

Our Book Review

Some wise animal, at some period more or less remote in history, said that, "to the writing of books there is no end," a fact apparent enough to be free from debate. Ink and paper, in immeasurable quantities, have been used up on the slightest, and on no pretext at all. Every rising of the sun, every falling of the night, every change of the wind, every happening, in fact, provides a fertile source for huge outpourings of words, now the garb of ideas, now their hiding place, and at other times concealing the lack of them entirely.

Russia is the latest subject of such as suffer from scribbler's itch. Since the declaration of war in 1914, the land of the Muscovite has been the theme of numberless volumes, most of the kind that few will read and nobody in any case will pay any attention to. There are a few, on the other hand, that, because of their content, will be added to the libraries of the historians of the future. To this latter class belongs the book now under review.

To the most of the western Europeans, the real Russia has been a closed book. The cheap novelists of the 19th century, writing in French and English, could color their tales of Russian life and character, according to the depth or vividness of their imagination, without fear of contradiction. Nihilist plotters, police spies and a beautiful princess, with a background from the Arabian Nights were sufficient to form the basis for a thrilling six-shilling shocker, for the edification of the reading public. Such was the Russia of the novelists and of the vast majority. Of that section of the people known as the cultured and intellectual, we may say that their knowledge was confined to the works of a few great Russians: Turgenev, Gogol and Dostoyevsky; Chaikovsky and Rubenstein or Mendelyeff, and Metchnikoff, according to whether their slant on life was literary, musical or scientific.

On a western world with this limited knowledge came the news of the revolution of March, 1917. Immediately scenting copy of the human interest variety and wishing to gather data that would enable our American manufacturers to know best how to HELP the Russian people, correspondents poured into the country. A few also found their way there from different motives. One of these latter was John Reed. According to a pass signed by Antonov, Chief of the Military Revolutionary Committee, John Reid was the representative of the New York Socialist press.

The book as he says himself is a "slice of intensified history." In the preface the author says, "In this struggle, my sympathies were not neutral." In such a struggle as he describes, we can take this for granted, as there are no neutrals when the workers line up in a struggle for political power, and every last word in the book shows that this is what was happening in Petrograd during these "Ten Days that Shook the World."

The revolution of March, though hailed by many as a proletarian revolution, proved as we in the S. P. of C. interpreted it to be, purely bourgeois, and the provisional governments that held sway during the eight months following could not give to the masses of the Russian people the things that would satisfy their demands—bread, peace and land.

Six months after the fall of the Romanoffs, Reed found an impression prevailing among the bourgeoisie in Petrograd, that the revolution was slowing down and on the other hand the workers considered that it had much more to accomplish. That is to say, it had reached that point where the bourgeoisie were well satisfied to let things rest. It had accomplished as much as the English or French revolutions. The field was now clear for the organization of a capitalist state, where political and industrial development could take place along the lines of our great free Ameri-

"TEN DAYS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD."

By John Reed. 370 pages \$2.00

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can democracy and the exploitation of wage-slaves could proceed apace.

This was, however, reckoning without the working class. As in all previous events of like character, the task of carrying the revolution to a successful termination was imposed on the enslaved masses, the workers in the factories, the soldiers and peasants. Workers' organizations in the cities found themselves in pretty much the same fix as their fellows in less democratic countries, lockouts and strikes were an everyday occurrence. Land committees of the peasants acting in accord with the proclaimed intention of the government were landed in jail and the army committees of the men continually found themselves at variance with their officers.

In Petrograd the life of the city ran on as usual. The multitude was not interested in the squabbles of the political sects. The bread queue still shivered in the cold; theatres and moving picture shows presented the latest in Italian melodrama; the aristocracy indulged in pink teas and longed for the good old days; the Intellegenzia attended its lectures on Theosophy and kindred cults; gamblers and bejewelled prostitutes held sway by night.

To those actively interested in the struggles of the contending parties, these were, however, busy days. All the forces of the bourgeoisie and the Mensheviks were called into play in their efforts to offset the propaganda of the Bolsheviks. After years of patient and unceasing endeavor, after exile in foreign lands and Siberian prisons, the spokesmen of the proletariat worked like Trojans to rouse the masses to action. Those men and women, Lenin, Trotsky, Antonov and Kollontai and all the others whose names are now embodied in revolutionary history, worked through lurid days and sleepless nights till on the 7th of November the Bolsheviks secured control of the Second Congress of Soviets of Workmen's and Soldiers' Deputies, proclaimed the Russian Soviet Republic, "all power to the Soviets," and laid the foundation for the proletarian dictatorship.

