

*Vanguard Studies
of Soviet Russia*

HOW THE SOVIETS WORK

H. N. BRAILSFORD



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VANGUARD STUDIES OF SOVIET RUSSIA

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By H. N. BRAILSFORD

Author of *The War of Steel and Gold*;
A League of Nations; *Shelley*,
Godwin and Their Circle, etc.



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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

HENRY NOEL BRAILSFORD

Born in Yorkshire, England, in 1873; graduated from Glasgow University, M.A. with double honors; studied special courses in Oxford and Berlin; was Assistant Professor of Logic in Glasgow University; served in the Greek Foreign Legion in the Turco-Greek War of 1897; was foreign correspondent and leaderwriter for *The Manchester Guardian* and *The Daily News*; served on the staff of the *London Nation* throughout the editorship of H. W. Massingham; acted as relief administrator in Macedonia, and was a member of the Carnegie Commission in the Balkans; editor, from 1922-1926, of *The New Leader*, the London Socialist weekly; author of *The War of Steel and Gold*; *A League of Nations*; *Shelley, Godwin and their Circle*, etc.

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. We are indebted to Mr. Allan Wardell for giving funds which make possible our securing this volume.

JEROME DAVIS,
Yale University.

PREFACE

THIS book is the fruit of two visits to Russia—in 1920, and again, early in the present year. It is an attempt to give an account of the working of the Soviets as a political system. But as it grew in my mind, the constitutional questions sank into a secondary place. The Soviet system, after all, is not an experiment in constitution-building: it is an instrument which Russian Communists have found well adapted to secure them their leadership during the period of revolutionary dictation. Another subject, however, continually crossed that which the title suggests. The book is really as much an attempt to answer the question "Why does the Soviet work?" as the question "How does it work?" Every political system is a psychological experiment. I have tried to show how the survival in Russia of this system follows from the history of its working-class. A social structure which can, for nearly ten years, surmount the trials which Soviet Russia has experienced, manifestly has deep roots in human nature.

I must make a double apology, first to the writers of other volumes in this series, for trenching occasionally on their subjects, and then to my readers. One cannot study the Soviet system altogether in *vacuo*. It is a method for managing industry and agriculture, and promoting education and health. At the same time, I must apologize to the reader because my references to these subjects are inevitably brief, and sometimes vague.

They lie outside my theme. May I also remind critics, who may complain that I have said little about certain matters of controversy—about civil liberties for example—that these also form the subjects of separate volumes?

For the courtesy and attention which I met with in Russia, I should like to thank some friends, both old and new—in particular Comrades Fedor Rothstein, Rozinsky and Radek in the first category, together with the leaders of the Vladimir Soviet; and in the second, Comrades Bucharin, Ichok, and Larin, and my new acquaintances in Kazan. To the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs I owe a special debt, notably to Comrades Litvinoff and Karakhan in Moscow and to Ivan Maisky in London. The last of my pleasures in writing this book is to thank Miss Claire Leighton for the honor she has done me in reading my manuscript.

H. N. B.

London,
May Day, 1927

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