

**A HISTORY OF SOVIET RUSSIA 4**

— **E.H.CARR** —

# **THE INTERREGNUM**

— **1923-1924** —



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A HISTORY OF SOVIET RUSSIA

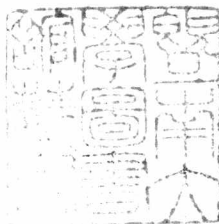
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# THE INTERREGNUM 1923-1924

BY

E. H. CARR

*Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge*



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# A HISTORY OF SOVIET RUSSIA

# A HISTORY OF SO'VIET RUSSIA

by E. H. Carr

*in fourteen volumes*

1. THE BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION, *Volume One*
2. THE BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION, *Volume Two*
3. THE BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION, *Volume Three*
4. THE INTERREGNUM
5. SOCIALISM IN ONE COUNTRY, *Volume One*
6. SOCIALISM IN ONE COUNTRY, *Volume Two*
7. SOCIALISM IN ONE COUNTRY, *Volume Three, Part I*
8. SOCIALISM IN ONE COUNTRY, *Volume Three, Part II*
9. \*FOUNDATIONS OF A PLANNED ECONOMY, *Volume One, Part I*
10. \*FOUNDATIONS OF A PLANNED ECONOMY, *Volume One, Part II*
11. FOUNDATIONS OF A PLANNED ECONOMY, *Volume Two*
12. FOUNDATIONS OF A PLANNED ECONOMY, *Volume Three, Part I*
13. FOUNDATIONS OF A PLANNED ECONOMY, *Volume Three, Part II*
14. FOUNDATIONS OF A PLANNED ECONOMY, *Volume Three, Part III*

\*with R. W. Davies

## PREFACE

IN the preface to the first volume of *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923*, published in 1950, I expressed the intention of proceeding, on the completion of this work, to "the second instalment of the whole project" under the title *The Struggle for Power, 1923-1928*. Further consideration and fuller examination of the material have led me to modify this plan in several respects. In the first place, the last months of Lenin's last illness and the first weeks after his death, the interval from March 1923 to May 1924, appeared to constitute a sort of intermediate period — a truce or interregnum in party and Soviet affairs — when controversial decisions were, so far as possible, avoided or held in suspense: in the new plan this period occupies a separate volume, now published under the title *The Interregnum, 1923-1924*. Next, it was found that the period from 1924 to 1928, while constituting in many respects a unity, could more conveniently be divided into two sections. Finally, the title originally suggested for this period seemed too trivial, and inadequate to the fundamental issues involved in the struggle. According to my present plan, the third instalment of my project will bear the title *Socialism in One Country, 1924-1926*, will cover the period approximately from the summer of 1924 to the first months of 1926, and will occupy two volumes. The proclamation of "socialism in one country" will provide the occasion for some reflexions, which I feel to be appropriate at this stage, on the relation between the Bolshevik revolution and the material, political and cultural legacy of the Russian past.

I have once more to acknowledge a continuing debt of gratitude to many of those who helped me in the earlier stages of my task. The most important sources of my material have again been the British Museum and the libraries of the London School of Economics and of the Royal Institute of International Affairs. I have also been able to use the libraries of the School of Slavonic Studies of the University of London and of the Institute of Agrarian Affairs of Oxford University, the Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine of the University of Paris, and the libraries of the International Labour Office at Geneva and of the Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis at Amsterdam. It was in the last-named institute that I found the typewritten copy of the hitherto unpublished "platform of the 46" from which I made the translation printed in the present

volume. I wish to express my very warm thanks to the librarians of all these institutions and their staffs for their invaluable assistance and for the untiring patience with which they have received and satisfied my exacting demands on them.

The present volume has suffered, in comparison with its predecessors, from the fact that I have had no opportunity of visiting the United States while I have been engaged on it. But I have been deeply indebted to Mrs. Olga Gankin of the Hoover Library and Institute at Stanford for her unfailing kindness in answering my most pertinacious enquiries and in supplying information from the rich and still partly unexplored resources of the library. Few scholars appear so far to have worked on the Trotsky archives in the Houghton Library of Harvard University; nor, so far as I know, has any systematic account yet been published of what they contain. This is a most serious gap in our knowledge of Soviet history.

