

Seventy days in Russia: What I saw - Angel Pestaña



First published in Spain in 1924, Angel Pestaña's journal recounting his experiences in Russia in the summer of 1920 as the delegate sent by the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (the CNT) to the Second Congress of the Third International, which he represents as "an objective accounting", features encounters with Victor Serge, Peter Kropotkin, Lenin, Zinoviev, Lozovsky and Tomsy; while critical of the "mistakes" of the Bolsheviks, Pestaña ultimately absolves them of the greatest share of responsibility for the suffering of the Russian people, which he attributes to the blockade and civil war imposed and underwritten by the Western Democracies.

Chapter 1

The Journey to Russia and First Impressions

While the repression launched by the civil governor, Conde de Salvatierra, was wreaking havoc on the Barcelona workers organization, filling the prisons with syndicalists, the Committee of the National Confederation of Labor, and more directly the Committee of the Regional Federation of Catalonia, were attempting to implement the mandate of the National Congress held in Madrid which authorized the workers confederal organization to join the Communist International in Moscow.

Since the mandate to join the Communist International also implied the duty to send, if possible, one or more delegates to Russia, for the purpose of informing the confederal organization upon their return regarding their observations, the Committee's task was a difficult one. It would of course be much easier to join the International by means of a letter, than to try to get any kind of delegation through the blockade. And it was in the best interests of the organization to send a delegation; instead of a Platonic gesture of support, which the mandate of the Congress represented, it sought to obtain the most precise knowledge of the real situation in Russia.

As we shall see, this was no simple matter. The blockade squeezed Russia in an iron grip, and it was in the interests of the governments that imposed this blockade to prevent anyone from getting into Russia who might bring, not to speak of material aid, even a word of support and sympathy to the people who had carried out their revolution.

The difficulties encountered by the Committee in its attempts to plan an itinerary from Barcelona always seemed to be insurmountable, and we must say that, for a journey starting in Spain, they really were.

When it became clear that the success of the mission did not depend on detailed planning, the whole enterprise was consigned to fate, and to the hazards of the unforeseen; so a few hundred pesetas were staked and three members of the workers organization were sent towards Central Europe.

As one of the three delegates, and, by the way, the delegate who had the most luck on his journey, after numerous incidents and after having had to overcome major inconveniences (some of which were picturesque enough), I set foot on Russian soil on June 25, 1920, and entered the country of revolutionary enchantment. Almost three months had passed since I departed from Barcelona.

What was my first sensation? Enthusiasm, admiration, intense happiness. Why? It would take too long to explain.

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Once you leave Narva (Estonia)—which is where I disembarked—the Russian frontier is just on the other side of the river that also bears the name of Narva, a short distance from the Estonian capital.

Proceeding from Narva, the train was composed of the one car that was designated for us, one of the sleeping cars confiscated by the Soviets from the *Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits*. It is also the car for diplomatic mail; and it was also the car in which the diplomatic pouch of the Emperor of Russia was transported in years past when he travelled through Estonia, and in which comrade Gukosky and the trade delegations from London and Berlin also travelled.

The Russian frontier was heralded by a large white wooden disc with a border of bright red, set on a high pole.

A squad of soldiers with their commanding officer in the lead, who came aboard the car to determine who was on the train and what their purposes were, legally authorized our happy arrival in Russia.

After a brief inspection and after answering some questions put by the commanding officer, the train continued its journey and did not stop until Yamburg, the first major Russian train station after crossing the border.

Because we had to wait for a train composed of boxcars carrying consumer goods that had to be detached and added to our train, we spent about six hours at this station. This delay afforded us the opportunity to fraternize with the authentic genuine peasants, with the long-suffering muzhiks, and to observe them going about their everyday affairs.

Over the lintel to the station's main doorway we discern the portraits of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky. Numerous red flags are waving in the breeze, with the hammer and sickle in the center, the emblem of the Soviet Republic.

Because we were accompanied on our journey by Abramovich or Albrecht, also known as “The Eye of Moscow”—the important Russian official who was known by these three names was one of the most prestigious secret representatives of the Government, and enjoyed the greatest confidence of the Communist Party—we were received with honors and deference everywhere we went.

The stationmaster invited us to stay in his office, if we did not prefer to wait in the lobby. We declined his invitation and sat down with about thirty travelers who were riding on the train with the consumer goods.

A gramophone was playing one of the speeches Trotsky had just delivered at the battlefield. Our lack of knowledge of Russian prevented us from understanding his (undoubtedly) notable speech. The peasants paid no attention to the voices from the gramophone. Perhaps the speeches made no impression on them after having heard them so many times. A dispassionate observer would have noted the unmistakable expression of boredom on those faces.

