

RUSSIA

And the Struggle for Peace

Michael S. Farbman

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THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION



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Volume 2

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MICHAEL S. FARBMAN

First published in 1918 by George Allen & Unwin Ltd

This edition first published in 2017

by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-138-21999-1 (Set)

ISBN: 978-1-315-31269-9 (Set) (ebk)

ISBN: 978-1-138-22478-0 (Volume 2) (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-40154-6 (Volume 2) (ebk)

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RUSSIA & THE STRUGGLE FOR PEACE

BY

MICHAEL S. FARBMAN

LONDON :
GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN, LTD.
RUSKIN HOUSE
40 MUSEUM STREET
W.C.

To Maxim Gorky

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PREFACE

THIS book is not an apologia for Russia or the Revolution. I do not intend to plead for Russia or to beg that she should be judged with mercy or that her conduct should be forgiven. Nor do I intend to blame anyone for Russia's misfortunes or to engage in controversy with the many severe and contemptuous critics of the Russian Revolution. But at this terrible hour when enemies and friends alike are blaming Russia for their misfortunes, when old and friendly ties are being displaced by new distrust and active hatred, I feel I must do my best to dispel the fundamental misunderstandings and calumnies. My sole intention is therefore to give a truthful and objective account of the Russian Revolution and what it stands for—so far at least as objective truth is accessible to one who is filled with enthusiasm for the Revolution, and is deeply convinced that the Revolution is not only a magnificent opportunity for the free development of the true genius of Russia, but also the greatest victory of the human spirit.

I do not pretend that everything in Russia is good and that the Revolution has to answer for no sins, nor do I intend to hide its failures or to be silent about them.

The time has come to speak about Russia, it may be with regret, but certainly without bitterness or passion.

* * * * *

It will be for the future historian of the Great Russian Revolution to trace its beginnings. Such an historian will no doubt go back many decades into the past. He will begin its story at least from the date of the liberation of the Serfs in 1861 and will record the causal chain of events from that point.

We, as contemporaries of the Revolution, have another task, and are face to face with other and more actual problems. We are too near to the scene; we see the actors too clearly and ascribe to them a far greater rôle than will history. We are active to praise and to condemn. In short, we are at this stage unable to judge the Revolution historically.

The main questions of interest, to friends and enemies of the Revolution alike, are these : *First*, how far was the Revolution the result of the War and how far was the struggle for peace which followed the Revolution inherent in it? In other words, did the peace policy of the revolutionary democracy express the true purpose of Russia at the time ; or were the Soviets, with all that they stand for, really alien to the people and to the Revolution? *Secondly*, was the disintegration of Russia and the dissolution of the Russian Army inevitable, or was Russia torn to pieces and made helpless by the very acts of the leaders of the Revolution?

I do not think I am far wrong in thus reducing all the bitter controversy which has raged around the Revolution to these two single questions.

M. F.

St. John's Wood, March 21, 1918.

Part I: Introductory

CHAPTER ONE

THE REVOLUTION AND THE ALLIES

NEVER perhaps in history has a great Revolution been less foreseen abroad ; probably nothing in history has perplexed people more.

At first sight this is strange, because the Revolution was developing in Russia for more than two years, and no honest observer ought to have failed to see its approach. And yet people here had not the slightest idea that revolution was imminent, and when it actually occurred they were taken by surprise. And then the British public was absolutely unprepared to understand either the causes of the Revolution or its meaning.

But after all it is not unnatural that the Revolution was so great a surprise. Probably no country in the world was less known than Russia. Ideas even of Russian geography were most hazy. The ethnography of Russia was virtually a Chinese puzzle to the majority ; and a good many Englishmen are now probably for the first time making themselves acquainted with Ukrainians, Lithuanians and other races and nationalities of Russia. Russian economics have seldom been touched upon, and Russian social life was less understood than that of Mexico or Japan. There were available one or two good books on Russia, but those (notably the famous Klutchevsky's " History of Russia ") are little known and little read. Unfortunately other books, of a biased character, written either by illiterate compilers or clever charlatans, have lately acquired a rather considerable influence in this country.

