

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

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BY
M. N. ROY

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INTRODUCTION

THIS is not a history of the Russian Revolution. It is a study of the consequences of a political event in the country where it took place and also on the contemporary world. The heroic period of the Revolution, from 1917 until the end of the war of foreign intervention and the civil war, has been covered by a large number of books, good, bad and indifferent. I have resisted the temptation of dramatising history, and to add one more book to the poetic political literature that passes as history. In that art, Trotzky cannot be beaten. His book on the Russian Revolution is a master-piece of imaginative literature; but as a work of history, it is of doubtful value. Without the personal element, it could be on par with Carlyle's French Revolution. To eliminate passion from the writing of history, however, still remains a controversial possibility. I have only made an effort to explore it. It is for the reader to judge to what extent I have succeeded.

As a matter of fact, this book has not been written according to a preconceived plan. It is written over a period of ten years, as a record of my reactions to contemporary events in the process of unfolding. The events themselves had to be chronicled; to that extent, this is a history of the Russian Revolution—of the period it covers, the period in which the Revolution unfolded its constructive possibilities, while also revealing the contradiction between its theoretical presuppositions and pragmatic compulsion.

My point of departure was acceptance, critical to a degree, of the Marxist point of view that, having taken place as of historical necessity, the process of the unfolding of the Revolution was predetermined. That view, which is the basic feature of the presuppositions of the architects

and engineers of the Russian Revolution, was put to the test of experience, which after all is the material of history. To analyse the experience of a particular period objectively, instead of interpreting it from this or that point of view, is the scientific method of writing history. Even then, no historian can be taken on his word, if he claims to be entirely free from subjectivism. My analysis of the experience of roughly two decades, covered by this record, under the banner of the Russian Revolution, is subjective only to the extent that any item of scientific knowledge is necessarily so. Knowledge presupposes the existence of the knower, and no knower ever begins an investigation with a really open mind, which means, an empty mind, a mental vacuum, if it means anything. The test of objectivity is the readiness to change one's opinion when subsequent experience challenges its validity.

I hold that my attempt to record history in the process of making stands that test. This is not history written from a personal or any theoretical point of view. At the same time, I do not make the absurd claim of having started with an open mind. I had a distinct theoretical predisposition and corresponding expectations of the Revolution. Concretely, I began the study of what I believed to be the constructive phase of the Revolution as a Marxist; and it was also as a Marxist that I was driven to the conclusion that, pragmatically, the Revolution was not conforming with its *a priori* theoretical pattern.

The essence of Marxism is that ideas are moulded by experience. Marxism is not the horoscope of humanity; it is a method of studying history. It does not permit of scholastic historicism, interpreting history by distorting or ignoring facts. If consciousness is determined by the physical existence, then a really Marxist study of history should not be theoretically hide-bound. Empiricism is nowhere more valid than in the study of history. That is not the case when one undertakes to study or to write a

history of the past. Then, historians who want to be distinguished from the facile manufacturers of legends must rely upon logical deductions from available materials, having first subjected them to a searching criticism guided by rational judgment of truth and error or positive falsehood. In studying contemporary history, actual experience must be the sole guide, unless one wishes to be a court chronicler. Experience again has to be objectively analysed, the sequence of facts understood in their logical significance, not by interpreting them from a fixed point of view. Any fact is not to be judged by its supposed purpose or imaginary cause, but by its logical implication. Then, the significance of some facts is so very self-evident that only theoretical sophistication or deliberate falsification can weave them into a legend and call it the glorious achievement of revolution.

The first section of this book was written ten years ago, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution, as essays on its positive outcome during the preceding period. It was then published as the first edition of this book, with the sub-title "A Review and Perspective", which indicated the scope and purpose of the essays. That original review of the initial period of the Revolution, which was far from being detailed, has not been amplified in this enlarged edition. My purpose was mainly to visualise the future of the Revolution in the light of its development until that time. Therefore, I did not go into the historical background and the immediate causes of the Revolution; nor did I depict the dramatic events of the "Ten Days That Shook the World", nor again the epic of the civil war. Having had a modest role in that drama, I could with difficulty resist the temptation of adding to the romantic literature called the history of revolutions. However, for my purpose, it was enough to recollect certain significant facts indicating tendencies which were to assert themselves eventually to determine the course of the Revolution in its constructive phase.

