILSFORD, IN THE HERALD (LONDON)

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A friend of mine who is a connoisseur remarked the other day that the Russian Revolution has thrown up no great men. Probably he was right, for few of us have made up our minds about Kerensky as yet. Vitality he has, resolution, magnetism, and eloquence, but has he the contrivance and foresight of the political architect? I am not sure that the revolution is to be commiserated on the death of great men. The hero in politics, as that chief of sentimentalists, Carlyle, would have called him, is commonly an arch-egoist, who elbows his way to prominence by the art of calling attention to himself. These Russians seem deficient in that species of egoism. They think in terms of councils and committees, and not in terms of great men. The hero of this revolution is, to my thinking, the anonymous working man, whose intelligence has been sharpened by the unending Russian practice of debate. He it was who overthrew Tsardom. The Socialist leaders at that moment were mostly in exile. The Liberals looked on from their balcony. It was the simple munition worker and the private soldier who won the battle in Petrograd streets and made the Soviet. This same simple artisan it was who defeated Korniloff last week. That story of the proclamations has a grandeur about it which compensates us for the absence of a Danton or a Mirabeau. Korniloff, at his headquarters in Mohileff, sent his declaration of rebellion to the composers of the General Staff. They refused to set it up. Then the General's bodyguard, Mohammedan Turcomans from the Steppes of Asiatic Russia, were called in, and, by threatening to cut the composers to pieces, reduced them to a sort of obedience. But Kerensky's proclamation had meanwhile arrived. These Socialist composers printed both documents, and took care that for every parcel of Korniloff's poison which went out to the regiments along the front a parcel of Kerensky's antidote went with it. The effect was perfect. The revolutionary armies heard both sides, but they acted on the advice of Kerensky and the Soviet. Looking back over the events of this anxious week, it is fairly clear that the counter-revolution never had a chance—or, rather, its only chance lay in deception and surprise. If Korniloff's cavalry had ridden a little harder, if he had placed himself at its head as Napoleon or even Boulanger would have done, if he had kept back his proclamation until he had rushed the unsuspecting capital he might perhaps have scored a momentary success. What happened, in fact, was beautifully Russian. British or French troops in such a case would have rushed at each other and fought. These Russian soldiers talked it over, and the result was that the revolution won the debate. One hears it said that the Russians are merely talkers. In other words, they are rational beings. Put them in uniform, bathe them in blood of a world-war, baptise them with the Revolution, and still their deep faith prevails in reason, in discourse, in the fraternal exchange of opinion. One can dispense with a great man when one sees a great nation.

THE OLD DELUSION AGAIN

It was rather pathetic to watch at work last week in London the same delusion which welcomed the Revolution amiss. London imagined that the Russian people overthrew Tsardom in order to prosecute the war with more enthusiasm. Once again we were told that the Moscow

merchants and reactionaries who used to arm the Black Hundreds had stimulated Korniloff to his adventure from that same motive. About Korniloff himself one need not speculate. He is only a tenth-rate Napoleon, and with the mind of a gallant boy, he must have the vanity of a child, on which astuter persons played. If he meant to "get on with the war" he chose an odd moment and a strange method. He split the army, he started civil war at the very hour of a brilliant German success. He said himself that the enemy might easily march from Riga to Petrograd (probably a gross exaggeration), and then proceeded to recall the best troops from the fighting front in order to push his own personal pretensions. If he had managed to rush Petrograd, what would the result have been? A long civil war, a revolt of the workers on all the railways and in all the factories, a feud in every regiment between officers and men, the dissolution of any show of political unity in Russia, the entry of the enemy amid these confusions, and as the most probable result an ignominious separate peace. The sooner we realise that the Russian reaction is not thinking of the war at all, the sooner shall we reach a clear view of the Russian problem. Middle-class Russia was certainly "patriotic" and nationalist in 1914. The Sazonoffs and Sukhomlinoffs who made the war inevitable by lying and intrigue were only the instruments of this war party. It was anti-German primarily because its economic interests made it so. German competition, in spite of the high tariff, was formidable, and the popular cry was for "liberation" from the German menace, which meant primarily from cheap and saleable German imports. That issue, with the Turkish question, made the war for the Russian middle class. To-day it is another class-interest which governs it.