It sounds paradoxical, but it is nevertheless a grim reality, that the political *rapprochement* between Eng-

land and Russia, which might have been expected to contribute to a better understanding of Russia and of the Russian people, had, on the contrary, an exactly opposite effect. From the very beginning of the *rapprochement* in 1907 it became the fashion to depict Russia and the Russian people with sentimental flattery. The previous conception of Russia as a backward country, with rotten political institutions and a monstrous despotism, was said to be biassed and false. Russia had to be "discovered" again. And since then Russia and the soul of Russia have been successfully "discovered" many a time. The real aim of these discoveries was not so much to give a full and veracious account of real Russia, as to blind the British people to Russian realities. So long as the political interests of the two countries were regarded as opposed, the sharpest and most implacable critic of Russian political institutions and public life used to be considered rather useful and therefore welcome. But when the Governments of Britain and Russia decided upon a common policy and a political *rapprochement*, a change of public opinion about Russia was deemed necessary. And that is precisely why the greater part of these "discoveries" of Russia and of that mysterious "Russian Soul" differ very little from the old-fashioned political art of applying "whitewash."

To reconcile the free British people with the Russian autocracy was, of course, no easy undertaking. Dislike of Russian political institutions was deep-rooted. A free and proud people like the British not only had a deep repugnance to the Tsardom, but could scarcely admire or like a people which was content to live and suffer under a rotten autocracy. But the political aims of the State demanded a reconciliation; and there is never any lack of imaginative genius when the "highest interests of the State" demand it. Thus it was that the very difficult problem of reconciling British public opinion with reactionary Russia was quickly solved, and with ingenious simplicity. The solution was the

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discovery of "Holy Russia." It was declared that Russia was unlike other countries which are "hopelessly plunged in commercialism and materialism." It was declared that her mystical, religious and unpractical inhabitants, and her institutions, must not be judged from the materialistic Western point of view. Autocracy would certainly be abominable for the Western peoples, and for Western culture. In Russia it was quite different. Russia suffered under the autocracy in a material sense, but that was the mystical way of her spiritual perfection. And so on. Thus the "Holy Russia" school not only justified the autocracy but even glorified it. The legend about the Tsar as the "Little Father" of the millions of Russian peasants was cleverly disseminated. The Tsardom was no longer a nightmare and a curse. It became the mystical *focus* of Russia's spiritual life.

The theory of Holy Russia and the discovery of the mystical Russian soul, with its semi-religious relations to the Tsardom, were at first received in England rather sceptically. But politically it was too convenient a conception to give way before scepticism. It fulfilled its function of relieving the conscience of the people and making the *rapprochement* with the Tsardom plausible. As always happens with convenient theories of this sort, the legend of a Holy Russia and its Little Father was easily swallowed by an indiscriminating public opinion.

At the time of the outbreak of war there was hardly a single spiritual barrier left to an alliance with Russia. Ten years ago, before the discovery of "Holy Russia," it would not have been so easy to fight in comradeship of arms with Tsarist Russia. The United States, which had remained somewhat sceptical of this theory that Russia for the sake of her spiritual perfection needed the blessing of Tsardom, waited until the Revolution made it possible for her to join Russia and Russia's Allies.

In the course of the war the real Russia emerged. It became better known in Western Europe thanks to

Russian literature, which was then widely translated and read. Russian literature helped to show many people that the real soul of Russia had nothing in common with this fallacious, essentially contemptuous and "sugary" legend of "Holy Russia." It exposed the lie that the Russian people were content with the abject conditions of their life; that in curious contradiction with the rest of mankind they enjoyed, as it were, inwardly with a sweet suffering, oppression and misery, the squalor and poverty of their existence.

But in spite of the positive influence of Russian literature the justification of Tsardom made ever greater progress during the war. It is true that in the Grand Alliance of Western Democracies Russia was given the rather modest function of a "Steam Roller," but all that was spoken, and all that was written in newspapers and books, about Russia during the war was intended to convey the idea that we had always made a big mistake about her and that there was nothing objectionable in Russia's political institutions. With the exception of a small remnant of the Liberal and Labour Press the whole British Press exalted Russia's Government, her political institutions, and her public life. The Alliance added to the justification of Tsardom a certain amount of official politeness and indeed of flattery.

