

THE X Y Z OF COMMUNISM

BY
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"It looks as though an economic Mohammed had arisen in Lenin and that the world will have to meet his creed. . . . The question is: How are we going to meet it? The first thing is to study with care the mind and method of Communism."

CHARLES H. BRENT.

FOREWORD

IN a book known as *The A B C of Communism* used for world-wide instruction, two Communist authorities have set forth the objectives, principles, and formulas of that militant creed which has its present base in Russia. The co-authors are Bukharin, for long editor of the Central Communist organ in Moscow, also sometime President of the Third International; and Preobrazhensky, formerly prominent in the League of Communist Youth, a training auxiliary of the Russian Communist Party. Differences with Stalin have weakened the present political influence of both men in the Party without in any way impairing the doctrinal soundness of their book. The passages cited as chapter texts in this volume are taken from a translation published by the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1927.

The X Y Z of Communism represents an effort factually to make clear what certain main theories expounded in *The A B C of Communism* prove to involve in terms of action, when serious and resourceful believers in them obtain power and proceed to apply them in human life. The rising interest the world manifests in the practical program of the Communist rulers of Russia and their own serious purpose to secure universal adoption of the program have led me to undertake this work on my sole personal responsibility, and independently of any organization.

Their government of the peoples of Russia has now

extended over thirteen years. This is long enough for procedures to be observed beyond first superficial impressions and for results to be debited or credited directly to them. The leaders do not shirk responsibility for the régime or its consequences. While modifying or holding in suspense some points of pure theory under the pressure of realities, they do so uniformly on the confessed grounds of expediency, disavow any permanent surrender of doctrine, and maintain the methods prescribed by Marx and Lenin as a whole to be correct.

The rest of mankind therefore may with propriety examine what has taken place in the situation and what is in prospect in this incomparably largest experiment and demonstration of practical Communism. The data and commentaries that follow are submitted in the hope that they will serve usefully honest inquiry and appraisal.

My main reliance for documentation has been the official press organs of the Communist Party and of the Government and its Departments, as the most authoritative source materials on Party and Soviet policies and events. In controversial matters I have added the Communist versions of the underlying philosophy, of the ends in view, and of the measures taken. Indeed the Communists have been most consulted to supplement or reënforce my own first-hand knowledge and the riper Russian experience of my collaborators to whom I am most heavily indebted, but who under the circumstances must remain anonymous.

The cartoons from the current Russian press are introduced both for their qualities and to illustrate a Soviet publicity and educational instrument of notable effectiveness. The captions and other textual material

appearing with them are faithful translations of the originals.

Within the compass of this work examination of the full range of Communist activities obviously could not be undertaken. The spheres selected are those about which contemporary concern appears most active. The subject of recognition of the Soviet Government by the United States has been avoided by design. Familiarity with its pros and cons exists throughout the intelligent public, which divides into two camps with well-fixed ideas. Entering the lists on either side now serves chiefly to establish the partisanship of another combatant.

The use of X Y Z in the title does not presume solution of all unknown quantities in the final chapter. The only certain demonstration made in the situation thus far is that nothing about it has reached or approached a final phase. To predict how much of success and of failure will commingle in the years ahead appears idle, even foolish. If the course of events in any degree follows the nearest historical parallels a revolution of these proportions, intensity, and duration though arriving wide of the marks set must effect profound changes in the social order it would destroy and displace—changes confined by no means to the immediate geographical seat of physical disturbance. In Communist theory it is specifically taught that the class war and dictatorship period marks the first phases of the new order. The calmer and happier state lies beyond, and hence does not fall within the scope of this book. To-day's dust and deprivations of the Five Year Plan probably afford the workers and peasants the lowest actual visibility of the promised land they have experienced since the 1921-1922 famine.

The judgments expressed are those of one with respect for the sincerity, zeal, and unselfishness of the genuine Communists who have truly dedicated themselves to bringing in a better day for the masses of humanity. He holds the conviction, after contacts with Communism which coincide exactly with its period of ascendancy over the Russian masses, that its most successful challengers will be men and women with an equal concern for the material well being of the humble and dispossessed, with a superior program for establishing them in the full fellowship of human society, and with more regard for the rights of personality.

ETHAN T. COLTON.

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CHAPTER I

THE CLASS WAR

*"The class war arises out of the conflict of interests between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. These interests are as essentially irreconcilable as are the respective interests of wolves and sheep."*¹

*"Sooner or later, notwithstanding all the wiles of the bourgeoisie, the workers will come into violent collision with the master class, will dethrone it, will destroy its robber government, and will create for themselves a new order, a Communist order of labor."*²

*"Many persons have supposed that the ferocious character of our civil war is due to the backwardness of our country, or to some peculiar 'Asiatic' traits. The opponents of revolution in western Europe are in the habit of saying that 'Asiatic Socialism' flourishes in Russia, and that in 'civilized' lands a revolutionary change will be effected without atrocities. Obviously this is all nonsense. Where capitalist development is far advanced, the resistance of the bourgeoisie will be more stubborn. The intelligentsia (the professional classes, the technicians, the managing engineers, the army officers, etc.) are more strongly solidarised with capital, and are for that reason far more hostile to Communism. In such countries, therefore, the civil war will inevitably assume a more savage form than in Russia. The course of the German revolution has actually proved that the war assumes harsher forms in countries where capitalist development is farther advanced."*³

¹ *ABC of Communism*, p. 63. ² *Ibid.*, p. 65. ³ *Ibid.*, pp. 132-3.

