

*Vanguard Studies
of Soviet Russia*

VILLAGE LIFE UNDER THE SOVIETS

KARL BORDERS



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By KARL BORDERS



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*To the sincere men and women of Russia who, despite
prison, exile, and death, burned out their
lives trying to attain freedom, peace,
and brotherhood for the
common people.*

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

KARL BORDERS

Born in La Rue county, Kentucky, in 1891; A. B. Transylvania College, Kentucky; B. D. Union Theological Seminary, New York; graduate work in Columbia and Chicago Universities; teacher for two years in mission school in Manila, P. I.; Chaplain in U. S. Navy for one year; founder and director of small settlement among Russians of the west side of Chicago for five years, under auspices of the Disciples church; one year in Russia during this period as famine relief worker with the Quakers, six months of that year acting as field director; since 1925 Educational Director with the Russian Reconstruction Farms; at present assistant head president at Chicago Commons, Chicago.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE Russian Revolution startled a war-diseased world and ushered in the most daring political and economic experiment of the twentieth century. Considering the vast territory affected, the radical changes inaugurated, and the influence which has been and still is being exerted on international relations, there is probably no greater event in modern history, whether for good or evil. Most Americans forget that a decade has already passed since Lenin and his Communistic followers assumed the power. The period of rapid revolutionary change has gone. Russia is painstakingly, step by step, building something different, something unique, something whose final destination is unpredictable.

America has been a land of discovery from its foundation. Not only in the realm of scientific invention, but in first attaining the coveted North Pole and in exploring other unknown areas of the world, Americans have given generously of life and treasure. Today we are uninformed about a great nation covering one-sixth of the land surface of the world. Russia is cut off by an Atlantic Ocean of prejudice, misunderstanding, and propaganda. We still maintain a rigid official quarantine about the Soviet Government. The result is ignorance frankly admitted by one "of the highest authorities in our Government," who declares this inevitable "in the absence of diplomatic relations." Judge Gary corroborates this verdict, "Like many other Americans, I am ignorant in regard to many of the

conditions which exist in Russia at the present time.”*

Every scientist realizes that ignorance is one of the most dangerous forces in the world today. No matter how good or how bad the Soviet system, we should know all about it. Instead, we have been ruled by propaganda and hearsay.

The fact is that for the past ten years the Bolshevik government has been operated on, dissected, and laid in its coffin amidst loud applause and rejoicing by distinguished orators in all parts of the world; yet today it is stronger, more stable, than ever before in its history and its leaders have been longer in power than any other ruling cabinet in the world. It is high time that we appraise this government as scientifically and impartially as possible, without indulging in violent epithets or questionable and controversial dogmas. Surely the world is not so abysmally ignorant that after ten years of the rule of the Soviet we cannot discover a common core of truth about Russia.

Whether the Communists are thought to be “dangerous enemies of society” or the “saviors of humanity,” the facts should be known before judgment is pronounced. No matter what our conviction, we have to admit that the Bolsheviks are hammering out a startling new mechanism in the field of political control. Their experiment deserves scientific study, not hostile armies; intelligent criticism, not damning epithets.

In the past, America has been flooded with propaganda of all shades. Dr. E. A. Ross dedicates his last volume on Russia “To my fellow-Americans who have become weary of being fed lies and propaganda about Russia.” In his chapter on the “Poison Gas Attack”

* *Current History*, February, 1926.

he lists forty-nine stories broadcast throughout America which have been proved totally false. Other writers have pointed out similar facts. Walter Lippman, Editor-in-Chief of *The New York World*, in his illuminating study of all Russian news which appeared in *The New York Times* in the early period of the Revolution, has proved the stupidity, inaccuracy, and falsehood of the "facts and fabrications" which have passed as news. Even those articles and books which have tried to deal honestly with the subject have usually been inadequate. They have either been too general or they have been specific but too brief to be of more than passing value. In all too many cases they are based on only a few weeks of observation in Russia by someone who did not know the native language.

