What the Bolsheviki Really Want

I

To speak of the events of the last ten days as only another phase of the question whether Russia will make peace or not is to cling to an error which has persisted too long. The Bolshevik uprising compels a reexamination of the Revolution as a whole. For all the good will and self-detachment that the outside world might bring to an understanding of the Revolution, it was inevitable that between the foreign observer and the Russians themselves there should be a difference in the angle of approach. The Russians have naturally thought of the war in terms of the Revolution. We, on the outside, have thought of the Revolution in terms of the war. It is not a question here of that selfish and unenlightened school of Allied sentiment to whom the rise of new Russia has had meaning only as it might hasten or delay the defeat of Germany. Brutal and mischievous is the attitude of supposedly influential organs of opinion in this country which, long before the present crisis, sent forth a piteous cry for the return of the Czar to set the Russian steam roller once more into motion. That the Czar's steam roller would have to be stoked into action with the freedom and happiness of one hundred and eighty million souls did not in the least concern these ardent champions of a war for democracy. Let us leave them to their own conscience and judgment. Yet there were others in this country, and doubtless among the western Allies, who were of no mind to demand such a sacrifice from Russia; who were prepared to say that if it was a clear choice for the Russian people between losing their new freedom and abandoning their allies, let Russia go her own way; who understood how badly Russia was in need of peace; but who, in spite of all, acquiesced in the common opinion that the problems of the Revolution were primarily war problems.

It is true that in a perfunctory fashion we have recognized that the Russian people was thinking of something besides war and peace. There was the safeguarding of the Revolution in its elementary political aspects. There was the question of the rights of nationalities within the Russian state. There was the overtopping problem of the restoration of the land to the Russian people. "Land and Freedom" has always been the watchword of revolutionary effort in Russia, with a conflict of opinion whether the transfer of the land was to take the form of confiscation or of purchase. There was the reorganization of industrial life, with another conflict of opinion whether the Socialist cooperative commonwealth could be brought into being at once as the Bolsheviki would have it, or whether the road must simply be cleared for an evolution into Socialism. All these questions we have been dimly aware of without seizing their true proportion in the mind of the Russians themselves. We have imagined that the vital difference between Kerensky and Lenin was one of foreign policy, that Lenin wanted the war stopped at once and that Kerensky wished it to go on as long as the Allied governments thought it necessary.

The Bolsheviki or Maximalist thus appeared as the peace-at-any-price man. The Mensheviki or Minimalist and his comrades of the Socialist Revolutionist Party were the moderate peace men. What the Bolsheviki and the Menshevik thought of the enormously important internal problems of Russia we have known little.

And there is thus much to be said for the great mass of us who have had no access to the innermost springs of Russian action, that we have been confirmed in the belief that peace is the primary difference between the contending factions in Russia, by their own utterances. It is true that Lenin and his followers have stressed the immediate need of peace to be obtained against the will of the Governments if it came to that, and that Kerensky has stood out for Government action at home in cooperation with Government action among the Allies. The Bolsheviki have advocated, and carried through, a suspension of the offensive by the Russian army, whereas Kerensky labored, successfully at first, for a resumption of the offensive. The Bolsheviki influence was exerted for the convocation of the two abortive Stockholm conferences, whereas Kerensky would not go to extremes in forcing Stockholm on the Allies. It is true that Kerensky's influence in the country was undermined by his inability or unwillingness to obtain from the Allies a restatement of war aims, and that every such disappointment added to the influence of the Bolsheviki. We may trace a definite connection between the victorious Bolsheviki uprising of two weeks ago and the earlier announcement that the long awaited Paris Conference was, after all, to be a war-methods conference and not a war-aims conference. All these incidents would indicate that internal vicissitudes in Russia have been shaped by the question of peace and war; yet a closer study may show that at bottom such has not been the case.