My special thanks are due to Mr. Isaac Deutscher, the biographer of Stalin and Trotsky, both for reading and criticizing a substantial part of my manuscript and for putting at my disposal notes made by him from the Trotsky archives during a visit in 1951; to Herr Heinrich Brandler for giving me his personal recollections of the events of 1923; to Mr. Maurice Dobb and Mr. H. C. Stevens for lending me books and pamphlets which I should otherwise have missed; to Mrs. Degras for once more volunteering to read the proofs, and to Dr. Ilya Neustadt for compiling the index — two particularly onerous tasks, the discharge of which places both the author and his readers very much in their debt.

E. H. CARR

*January 5, 1954*

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*PART I*

THE SCISSORS CRISIS



## CHAPTER I

### MARKING TIME

**I**N the winter of 1922-1923, after two years of NEP, a noteworthy revival was discernible in the Soviet economy — a revival due partly to the natural process of recovery from the long ordeal of war and civil war, partly to the excellent harvest of 1922, and partly to the new policies which had been inaugurated in March 1921. Production had risen steeply both in agriculture and in rural and artisan industry, and less steeply in factory industries producing consumer goods (and as yet hardly at all in the heavy industries producing capital goods); while the peasant was the principal beneficiary of NEP, the industrial worker had been freed from labour conscription, and his miserable standard of living had to some extent risen; both internal and foreign trade were being developed; the foundation of a fiscal system and a working state budget had been laid, and the first steps taken towards the creation of a stable currency. On the other hand, none of these aims was distinctively socialist. The structure of the economy was capitalist or pre-capitalist except for the nationalized industries; and these had been obliged to adapt themselves to a quasi-capitalist environment through the obligation laid on them to conduct their business on commercial principles. The successes of NEP had been achieved by resort to capitalist methods and brought with them two incidental consequences which Marxists had always regarded as characteristic evils of capitalism — large-scale unemployment and violent price fluctuations. The problem which had dogged the victorious revolution since 1917, and was inherent in the attempt to effect the transition to socialism in a predominantly peasant community, was its dependence on the support of the peasantry. In 1921 a temporary solution seemed to have been found in the adoption of NEP; the alliance with the peasantry had been so securely welded that it would hold until the spread of the proletarian

revolution to Europe brought relief to the struggling Russian proletariat. But, at the moment of Lenin's final withdrawal from the scene, this assumption was for the first time severely challenged. A revival of economic tension, primarily due to wild fluctuations in market prices, opened a new rift between industry and agriculture, between proletariat and peasantry, and called in question the tenability of the NEP compromise.

Attention has already been drawn to certain inconsistencies in the attitude to NEP revealed in the pronouncements of the party and of Lenin himself, turning on the equivocal position of the peasant as the necessary ally of the proletariat but the ultimate obstacle to be overcome on the road to socialism.<sup>1</sup> Lenin had been fully conscious at an early stage of NEP of the anomalies inherent in it :

There are more contradictions in our economic reality than there were before the new economic policy : partial, small improvements in the economic position among some strata of the population, among a few ; complete inability to make economic resources square with indispensable needs among the rest, among the many. These contradictions have grown greater. And it is understandable that, so long as we are going through a sharp turn, it is impossible to escape from these contradictions all at once.<sup>2</sup>

When, at the eleventh party congress in the spring of 1922, under pressure from those who dwelt on the disastrous consequences of NEP for industry, Lenin announced the ending of the " retreat ",<sup>3</sup> it was a natural deduction that there would be no more concessions to the peasant. Yet at the same congress he dwelt with the utmost emphasis on the need to " restore the link ", to come to the help of " the ruined, impoverished, miserably hungry " small peasant — " or he will send us to all the devils ".<sup>4</sup> In his speech at the fourth congress of Comintern in November 1922 — his last public speech but one — Lenin spoke both of the satisfaction that had been given to the peasant and of the need for state subsidies for heavy industry ( " unless we find them, we are lost " ).<sup>5</sup> A week

<sup>1</sup> See *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923*, Vol. 2, pp. 274-279.

