

# Russia Under the Soviets

Being a series of articles based upon an interview with Wilfred R. Humphries, American Red Cross man, recently returned from Russia

By W. A. PRITCHARD

## "THE TRUTH ABOUT RUSSIA"

A Lecture by Wilfred Humphries—(Reported by Amy Oliver of People's Institute)

"I saw more opera in Petrograd during the months it was supposed to be running knee-deep in blood, than I ever did in all the rest of my life," said Wilfred R. Humphries, worker for the American Y. M. C. A. and later for the American Red Cross in Russia during its reddest months. Humphries, young, unaffected, eager-eyed, of the college organization worker type, was giving his first lecture on Russia at the People's Institute, 1256 Market street, San Francisco, Thursday evening, April 10, and in the course of it showing slides of Bolshevik scenes that he brought with him when he left Russia four months ago. "Besides the opera, there were Ibsen, Shaw, Tolstoy, Shakespeare's plays and vaudeville. In two months that Maeterlinck's 'Blue-bird' run, I never succeeded in getting in line early enough to get a ticket. In Moscow, I went to night school three evenings a week to learn Russian, and other evenings attended political meetings at Smolny Institute and other places. And every evening I saw women coming out of theaters in twos and threes, unattended by men, starting out across the street, streetcarless and dark, with no fear whatever. At this time schools were being organized all over Russia. I remember in Petrograd seeing a poster announcing the opening of a kindergarten that said the children would be served with a hot lunch. This was the chaos and anarchy you read about.

I heard stories of chaos and anarchy in Russia, too. From the time I landed in Vladivostok—where then the red flag was flying—through the seven thousand miles of the journey to Moscow, we were met by the fleeing bourgeoisie and regaled with stories of terror and atrocity, hunger, typhus and murder. Typhus was killing a thousand a day, said the fugitives. Three-fourths of Moscow was burned to the ground. The Kremlin was destroyed. First we heard that Kerensky had thoroughly defeated the Bolsheviks. As we came nearer, it was that the issue of the battle was still in doubt. Nearer—the Bolsheviks seemed to have the advantage, temporarily. When we got there, the six days of fighting was over and Kerensky was fleeing.

"I saw the 'destroyed' Kremlin—with a piece of statuary at the gate broken and the holes through two of the churches—otherwise intact. I found the origin of the 'three-fourths of Moscow burned.' Five buildings had really been destroyed.

"Outrages—of a sort—I did see. On one of my departures from Petrograd, at the Nicolief station, I saw three Russian officers, epaulettes off, of course, carrying passenger baggage to the train. For the standard fee, since no tips were allowed, they duly carried my luggage for me. I saw a portly Russian gentleman in an expensive fur coat selling a bourgeois newspaper. After a particularly heavy snowfall the Petrograd Soviet ordered everybody out to shovel snow, with the order that no one physically able to shovel might hire anyone else to do it for him. And house committees enforced the ruling.

"One more outrage I saw. Soon after the Soviets came into power, the bank clerks and civil servants, encouraged and supported by the bourgeoisie, went on strike. Lenine countered suddenly and cruelly by seizing all the banks and ruling that no matter if a man had millions deposited he could draw no more than one hundred and fifty roubles (fifteen dollars) a month for each member of his family. This meant that the bourgeoisie could get no money to support the strikers and the result was that the strike was broken. But the touch that added insult to injury was the order that each depositor must stand in line to draw his monthly allowance. He couldn't send anyone for it. I saw in that line a plump, deeply-furrowed, bediamonded woman with genuine tears coursing down her cheeks at the indignity she was suffering.

"What impressed most impartial observers in Russia, I think, was the tolerance, the consideration, I had almost said the gentleness of the Soviets and their policies. You have heard much about the suppression of bourgeois newspapers. The only ones suppressed were those that were printing absolute and outrageous lies about the Bolsheviks. If a Russian newspaper said in glaring headlines that the Bolsheviks had massacred all the prisoners and cut them in small pieces, it would be closed. But newspapers might print all the arguments against the Soviet system that they pleased. I have shown you a slide of the procession of priests, marching through the streets in protest against the division of church and state.

"The Social Revolutionists had planned a great demonstration in protest against the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, to be held January 5. The Soviets did all in their power to persuade the Bolsheviks to keep away from the streets where the procession was to pass, so as avoid any possible disturbances. There was fear of an uprising, so the Soviets arranged that all public buildings be well guarded. The manner of this was to ask all the people in the building, including the janitor, to aid in protecting it. The Soviets guarded the city by placing emergency armored cars with Red Guard groups at intervals all over the city.