This view is tenable even in face of the fact that the most featured item in the programme of the Leninite government has been the demand for an "immediate democratic peace." Read this programme a little more carefully, and not as displayed in the headlines, nor yet in the order of the clauses, but displayed in the Leninite proclamations, and it will appear that something more is at stake than the question of peace and war. The Bolsheviki plan of November 8 called for (1) immediate democratic peace; (2) the transfer of landed estates to the peasants; (3) the transfer of political authority to the Councils of Workers and Soldiers; (4) the convocation of an "honest" constituent assembly. The Bolsheviki exhortation to the armies runs: "For peace, for bread, for land, and for the power of the people." But if we read this programme in the light of a fuller knowledge of Revolutionary conditions and of the utterances of the Bolsheviki leaders, there is a case for reversing the avowed order of precedence. We might then read (1) the power of the people; (2) land; (3) bread; (4) peace—if possible.

In other words, what we see now in Russia is the latest phase in the struggle, not between two foreign policies, but between two internal policies. It has been a contest between the moderate programme of a political revolution preparing the way for the progressive realization of the Socialist ideal—Kerensky—and the immediate realization of the Socialist commonwealth—Lenine. The Bolsheviki conception—Lenin has virtually said it—is as follows: We had one revolution when the Czarism was overthrown. We have now put through a second revolution by deposing Kerensky and putting the powers of government into the hands of the "people." When we have given the land to the peasants and the instruments of production...
to the industrial workers, we shall have put through the third, the final, the Revolution.

II

Let us for the moment try to forget the war and attempt a summary of the Revolution from its beginnings as a purely domestic event. In the second week of March the Czarism is overthrown by a national upheaval. The army, the fleet, the working masses in the towns, the middle classes, all take part. There is created a "bourgeois" Provisional Government containing only one Socialist representative, Kerensky. Even before the establishment of a Provisional Government there have arisen the Councils of Workers' and Soldiers' Delegates, the famous Soviets, which are entirely Socialist in character, and which, by their control of the army and the civilian masses, exercise the real power in Russia. If the Socialist Soviets nevertheless acquiesce in an apparently superfluous "Government," it is because there must be national unanimity during the first few perilous weeks of the new régime. The Provisional Government, in its turn, acquires in the famous Order Number 1 for the subversion of discipline in the army, partly perhaps because it must bow to the Socialists, in part because the Revolution will perish if the army cannot be held to its support.

The winning over of the army is speedily assured. The danger of a march upon Petrograd by a monarchist General disappears. Simultaneously, the class conflict reappears. The antagonism between Socialist and "bourgeois," which has been the commonplace of Socialist agitation for years back, manifests itself. In April the leaders of militant Socialism, Lenin from Switzerland, Trotsky from the United States, appear on the scene. Socialists are reminded of the old question whether a revolution produced by the "people" is to be "stolen" by the middle class. Kerensky's presence in the "bourgeois" cabinet is no guarantee; for recent history in other countries is rich in examples of Socialist ministers who enter bourgeois cabinets and are seduced out of their allegiance, or outwitted. So the Soviets begin their offensive upon the Provisional Government, whose outstanding figure, Paul Milyukov, is also its most vulnerable figure because of his pronounced Imperialism. Russia's great longing for peace is made the issue. Milyukov boldly challenges the Soviets, during the first days of May and is overthrown. The Soviets, still under the control of the moderate Socialists, are not yet ready to assume the entire responsibility of Government, and a coalition Ministry of "bourgeois" and Socialists is organized, and the first article in its programme is the attainment of a speedy peace without annexations and without indemnities.

