

The Technique of Revolution

["The Nation," March 22]

The old European civilization has passed away forever; we are watching beyond the Atlantic the birth of a new order—not in Paris, where we witness only the vain attempt of politicians to keep alive a decrepit state system by injecting into its hardened arteries the saline solution of a league of nations falsely so called. No, the new order comes to birth where the pulsing life of the peoples begins to find expression in new forms of economic and political organization which better meet the needs of human beings. It comes with travail and sometimes with bloodshed, as in Russia and Germany, but it comes—not only on the Continent, but in England; not only in England, but here in the United States, where a few short months ago reaction seemed to hold us in a vise-

like grip. The transfer of power to the masses of men, with the accompanying break-up of economic privilege, is occurring before our eyes all over the world, and even if we did not see the same processes beginning here, it would be inconceivable that the United States alone should remain immune. Today sober and competent observers the country over admit that the revolution is upon us; it is ours to ride the storm.

With their thinking faculties apparently paralyzed by fear, the holders of power in this country turn unseeing eyes upon Russia. They perceive only that social disorganization has occurred and that privilege has crumbled. They do not observe that the mighty of Russia chose to rely on forcible repression, and that while repression did not in the end suffice to maintain their

privilege, it brought in its train disorganization and the machine gun as the technique of the revolution. The spectacle is terrifying, and the ordinary American beholder turns from its contemplation to bow down in gratitude before our Gregorys and Overmans and Hansons, prayerfully beseeching them to save us from the same dread fate. But in his blindness the American overlooks the fundamental fact. Privilege in Russia was outgrown, and it inevitably fell; it is outgrown here, and here, too, it is about to fall. The appeal to the little gods of force can mean only, here as it meant there, that the unavoidable fall will be accompanied by violence, bloodshed, and disorganization. The responsibility will rest with those who attempted to resist an inevitable social process with machine guns.

AMERICANISM AND THE SOVIETS

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and intimate relations with those he represents. No definite programme has even been worked out in America to put such a plan into effect. It has remained for Russia to take the lead in its concrete political application.

Elections in Russia are, so to speak, by the shop and not by the map. Each factory, each economic organization, in proportion to the numerical strength of the group, elects its own delegates to the Soviet. The assembly is made up of representatives, not of districts, but of economic interests. Every member of the Soviet works in the same factory or organization with those who elected him. He is known to them personally; he is in constant contact with them, and is under their continuous instructions; his sympathies are their sympathies, his loyalty is their loyalty.

Elections alone, however, even such elections as these, would leave an essential weakness in the pyramid of responsibility. Pioneers of democracy in the United States have realized this for years. Merely to elect a candidate to office, they have pointed out, does not insure his responsibility. The threat of the next election is oftentimes far less powerful than immediate political advantage. Without a continuing control a representative is, for the time being, irresponsible. For the past twenty years there has been a campaign in the United States for the recall of elected officials. From its inclusion in the Los Angeles charter of 1903 to the present day, the recall has made its way into the constitutions of two or three States, into the general laws of several more, and into the charters of almost two hundred municipalities. In one sweep the principle of the recall was, in 1917, put into effect in every governing body of Russia from Petrograd to Vladivostok. The Law of the Soviet Organization (addendum to paragraph 2) prescribes that "if a member of the Soviet deviates from the instructions of his constituents, then the constituents have the right to recall him and elect another in his place." This applies to every Soviet and every committee of every Soviet under the jurisdiction of the present Government of Russia. Leon Trotzky, for instance, as Commissar of the Army, is responsible by election and recall to the Executive Committee of the All-Russian Soviet, which is responsible to this Soviet, which, in turn, is responsible to the local Soviets, which are responsible to the voters that elected them. Besides this, Mr. Trotzky carries a double responsibility as a member of the All-Russian Soviet and of the local Soviet of his own district. Whatever else Mr. Trotzky may be, he cannot be called a dictator. Whatever else the Soviet may be, it cannot be classed as an autocracy.