<sup>2</sup> Lenin, *Sochineniya*, xxvii, 71.

<sup>3</sup> See *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923*, Vol. 2, p. 277.

<sup>4</sup> Lenin, *Sochineniya*, xxvii, 231.

<sup>5</sup> See *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923*, Vol. 2, pp. 295, 316-317.

later, in his last speech of all, he referred to the "retreat" as still in progress, and added frankly:

Where and how we must now re-form ourselves, adapt ourselves, re-organize ourselves so that after the retreat we may begin a stubborn move forward, we still do not know.<sup>1</sup>

In one of his last articles, written in January 1923, he described the Soviet order as "founded on the collaboration of two classes, the workers and the peasants", and laid down what he regarded as the major task of the party:

If serious class antagonisms arise between these two classes, then a split will be unavoidable; but in our social order there are no fixed and inevitable grounds for such a split, and the chief task of our central committee and central control commission, and of our party as a whole, is to watch attentively those circumstances out of which a split might arise and anticipate them, since in the last resort the fate of our republic will depend on whether the peasant mass goes with the working class and remains faithful to its alliance with that class, or whether it allows the "nepmen", i.e. the new bourgeoisie, to divide it from the workers, to split it away from them.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, while Lenin had appeared in 1922 to voice the demand for a resumption of the march towards socialism, his last injunction was to keep the link with the peasantry in being at all costs. So long as the compromise held, all was well. But, in any crisis which made the existing compromise unworkable without further concessions to one side or the other, any course of action could be supported by appropriate quotations from the fountain-head.

The first signs of crisis began to appear when, in the winter of 1922-1923, the terms of trade between agricultural and industrial goods, hitherto favourable to the former, began to move slowly but steadily in favour of industry. NEP had given the peasant the opportunity to recoup himself, after the privations and terrors of war communism, by extracting from the town-dwellers a high price for his products; the land law of May 1922, confirmed by the new agrarian code at the end of the year, gave

<sup>1</sup> Lenin, *Sochineniya*, xxvii, 362.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* xxvii, 405; Lenin's "testament" also emphasized agreement between workers and peasants as the fundamental basis on which the party rested (see p. 258 below).

him security of tenure;<sup>1</sup> and the steps taken to restore orthodox finance and stabilize the currency promised protection to the peasant against a currency inflation the cost of which had fallen heavily on him. After the wonderful harvest of 1922, the peasant was more prosperous than at any time since the revolution, and was, as Lenin noted, well satisfied with his lot.<sup>2</sup> It was true that the process of equalization of holdings and resources between different categories of peasants which was set in motion after the October revolution and intensified by the requisitions of war communism had now been reversed. The inherent tendency of NEP to encourage differentiation between different strata of the peasantry continued unchecked. At one end of the scale more poor peasants were sinking below the level of self-sufficiency and had to hire out their land or their labour in order to live; at the other end the *kulaks* were producing larger surpluses for disposal on the market. The extension within the peasantry of the practices of leasing land and hiring labour, which had been held in check in the first years of the revolution, was the symptom of this differentiation.<sup>3</sup> According to statistics compiled by Vserabotzemles, the agricultural workers' trade union, at the end of 1923, 400,000 peasants (or 2 per cent of the total number) employed

<sup>1</sup> See *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923*, Vol. 2, pp. 289, 296-297.

<sup>2</sup> See *ibid.* Vol. 2, p. 295.