But the ultra-Socialists are by no means reconciled to the policy of cooperation with the bourgeois, even in a Government of predominantly Socialist tinge. Kerensky, Tseretelli, Skobelev, as Cabinet Ministers, will only repeat the sad disillusions of Millerand, Briand, and Viviani in France. And, as a matter of fact, Kerensky has all along revealed tendencies towards "reaction." He is for a continuation of the war until Germany is beaten. He is for the restoration of discipline in the army and a resumption of the offensive. These are the ostensible charges against the policy of coalition. The real opposition is concerned with Russia's internal problems. A coalition Government will consent to the transfer of the land to the peasants, but will insist on compensation. It will promote the interests of the labor masses, but will insist that the establishment of the Socialist coöperative commonwealth can come only with time. It will call a Constituent Assembly, but it will be an assembly in which the middle classes will be represented, in which they may even predominate, and not an "honest" Constituent such as Lenin promises to-day. Under continued pressure, the Provisional Government enters on its third phase. Kerensky organizes a new Cabinet. The most forceful of the "bourgeois" members of the Cabinet retire; only figureheads like Nakrassov or extreme radicals like Terestchenko remain. Nevertheless Kerensky himself is tainted with the poison of compromise. In the first days of July he personally leads the armies in Galicia to battle.

Even in the Soviets the Bolsheviki are in a minority, but their leaders are resolute and they have the most militant popular elements of Petrograd behind them. As a rejoinder to Kerensky's offensive in Galicia they attempt a "demonstration" in the streets of Petrograd, and are suppressed with bloodshed. Kerensky, on the other hand, perhaps because he is not secure enough, more probably because it is not in him to train the guns on his former comrades in Socialism, does not resort to retaliation, though the Bolsheviki rioters are kept in mild confinement. The Bolsheviki bide their time. And time works in their favor. Kerensky is unable to redeem his pledge of bringing the Allies to a restatement of war aims. Signs of counter-revolution appear. The middle classes grow restive. In the second week of September, the menace of counter-revolution takes form in the Kornilov demonstration. The peril of the moment unites Bolsheviki and moderate Socialists; but when the crisis is over the Bolsheviki have found new material for their war on Kerensky, who is the "accomplice" or the "tool" of the reactionaries. "Conciliation" alone made Kornilov possible. There is no putting faith in the bourgeois, whose purposes are not the vindication of the national honor and the territorial integrity of Russia as they profess—so would run the Bolsheviki argument—but plain fear of true Socialism. The landlords fear for their estates, and the town bourgeois for their wealth and control of industry.

There follow upon the Kornilov crisis two months of preparation for the final struggle, for the destruction of Kerensky and the policy of compromise, and for the establishment of the Socialist commonwealth. The question of peace remains the ostensible issue, for the simple reason that it has immense appeal to a war-weary people released from the ties of discipline. Kerensky's prestige fades as the weeks go by and there is no response from the Allies to Russia's plea for a statement of war aims. Yet Kerensky has shown such marvellous skill in weathering crisis after crisis that another peril looms up for the Bolsheviki. That peril is the Bolsheviki's own "coup de main." It is delivered on November 8, and succeeds. The Bolsheviki win on the issue of an immediate democratic peace. But the real victory is less for peace than for the immediate realization of the Socialist commonwealth. Lenin, who is eager to destroy the capitalists and put industry under the control of the workers, is joined by
Tchernov, of Kerensky’s own Socialist Revolutionist Party, who wants to destroy the landlords and give the soil to the peasants at once. It is not a radical foreign policy, but a radical domestic policy that has triumphed.

It would be idle to assert that the Bolshevik slogan of immediate peace is entirely insincere, a species of elaborate camouflage for the enactment of a social revolution. The case has here been purposely overstated to emphasize a phase which has hitherto received scant attention. It may be that the Bolsheviki are more “internationally minded” than Kerensky, and that some of them are willing to have Russia pay for the advancement of universal Socialism. The simple element of fanaticism will explain in part the Bolshevik scheme of a peace to be brought about by the rising of the proletariat of every country against the “masters.” Nevertheless the probability is strong that the peace issue has been employed by the Bolsheviki to seize control of Russia for the realization of their own schemes of internal reconstruction.