It is, therefore, not astonishing that people in this country were perplexed when the Revolution came about.

When the Russian Workers and Soldiers tore down the crumbling pillars and rotten institutions of what was being glorified in this country as Holy Russia; when the Autocracy became in a few hours a sad memory, and the "Little Father" was reduced to the proportions of a mean-spirited nonentity, the people of England, who had been taught to believe that this dark corner of Russia was the real and "Holy" Russia, were greatly bewildered. The speedy and complete liquidation of the Tsardom was astounding and painful to the followers of the Holy Russia school. They asked them-

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selves anxiously : " Where is the army of the Tsar? Why do the Soldiers not rush to rescue their beloved Chief? Why are the peasants so indifferent? Why do they suffer this humiliation? Why do they allow themselves to be robbed of the Tsardom which is the means and end of their perfection? " The Revolution was in fact a day of great anxiety and bitter disappointment to the whitewashers. Their ten years' labour of justification and glorification of Tsardom was torn to pieces. But they were not willing to give up their theory. When they had satisfied themselves that the Tsar's abdication was definite, they made a desperate attempt to save the glory at least of the Tsardom. They hastened therefore to assert, first, that the Revolution was a mere reaction against the treacherous Government which, under the influence of an immoral Empress, a German Princess, had contemplated a separate peace with the Enemy; and, secondly, that the Tsar's abdication was a " noble act " of " his own will," dictated by his devotion to his people and the " great European cause which he served so well."

To-day we know too much about the causes and the meaning of the Revolution to need seriously to consider the attempts to save the theory of Holy Russia and to represent the Tsar as a martyr to his love for " his " people and for the Allied cause. I mention it only because it was the unfortunate origin of all the discrepancies of the Allied diplomacy towards Russia after the Revolution. Only thus can the confusion and wavering of the Allies be explained. Their badly-informed spokesmen believed in the tales about the Little Father. They had been told that a rising of the peasants in the " million of Russian villages " to restore the sanctuary of Tsardom was possible, even probable; and they therefore could not bring themselves to think that the Revolution was final. As statesmen, of course, they considered that they had to be very cautious in their attitude towards a revolution. They sent greetings to the Russian people, expressed their joy over the estab-

ishment of a democratic Government, but all that in an astonishingly cool spirit, with many reservations, and (monstrously enough) coupled with compliments to the Tsar. This type of greetings to the Revolution, coupled with the strange compliments to the overthrown tyrant, produced the most painful impression in Russia. There the disappointment was as bitter as it was unexpected. For instance, the "*Rabotchaia Gazetta*" (the organ of the Minimalists, the leading group at that time) published very bitter comments on Mr. Bonar Law's official speech of congratulation to Russia, with its tribute to the ex-Tsar, under the title, "Greetings to Nicholas!"*

This initial and fundamental blunder of the Allies towards the Russian Revolution was almost entirely due to the work of those traducers who had substituted for the true, authentic, creative genius of Russia the despised offal of Russian culture, of those who had pronounced as "Holy" the bigoted and unholy corner of darkest Russia.

There was, however, another reason which made the relations between the Allies and revolutionary Russia even more difficult. I refer to the unfortunate idea of appraising the Revolution not for its own sake or its

* The following are a few passages from this article in the "*Rabotchaia Gazetta*," which truly represented the general feeling in Russia at that time towards this unfortunate lack of tact and understanding on the part of Allied Statesmen: "Nicholas Romanov has received his first greetings. . . . While Revolutionary Russia was celebrating the victory over the tyrannical and pernicious dynasty of the Romanovs, in the English Parliament, Russia's Ally, Mr. Bonar Law said, 'I hope I may be allowed to express my sympathy to the late Tsar, who I believe was our true Ally for three years. . . .' Whose Ally, then, is the English Minister, Mr. Bonar Law?" the paper asks indignantly. "Is he the Ally of the deposed despot or of the new free Russia? . . ." Equally unfortunate was the lack of tact of the Allied Ambassadors and the patronising tone which they adopted towards the new Russian Government. The speech of the British Ambassador during the first official reception by the Provisional Government aroused universal indignation, and was equally sharply criticised in the Liberal and in the Socialist Press.