THE SOCIAL REVOLUTION

This propertied class realises that a social revolution is latent in the political revolution. It shuddered when Kerensky and his first mainly Socialist Cabinet proclaimed the principle of the abolition of private property in land. It trembled when Tchernoff, the Social Revolutionary leader, was nominated Minister of Agriculture and began to prepare a scheme for the breaking-up of big estates without compensation for the prairie-value of land. If agricultural landed property were threatened, mines and oil-wells might not remain for long in private hands, and already even industrial capital feels insecure. It was rather naïve to imagine that Socialist workmen had shed their blood merely in order to set up a Republic of the French type. Socialism in the West is a doctrine which has to struggle against a rooted tradition of individualism. Socialism in Russia is grafted on to the deepest and oldest traditions of the peasantry. It is merely a modern formulation of what this peasantry has thought for centuries. In its village commune or Mir it had preserved the collective ownership of land. No one had ever succeeded in teaching the Russian peasant our strange Western paradox, that private ownership is the pillar of morality. On the contrary the Russian peasant always held that the immoral and anti-social thing is to own or seize more land than you can till. Periodically the Mir parcelled out the land to all the families who composed it, "to each according to his need." What each got was a thin and hungry strip, barely enough to starve upon. More than once the rumour ran through Russia that the Little Father was going to give back the rest of the land to the people. The rumour was enough to keep faith in the millennium alive. The Revolution is going to do what the Tsar never did. That is the explanation of this and all future attempts at counter-revolution. The propertied class is ready to do what in all ages and in all countries the possessing class will always do: it is ready to fight for the land. It has probably no objection to the breaking-up of the Crown lands and the vast Church

estates. It might even accept a scheme of land purchase, like that of the cadets in 1906. But it would rather destroy the Revolution than face the compulsory uncompensated breaking-up of large private estates.

[We gladly reproduce, in part, this searching and informing article from the pages of our contemporary, but we cannot agree with the writer that Socialism is merely a modern formulation of what the Russian peasantry has thought for ages. The Russian peasantry, as Tolstoi taught us so long ago, and as the peasantry are now proving up to the hilt, are not out for Socialism with all its soul-destroying bureaucracy; they are out for land and liberty. The writer of the article himself seems to see this when he declares that "Socialism in the West is a doctrine which has to struggle against a rooted tradition of individualism." Doubtless, for the peasantry know that their Republic will live just as individual and personal liberty is assured.—Ed. LAND VALUES.]

RUSSIAN LAND MONOPOLISTS AT BAY Causes of the Counter-Revolution

We are firmly convinced that the motive behind the counter-revolution had little relation to the war. Neither before the Revolution, nor after it, has the war meant for Russians what it meant for the West. The mass of the people, after the first passing wave of emotional interest was over, thought of it chiefly as a disturbance which would shake the fabric of things, a long and painful labour which might end, as the Japanese war so nearly did, in the birth of domestic freedom. After the Revolution the war had lost its governing purpose. Freedom had resulted from it, and the rest was irrelevant. Hence the powerful and nearly universal desire for a general peace, which immediately followed the change.

We shall do well to assume that there is a local, a purely Russian cause for most of what happens in Russia. Simple physical hunger made the Revolution in Petrograd. Land-hunger rallied the peasants to it. Hunger, which the Provisional Government can no more satisfy than did the Tsardom, is the chief difficulty of the Revolution. The inverse of the peasants' land-hunger, that is to say, the defensive instinct of the propertied class, is the real motive of the counter-revolution. To be sure the Conservative elements talk of many other things—of Finland, of the Ukraine, even of Constantinople, of discipline, and the shame of retreats, and of the death penalty. What it means is land.