The present series is designed to meet the need for reliable, accurate information on the major aspects of present-day Russia. We have tried to make it as scientifically accurate as is possible in the treatment of contemporary phenomena. It has been our aim in selecting each author to choose someone who because of previous experience and training was peculiarly well qualified as an authority on the particular subject to which he was assigned. In every case we have chosen those who either have made a prolonged stay in Russia, actually writing their volumes while in the country, or those who have made a special trip to Russia to secure the facts about which they write. We have tried to make the series inclusive, covering the more important aspects of the many-sided developments in Russia. Each volume is devoted to one major subject alone. People want detailed, accurate facts in readable form. Here they can be found, ranging all the way from an

analysis of the governmental machinery to the school system. Within this series some repetition has been inevitable. The editor believes that this is distinctly desirable since each author expounds his subject in his own way, with an emphasis original to him and in the light of his own data. No effort has been made to eliminate contradictions, yet they are surprisingly few. Where the testimony of all is unanimous, the conclusions reached are overwhelmingly strong. Where differences exist, they should stimulate the reader to weigh the evidence even more carefully.

It is probably too much to hope that propaganda organizations will not endeavor to discredit any such genuine effort to arrive at the truth. Perhaps it is sufficient to say in refutation that no similar attempt to secure the facts about Russia from trained experts has yet been made in America or elsewhere, so far as the writer is aware. There is scant ground for intelligent criticism unless similar scientific studies have been made with conflicting results; even then time alone can proclaim the final truth. No sincere and unprejudiced scientist will deplore an effort to study and describe what has happened in the first experiment the world has ever seen in applied communism, even if mistakes have been made in the analysis.

These volumes on the whole not only contain the most valuable data so far available, but they will probably remain of permanent worth. In the future no real historian endeavoring to master the facts about the great political upheaval in Russia will care to ignore them. Is Russia the most tyrannical dictatorship of bloody despots that the world has ever seen? Is Russia the first step in the building of a new world order whose keynote will be industrial democracy? We do

not pretend to give here the final judgment of history, but we do claim to have made a sincere effort to portray the facts.

Thanks are due to the authors who have so painstakingly sought to present the truth as they found it, to the publishers for their assistance in making this a notable and usable series, and to all those whose labor, whether by hand or brain, has helped to give these volumes to the American public.

JEROME DAVIS,
Yale University.

PREFACE

No one would be so rash, I think, as to thrust upon the book-bound public of America, with its high-powered presses and seemingly endless pulp supply, even a thin book with such a title without at least an effort to justify his presumption. Hence a bit of itinerary.

I have spent well on to three years in Russia since the Revolution, first as a worker with the Quaker relief forces in 1922, and again with the Russian Reconstruction Farms since 1925. I have learned to speak a language sufficiently near Russian to make me understood wherever I have wished to go. Practically all of my time has been spent directly in the village, where I have dealt with the peasant in the course of daily work. I was for nine months in Samara Gubernia in the lower Volga district where it was my duty to travel widely among scores of villages. I have spent more than a year as a member of the staff of an American organization operating a group of government farms in the North Caucasus grain and grape district, and while there participated in a rather exhaustive survey of the county in which the Farms are located. I later visited agricultural collective projects in the Tver Gubernia north of Moscow, and villages of the semi-forested section of the Leningrad Gubernia.

I read Russian with a fair degree of ease, and have depended largely upon contemporary journals and newspapers for general statistics and information. This source is always the freshest and, at the same time, often

has the virtue of being retailed by a speaker or writer who is seeking flaws in the department he is criticizing, from the vantage point of an insider—a point of some value to a foreigner seeking a fair view of the whole situation. The work has been completed in Leningrad where I have had access to a great library and have been most courteously received in various regional departments dealing with the different aspects of village work.

The undertaking of so limitless a subject in the bounds of so few pages can be justified only on the basis of a desire to get before the public a comprehensive outline of the principal phases of village life in Russia after ten years of Soviet rule. To make a composite picture of a form of social structure so widely variant as the scattered villages of this vast country is no simple undertaking. I am ready to accept individual stories of practically anything I hear about the country. Only last week I read in the evening newspaper of Leningrad that a group of explorers had found immured in the forests of Siberia a settlement of fifteen hundred persons who had been so long cut off from the outside world that they did not know that there had been a World War. They had not heard of the Revolution and thought the Czar was still ruling. Only two of the settlement were literate. In such a country anything can happen. But to draw general conclusions is another matter.

Throughout the study I have conscientiously tried to make my statements factual and have resorted to conclusions and opinions only in the closing chapter.