CHAPTER I

THE CLASS WAR

COMPLETE loss of the trail to an understanding of present-day organized Communism results from any attempt or disposition to regard the language of its class war tenets as figures of speech. Realism admits no such interpretation but rather requires that the fullest literal content be given every sentence and word. Performance here measures up completely to book theory. Lenin, from his lifetime study and organization for revolt, believed and taught one determining reason for the defeat of the Paris Commune in 1872 to be that the resistance of the enemy class was not crushed "with sufficient determination." ⁴ The Leninized class war program of Karl Marx accordingly stipulates not only the overpowering of all opposition, but its veritable extinction. It decrees and sets up a social order in which dissolution of the remnants of the defeated classes is explicit by a process euphemistically known as "liquidation."

The members of an American Mission to Russia in 1918 asked a high Soviet official why the Russian internal issues, then being contested in bitterness and blood, could not be composed by measures of conference and agreement in which the struggling parties would give and take until a *modus vivendi* were found

⁴ Lenin: *The State and Revolution*, published by the Communist Party of Great Britain, p. 55.

to end armed strife and allow time, education, legislation, and experience to make just settlements. The answer of this leader of Communism in action froze the uninitiated, whose "class war" concept had been formed in orthodox university courses on Socialism.

For a true picture this Communist himself needs delineation. Russian born, escaped exile of the old régime, he had lived much of his adult life in the United States. Before the war his name was on a radical ticket as candidate for the lieutenant-governorship of New York. He spoke English well, was quiet mannered, and in appearance like most of the active "comrades" quite belied the popular impression conveyed by the unknowing foreign cartoonists, who habitually draw these young to middle-aged rulers of Russia as men "going down in a sea of whiskers." He had a virile mind, a high intelligence, and faced and acknowledged ugly facts even though they scored against his case. The revolutionary cause had yielded him little except a poor living, epithets, some bricks, political imprisonment, and family separations. For himself he was content with that. Ambition in him spent itself in behalf of his class.

"You ask for negotiation and concession," he replied. "But this is war. No class ever rose above self-interest and none ever will. When the others were in power they governed for their class. Now we in power govern for ours. You think it something terrible that we execute a few thousands of men and women for trying to overthrow this workingman's government, although in a single week your soldiers killed more Germans on the Western Front and you justify it because you are at war. This is war and there will be no compromise. Either they will crush us utterly or we shall as relent-

lessly crush them. We propose either to win it all or to lose it all."

Who compose the irreconcilable "wolves and sheep" that for social justice must fight out to the death " . . . a war in which prisoners are not taken and no compromises made, but opponents are killed?" *

The bourgeoisie under Communist classification, for practical purposes, embrace all groups in society, apart from the proletariat and peasantry, who engage in economic production and distribution—conspicuously the capitalists, proprietors, employers, managers, bankers, and merchants. Most members of the legal, medical, educational, scientific, literary, and artistic professions, attached to a capitalistic order, find themselves in the "wolf" category, being regarded as supported by and supporters of the bourgeoisie. Their only alternatives in the period of struggle are unconditionally to surrender to Communism, or pay the penalties meted out to those taking any other course. The best they can hope for under a Communist rule is toleration so long as they are subserviently useful, and newly reared successors with a "safe" social outlook have not been produced to replace them. Holders of landed estates and an aristocracy, where such exist, belong to the well-hated and are promised short shrift. Along with the clergy they have no place in the Communist sun. For good measure the "urban petty bourgeoisie" are thrown in with the "enemy," specifying independent artisans, small shopkeepers, minor salaried intellectuals, and the lesser officialdom. *The A B C of Communism* dismisses these with the comment: "In reality they do not constitute a class, but a motley crowd."

The term proletariat designates the masses of work-

* Latsis: *Two Years of Struggle on the International Front*.

men in large-scale industry conceived as propertyless "wage slaves." The peasants are separately classed. For carrying class war to the villages Communists subdivide them into three categories as will appear later. Farm laborers employed for wages are proletarians. When farm enterprises develop beyond petty peasant holdings and approach the status of a small business or industry by working leased land, hiring labor, or operating a feed mill, the owners who have so far prospered and reached independence become "class enemies."