On the twentieth anniversary, it was sufficiently clear that the Revolution had not flowed in the channel marked out for it theoretically by Marxist historicism. From the very beginning, it was not a proletarian revolution of the Marxist conception. Let alone Marx, who had laid down his theory of the proletarian revolution half a century before 1917, the Russian Revolution did not fit into the expectations even of Lenin, its sponsor, organiser and leader. As a matter of fact, it was Lenin who directed the revolution in a channel unforeseen in its theoretical presuppositions. Yet, Lenin died prematurely, the most dogmatic defender of Marxist orthodoxy. There could be no doubt about his sincerity and honesty of purpose. Sincerity and firmness of conviction are of the essence of fanaticism. Lenin was the greatest fanatic of our time, perhaps of all time, since the Prophet of Arabia. Leninism is a remarkable doctrine—theoretically orthodox to the extreme degree of dogmatism, practically realistic in the sense of unscrupulous opportunism. Lenin was an indifferent philosopher; but he philosophised in order to rationalise his masterful opportunism. Plagiarising Goethe, he used to say: "Theory is gray, but evergreen is the tree of life." If Lenin was a poor philosopher, his sense of the poetic was certainly not very striking. The poetico-philosophical dictum was meant to justify his practice in crass contradiction of the theory he so dogmatically defended. Whatever philosophy of life Lenin professed, found concrete expression in his revolutionary opportunism—the end justifies the means—which eventually brought about the moral degeneration of the international communist movement.

Lenin's realism, as yet very far from opportunist tactics, switched the revolution in an unforeseen channel when in 1920 he liquidated War Communism and introduced the so-called New Economic Policy. The word "new" was of crucial importance. It marked a departure from Marxist orthodoxy, which could not be practised without liquidating the revolution. Nobody will ever be

able to say with certainty if Lenin wanted power for the sake of it. But he admittedly did attach supreme importance to power. Having captured power fortuitously (until April 1917, Lenin did not believe that the Bolsheviks could capture power), he was determined to hold on to it at all cost, firmly believing that, in possession of power, he could shape things into the *a priori* pattern of Marxism. The cost, in the first place, was theoretical orthodoxy which since then became the lady-love of the knight-errant Trotsky. Fanatical champion of permanent revolution, he disapproved of the New Economic Policy as a dangerous deviation from the road to Socialism. He was right; only, the goal of Socialism has, since those days of confidence and optimism, turned out to be either an unrealisable utopia or the prosaic reality of State Capitalism. Lenin, however, firmly believed in Socialism; he only chose a long detour as soon as he saw that the tempting shortcut to the goal was risky, and might even turn out to be a blind-alley. To call the practice during the years immediately after the capture of power "War Communism" was like giving the dog a bad name to justify beating it. No other practice is visualised in the Marxist scheme of building the socialist society on the ruins of Capitalism. The New Economic Policy was a definite departure from Marxist orthodoxy.

A review of the earlier phase of the Revolution led me to that conclusion, and the perspective of its future development appeared to me accordingly. But I did not believe that the Revolution was betrayed—not even by Stalin. I only realised that the road to world revolution and Socialism could not be built theoretically, but that it had to be paved with the materials available and under the supervision of the experience of the engineers engaged in the task and of the architects of the new order. A critical and realistic review of the past opened up an optimistic perspective; the revolution could not be fitted into the *a priori* theoretical pattern; it must break new

grounds; it would experience difficulties, but unfold possibilities never dreamt of in the simplified philosophy of Marxist Horatios. I believed that Stalin worked out the implications of Lenin's realism, and that the Soviet planned economy, though essentially based also on the "exploitation of labour", was paving the road to Socialism in as much as it fortified the base of the world proletarian revolution. The Russian Revolution had changed its course; still, it remained a revolution. That was the optimistic note of the first edition of his book, which nevertheless was a critical review of the history of the first two decades of the Revolution.

The rest of the book, which is the major part of this second edition, records history in the process of making, and I hold that that is the best method of writing reliable history. With this method, the historian deals with first-hand material. If he resists the temptation of dramatising events, even when they are dramatic, he can trace their logical sequence irrespective of motives which might have brought them about. I adopted that method in studying the development of the Russian Revolution during the last ten years. My purpose was not to interpret from a definite point of view. I did not pretend to approach the problems of contemporary history with a blank mind. I had my predispositions, theoretical convictions, fond expectations, and—illusions. But I had also the desire to submit them to the test of experience. I held on to my opinion, cherished my illusions, to the bitter end, but had the objectivity to change my opinion, forsake illusions, not without grief when experience left no option.

