Bolshevism: the Heresy of the Underman

By LOTHROP STODDARD

NINETEENTH-CENTURY materialism spawned two great heresies, the heresy of the overman and the heresy of the underman. The heresy of the overman flowered in Prussianism; the heresy of the underman flowers in Bolshevism. Both are deadly to our civilization. Prussianism would send us saber-rattling back into the gorgeous barbarism of Assyria; Bolshevism would suck us down into the slattern savagery of the Congo.

Modern civilization rests upon two ideals, liberty and democracy. Ever since the Renaissance and the Reformation freed man from the penthouse of the Middle Ages and set his face toward new stars, these two forces, however imperfectly understood, have been molding the idealistic framework of our world. By the beginning of the nineteenth century the broad lines of this framework were fairly fashioned.

Then came the materialistic age. Man had just plucked a talisman from Nature's girdle, and within a few short decades his developed science and invention utterly transformed the face of things. This transformation was absolutely unprecedented in the world's history. Hitherto man's material progress had been a gradual evolution. With the exception of gunpowder he had tapped no new sources of material energy since very ancient times. The horse-drawn Egyptian chariot; the wind-driven clipper-ship traced its line unbroken to Ulysses's lateen bark before Troy; while industry still relied on the brawn of man and beast or upon the simple action of wind and waterfall. Suddenly all was changed. Steam, electricity, petrol, the Hertzian wave, harnessed Nature's hidden powers, conquered distance, and shrunk the terrestrial globe to the measure of human hands. Man entered a new world.

Man entered a new material world. Almost overnight his material environment had altered not merely in degree, but in kind. That meant necessity for profound adaptation to novel circumstances. Man concentrated intensively, exclusively upon the problem. He felt instinctively that he could thus concentrate because he believed that the idealistic conquests of preceding centuries had given him sound moral bases upon which to build the new material edifice.

Unfortunately, that which had at first been merely a means to an end presently became an end in itself. Losing sight of his idealisms, nineteenth-century man quickly evolved a thoroughly materialistic philosophy. Those persons satisfied with the trend of the times mirrored this philosophy in quiet and pleasing fashion. The English mid-Victorians, with their sweetly reasonable "economic man" and their law of inevitable progress leading to a calico millennium, certainly envisaged no vol-
canic morrow. But those at odds with the times developed less admirable points of view. To be sure, they were poles asunder among themselves. Some wanted merely to slant the existing order to their own special profit, while others desired to abolish the existing order and establish a radically new scheme of things in its place. But philosophically they were akin. Materialists, like every one else, they both looked to material goals attained by material means, primarily by force. Thus germinated the twin-heresies of force, bedded in materialism and sired by the will to power. Cult of overman and cult of underman, Prussianism and Bolshevism, they are only the opposite sides of the shield.

The cult of the overman need not detain us. The late war has fully instructed us as to its nature, and in Prussianism it reached its logical conclusion. The cult of the underman is our present concern. Its incipient phase was Marxian socialism. Of course there were socialists before Marx, but it was Karl Marx who really popularized socialism and made it a world force. The kernel of socialism is the communal ownership of capital and land. According to Marx, this was to be effected by the workers, who were to dispossess the propertied classes by revolutionary action. The revolutionary overthrow of the existing order is epitomized in Marx's famous peroration: "Let the ruling classes tremble at a communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working-men of all countries, unite!"

Although written in the year 1847, this reads like a Bolshevik manifesto of to-day. As a matter of fact, however, the spirit was different. To begin with, Marx, though a preacher of revolution, was by nature an evolutionist. The core of his doctrine was that modern industrialism, by its very being, was bound rapidly to concentrate all wealth in a very few hands, wiping out the middle classes and reducing both bourgeois and working-man to a poverty-stricken proletariat. In other words, he predicted a society of billionaires and beggars. This was to happen within a couple of generations. When it did happen the wage-slaves were to revolt, dispossess the capitalists, and establish the socialist commonwealth. Thus would come to pass the social revolution. But, note: this revolution, according to Marx was sure, soon, easy. In Marx's last stage of capitalism the billionaires would be so few and the beggars so many that the "revolution" would be a mere holiday, perhaps effected without shedding a drop of blood. Indeed, it might be effected strictly according to existing legal procedure; for once have universal suffrage, and the overwhelming majority of wage-earners could simply vote the whole new order in.

From all this it is quite obvious that Marxian socialism, however revolutionary in theory, was largely evolutionary in practice. Marxists were willing to bide their time and were apt to pin their faith on ballots rather than on barricades. Furthermore, Marxism did not assail the whole idealistic and institutional fabric of our civilization. For example, Marxian socialism might preach the "class-war," but, according to the Marxian hypothesis, the "working-class" was, or soon would be, virtually the entire community. Only a few great capitalists and their hirelings were left without the pale. Again, the Marxian revolution was more a taking-over than a tearing-down. In its purview existing institutions, both state and private, were largely to be preserved. As a matter of fact, Marxian socialism has shown itself everywhere a predominantly evolutionary force, ready to achieve its objectives by instalments and becoming more conservative with time. So matters stood down to the close of the nineteenth century.

