

The Truth About Soviet Russia

By M. Phillips Price.

(From "Soviet Russia," August 16.)

NOW what is the Soviet as it exists in Russia today? We have seen that, in the first days of the Revolution, it was formed out of the thousands of informal gatherings of workers and peasants throughout the land which came together to decide what next to do. The original Soviets were economic bodies, for it was natural to expect that people connected with one another by common work and common material interests should meet in times of stress in social gatherings. A factory workman's immediate interests are more closely bound up with the interests of his comrades in the same factory than they are with workers in another industry. For instance, the metal workers depend for their daily bread upon the welfare of the metal industry, the railwaymen on the railways, the peasants on the agricultural industry. Ever since man first began to divide the work of civilization among his fellowmen he has shown a tendency to congregate on the basis of guilds or special trades. All the more natural is it now, in a highly developed society, in a state of temporary flux, that metal workers, railwaymen and peasants should get together in a different district and discuss the subject that most affect their lives. The informal economic unions, which sprang up in the first days of the Russian Revolution, became, as we have seen, the basis of the Soviet system. The most important point to observe about them is that they were industrial and had no relation to territorial divisions of society, except in so far as geographical and climatic conditions imposed a certain limit to the industrial organization. The Revolution therefore brought the Soviets into life on the economic basis and for an economic purpose, and in their first inception they were anarchic and without any common plan of action. During the first few weeks of the Russian Revolution, one Soviet knew nothing of what the other was doing. Only after the first month was it possible to talk of an organization which was gradually uniting and co-ordinating the actions of all the Soviets scattered about the country. This co-ordination became most imperative for the safety of the Revolution, because the forces of the old social order, which had been overthrown, soon began to gather strength again. Only organized Soviets could raise the necessary barrier to reaction. Only if they expanded their activities to broad political action could they possibly safeguard those local economic interests to protect which they originally were created. Only by becoming political bodies could they guarantee the new social order. Thus, in every town in Russia the factory committees and informal workers' unions united into a Central Soviet, which at once took upon itself the task of fighting the counter-revolution and controlling whatever authority the middle classes had set up. Soon the question was raised, whether this Central Soviet, which was already exercising a sort of control over the bourgeois government, should not take all political authority into its hands. The controversy that raged about this question marked the second stage of the Revolution, which ended in October, 1917, in the victory of the proletariat and the expansion of the power of the Soviets from that of indirect political control into that of direct political responsibility. Thus in every town in Russia after October the central committee of all the Soviets of that district became responsible for public order, for the militia, for public works and conveniences, and for the local finances. The same thing took place in the villages, where the union of peasant communes or later the committees of the poorer peasantry, which came from the former, replaced the local democratically-elected body. The latter for the most part were controlled by people who had got into power in the

first days of the Revolution and had stuck to that power ever since. Finally these central urban Soviets and the unions of provincial Soviets sent their representatives to a great State Congress of the whole country. This Congress now meets every six months and elects a Central Soviet Executive, which is empowered to act with authority in the period between the Congresses. This body has now become the supreme political authority in the Soviet Republic. It controls the Red Army and Navy, the foreign policy and the economic exchange with other states. Thus beginning with informal gatherings of workers, bound by economic interest, the Russian Soviet has developed into a great political power, which is to be reckoned with in international politics.

But that is only half the story. We have seen that the original anarchically-formed committees were the seed from which the green shoot of the centralized political Soviet grew. But it soon began to put forth another shoot—the organized economic syndicate. And it came about in this way. The workers' factory committees, that elect the local political Soviet for managing the militia, etc., soon began to send their delegates to a conference representing all the workers divided according to profession in that particular district. This movement was in complete antagonism to the old trade union movement, which sought under Czarism to divide the workers into a number of craft unions within the industries. The essential feature of this new economic Soviet or syndicate is that it is organized on the basis of industry and not on the basis of guild. Only in this way is it possible to prevent the economic power of the workers, the unity of which is so essential in the struggle against capitalism, from being broken into jarring craft unions, all working at cross purposes. Under the new system the wood-workers and bookkeepers in the metal industry must choose their representatives to look after their economic interests along with the actual metal-workers themselves.