The second section of the book covers a period which, heralded by the establishment of the Nazi regime in Germany, began with the swift-moving succession of crises in 1939. Until then, the Russian Revolution, despite the world significance of its professed ideology, had been a localised occurrence, although the area affected was con-

siderable. In the early 'thirties, thanks to the initial success of planned economy, which enabled Russia to regain her share of the world trade, she came out of diplomatic isolation. Consequently, the repercussion of whatever happened in Russia began to make itself felt abroad. The impact of the Revolution reached the neighbouring countries of Europe as well as Asia, no longer only in the form of Communist propaganda, but directly, through political and economic relations. The outcaste of the 'twenties attained the status of a Great Power. Since then, the further history of the Russian Revolution became interwoven with the history of the contemporary world. By the end of the 'thirties, the political horizon of Europe was darkened by the shadow of the war which had determined the internal development of Russia, ever since in the middle of the 'twenties the Revolution entered its constructive phase. That turning point in its history coincided with the capture by Stalin of the supreme leadership. Stalin visualised the ultimate triumph of the Revolution in an eventual military victory of Russia.

Therefore, an analysis of the international relation of forces in Europe became necessary to have a realistic view of the future of the Russian Revolution. On the other hand, the Napoleonic tendency of the latter determined the development of events in Europe. In the most critical period of contemporary history, from autumn 1939 to summer 1941, when Europe offered the opportunity for the Russian Revolution to advance according to the Stalinist strategy of Red Napoleonism, Russia acted in such a manner as to isolate itself once again completely from the civilised world. Her curious attitude provided plausible justification for confounding Communism with Fascism.

I tried to see through the veil of the mystery of Russian diplomacy and explained it as manoeuvring to capture strategic positions before striking. I still believed in the possibility of the Revolution spreading to Europe,

according to Stalin's plan, and Revolutionary Russia capturing the moral leadership of the continent as its deliverer from Fascism. Of course, in that case, she must share the actual political leadership with others, more qualified for the role, as Lenin had visualised. But Stalin's Napoleonism, like Bonaparte's in the period of the French Revolution, turned out to be also a generator of the lust for power, notwithstanding its objectively liberating and revolutionary significance.

In the period of the French Revolution, Napoleon's Empire was a transitory phenomenon, but the impact of the revolution imparted through that medium was abiding. Stalin's strategy of spreading the revolution of our time, might have had a greater success if it remembered the lesson of history and was guided by Lenin's wisdom. Reaching Europe, the revolution was bound to democratise itself in order to be abiding in a new cultural atmosphere. In that historically determined perspective of the revolution triumphant, the Russians saw a danger for their supremacy. A masterful revolutionary strategy, on the point of successful culmination, degenerated into a struggle for the domination of Europe. The Russians moved farther and farther in the direction of unscrupulous power-politics, the more opportunities they missed during the post-war years owing to the fading of their revolutionary vision. It became clear that the Russian Revolution had exhausted its possibilities to influence directly the reconstruction and regeneration of Europe. That process is traced in the latter sections of the book, which record my reaction to the movement of events. The tortuous and often incredibly stupid and short-sighted policy of the Russians could no longer be explained on the assumption of a realistic revolutionary strategy.

But even now I do not share the opinion that the revolution has been betrayed by Stalin personally or by the Stalinist regime. It was not a betrayal, but a mis-

carriage. The miscarriage of the Russian Revolution is due to the fallacies of Marxist historicism. Experience exposed those fallacies. It will never be known whether Lenin consciously realised the inadequacies of the Marxist theory of revolution. In any case, already early in its history, he did switch the revolution in a different channel. Until after the war, when the Russians missed rapidly recurring opportunities to adjust the revolution to the new context of its expansion and further development, I believed that Stalin was astutely reacting to reality, disregarded in the theoretical system of Marx, and deliberately bringing about a metamorphosis of the Revolution. Speaking at the Congress of the Russian Communist Party in 1926, when practically all the veterans of the Revolution—Trotzky, Kamenev, Zinoviev—were opposing his policy as deviation from Marxism and betrayal of the proletarian revolution, Stalin declared that, on the authority of Marx, intelligent Marxists should see the necessity of revising their theoretical presuppositions in the light of experience. Until two years ago, I believed that Stalin's revolutionary strategy—military, diplomatic, political and economic—was determined by the idea he proclaimed twenty years ago. Why, how and when he abandoned that sound position, and his legendary realism degenerated into the opportunism of power-politics, are very interesting questions.