The despised and rejected Russian worker, until now considered stolid and unimpressible as the ox, took his destiny in his own hands, the greatest event in Russian history since Ruric and his Viking brothers accepted the invitation of the Slavic peoples to come and rule over them, a thousand years ago.

All this John Reed saw from the inside. He describes the moves and counter-moves of the revolutionaries and reactionaries. His standing as a Socialist correspondent placed him in a decidedly advantageous position. The proclamations, decrees, handbills and newspaper quotations with which the book is well furnished will help to an understanding of the task the Bolsheviks set themselves to accomplish.

Bourgeois democracy in all countries finds its political expression through parliaments and constituent assemblies and bases its shibboleths on the cornerstone of constitutional law. Thus arose in Russia the cry for a constituent assembly.

At the same time, however, out of the lingering institutions of communal Russia and the revolutionary aspirations of the mass of the Russian workers, a new political instrument came into being. During the 1905 revolution, the workers had organized themselves into local councils or soviets based on geographical and other considerations. When the revolution was crushed beneath the heel of the Cossack, in a merciless riot of blood and murder and thousands of workers deported to Siberia, the soviets ceased to function.

Immediately on the overthrow of the Romanoff

dynasty the soviets re-appeared, all over Russia; the same in character in the Far East as in cosmopolitan Petrograd. The sailors on the battleships in the Mediterranean and the soldiers of the Russian army on the western front elected soviets to give expression to their needs.

Between these two instruments friction immediately developed. The bourgeois constituent assembly or the proletarian Soviet, one or other but not both!

The insignificance of the bourgeoisie as a political force gave added power to the proletariat; their weaknesses being all to the advantage of the workers. The formless, hazy concepts of the army and the peasants had allowed all kinds of professionals and intellectuals to blossom forth as spokesmen of the new order.

With the proletarian revolution in sight we find these people in control of all the directing and administrative bodies of the Republic, the Duma, the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets, the Peasants' Congress and the Army and Navy committees. Having no understanding of the questions involved, they had no solutions to the problems presented to them. To satisfy the demands of the masses would mean to abolish themselves.

The Bolsheviks during these months were not idle. Although a majority when they acquired their name, the March revolution discovered them very much in the minority. By constant work and ardent propaganda they explained the class nature of the struggle and placed their solution before the workers.

After the July rising, many of their best members like Trotsky and Kollontai landed behind prison bars and others like Lenin and Zinoviev went into hiding. We can well remember the detailed accounts of Lenin's flight through Finland to Scandinavia at that time. Like most of the capitalist news this incident had its origin in the mind of some newspaper bonehead, as Lenin was in Petrograd during the whole period doing his share of the work that was to result in the glorious 7th November.

Having their plans perfected, the Bolsheviks called for an armed insurrection on that date. This decision was arrived at only after long discussion as there were faint hearts even amongst the Bolsheviks. On October 23, armed insurrection was discussed at an all-night session of Central Committee of the Party. All the leaders, the party intellectuals and delegates from the Petrograd workers and garrison were present. Of the intellectuals Lenin and Trotsky alone stood for insurrection. A vote was taken and insurrection was defeated.

"Then arose a rough workman, his face convulsed with rage. 'I speak for the Petrograd proletariat,' he said harshly; 'we are in favor of insurrection. Have it your own way, but I tell you now that if you allow the Soviets to be destroyed, we are through with you!' Some soldiers joined him. . . after that they voted again . . . insurrection won."

Riazanov, vice-president of the trades unions, declared, "It's insane, insane; the European working class won't move." So the party was whipped into line in spite of the calamity howling of a few intellectuals. The vision of the proletariat was the keener as contemporary history is proving.

November 7th came, with the result known to us all. The disbanding of the Council of the Republic by the sailors, assumption of power by the Second Congress of Soviets and the proscribing of the Provisional government. The armed factory workers, the Petrograd garrison and the sailors from the Baltic fleet, executed the mandate of the proletariat with the modern expression of power—machine guns, artillery, armored cars and battleships. The Bolsheviks spelled

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