<sup>3</sup> S. G. Strumilin, *Na Khozyaistvennom Fronte* (1925), pp. 230-261, contains a careful statistical study of these processes originally published in April 1923. A detailed analysis, which appeared in the trade union newspaper, *Trud*, of the peasantry in one province of the Ukraine (Odessa) showed that out of 577,000 households 11,000 had no cultivated land at all, another 162,000 had no animal, and could not grow enough to be self-supporting. A further 137,000 had one animal; their situation was precarious. Peasants who were not self-supporting could not find employment in the towns (industrial unemployment was worse in the Ukraine than elsewhere — see p. 50 below), or in the collective farms, which were not in a flourishing condition, or in the Sovkhozy (see *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923*, Vol. 2, pp. 155-156, 289-290), which were more or less derelict, employing only 3000 workers in the whole province, and leasing most of their land. There was therefore no option but to become *batraks*, i.e. hired workers on the land of more prosperous peasants. In brief, "a sharp division exists between 'strong' and 'weak' households" and "the 'weak' households perish, filling the ranks of the *batraks*" (*Trud*, September 26, 1923). A year later, at the thirteenth party congress, Kamenev, apparently quoting from a monograph issued by the central statistical administration, classified the peasant population as follows: 63 per cent poor peasants, forming 74 per cent of the total number of households, cultivating 40 per cent of the area under crops, and owning 50 per cent of the animals; 23 per cent middle peasants, forming 18 per cent of the households, cultivating 25 per cent of the area under

600,000 hired workers.<sup>1</sup> Both figures certainly represent a serious understatement. But the proportion of employed to employers shows that the process had not yet gone very far. For the moment, the picture of a prosperous and contented peasantry which had left behind for ever the horrors of requisitioning and war communism represented a fair approximation to the truth; and the arguments for letting well alone seemed still impregnable. Towards the end of 1922, after the excellent harvest of that year, a small quantity of grain had been exported from Soviet Russia for the first time since the revolution; and a lively demand was now heard for action to stem the progressive fall in grain prices by promoting exports of grain. Narkomfin, the champion at this time of peasant interests and now also concerned to build up the foreign currency reserves of Gosbank, came out strongly in favour of grain exports; and, on its instigation, the tenth All-Russian Congress of Soviets in December 1922 came out with a recommendation to expand exports of grain and raw materials.<sup>2</sup> The distribution of seed to the peasants on an unprecedented scale was announced in a decree of January 17, 1923, which described an increase of the areas under crops as "the foundation of the welfare not only of the peasant, but of the whole state"; and another decree promised land "in border regions where land is abundant" to agricultural immigrants.<sup>3</sup>

Industry presented a more difficult problem than agriculture, if only for the basic reason that, while agriculture, in the favourable harvest of 1922, had attained some three-quarters of average pre-war production over the same area, industry had at the same period crops, and owning 25 per cent of the animals; and 14 per cent rich peasants forming 8 per cent of the households, cultivating 34 per cent of the area under crops and owning 25 per cent of the animals (*Trinadtsatyi S"ezd Rossiiskoi Kommunisticheskoi Partii (Bol'shevikov)* (1924), pp. 408-409). Examples of the way in which legal limitations on the right to hire labour were evaded by such devices as fictitious marriages or adoption, or the rendering of labour in return for advances of grain or seed, are given in L. Kritsman, *Klassovoe Rassloenie v Sovetskoi Dereвне* (1926), pp. 163-164.

<sup>1</sup> *XI Vserossiiskii S"ezd Sovetov* (1924), p. 47; the statistics also showed 100,000 workers on Soviet farms, 100,000 in forestry and 100,000 on specialized forms of agricultural production (fruit, vegetables, etc.). For an account of Vserabotzemles see *Trud*, December 2, 1923; it was founded in 1920 for workers on Soviet farms or in artels and communes (these being later excluded), but it never became an effective organization.

<sup>2</sup> *S"ezdy Sovetov v Dokumentakh*, i (1959), 227.

<sup>3</sup> *Sobranie Uzakonenii*, 1923, No. 4, art. 73; No. 10, art. 128.