The same process of organizing the proletariat industrially has taken place among the rural peasantry. After the October Revolution, the latter sent their delegates to a political Soviet, whose duty it was to organize the rural Red Guard and keep revolutionary order in the villages. Somewhat later they began to form purely economic unions, as the villages began to split up into rich and poor peasants and the conflict between these two classes began to develop. Western Europeans imagine that the Russian peasant is a peculiar creation, with habits and customs of his own, living apart from the rest of the world in dirt and ignorance. My experiences in the Russian villages has taught me that just the same social divisions are to be found there in perhaps slightly different form, as exist in the more industrialized rural districts of Western Europe. The idea that it is possible to separate the peasants from the urban population of Russia and thereby mobilize an anti-Bolshevik force within the country is a fantasy. The same proletariat and land laborer, middle class corn speculator is found there as in other lands. And the urban worker in Russia who supports the Bolshevik has an ally in the village in the shape of the landless peasant, just as the urban middle class has his counterpart in the village corn speculator. It was natural, therefore, that this mobilization of the Russian village into two social camps should be accompanied by the growth of professional unions on the basis of the new social division. Side by side with the rural political Soviet there thus grew up the Union of Laboring Peasants, which took upon itself the duty of working the landlords' land on a communal basis.

THE TRUTH ABOUT MAXIM GORKY.

(From "Soviet Russia," August 9.)

People frequently resolve to do things that are beyond their powers. Particularly difficult to carry out is the desire to tell the truth always. It requires a knowledge of the truth. The motto of the New York Tribune, conspicuously printed on the first page of that paper, is: "First to Last—the Truth: News, Editorials, Advertisements." In view of the praiseworthy nature of this ambition, it is unfortunate that no one has informed the Tribune that the articles and stories from the pen of Maxim Gorky, which the Tribune has been printing at rapid intervals within the last few weeks, and in which Gorky expresses hostility to the Soviet Government of Russia—were written long ago, some of them over a year ago before Gorky became a complete convert to the Soviet Government's philosophy and to the methods of the Bolshevik Section of the Socialist Party of Russia. For the information of the Tribune we add that Gorky is now a prominent administrative official in the Department of Education at Moscow, and that after the supply of its anti-Soviet material gives out, the Tribune can obtain, in this country, and without unusual difficulty, a rather large collection of excellent short stories from Gorky's pen, written at a much later date than the Tribune's material, and breathing from first to last a passionate love of the achievements of the great proletarian revolution in Russia.

EDUCATIONAL CLASSES.

Prepare for your Fall and Winter educational classes by getting in a good stock of scientific literature. The usual text books are as follows:—Philosophy: Socialism, Utopian and Scientific. Economics: Value, Price and Profit, in addition as a support we can recommend Wage-labor and Capital. The present Economic System by Bonger. Also the first nine chapters of Vol. I Marx' Capital may be had in a handy volume. Look up literature Advt.

In places where there are no locals those interested might take an example from Comrades in New Zealand and in the United States by forming Marxian Economic Clubs for the purpose of study and for correspondence with headquarters on progress and on such matters as the students may be in doubt.

CAPITALIST MISRULE IN INDIA.

(Continued From Page One.)

dies no wrong, it stanches not a drop of the ruinous drain, it gives Indians no real power in their own country, it leaves the central despotism, which is guilty of the crimes recited above, wholly untouched. Therefore, the Bill is quite useless to Hindustan. It is a sham and a fraud, worthy of the men who have botched it up. It is condemned, beforehand, even by passages in their own Montagu-Chelmsford Report.

An Appeal to Englishmen.

I have done for the moment. But I appeal to my countrymen, as one who has long worked strenuously for India, to remove from England the reproach that while fighting against German ruthlessness in Europe we impose an iniquitous despotism upon one-fifth of the entire human race. Our British misrule in India benefits in no way the mass of the people at home. On the contrary, it is politically, socially, economically, and even commercially, injurious to us. Only a minority of parasites and anti-democrats, gain by our dominance in Hindustan. Tyranny there strengthens militarism and illegality here. But on far higher grounds even than these, on the grounds of morality, justice and common humanity, I beseech all men and women who are striving for freedom in Europe to take an active part in the struggle for the speedy emancipation of India.