

tremely complicated. Exhausted and shattered as we are by war, we cannot devote all our energy to managing economic relations between a proletarian government whose factories are merely a vast wreck, and the small farmers who remain up to the present what they have always been, and who can not survive unless their present farming system is sustained by a certain amount of trade freedom. In my opinion these two conditions are the pressing questions of the hour, both from the economic and the political standpoint. It is to them that we must devote our thought and effort from the moment hostilities end and we are really on the road to peace. The existing unrest among the petty bourgeoisie which characterizes this period, is itself an admonition of the policy we must adopt.

If we consider all I have described from the point of view of the class-struggle — avoiding error in our understanding of the relations between the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie — we shall see that the problem is very difficult; that it will require careful and delicate handling to insure the victory of the proletariat. The fact that as long

ago as 1918 we issued a decree providing a tax in kind, proves that we are dealing with a question which demands a Communist solution, but a solution which the war prevented our undertaking at the time. The war compelled us to follow war procedure. But it would be a grave blunder for us to assume therefore that only war measures are permissible and possible during the period of transition from war to peace. Involved as we are in economic crises, we must bear in mind that it is much easier to perfect a proletarian government in a country where industry is organized on a grand scale, than in a country where manufacturing is still done for the most part in small workshops and on a petty scale. We must recognize the necessity of granting concessions in order that we may obtain the agricultural machinery we require. We should realize that we must arrange for the barter of grain for that machinery; that we must open channels for direct exchange between the proletarian artisan and the proletarian peasant, so as to assure the survival and well-being of both during the initial years of peace.

ONE STORY OUT OF A THOUSAND

BY ARKADY AVERCHENKO

A MAN from the Commissariat came to a Petrograd citizen of free Soviet Russia and said to him:

‘Are you Gregory Nedoryezov?’

‘I am.’

‘You have been designated to come to-morrow to the meeting near the Modern Circus.’

‘To come to the meeting as what?’

‘As the audience, of course.’

‘Yes, sir. And when do I have to applaud?’

‘You’ll know by watching a dark fellow with a pimpled face down front. When you see him start, clap for all you’re worth. That’s all you have to do.’

In order not to overlook the telegraphic signs of the dark fellow with a pimpled face, Gregory Nedoryezov

pushed forward into the front row and stood within two steps of the orator, drinking ecstatically of the orator's magic words.

'Comrades,' bellowed the orator, bending forward so that it seemed he would break his body in half, 'the liberty we have won is threatened. The Polish imperialists are pressing against us on one side, the South Crimean White Guardists are coming from another. Only by the last gigantic effort can we save our precious freedom, and therefore all should be at the front. Am I right?'

His hearers sighed, changed from one foot to the other, and remained silent.

'Am I right?'

More sighs, and continued silence.

'Why are you silent? Perhaps, I am wrong, then tell me. Well? What do you say? Am I right?'

The orator's sharp glance darkened, his face frowned, as his eyes paused on Gregory Nedoryezov's bosom, from which, according to the orator's firm conviction, should have come the mighty shout.

'R-right!'

'Well, what do you say? You, comrade, for example! I mean the one in a woman's coat and with only one shoe on. Why don't you say something? I am asking you, "Am I right or am I wrong?"'

Gregory Nedoryezov sighed sorrowfully, and gazed down on the ground.

'What is the matter with you? Are you deaf and dumb?'

'No, on the contrary, I am all right, thank you.'

'Then, why do you remain silent, and just open and shut your mouth, like a fish taken out of the water? Now you tell us, was I right or wrong?'

Gregory Nedoryezov was as taciturn as his lonely shoe; perhaps, even more taciturn, for the shoe was so torn that its mouth was open all the time, showing rows of white wooden teeth, while

Gregory's mouth was usually closed, like a suit-case which had been locked with a key that had been lost later on.

The orator shook his head and said with a sigh:

'Well, Comrade Oupokoinikov. Take the one who would not speak aside. I shall speak to him later on.'

'Won't you please?'

'Where are you taking me?'

'A very pretty girl is asking about you. She is waiting for you on the corner. Will you come, you . . . or shall I help you along with the rifle butt?'

As might have been expected, the information concerning the pretty young girl was rather exaggerated. Moreover, Gregory was not taken to the corner, but to a closed room, where no one waited for him, but he had to wait. Instead of the girl, the erstwhile orator came into the room, sat astride a chair and, looking at Nedoryezov who stood before him mournfully, said:

'Well, you wouldn't talk to me there, where so many people were present. Let's see if you'll talk now. Was I right or wrong?'

The lonely shoe, opening its mouth wide open, shouted its story to the whole world. But the owner of the shoe remained silent.

'So,' said the erstwhile orator with a sigh. 'Very well. Comrade Grobov, take this taciturn comrade to the prison, and shoot him on the spot in case of an attempt to escape.'

'I give you my word of honor that there will be no attempt to escape,' said Nedoryezov hastily. 'I give you my word of honor.'

'Yes, you may not want to escape, but they may think that you want to escape. We are all so tired and mixed up. How can you tell a walk from a run?'

Suddenly Nedoryezov said with an air of a man who had made a decision:

'All right. If I am doomed to perish, anyway, I'll tell you why I remained

silent. I remained silent because I did not know whether I should have said that you were right or wrong.'