The Communist formula for open revolutionary action begins with seizure of the State by the proletariat on the theory that under bourgeois control it exists with its army and other apparatus to enforce the oppressions of the exploiters upon the workers. Preparatory thereto, will have preceded, legally or otherwise, the disaffecting and undermining of the State's protective forces, and the creation and training of trusted Communist units to act under Party orders either in civil or military capacities. With these preliminaries in order the "historic moment" is awaited for "breaking the governmental machine." *

The Great War brought Russia to the fullness of time for these tacticians. The Communists and their sympathizers within the military and naval forces possessed both arms and training. The decrepit Czarist Government racked by the struggle of the titans fell in ruins, its throne abdicated. The huge original standing army of the Empire had been practically destroyed. Its killed, wounded, prisoners, and missing totaled 9,150,000. The forces left to the new Government consisted of millions of conscripted recruits, badly dis-

* Lenin: *The State and Revolution*, p. 41.

ciplined and without morale. Desertions prior to January, 1917, reached 1,000,000. From June of that year everyone informed knew the German army could go through the Russian lines any time, anywhere into territory as deep as its high command deemed strategically useful. For the masses of Russia with respect both to motive and confidence the war really was over by the close of 1916. Intriguing generals completed the reduction of their commands to impotence.

The March, 1917, Revolution came at the hands of the democratic and moderate Socialist Parties committed to continuing the war and to carrying out their political, economic, and social programs, but by constitutional methods. Inexperienced in statecraft, the Provisional Government they formed lacked both direction and driving power equal to coping with the forces released. The Minister of Interior in that Cabinet has related that the office to which he succeeded was only a telephone system attended by girls.

German and Communist agents, with different objectives but acting together through the spring and summer of 1917, flooded the army ripe for demoralization with propaganda to hasten its disintegration. The former strove to force a peace; the latter, to realize Lenin's slogan, urged on Communists in all belligerent countries, "turn the imperialist war into civil war." The German military heads gave Lenin safe conduct from the Swiss border, enabling that redoubtable exile to appear in Petrograd to dig from under the existing Kerensky Cabinet its unstable support. Trotsky¹ gives this version of the transaction: "Ludendorff was saying to himself: 'Lenin will overthrow the patriots, and then I will strangle Lenin and his friends.' And Lenin was

¹ *My Life*, p. 309.

saying to himself: 'I shall pass through in Ludendorff's car, but for his service I shall pay him in my own way.' "

The Army became a vast network of debating societies in ever-rising bad temper. The Government under pressure legalized the election of officers by their units. Orders were discussed and more often rejected than obeyed. Privates took revenge on officers formerly cruel by summarily shooting them. Desertion took on the proportions of mass movement. One morning, for example, a faked newspaper with no marks to betray its propagandist origin circulated through a division of troops giving apparently official notice that on a day appointed the land of the proprietors in their gubernia would be allotted to the peasants. The sons of this Slav race in whom for generations hunger for land had gone unfed read no farther. They remained soldiers no longer. They left camp to arrive where and where the dividing was good. Millions from this largest army of the World War simply went home permanently A. W. O. L.

The "historical moment" of Communist theory had come when in a given situation a small number of disciplined loyal partisans could dominate it and emerge in possession of the ruling power. While propaganda of speech and print had been sweeping through the masses in the Army and the industries, the Communist Party (not then exceeding 25,000* members) was being fashioned into the framework of a new State and of a new fighting force to install and defend it.

Events followed rapidly. The crucial conflict point

* *Report of the Communist International, between the V and VI World Congress (1924-1928)*, published by the Communist Party of Great Britain, p. 495.

developed around the authority of the Provisional Government, heir to the shattered State power and machinery left by the Autocracy on the one hand, and that of the Soviet (Council) of Workmen's, Peasants', and Soldiers' Deputies on the other. This latter body, skillfully organized and brought into prominence by Lenin, had as its nucleus a restored Workmen's Soviet that had functioned in the ill-fated revolutionary attempt of 1905. The militant instructed rank and file forces of the rising Soviet power came from "factory committees" out of the larger plants—mostly Communists or thoroughly impregnated allies. By virtue of better leadership and greater energy, these came to be the ostensible spokesmen for the Trade Unions and the unorganized industrial masses. The Soviet organizers reached out also to the Army units. They brought in deputies from the soldier committees who were for ending the foreign war and could be stirred into discontent with the slowness of the Provisional Government in giving effect to the standing promises of the older revolutionary parties. In undermining the old régime, party agitators had promised the factories to the workers and the land to the peasants. Many of the Workmen's and Soldiers' deputies were peasant in fact or origin. The plotters succeeded also in establishing liaison with the Soviet of the Peasants, which for a time had held out as an independent body, but came finally to associate itself with the more aggressive body of workmen and soldiers, engineered by the Communist inner organization.

The first measures of the consolidated Workmen's and Soldiers' Soviets were large obstructive. The Provisional Government's progress was blocked by strikes, passive resistance, violent denunciation, and