III

If the preceding analysis comes close to the truth, the implication is obvious for the question which the outside world is now asking, How near is Russia to a separate peace? If we believe that the primary purpose of the Bolsheviki was the conquest of power within Russia and that their interest in peace is subsidiary, then peace recedes into the distance. A gross parallel would be the emphasis laid upon an issue by a candidate before election and after. We need not accuse the Bolsheviki of hypocrisy. They will undoubtedly do their best to get peace; since peace would perpetuate them in power. But it is absurd to suppose that it is only of peace they are thinking. Kerensky, too, wanted peace. He asked the Russian people to be patient while he negotiated with the Allied Governments. Lenin has virtually asked the Russian people to be patient while he is negotiating with the proletariat of all the belligerent countries. And in the meanwhile the “honest” Constituent Assembly will be convened and the attempt will be made to put through “real” revolution, the expropriation of the landlords, the expropriation of the factory owners, the intrenchment of the proletariat in the Government. This forecast is not mere supposition. It is based on the programmes and utterances so far enunciated by the Bolshevik Government. It proposes immediate democratic peace negotiated by the “elected representatives of the belligerent peoples.” But how immediately will such elections take place, in Germany, in Great Britain, in France, in the United States? If the Governments once more refuse to give passports to their trade-union leaders for a final Stockholm Congress, what then? Are we to look to the proletariat in these countries to rise against the Governments? The future may hold even this in store, but hardly the immediate future. Unless Lenine is willing to do business with William II the Russian people will have to wait for their immediate democratic peace. But it is not impossible that they may consent to wait if in the meanwhile the land, the factories, and the Government of Russia are being delivered to them.

SIMEON STRUNSKY

Why Mr. Roosevelt and the Rest of Us Are at War

WHEN Mr. Roosevelt’s mind is not inflamed by passion, it keeps him pretty well in the middle of the road. A man who has been President of All the People is apt to be a genuine believer in the Golden Mean. He has had incomparable opportunities to discover the wide and deep duplicity of human desires. He has stood for years at a point where vast, opposite, and nearly equal forces have met, each seeking to sweep him before it. He knows in the depth of his heart that his landed stability in crises was due largely to his sheer inability to move hastily or far between the contending pressures of the interests besieging him. Extremists on both sides have called him a trimmer, as Wendell Phillips called Lincoln a trimmer; but he knows that he has been quite literally a well-balanced man. Critics without insight into the mysteries of government have failed to appreciate Mr. Roosevelt’s Aristotelianism. They have undervalued his golden platitudes, and have made game of the well-balanced style in many of his public utterances: “On the one hand, I applaud the honest capitalist; on the other hand, I applaud the honest laboring man”; “Just as I reward the well-doer, exactly in the same way do I punish the evil-doer.” The sympathetic critic recognizes in this stylistic habit the mark of a mind truly impressed with the two-sidedness of things—a mind which if not just is at least infatuated with the idea of justice. Even when Mr. Roosevelt’s mind is in a state of general conflagration, as it has been much of the time since 1908, it seems to continue more or less automatically its two-handed motions of balance and compensation. If he detests the German Government, on the one hand, he detests the American Government on the other. Just as he insists on being right half of the time, exactly in the same way he insists on being wrong the other half of the time. And so his new miscellany, “The Foes of Our Own Household,” falls easily into two parts. Just as one of them was written by a judicious, progressive, and patriotic Aristotelian, exactly in the same way the other was written by a wilful, angry, and furiously inequitable extremist.

The judicious, progressive, and patriotic notes in this book are chiefly audible in the chapters on Law Enforcement, Industrial Justice, Social Justice, Socialism Versus Social Control, The Farmer, and The Word of Micah. Mr. Roosevelt’s conception of government as a positive, helpful, creative force, frequently initiating as well as controlling social enterprises, is essentially sound. Much of his criticism of our laissez-faire disposition in the presence of conflicting interests which are nation-wide, is timely and weighty. His interest in and his habit of calling attention to such experiments as the Municipal Court of Philadelphia, the Raiffeisen system of rural credits, and the cooperative movements in North Dakota and North Carolina, are most commendable. His steering of a middle course between the extremes of individualism and the extremes of collectivism is, at times, eminently skilful. On the one hand, he scornfully condemns those who shrink aghast from any project because its tendency is “socialistic.” On the

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