The Soviet is not a dictatorship. Neither can it accurately be called "of the proletariat." The term has been torn from the lexicon of Socialist vernacular and has been used to describe what it

was never meant to describe. The phrase connotes class rule, the control by one caste of the destinies of another, the tyranny of labor over capital. While it may well apply to a period of transition in the Russian revolution, it cannot correctly be used to describe the ultimate composition of the Soviet state. The accomplished society of the Soviets is a caste-less and a class-less affair. The great object of the revolution has been to eliminate entirely the present antagonism between labor and capital in the only way which to the Russian is possible; by the elimination of the party of the second part. It is of the greatest importance to note, however, that there are two ways in which this can be accomplished. Fre property owner can be eliminated by the elimination either of the property or of the owner himself. Newspaper reports would lead us to suspect that the latter method is the policy of the Soviets. Such is emphatically not the case. One need have no illusions about the by-products of a revolutionary upheaval when individuals and mobs run riot, and may yet be convinced by the evidence at hand that the policy of the present Russian Government is to eliminate the property owner only by nationalizing his property.

The present Russian Government has taken over one by one the ownership of the great resources of the nation. Capital, in the sense of property, remains, but in the hands of the people through the state. In this way the private owner of capital who exploits it for his personal advantage is rapidly being eliminated from Russian society. If the Czar should not own and operate the government for his personal benefit, why should the capitalist own and operate the factory to the same end? The nobility have already been expropriated; the capitalist soon will be. When the change has been accomplished, the nobles and the capitalists will still live but they will be workers and not owners for a living. There will remain neither "bourgeoisie" nor "proletariat"; there will be only workers in Russia. Such is the logic of the Russian revolutionist. In the phraseology of the Russian Constitution (Section 9): "The fundamental problem of the Constitution of the Russian Federated Soviet Republic involves, in view of the present transition period (italics mine), the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat . . . for the purpose of abolishing the exploitation of men by men" and of insuring that there shall be "neither a division into classes nor a state of autocracy."

To accomplish this purpose the owners of capital have been excluded from the franchise. Every inhabitant of Soviet Russia, male or female, of eighteen years or over, who has "acquired the means of living through labor that is productive and useful to society" or "who has lost the capacity to work," and also "persons engaged in housekeeping," are entitled to vote and to be elected to the Soviets. "Persons who employ hired labor in order to obtain from it an increase in profits" and those "who have an income without doing any work" are definitely excluded from voting or holding office. Temporarily this means

a class domination. There can be no dispute as to that. Even so, however, it is the majority that has willed it.

Were the figures available they would probably show that even with the property-owners excluded the franchise is more democratic in Russia than in England or the United States. It is probable that a larger portion of the population is entitled to vote today in Russia than in any other country of the world. In the first place, only a small proportion of the Russian population has ever been included in the property-owning class. Russia is and always has been an agrarian land. Its population has been composed overwhelmingly of peasants and workers. In the second place, so-called democracies like England and the United States have limitations of the franchise that Russia has not. England still frankly retains property as the basic qualification for suffrage, excludes women under thirty, men under twenty-one, and aliens. About one-half of the American States exclude women from the franchise; several require educational tests, and many also demand a poll tax; Southern States in practice exclude the Negro; and most States allow only citizens of the United States to vote, while every one disfranchises all men under twenty-one and those who have not lived a certain time in the district from which they vote. Only nine out of forty-five million persons in England voted in 1918, and only eighteen out of over a hundred million in the United States.

In Soviet Russia there are no residence requirements, while all men and women over eighteen, including aliens, can vote. The lack of other limitations in Russia will probably outbalance the exclusion of the property-owners in a comparison of the proportion of the population even now entitled to vote.

Ultimately, however, age will be the only limitation upon the suffrage of Soviet Russia. Like the physician whose highest function it is to make himself unnecessary, the temporary domination of the majority continually works to eliminate itself. The property-owner is excluded, but with an ever-increasing nationalization of capital each month sees fewer and fewer in the property-owning class. The property-owners become workers and entitled to the franchise; the disfranchised rapidly approach complete absorption as the limit they will ultimately reach. Each month makes the electorate more nearly all-inclusive, more completely democratic. What has been called the "dictatorship of the proletariat" proves upon analysis to be ultimately a democracy of the unclassed.

Soviet Russia throws our American institutions into a novel perspective. It probes anew our ideals of self-government. The Soviet, unified, responsible, controlled by the masses at every point, and amenable to change with the times, is a penetrating commentary on our congealed constitution, our sovereign courts, our President, our Senate, and our House, only intermittently responsible and frankly designed to check and to balance the popular will, and our restricted and rather futile electorate.