"Another evidence of this large tolerance is the fact that nothing was done about the dastardly attempt to assassinate Lenine, who was shot at by a member of the Social Revolutionist Party. At one time when the Social Revolutionists seemed bent on starting a reign of terror, the warning was sent out to them: 'For every Bolshevik leader killed, we shall kill one hundred of the Social Revolutionists.' That was enough. There was no more trouble except one attempt by an anarchist girl.

"Trouble between the Anarchists and Bolsheviks never came to any more than battles in a few cities just at first. In the early days of Soviet rule, many Monarchists who wanted to oppose the new Government and also wanted to make a living without working, announced themselves as Anarchists and seized houses and goods. But, of course, real Anarchists denounced them.

"Now there are about ninety per cent. of the population participating in the government—and I don't believe that percentage votes in America. All those that do useful work with hand or brain—and that means now about ninety per cent. of the population—have representation in the Soviets. The teachers send delegates, as do the medical associations composed of doctors and nurses. What was in the beginning a dictatorship of the proletariat—with action begun as it always must be begun, by a militant minority—is now a true democracy. Those sabotaging against the Bolsheviks in the early days when they thought that the government would not last six weeks, are giving up their opposition as they realize that this is a government that has come to stay. I was in Samara when the teachers' association met, split into a left and right wing, the majority reorganizing the association and electing delegates to the Soviets, the minority going out of the association altogether. A considerable section of the Intelligentsia were with the Bolsheviks from the first. A glance at the Bolshevik cabinet will prove that. I think one might say that it is the most cultured cabinet in Europe. Many of the rest have been honestly converted since then.

"A minority objects to the centralization of industry—says there is not democracy enough and that the industries should be immediately and completely handed over to the workers.

"But remember, that the Bolsheviks do not claim that Russia is wholly socialistic. They say that the co-operative commonwealth is not immediately possible, especially in a country as industrially backward as Russia. They say that Russia will have to develop the stage known as State Capitalism, with concentration of industries and formation of trusts. Mme. Kollantay said: 'We can't fully socialize Russia all at once. You other nations have a much better chance to socialize your industries, as industry is already partly socialized with you. You can begin where we leave off.'

"But centralization of industry under proletariat rule is a very different thing from centralization under bourgeois rule. Russia has not nationalized all her industries. Some are still under private ownership, modified by Workers' Control. Committees of workers audit the books of the industry, seeing that there is no watered stock, limit the profits to five or six per cent., require the owner to re-invest in the industry a good proportion of his receipts, and regulate hours and wages.

"Lenine says the policy of the Bolsheviks is to take over those industries that have reached the monopolistic stage, and then the others as fast as the new government can chew and swallow them. It may be said that the industries not owned by the workers are controlled by the workers.

"Under Workers' Control the number of stores and shops has largely decreased, naturally enough, with the vanishing of competition.

(To Be Concluded Next Issue)

## THE SMALL FARMER AND THE SOCIALIST MOVEMENT

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Poverty is the lodestone that holds the small farmer down. There is many a farmer who knows of better methods than those he is practising, but who is held back from applying them on account of his lack of means.

In the second place, the development of agricultural technique under capitalism, far from relieving the small farmer of his poverty, will, on the contrary, aggravate it. For any reduction in the socially necessary labor time required to raise farm products can only result in the increase in the quantity of these products. But the market, as has already been pointed out, is overstocked. More products will mean less social value, and accordingly a further degree of enslavement on part of the small farmer. Hence, the decrease of the socially necessary labor time does not present any loop-hole of escape from the exploitation of the capitalist system. On this score, too, then, the small farmer is thrown into the arms of the revolutionary movement.

The outlook for the small farmer is gloomy only in so far as he continues his efforts to try to adjust and better his conditions within the capitalist system. The dark night of capitalism's ebbing life is gloomy enough, especially if one just keeps his eyes on the darkness about. But this night of gloom need not last long. Its length depends on how swiftly the proletariat and the small farmer will go about to overthrow the capitalist system. The small farmer should not shrink from doing his share in this great historical movement. If he is wise he will do it gladly: for, capitalism has reduced him to this strait that he, even as the industrial proletariat, has now "nothing to lose, but his chains."

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