But the opening decade of the twentieth century saw a change, an ominous change. A fateful decade, truly! It marks the final elaboration of the philosophy of the overman, the embodiment of that philosophy in mature Prussianism, and Prussianism's girding-up for the 1914 spring on civilization. The same decade marks the emergence of the full-fledged philosophy of the underman and its girding-up for its present spring on civiliza-
tion. This philosophy of the underman is to-day called Bolshevism. Before the Russian Revolution it was known as Syndicalism. Bolshevism and Syndicalism are one and the same thing. Soviet Russia has invented nothing. It is merely practising what others had been preaching for years, with such adaptations and forms as normally attend the putting of a theory into practice.

Bolshevism-syndicalism in its present form is the work of two French thinkers, Fernand Pelloutier and Georges Sorel. Of course, just as there were socialists before Marx, so there were Syndicalists before Sorel. The real progenitor of contemporary Bolshevism was probably the Russian anarchist Michael Bakunin, who away back in the middle decades of the nineteenth century strove hard to win the class-conscious working-men away from Marxism over to the anarchist school. But Bakunin failed, and his followers long remained a negligible group, known chiefly from sporadic bomb outrages more sensational than significant.

It was Georges Sorel who, at the very end of the nineteenth century, laid the practical foundation of Bolshevism. The hour awaited the man. The proletarian world was full of disillusionment and discontent at the long-dominant Marxian philosophy. Half a century had passed since Marx first preached his gospel, and the revolutionary millennium was nowhere in sight. Society had not become a world of billionaires and beggars. The great capitalists had not swallowed all. The middle-classes still survived and prospered. Worst of all, from the revolutionary point of view, the upper strata of the working classes had prospered, too. The skilled workers were, in fact, becoming an aristocracy of labor. They were acquiring property and thus growing capitalistic, they were raising their living standards and thus growing bourgeois. Society seemed endowed with a strange vitality. It was even reforming many of the abuses which Marx had pronounced incurable. When, then, was the proletariat to inherit the earth?

"The Proletariate"—that was the new key-word. The van, and even the main body of society, might be fairly on the march, but behind lagged a ragged rear-guard. Here were first of all the lower working-class strata, the "manual" laborers in the narrower sense, relatively ill paid and often grievously exploited. Behind these again came a motley crew, the rejects and misfits of society. "Casuals" and unemployables, "down-and-outs" and déclassés, victims of social evils, victims of bad heredity and their own vices, paupers, defectives, degenerates, and criminals—they were all there. They were there for many reasons, but they were all miserable, and they were all bound together by a certain solidarity—a sullen hatred of the civilization from which they had little to hope. To these people evolutionary, Fabian socialism was cold comfort. Then came Georges Sorel, promising not evolution, but revolution; not in the dim future, but in the here and now; not the bloodless "taking-over" by "the workers," hypothetically stretched to include virtually the whole community, but the bloody "dictatorship" of "the proletariat" in its narrow and technical sense. Here at last was living hope—hope and the prospect of revenge. Is it, then, strange that a few short years should have seen revolutionary socialists, anarchists, all the anti-social forces of the whole world, grouped under the blood-red banner of Georges Sorel? For a time they went under different names, Syndicalists in France, Bolsheviks in Russia, I. W. W.'s in America; but in reality they formed one army, enlisted for a single war.

Now, what was this war? It was something absolutely new in the world's history. It was not merely a war against a social system, not merely a war against our civilization; it was a war of the hand against the brain. For the first time since man was man there was a definite schism between the hand and the head. Every principle which mankind had thus far evolved, community of interest, the solidarity of civilization and culture, the dignity of labor, of muscle, of brawn, dominated and made sacred by intellect and spirit—all these the new heresy of the underman howled down and trampled in the mud. Up from the dark purlieus of
the under-world strange battle-shouts came winging. The under-world was to become the world, the only world. As for our world, it was to be destroyed; as for us, we were to be killed. A clean sweep! Not even the most beautiful products of our intellects and souls interested these undermen. Why should they care when they were fashioning a world of their own? A hand-world, not a head-world. The undermen despised thought itself save as an instrument of invention and production. Their guide was not reason, but the "proletarian truth" of instinct and passion, the deeper self below the reason, whose sublimation is the mob. Quoth Georges Sorel, "Man has genius only in the measure that he does not think."

As for the citizens of the upper world, they were to be extirpated along with their institutions and ideals. According to Georges Sorel, "Violence, class struggles without quarter, the state of war en permanence," were to be the birthmarks of the proletarian revolution. The doomed classes were numerous. They comprised not merely the billionaires of Marx, but also the whole of the upper and middle classes, the landowning countryfolk, the skilled working men; in short, all except those who worked with their untutored hands, plus the elect few who philosophized for those who worked with their untutored hands. The elimination of so many classes was perhaps unfortunate. However, it was necessary, because these classes were so hopelessly capitalist and bourgeois that, unless eliminated, they would surely infect at its very birth the gestating under-world civilization.