reached little more than a quarter of its pre-war output.<sup>1</sup> What had happened to agriculture under NEP, whether welcome or not, was exactly what had been foreseen. What had happened to industry was far more complex and baffling. Industry fell into three categories. The first consisted of rural industry and small artisan industry conducted mainly in the countryside. This had shared in the impetus given by NEP to agriculture, and had recovered since 1921 at a far more rapid rate than factory industry, and to some extent at its expense.<sup>2</sup> But such a development merely tended to make the rural community more self-supporting, to strengthen the *kulak* element in the countryside, and to destroy the "link" between peasantry and proletariat, between country and town, which NEP purported to establish. The second category consisted of factory industry producing consumer goods for the market: this had recovered in the summer of 1922, through the formation of quasi-monopolistic syndicates, from the *raz-bazarovanie* crisis of the previous winter,<sup>3</sup> but was now on the verge of a new crisis due to the inflation of prices inherent in this process. The third category consisted of heavy industry producing capital goods or supplies and services essential to the economy as a whole, and not working primarily for a consumer market: the metallurgical industry and the heavy engineering and chemical industries, together with mining and transport, were the principal items in this category. An important distinction between the two categories of large-scale industry was in the method of their financing. Since the revival of the banking system at the end of 1921,<sup>4</sup> the consumer industries had been financed by Gosbank and Prombank on commercial principles and in virtue of their profit-earning capacity. Heavy industry and transport, operating at a loss and unable to obtain bank credits, continued to be financed by direct subventions from the state, out of which they paid their wages bills or purchased raw materials and equipment.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Dvenadtsati S'ezd Rossiiskoi Kommunisticheskoi Partii (Bol'shevikov)* (1923), p. 25; for the figures of industrial production see Y. S. Rozenfeld, *Promyshlennaya Politika SSSR* (1926), p. 515.

<sup>2</sup> See *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923*, Vol. 2, pp. 297-299, 310.

<sup>3</sup> See *ibid.* Vol. 2, pp. 312-315.

<sup>4</sup> See *ibid.* Vol. 2, pp. 356-357.

<sup>5</sup> In the financial year 1922-1923 state subventions to heavy industry still exceeded bank credits to the rest of industry: in subsequent years this relation was reversed (Y. S. Rozenfeld, *Promyshlennaya Politika SSSR* (1926), p. 412).



Without such subventions production and services essential to the economy as a whole would have come to a standstill.

While, therefore, both categories of large-scale industry were involved in the crisis of 1923, very different considerations affected them. Since the autumn of 1921 the consumer industries had been constantly adjured to apply the principles of *khozraschet* and warned that their efficiency would be measured by their capacity to earn profits. Thanks to generous credit facilities, and to the monopoly position established by the syndicates, they had driven up prices and earned substantial profits. By the summer of 1923 they had increased their production, built up their stocks and restored their working capital. Nor was it easy to blame them. The formal decree defining and confirming the status of the industrial trusts, which was issued only just before the twelfth party congress, described them as enterprises operating "with the object of earning a profit".<sup>1</sup> As late as July 1923 Vesenkha issued an order which repeated and elaborated the prescriptions of the decree and referred to profit-making as "the guiding principle of the activity of the trusts".<sup>2</sup> It was, however, this policy which led, or largely contributed, to the scissors crisis.

Heavy industry was in a far graver plight. In 1922 it had recovered scarcely at all from the low level of the two preceding years.<sup>3</sup> It suffered in a higher degree than the consumer industries from those basic weaknesses which were the direct result of war, revolution and civil war: an obsolete and worn-out plant, shortage of raw materials, dispersal of its always limited resources in skilled labour, and swollen overhead costs.<sup>4</sup> No serious reorganization

<sup>1</sup> See *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923*, Vol. 2, p. 309.

<sup>2</sup> *Sbornik Dekretov, Postanovlenii, Rasporyazhenii i Prikazov po Narodnomu Khoziaistvu*, No. 7 (10), July 1923, pp. 37-38; it was read by Rykov at the thirteenth party conference in January 1924 (*Trinadtsataya Konferentsiya Rossiiskoi Kommunisticheskoi Partii (Bol'shevikov)* (1924), pp. 9-10) as an example of the erroneous policy prevailing in 1923. Its author was Pyatakov.

<sup>3</sup> See *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923*, Vol. 2, pp. 311, 315-316.

<sup>4</sup> At the Sormovo engineering works the number of workers directly engaged on production fell between 1913 and 1922 from 6497 to 3708; subsidiary workers increased in the same period from 4187 to 6121 and employees from 1230 to 2188; the proportion of subsidiary workers and employees to workers engaged on production rose from 83 per cent in 1913 to 224 per cent in 1922 (*Trud*, February 3, 1923). In all major industries, except the chemical industry (where the increase was smaller), the proportion of employees to workers was estimated to have doubled since 1913 (*ibid.* October 25, 1923).