In the latter part of the book, I have briefly offered replies to the questions. Apart from more fundamental reasons, such as the fallacies of original Marxism, its dogmatisation by the epigons, the utopian nature of the ideal of Communism, the dangerous implication of the abstract concept of communal interest, Leninist glorification of power, the miscarriage of the Russian Revolution could be traced to one single mistake on the part of Stalin. It was to have waited too long at the most critical time owing to wrong calculations; the failure to strike to prevent the fall of France. The magnitude of that fatal blunder escap-

ed my understanding at that time. Very largely thanks to that grave mistake, Russia might have been overrun by the German invaders. During that gravest crisis of its history, since the darkest days of the civil war, the rulers of Russia lost their nerves. Panic-stricken, they invoked the tradition of legendary mediaeval heroes and patriotic warriors. That was a concession to nationalist chauvinism, which during the war practically eclipsed the romantic spirit of the proletarian revolution, and since then has made a mere formality of the Communist profession of Revolutionary Russia. One cannot escape the obvious lesson to be learned from that experience. In practice, Communism is not nearly as attractive as the ideal depicted in theory and imagination; therefore, it cannot command the spontaneous loyalty even of the toiling masses. The miscarriage of the Russian Revolution is due to the reason that, under the Red Flag of Communism, it cannot become a world revolution.

Even before Russia was drawn in the Second World War, an analysis of the then international relation of forces and its dynamics led me to the conclusion that the post-war world would be polarised as between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. The anticipated process has taken place, but it has not divided the world into the camps of revolution and counter-revolution. Why it has been so, is explained in the last section of the book. The threatening clash between the two giants competing for world domination would not be the grand finale of a period of wars and revolutions. That impending catastrophe of the international power-politics culminating in another war may be avoided by the leadership of the revolution of our time passing out of the hands of the Russians. In the concluding chapter, that heartening possibility has been examined. The result is an epitaph of the Russian Revolution, though hopeful for Europe. The period of revolution opened in 1917 will be closed successfully by European Democracy refusing to be dragged into another war. The leaders of

the Soviet Union and their communist cohorts throughout the world have failed to march abreast of the new forces and new ideas which, growing out of the life-and-death struggle against triumphant Fascism, are now reacting positively to the present crisis of modern culture and civilisation.

The purpose of this book was to judge the validity of the theoretical presuppositions of the Russian Revolution, which was expected to open up a new chapter to human history. Therefore, I followed the movement of international events taking place under its impact, and which in their turn determined the course of the Revolution. A detailed examination of the conditions at the home of the Revolution was not within the purview of this study. Yet, their implications had to be appraised in so far as they influenced the foreign policy of the State founded by the Revolution. On the whole, this book records the result of a study of the history of the contemporary world, and indicates the perspective of the future of civilised mankind opened up by it.

In an article written early in 1938, I tried to explain the strange practice of the Revolution devouring her own children, repeating itself in our time. I also wrote a critical appreciation of the dramatic personality of Trotzky after the tragic end of his chequered career—meteoric rise and equally spectacular fall. The Moscow trials and the fall of Trotzky were the most tragic episodes of the Russian Revolution. They puzzled the whole world, including the friends of the Revolution. Therefore, those articles are reproduced as appendices, because they could not be fitted into the text of the book without breaking the continuity of this study.

A pen picture of the personality of Stalin should have been also included in the book. I wanted to do that, but could not do it for various reasons. To that extent, this study of the Russian Revolution is incomplete. Because,

since Stalin captured the leadership of the Communist Party of Russia, the history of the Revolution coincided with his biography. Therefore, in a way, a picture of Stalin's remarkable personality is interwoven in the texture of the canvas of this book. The entire strategy of the Revolution, with its masterfulness as well as serious defects, its initial success and ultimate debacle, described in this book, bears the *imprimatur* of the personality of Stalin—the most powerful personality of our time, and who as such could make or mar history. Undoubtedly, he wanted, and still wants, to make history. The Red Army was his creation, and but for that powerful instrument, Europe and Asia might be to-day groaning under the iron heels of Hitler. In so far as the destruction of the mechanised hordes of the modern Attila gave civilisation a chance of survival, the Russian Revolution has triumphed. Stalin has made history. But history must go ahead. The Russian Revolution has failed to keep pace with it. Stalin is ageing, though rather prematurely. History will not stop at the nearing end of his career. It will survive one of its great makers, and also the revolution of our time.

M. N. Roy

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