I am particularly indebted to the Russian Reconstruction Farms for the use of much material from the survey of Archangelskoe county in which I had a share, and for access to the general files of the Farms. Special gratitude is also rendered Hannah Pickering, who was

for a year research worker and statistician for the Farms, for the free use of material she had gathered, especially in the study of the tractor and collective agriculture. Officials of various departments which I have visited, and individual peasants as well, have always gone out of their way to assist me in the collection of data.

Karl Borders,
Leningrad, March 1, 1927.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

THE historical material of the first chapter is based principally on the following books which are recommended to the reader for further reference:

For a detailed description of the social life of the peasant and the conditions following the Emancipation: Wallace; *Russia*, 1877, Henry Holt and Company.

For a brief general history of Russia down to the Revolution: Beasley, Forbes and Birkett, *Russia from the Varangians to the Bolsheviki*, Oxford Press, 1918.

For the period of the Revolution itself, out of the mass of books that have been written, see: John Reed's classic, *Ten Days That Shook the World*; also, a remarkably balanced and fair treatment of this tremendous epoch, entitled *Bolshevik Russia* from the French of Etienne Antonelli.

And for the best recent reporting on the intimate life of the village: Maurice Hindus' *Broken Earth*.

The contemporary journals quoted have usually been cited in the body of the text. Chief among these is *Agricultural Life*, the official organ of the Department of Agriculture. The two newspapers most frequently used are *Izvestia*, the organ of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets, and *Pravda*, the paper of the Russian Communist Party.

TERMINOLOGY

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, or U. S. S. R., I have usually referred to as the Union or the Soviet Union. This union is composed of six large subdivisions, the Ukrainian, White Russian, Uzbekian, Turkmenian, South Caucasian, and Russian Unions or Federations. These, in turn, have in four cases autonomous national groups operating under the same general administrative head. Principal among the large divisions is the Russian Socialist Federation of Soviet Republics which includes the greater part of the agriculture and industry of the Union in its Russian confines and has, besides, twenty-three autonomous republics and districts of various nationalities federated with it. I have usually designated this great territory as Russia Proper. However, where I have spoken of the whole Soviet Union in a less technical sense, as in the last chapter, I have resorted to the commonly accepted sense of the old word and have said simply "Russia."

The most recent plans of territorial organization of the smaller units contemplates the establishment of large *Krais* or Sections, subdivided into *Okrugs* or Districts, and these again into what we would call counties. This reorganization has already gone into effect in some parts of the country, but much of the old system still remains. I have used the terms roughly in the American sense, with the exception of the:

Gubernia. These may be compared roughly to our

states but they are territorially much larger, and I have simply transliterated.

County and Township I have used again roughly to designate the Russian Ooyezd and Volost. As a matter of fact the Ooyezd is much larger than our county, whereas the Volost includes a small group of villages that may be territorially smaller than our county. The new arrangement such as we found in the North Caucasus with its division into District and Rayon corresponds much more nearly to our State and County plan.

Peasant and farmer have been used interchangeably, though it will be seen at once that the Russian peasant in his mode of life and methods of farming is different in many respects from our own farmer.

The *Rouble* has not been transferred to dollars in every case. It may be roughly estimated at fifty cents, though as a matter of fact the exchange at present is one rouble ninety-four copeks to the dollar.

The Russian unit of land measure is the *dessiatine*, which is equal to 2.7 acres. In most cases I have translated to acres, except where the figures involve a comparison of various amounts of Russian land.

CONTENTS

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION	vii
PREFACE	xiii
BIBLIOGRAPHY	xvii
TERMINOLOGY	xix
I. WHAT WENT BEFORE	I
II. THE VILLAGE AND THE VILLAGER	10
A Village of the Steppe	11
Ivan Ivanich at Home	17
The Family Wardrobe	21
Dinner Time	25
In the Barnyard	27
North and South	30
Communication	31
III. LAND	34
The Inheritance	34
The Soviet Plan	39
In the Field	44
Pliable Land Laws	49
The Kulak	53
IV. THE TRACTOR AND COLLECTIVE AGRICULTURE	57
The Commune	57
Artels	60
The Collective Under the N. E. P.	61
Enter the Tractor	66
The Sovhoz	70