This is a peculiar view, the reader will say, why do not the correspondents talk more about it? Most of them have mentioned it, or indicated it, in a phrase or two. But they, too, being Englishmen, are chiefly interested in the war, and they are writing for the British public which at this moment cares for Russian internal problems only as they affect the war. The clearest note came from Prince Lvoff, the late Premier, when he resigned, and issued his declaration against the Socialist land-schemes which would, he said, divide Russia into two irreconcilable camps. For the rest, the silence is largely tactical. It looks much better to say that one is making a counter-revolution out of patriotism than to plead class-interests. It may also be partly true, for so long as the war goes no the final settlement of the land question can be postponed. The motive of the movement, however, was clearly revealed in the concentrated attacks on M. Chernoff, the Minister of Agriculture. The Provisional Government had already adopted and proclaimed the principle of the abolition of private property in land. If M. Chernoff followed the thinking of his party, the Revolutionary Socialists, he would have recommended to the Constituent Assembly the boldest

and most unflinching scheme that has ever seen the light in Europe. It would probably lay down the general principle that every family which wishes to live by the land may have the use of as much arable land and pasture as a family can cultivate with its own hands, and no more. The ownership and sale of land would cease, and property would be vested in the commune. Existing estates would be scaled down to the average, which may be about thirty acres, and the surplus would be distributed, without compensation to the present owners (save possibly for improvements).

That is, as we understand it, the outline of the contemplated scheme, though there may be compromises or alleviations in detail. Put to the vote of a land-hungry peasantry which has a rooted traditional belief in communal ownership, it would have every prospect of being carried. One need not pause to discuss this scheme. Right or wrong, wise or foolish, a revolution which must win the peasants, has probably small choice in the matter. The peasants have acted on these principles already. With this fact before us, one need not speculate about the motives of the counter-revolution. A landed class will always be ready to fight for its estates, and the propertied class, as a whole, can hardly feel that industrial capital is likely to be safe for very long.

The political revolution had latent in it a social revolution. That is the issue to-day. Whatever attitude one takes towards it, it is wiser not to assume that the Conservatives of the Duma and the Moscow merchants are fired by pure zeal for the war. It is a class struggle which is going on. We do not mean to imply that the burning issue of discipline in the army is unreal. About that the party of order and property is in deadly earnest. It wants an army which will do as it is bid. But does it want an automatic army primarily to fight the Germans? Such an army is also useful for internal needs. An army of peasant citizens, with committees, public meetings, and trench newspapers, could never be used to suppress a troublesome council or to enforce a landlord's rights. For this latter purpose the one essential is implicit obedience to superior officers.—"The Nation," 15th September, 1917.

MR. TRUSTRAM EVE ON THE NEW CORN LAW

At a meeting of the Herts, Beds, and Bucks Valuers' Association held in London on September 7th, Mr. Trustram Eve said (we quote from the MANCHESTER GUARDIAN report):

It was the saddest day for agriculture when the Act was passed. Agriculture had been dragged down to politics, and there it must remain for many years.

If this Act is such a wonderful boon to agriculture and such a marvellous bribe to the mind of the farmer, the original three-million-acre scheme ought to be almost automatic and assuredly a certainty. With raised rents and more rates, with more taxes, with farms up to auction, increased labour bills, a guaranteed minimum for wheat and oats (which must for 1918 be less than the market price), and with the Food Controller at hand to fix maximum prices for everything the farmer grows, forgetting to do the same thing for everything he buys, it must be plain to the politician and to the townsman that the farmer must be a perfect idiot if he does not plough up all his grass straight away now that this Act has been passed.

We have what is practically a Conservative and Labour Government now, with the Liberals looking on and playing the game, with the exception of a few miserable pacifists. How can this coalition of Conservatives and Labour get in at the next election? The answer goes forth that we must have the vote of the agricultural labourer. So they stole the clothes of the Radicals and offered the bribe of a