

TRIUMPHANT PLUTOCRACY

The Story of
American Public Life
from 1870 to 1920

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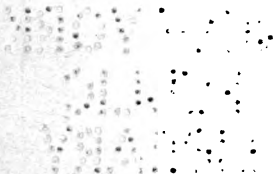
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ASTOR. LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
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XXIX. THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

The war was an affirmation of capitalism. The Russian Revolution was the answer of the workers. The war wrecked most of the capitalist nations of Europe—wrecked them financially and economically—and those that survived the period of hostilities were caught in the maelstrom of high prices that followed the signing of the Armistice. During more than four years the producers of Europe turned from making useful things and devoted themselves to making the means of destruction. The result was fatal. European capitalism had written its own death sentence.

The old system broke down first in Russia. The revolution began there, and no sooner did it show itself than the other capitalist nations—the former Allies of Russia,—turned against her and fought her with armies, with a blockade, and with every other device that military and diplomatic experts could devise.

The demands of the Russian people were very simple. They asked for work, bread and peace—three things that the capitalist system in Russia was unable to provide. Hence the Revolution.

There have been scores of revolutions during the past two centuries, and after each one of them that proved successful, the people have written a Constitution modeled on the Constitution of the United States—a constitution that permitted the economic masters to carry on their work of exploitation with impunity. The Russians abandoned this precedent.

Instead of writing a political constitution, they did a very new and a very wonderful thing—they wrote an economic constitution, based on the proposition that the exploitation of one man by another must cease.

The Bill of Rights was added to the Constitution of the United States as an afterthought. It is not in the body of the Constitution at all, but takes the form of “amendments.” The Russian Constitution begins with a Bill of Rights.

The rights enumerated in our Constitution are civil rights, free speech, free press, religious freedom, rights of accused persons, rights in the case of civil trials. The right to be admitted to bail, etc. The Russian Bill of Rights begins with a statement of economic principles. Chapter 1 of the Bill of Rights declares the existence of a Soviet Republic in Russia. Chapter 2 begins with these words,—“Bearing in mind, as its fundamental problem, the abolition of exploitation of men by men, the entire abolition of the division of the people in classes, the suppression of exploiters; the establishment of a Socialist society, and the victory of Socialism in all lands, the Third All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers’, Soldiers’ and Peasants’ Deputies further resolves:

“a. for the purpose of realizing the socialization of land, all private property in land is abolished, and the entire land is declared to be national property and is to be apportioned among husbandmen without any compensation to the former owners, in the measures of each one’s ability to till it.

“b. all forests, treasures of the earth, and waters of general public utility, all implements, whether animate or inanimate, model farms and agricultural enterprises, are declared to be national property.

“c. as a first step towards the complete transfer of ownership to the Soviet Republic of all factories, mills, mines, railways, and other means of production and transportation, the Soviet law for the control by workmen and the establishment of the Supreme Soviet of National Economy is hereby confirmed, so as to assure the power of the workers over the exploiters.

“d. with reference to international banking and finance, the third Congress of Soviets is discussing the Soviet decree regarding the annulment of loans made by the Government of the Czar, by landowners and the bourgeoisie, and it trusts that the Soviet Government will firmly follow this course until the final victory of

the international workers' revolt against the oppression of capital.

"e. the transfer of all banks into the ownership of the Workers' and Peasants' Government, as one of the conditions of the liberation of the toiling masses from the yoke of capital, is confirmed.

"f. universal obligation to work is introduced for the purpose of eliminating the parasitic strata of society and organizing the economic life of the country."

All wealth and all the comforts of civilization are the products of labor applied to the earth. Man is a land animal and his right to the soil is inherent and fundamental. The chance to reach the land and the right to reach it are as great as the right to use the air and the water of the earth.

The Soviet Constitution allows every person over eighteen years of age to vote if they are engaged in some useful employment.

Thus disfranchising the lawyers and the preachers.

A lawyer spends the first half of his life over the past and the last half trying to apply the past to the present and lets the future go to hell.

A preacher spends the first half of his life over the past and the last half over the future and lets the present go to hell. I am sure neither are engaged in a useful occupation.

Then follows a provision regarding the right to bear arms. After it there comes the forceful and splendid declaration against capitalist imperialism and in favor of a self-governing and self-determining world. Sections 4 and 5 of Chapter 3 provide:

"Expressing its absolute resolve to liberate mankind from the grip of capital and imperialism, which flooded the earth with blood in this present most criminal of all wars, the third Congress of Soviets fully agrees with the Soviet Government in its policy of breaking secret treaties, of organizing on a wide

scale the fraternization of the workers and peasants of the belligerent armies, and of making all efforts to conclude a general democratic peace without annexations or indemnities, upon the basis of the free determination of the peoples.

“It is also to this end that the third Congress of Soviets insists upon putting an end to the barbarous policy of the bourgeois civilization which enables the exploiters of a few chosen nations to enslave hundreds of millions of the toiling population of Asia, of the colonies, and of small countries generally.”

Following this protest there is a section (8) setting forth the attitude of the Soviet Government toward those portions of the former Russian Empire which were not yet incorporated into the Soviet Republic:

“In its effort to create a league—free and voluntary, and for that reason all the more complete and secure—of the working classes of all the peoples of Russia, the third Congress of Soviets merely establishes the fundamental principles of the federation of Russian Soviet Republics, leaving to the workers and peasants of every people to decide the following question at their plenary sessions of their Soviets: *whether or not they desire to participate, and on what basis, in the federal government and other federal Soviet institutions.*”

Conservative thinkers and publicists deride these provisions on the ground that the Soviet Government has not yet been able to put them fully into practice. They jest. Have we been able to enforce the Prohibition Amendment?, to enfranchise the Negroes in accordance with the provisions of amendment 14?, to guarantee the right of free speech in accordance with

amendment 17, or to protect American citizens against unreasonable search and seizure in accordance with amendment 4? To ask these questions, is to answer them.

A Bill of Rights presents the aspirations and the political ideals of a people—nothing more. The ideals of our forefathers were of a political nature, as is clearly indicated in the Bill of Rights which they drew up. In the same way, the ideals of the Russian workers are of an economic nature, as is clearly indicated by the Bill of Rights which they have drawn up.

The times have changed since the Constitutional Convention met in 1787. Then men were striving for political freedom. Now they are seeking economic emancipation. It is all part of the same struggle—for liberty, but the new times have called forth new ideals. The Russian Bill of Rights is a new step and a long step in the direction of freedom.

There were nearly 170 millions of people in Russia when the war began in 1914. After three years of bloody struggle they demanded work, bread and peace, and they proceeded to get these things in the only way that the workers will ever get them from the masters—by taking them. The beneficiaries of privilege will not yield unless they are compelled to by force of circumstances that are too strong for them to control. The embodiment of that force is the organized will of the people who do the worlds' work.

The Russian Revolution is the greatest event of our times. It marks the beginning of the epoch when the working people will assume the task of directing and controlling industry. It blazes a path into this unknown country, where the workers of the world are destined to take from their exploiters the right to control and direct the economic affairs of the community.