

James Green's "From My Hospital Window" (1935)

CHAPTER XII

IF RUSSIA HAD CHOSEN HENRY GEORGE INSTEAD OF KARL MARX!

The revolution found Russia for the most part a land of tenant farmers. They were elementary in their farming methods and lived at a low standard of comfort. They were conservative in thought, and for the most part illiterate. However, they fed the population of that vast country, and at the same time exported great quantities of wheat and other products to the surrounding European countries. They were wedded to the land.

The idea of the minority of communists who rule, is to break down the capitalistic system and industrialize the nation. This is the teaching of Karl Marx. The Soviet attempted to do in a few years what in other lands has taken the greater part of a century. Moreover, in other lands, where secondary industries abound, the manpower was not so backward in mechanics and not so illiterate. It may be taken for granted that all countries need some secondary industries, at least key industries, those which are necessary in case of war and those upon which other industries depend.

But it seems futile to overdo secondary industries in lands where there is a vast unpopulated territory and thousands of square miles of virgin soil.

Even in densely populated lands like Belgium, Britain, France and Germany, it has been proved to be immensely important to keep a considerable number of people on the land. If all countries were highly industrialized the competition for markets would be fierce indeed.

To feed the proletariat which was in course of being industrialized, the peasant farmers of Russia were required to make immense sacrifices. Their produce was commandeered at prices fixed by government, and to procure foreign capital to pay for the new machinery, the factories being built, and the powerful electric stations necessary to provide for the factories, the government claimed the right to buy wheat, butter, etc., at such wholesale prices that, through Soviet agents, it might export the produce to the countries from which it was importing the machinery. The Soviet was providing electric power and imported skilled labour to install it and to teach the workers how to use the new machinery. It also commandeered the produce at low prices to supply the proletariat with food.

Instead of currency the workers were issued food or other value-tickets, and they had to "queue up" to receive, in exchange for their cards, such food or clothing as happened to be in stock. Naturally the peasant farmers, the village traders, and the small storekeepers were hard hit. They opposed these conditions by passive resistance. They worked their farms only for themselves, killed their stock as required, and hoarded food.

The communistic junta resolved to expropriate the stock and property of the farmers, and endeavoured to drive them into large collective state farms, where methods were standardized and large-scale production over large unfenced areas was the rule. The *kulaks* (the small farmers) who owned their land and had a few cattle, a horse or two, and a few sheep, fowls, etc., were practically forced into the *kolhose*, or collective farm. These are the men who are industrious and ambitious to improve their lot; the contented yeomanry which other nations aspire to nurture and establish, and they are the worst in the eyes of their communistic rulers, for they are the hardest to uproot. The Soviet commissars send labour where they will, perforce. They remove *kulaks* to remote parts of Russia and Siberia. They are engaged now in the terrible task of breaking up homes, separating families, and dragooning labour into channels chosen by government officials, and not by the parties chiefly concerned. The Soviet State *lowers* everyone to a common level, and by its class war tears down the whole existing social system of the country.

The good features remaining from the Tsarist regime are the worst in the eyes of the Soviet, which aims to destroy everything of the old system and make an entirely new start. In Russia we see humanity uprooted from hearthstone and threshold, driven from its altars, and ordinary human instincts ignored.

HUMANITY UPROOTED AND COMPELLED TO MARCH

Trains and steamers carry thousands of Russian folk to fresh districts where they are mobilized under conditions and in forms of labour chosen for them by the Soviet.

These drastic and radical changes arise out of the fact that the small band of communists who rule, chooses the theories of social order taught by Karl Marx.

It is worth while speculating what the result would have been if the intelligentsia of Russia had accepted the doctrines of Henry George, the prophet of San Francisco, instead of those of Karl Marx.

If the Russian Government at the revolution had legislated to depend on the collection of the economic rent of the land for its revenue; as a first result, enormous tracts of land, in many cases good improved land, would have been thrown on the market.

By the economic rent we mean a tax on the unimproved valuation of the land; that part of the value of the land which is the creation of the community, and not the result of the labour of the occupier, the "unearned increment," as it is called. Admitting that some great change in the interest of the general community was imperative, perhaps no more natural and just principle could have been chosen by a people making a new start after a revolution than that of Henry George. Those unprepared to use the land to the extent of earning the economic rent would offer

it for sale.

There would have been enough land to satisfy the land hunger which our reading of Tolstoy shows us is a great feature of Russian rural life. There would have been a "General Post" in regard to the land. The ambitious and wealthier farmers could have established their children upon the land. The *kulak* would have been able to extend his area, all too limited in those days to be called a living area. Even the landless peasant, could have been provided for by the government.

There would have been an enormous revival of agriculture, and immense quantities of grain could have been exported to adjacent countries, which would have brought great wealth to Russia, for the people of postwar Europe were almost starving at the time. The general revival of trade would have brought prosperity to traders and professions alike, and the building trades would have boomed, for Russia was very deficient in housing at the time.

The liberated land put to its capacity use by the enlarged *kulak* and peasant class would have been like an additional stream of life-blood to Russia, and colonies would have pushed out into the virgin land of that great country. Its wealth of produce, timber, minerals and furs, borne on the great Russian rivers to the seaports, would have had a beneficent effect on all Europe. By its reward in the larger use of the land, and the consequent enlarged revenue, the people would have provided the means for an enlightened government to proceed to the greater education of the Russian masses.

At the same time this fuller intercourse with other nations would have enabled the peculiar genius of Russians in art, music and literature to make its contribution to the world.

Even the great hereditary landowner, who, unwilling to work his surplus land to the extent necessary to pay the economic rent of it, sold it, would have been no worse off for he would have sold it at its value.

Had the country adopted Henry George's doctrine instead of that of Karl Marx, the revenue of the government would have been sufficient and regular because of the larger field of taxation, without any burdensome increase of the taxation of the individual, for the economic rent would have been the only tax. Such other charges as municipal rates and harbour dues would have been for services rendered; rates, not taxes. The revenue of the nation would have enabled the government to develop and cheapen the means of transportation, so much in arrears in Russia.

The standard of agriculture could have been raised by the provision of experimental farms and agricultural colleges for the new generation. Had Russia chosen Henry George instead of Karl Marx, nothing worth while of the old order would have been lost. Religion, culture, art, and home would have been retained

at the will of the people, and there would have been no forceful anti-God propaganda or any attempt to dragoon the people, for the principles of Henry George make for individual liberty. The prosperous peasant farmers would have been rooted to the land more than ever, for payment of economic rent does not affect fixity of tenure. True, there would have remained competition—free competition—which would have promoted progress and rewarded effort. There would have remained freedom of contract and the individual liberty to choose one's own calling, place of habitation, and manner of life.

During all the long centuries Russia had attained a culture and status of its own. Nothing precious in the eyes of Russians, nothing treasured in its traditions, would have been abandoned. Religion would have had space to purify itself. Patriotism would have pointed the way to duty. Human life would have been secure and free in Russia under the land and liberty principles of Henry George. Her men of genius would not have been slaughtered by the hundred, her captains of industry, her honest bourgeoisie, whether merchants or professional men, would have been free to live and prosper under conditions fostered by the principles of Henry George, for the Georgian doctrine values genius and individuality, and sets it free under an economic system which guarantees to every man the reward of his labour and genius. Had Russia chosen Henry George and not Karl Marx she might have been today one of the great big brother nations in the concert of Europe.

Of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these: "It might have been!"