

Book Review

Bolshevism by Rudolf Sprenger, International Review

Books on Russia are no longer eagerly read: the sufferers from Russiaphobia have reached a state of satiety: Bolshevik publications have ceased to be news.

It is a mistake, however, to think “we know all about it”. There is much that has been concealed, and in this connection Rudolf Sprenger’s booklet supplies a long-felt want.

The first part deals with “The Class Triangle” of the Russian Revolution, and pithily sums up certain phases of the struggle.

Those things that Socialists want to know have been sifted out in a masterly fashion and placed before the reader in a consecutive form.

The Russian bourgeoisie could no longer part ways with Czardom. Lenin said in this connection, “For us the victory of the bourgeois revolution as a victory of the bourgeoisie, is impossible . . .” “This trait does not remove the bourgeois character of our revolution”.

The Russian Revolution was a bourgeois revolution without the bourgeoisie.

Leadership: the intellectuals. Weapon of attack: the proletariat. Mass-basis: the peasantry. Within this triangle the Russian Revolution unrolled. Without the understanding of this grouping of forces there can be no understanding of the nature, course and results of the Russian Revolution. Bolshevism was the political expression of those revolutionary intellectuals of Russia who understood the tasks of the moment and, with indomitable energy and ruthless consistence, set themselves to carry them out.

The second part deals with this interesting question: To what extent was the social character of Bolshevism determined by its origin in the revolutionary intelligentsia of Russia? Was Bolshevism the continuation of the international Marxist movement, or was it merely the continuation of a national Russian movement of the revolutionary intellectuals of that country?

The author sets himself the task of answering these questions.

The genesis of the movement in Russia is painstakingly examined by Sprenger. The Narodniki and the Bakuninists are faithfully sketched, together with many other organisations that contributed to the development of the thought of the Russian Bolsheviks.

The delegation of the Russian Social Democracy declared in its report to the International Socialist Congress in 1904:

“ . . . The Russian Social Democracy came into being primarily as an organisation of revolutionary intellectuals who were disappointed with the previous methods used in their fight for liberty and who arrived at the

understanding that in the capitalistically developing Russia only the proletariat could offer them a sure support in their struggle against Tsarism.”

Axelrod had declared previously that the “‘ideological elements of our upper classes’ could not stop at mere propaganda activity, but had to direct the aroused revolutionary energies of the ‘popular masses’ toward political action . . . ‘Naked reality points for the revolutionary intellectuals to the industrial proletariat as the class in which the organisation of a revolutionary people’s movement has the best chance of success.’”

Lenin also placed the proletariat in a central position, only “because the latter shows the greatest susceptibility to Social Democratic ideas, the highest intellectual and political maturity and, thanks to its numbers and concentration in the largest local centres of our country, decides the outcome of the battle”.

The Marxist theory adopted by them was nothing more than an ideological garb A covering that helped to tide the revolutionary intelligentsia over a period that they themselves could not cope with.

Tkachev gives us a clear and concise statement on the role played by the intelligentsia. “Neither now nor in the future is the people left to itself, capable of accomplishing the social revolution. Only we, the revolutionary minority, can and must accomplish the revolution and as soon as possible . . . The people cannot help itself. The people cannot direct its own fate to suit its own needs. It cannot give body and life to the ideas of the social revolution This role and mission belong unquestionably to the revolutionary minority.”

The writer shows the influence of the terrorists on Bolshevik thought, and arrives at the conclusion that, “By uniting the formal principle of ‘democratic centralism’ with the Narodnik principle of a professional revolutionary organisation, the Bolsheviks created their particular, typically Russian type of political organism”.

Many guileless proletarians are appalled at the recent display of nationalism by Stalin and Co., but the writer quotes Lenin to prove that this was inherent in the Bolshevik movement. “Is, then, the sentiment of national pride alien to us Great Russian class-conscious proletarians? Of course not. We love our language and our fatherland, and strive to raise its toiling masses to a conscious democratic and socialistic life”.

“ . . . We, the Great Russian workers, full of the sentiment of national pride, desire, at any price, a free, independent, self-reliant, democratic, republican, proud Great Russia”. “ . . . The interests of the (not slavishly constituted) national pride of the Great Russian fits in with the socialist interests of the Great Russian (and all other) proletarians.”

One of the most interesting parts of the booklet is that dealing with Jacobinism and Bolshevism: the difference between the tactics of the Blanquists and the Party of Lenin is clearly pointed out and is a valuable contribution to Socialist knowledge.

“The party that Lenin wanted to create was to be a conspiratorial, ‘leader’ organisation, which, with the aid of the ‘professional revolutionists’ would fashion a wide net of party organisations, ranging ‘from the narrowest and most conspiratorial kind to the broadest and least conspiratorial.’ The

'masses' were to 'cover up' and envelop the party.

The party centre as the general staff, the local committee as officers, the party membership as the lower rank of officers, the mass of workers acting under the command of this military political apparatus

Their party was a workers' party only in the sense that *it wanted to put the mass of workers under its orders.*"

"The struggle over the 'masses' has always been for Bolshevism a struggle against the competition of 'bad', 'opportunist', 'betraying', 'social fascist', 'Trotskyist' leaders who have to be vanquished so that the 'leadership' might fall to the Bolshevik Party. Policy is the business of leaders and leader organisations. They do all the thinking for the mass. *Bolshevism does not recognise a proletariat that is capable of developing and executing its policy independently.*"

Class-consciousness as viewed by Lenin is dealt with ably and well. According to him, the only possible creators of a Socialist consciousness were the intellectual strata of society, a part of the bourgeoisie. Socialism would be achieved by the working class, but the idea of the need of Socialism, that is, Socialist thought, could only be the creation of the bourgeois intelligentsia.

"Political class consciousness can only be brought to the workers from outside, that is, outside of the economic struggle, outside of the orbit of the relations existing between all classes and social strata and the State, that is, in the sphere of relations existing among all classes."

This was, in essence, Lenin's thesis.

"The political thought by which the workers were going to be mobilised for action in the complicated revolution against Tsarism could only be the creation of the Jacobinical intelligentsia."

The writer does a creditable job in tearing off the Marxian mask. He says rightly: "Lenin's Marxist terminology is a disguise veiling an outlook that is typical of the Jacobinical intelligentsia".

You became a class-conscious working man, according to Lenin's theory, if you agreed to support without question the decrees of the Bolshevik Party.

"By possessing themselves of the political direction of the proletariat, the Bolsheviki also possessed themselves of the opportunity to direct the peasantry.

This is the social significance of Bolshevism. It was a movement of the Russian intelligentsia. It enlisted in its service the two revolutionary classes of Russia: the industrial workers and the peasantry. It realised its aims through the action of these two classes. It won State power under a disguise of Socialist ideology. The Russian revolution was carried through by the Russian proletariat, acting as the dependable instrument of the Bolshevik intelligentsia. But the Russian workers did not and could not decide the course or content of the national revolution."

The booklet is too good to be missed.

Get it and read it!

The price is only 15 cents, but the knowledge you get in return is worth ten times this amount. Publishers' address is P. O. Box 44, Sta. O, New York, N. Y.

There are a number of copies at the Head Office of the S. P. G. B. we shall be pleased to forward one in return for ninepence to any of our readers. (10d. post-free.)

(December 1939)