At this point many of my readers will probably think that I have been depicting the ravings of minds crazed by the torments of the late war. Not at all. What I have been describing is the Syndicalist philosophy as it stood in 1914. Every item in that program has been drawn from Syndicalist pronouncements made before the fatal revolver-shots at Sarajevo. We must recognize once and for all that soviet Russia is not a mere war distemper, but the Muscovite manifestation of a movement which had formulated its philosophy and infected the whole civilized world long before. Thus when we come to contemplate Russian Bolshevism in action, we shall view it not as a purely Russian phenomenon, but as a local phase of something which must be faced, fought, and mastered in every quarter of the earth.

The Great War was, of course, a great boon to the undermen. The writings of Lenine and Trotzky in its early days mirror their terrible glee. They realized that, even though completely victorious over the Prussian assailant, civilization would emerge from the battle so bled, dazed, and tired that it might fall an easy prey to the onslaught of a second foe. The Russian Revolution of March, 1917, gave the undermen their opportunity. That Revolution was not primarily their work, but they resolved to garner its fruits. They knew what they were about, and they drove remorselessly toward their goal. For a few short months they let the cadets dream democracy and the socialists spout Marx. Then they struck, and Bolshevism became a red reality.

Bolshevism has ruled Russia for nearly two years, and Russia is utterly ruined. She ekes out a bare existence on the remains of past accumulations, on the surviving scraps of her material and spiritual capital. Everywhere are hunger, cold, disease, terror, physical, and moral death. The underman is making his clean sweep. The classes are being eliminated according to the best preachments of Georges Sorel. Legal executions have neared one hundred thousand, extra-legal "proletarian spontaneity" has accounted for an even larger number, while ten millions of specially offensive bourgeoisie have been slated for eventual elimination by the virtual suppression of their food rations, the soviet government allowing them, in Lenine's jocose phraseology, "bread enough to prevent them from forgetting its smell." Judging by the present mortality rate, next winter will see the last of these "walking shadows" disappear. Meanwhile Lenine, surrounded by his Chinese executioners, sits behind the Kremlin walls, a modern Jenghiz Khan plotting the plunder of a world.

Such is the heresy of the underman in action. What are we going to do?
An Englishman on the Irish Problem

By G. WARD PRICE

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BOUT this Irish question I know neither less nor more than the mass of my fellow-Englishmen, and that is based less on fact than on sentiment; but, like other Englishmen just now, I do realize that Ireland is a subject about which it is urgently necessary to arrange one's ideas and to make up one's mind.

A few weeks ago Ireland appealed to the peace conference for recognition as a nation. It is extremely unlikely that the peace conference will take any notice of the appeal, for to do so would be to interfere in the internal affairs of one of the great powers, and would open the door to all sorts of trouble. We have not gone nearly so far as that. The league of nations, even when its constitution is finally decided, will not be concerned with any but the foreign relations of the states composing it. Their domestic troubles will remain their own affair. Ireland, indeed, cannot expect representation at the peace conference, because she is represented there already by the delegation of the British Empire.

But this appeal, vain though it may prove to be, does bring the Irish question again into prominence, and in that respect it has been considerably reinforced by the sudden development of a new pro-Irish campaign in the United States under the auspices of a personage of the high international standing of Cardinal Gibbons. A few years ago American manifestation of sympathy for Ireland used to pass wholly unnoticed in England, but since then we have come into such close relations that neither nation can afford to neglect public feeling in the other. And one thing which this association has taught Englishmen is that we have a very imperfect knowledge of the national psychology of America and of its probable effect upon her political action. Consequently, at a juncture like the present, when new precedents are being created all the time in international relations, one realizes that there is just a chance that America as a nation, if not as a government, might take sides more energetically in this Irish question than she has done hitherto; and before that happens, it is only fair that Americans should hear not only the Irishman's, but also the average Englishman's, point of view.

We English can never judge how a matter of this sort is going to strike America. Americans, as a race, do not reason the same as we do. They are much less logical, far more sentimental. They seem, in fact, not so much to reason as to feel, and emotions, especially the emotions of a nation, are very uncertain things to reckon with. America has a way of shutting her eyes to what appear to us to be insuperable obstacles of hard fact, and in an access of sentimental strength taking a leap which lands her in positions where we English would have said that it was materially impossible for her to get.

A mention in passing of no more than two recent happenings will give some idea of this feeling of incomprehension, bordering on bewilderment, which I think is the prevailing impression about America in English minds just now. One was the remarkable disappearance, directly the United States joined in the war, of all manifestation of the pro-German sympathies that existed among the twelve million American citizens of German origin. The other is this amazing decision by which that great and individualistic country has been committed to teetotalism. Those two events alone would be enough to convince Englishmen that they know much less of the American national character and its possibilities of unexpected action than we do about those of a people like the French, who seem at...