'But haven't you a head on your shoulders?'

'Ah, Mr. Comrade, there is no rain before it begins to rain, there is no money, until you get some; but there is a head before it disappears. I had two brothers, Seryozha and Alyosha, and five minutes before they lost their heads, they had them, fixed securely to their shoulders, it seemed.'

'Well?'

'Let me begin with Seryozha. He was a fine fellow, knew all about things. So after thinking everything over, he came to a chief one like you and said to him, "Everything that you are doing is wrong. You promised bread, and the people are starving to death. You promised peace, and are chasing us from front to front like a lot of rabbits. You promised freedom, and when we have to bury a child or move from one house to another, we have to have ten permits and mandates. That is n't good. It's all wrong." Well, the chief one listened to him to the end, and said,

"So everything is wrong?"

"Very wrong."

"All right, take him over to . . . and give your orders in case he attempts to escape."

"But I won't try to escape."

"Never mind, give the orders."

'So they took him away and gave the orders. We learned about it, Alyosha and I; we cried a little, and then Alyosha says, "I am going to talk differently to them. Now I know." So he went over to the chief one and says, "How good everything is now, and right! For instance, you promised bread, and here we have everything we want. You promised peace, and here we have God's own peace. You promised liberty, and good Lord, have n't we freedom now? Only now we can see

the sun and breathe fresh air. Everything is right."

'And the chief one looked at him and said, "So everything is right?"

"Everything."

"All right, take him where he belongs and in case he tries to escape, give your orders."

"But why do you send me there?"

"What? For mockery, of course. What you said can be said only in mockery. Comrade Skeletov, please give the orders."

'They gave the orders.

'Now think for yourself, Comrade Orator, what was I to say? If I had said, "Right," you would have said, "Give your orders, Comrade Skeletov." If I had said, "Wrong," you would still have said, "Give your orders, Comrade Skeletov." It will be better if I keep silent.'

But the erstwhile orator shook his head and said,

'But it won't do to be silent, either. Silence as a refusal to answer a categorical question is sabotage and boycott of the Government, punishable by imprisonment, and in case of attempt to escape, by. . . . In short, Comrade Grobov, please give your orders.'

The rare passers-by saw Gregory Nedoryezov on the deserted public square. In spite of his promise not to attempt to escape, he apparently did. He lay on the cobblestones, his feet bent under him, and it really seemed as though he were trying to run.

And it seemed that he had two mouths at the two extremities of his body. One of his mouths, in the shoe, gleaming with its rows of white wooden teeth, was open and shouted something at the dusty sky. The other mouth, the ordinary human one, was also wide open, but it had no teeth; they had been knocked out by rifle butts. And that other mouth was silent.

It will be silent until Judgment Day.

AN UNKNOWN PORTRAIT

BY JOSÉ MARIA CHACÓN Y CALVO

FROM *La Pluma, March*
(MADRID LITERARY MONTHLY)

I FELT an overpowering curiosity, mingled with an inexplicable dread, in my desire to know something of the elderly man with an absent-minded gaze, who was the subject of that picture of the '60's. The portrait preserved an indefinable expression, something reflecting the inner nature of the man, which reminded me in a startling way of a pen drawing which I discovered once among my family papers. This drawing represented a youth just on the verge of maturity, with a book open on the table in front of him, gazing out through a window upon a rural scene. The drawing was sketchy and vague, suggesting its subject with the sternest economy of lines, and reminded me of some of the early portraits of Rosetti, and also of the impression which the view of the country once made upon me when I saw it for the first time after a protracted illness. That youth had lived in the depths of a great peace. His life had not been checkered by great adventures or thrilling experiences. It had brought him neither great sorrow nor great gladness. Still, let that youth become an elderly man, habitually clothed in black, attending mass every morning, a member of several charitable societies — and his gaze, so perfectly mirrored in this portrait, would possess that inexplicable suggestion of mysterious grief, of concealed care, of presentiment of something forbidding, of resigned sadness — not apparent, perhaps, in everyday affairs, but leaving the echo of hollow footsteps in the heart.

To-day I am to meet an aged lady who knew the man whose portrait interests me and who cared for him. She is to tell me something of his life.

'He was a fine old man, my son, such a fine man that everyone in the town where he and his ancestors before him were born called him "the good gentleman."' He never pressed men in distress to pay him. He never dunned worthy tenants for his rent. He often bestowed more than half of his generous income upon the town poor. He traveled over Europe and America when he was young, and wrote an elaborate journal of what he saw. He collected a choice library, where he spent much of his time. He always loved the country. I often used to hear him say: "Nothing pleases me like my country-town." He married there, and died there, an old man, after a perfectly tranquil and peaceful life, a peace unbroken from childhood through youth and maturity — that deep peace which is given by Heaven and which none may trouble.

'But that introspective gaze, that cast of melancholy, that secret something which you fancy you see in his portrait, springs from a very deep source in the simple and uneventful experience of that noble gentleman. He was ever conscious of the fact that this life which he was leading was growing less his own with every day that passed, that it was an inevitable repetition of another previous life, of a mysterious, vacillating, silent life outside of him, strangely associated with his existence, confused, sad, fatal.'