Tired of the gramophone, and of waiting, we decided to take a little walk in the direction of the town, which is a short distance from the station.

We reached the first *isbahs* (houses) of Yamburg and before we could thread its streets—a very euphemistic term to be used for rural tracks like these—we stood before a large placard upon which were posted two issues of *Izvestia* and two of *Pravda*, the news sheets of the Moscow government.

We asked a member of the local Soviet, a veteran communist who was sent along with us by Abramovich and served as our interpreter, why these newspapers were posted like this and if they were being sold or given away for free.

He told us that they were neither sold nor given away because the paper shortage imposed a restriction on how many copies could be printed. They were posted on these placards so that everyone could read them. This will be done throughout Russia as long as the paper shortage does not allow for a larger print run.

“Do many people read them?”, we asked.

“Enough,” he answered. “But not as many as we would like; for the Russian peasant, dominated by petit bourgeois ideas, is proving quite refractory to communism.”

“In Europe,” we continued, “we were told that many people froze to death in Russia this past winter. Now we understand that this was a hoax. There are so many forests here, that it is not possible for anyone to freeze to death.”

“No one freezes to death here, but in Moscow and Petrograd they do. We have endured a very cold winter. You see how I still have all my fingers? You see these scars?”—he showed us some marks on his skin that looked like the scars from burns or cuts—“they are ulcers from frostbite.”

“How can that be,” I interjected, “since you have plenty of means of generating heat?”

“It is because it is not allowed that each person should do what he likes and take as much firewood as he wants. That is what the distribution service is for, which distributes to each person what he needs. It is true that it could not function this past year; but from now on, when everything is well organized and the distribution service functions normally, everyone will have all the firewood they need. In the meantime we have to suffer.”

Since we had come a long distance from the station, we decided to retrace our steps.

When we reached the station, the train was almost ready to leave; only one or two cars still needed to be coupled.

Not seeing any extra passenger carriages, I said to Abramovich:

“We are going to be very uncomfortable in that car.”

“Why?”

“Unless I have miscalculated, there are fifty of us.”

“No one else is going to travel in your car,” he told me.

“So how are the other people going to be accommodated if there are no more passenger cars other than the one you gave us?”

“All these people are traveling in a boxcar with the goods.”

“And why not in this car?”, I responded, referring to the sleeping car.

“Because they would vandalize it and get it all dirty.”

At that moment I saw that the whole group, like a flock of sheep driven into their pen, was flowing towards one of the boxcars carrying consumer goods, everyone trying to get onboard at the same time.

Women, children, and old people; everyone climbed aboard and found a spot to sit down where they could. They sat right on the floor or on the luggage they brought, all piled up in a stack, seemingly satisfied. Some of them, I was told, had been waiting for this train since the night before.

The stationmaster, who had approached us as we were contemplating this spectacle, very courteously notified us that the train was ready to depart, and that we should now embark.

We climbed aboard, and when I had made myself comfortable in a nice soft chair, my imagination revisited the spectacle I had just witnessed.

It took us almost another day to reach Petrograd.

The train could have traveled this distance in a few hours during normal times; but there was no way the train could travel so fast now.

This delay provided us with the opportunity to contemplate the damage caused by the civil war.

Narva was the base for Yudenitch's white army when he tried to conquer Petrograd and overthrow the communists.

Along the course of his army's progress everything had been destroyed. From the windows of our carriage we could contemplate the holes made by exploding artillery shells. Trees completely destroyed, collapsed barns, impassable roads utterly ruined by explosives. Once we reached the outskirts of Petrograd we could see the trenches that the revolutionaries had constructed to defend the city, since the Red Army alone was incapable of defending the city on its own, as it was too weak to contain the advance of Yudenitch. The Red Army was in the first stages of being organized.

Our anxious desire to get to Petrograd was in sharp contrast with the very slow progress of the train. Even during peacetime, before the war, it was rare for Russian trains to go faster than 40 kilometers per hour. With the exception of the major Berlin-Warsaw-Moscow-Petrograd express trains, none of them exceeded that speed, and many could not even go that fast. Considering the situation of the railroads after three years of war and almost four years of revolution, the dreadful conditions with regard to materiel and the fact that we were traveling in a train carrying basic commodities, it will be understood why we were going so slowly.

Station stops seemed to take forever. And the spectacle to which we were treated at Yamburg was constantly repeated. When a cattle car was not big enough for a crowd of travelers, they were allowed to occupy another one, which was only done with difficulty, since it was necessary to consult the Extraordinary Commission that was traveling in the train.

Since the number of travelers was constantly growing with each stop and the debate about where to put them increased even more than the number of travelers, the whole business resulted in a longer and longer stopover at each station.

At every station, as at Yamburg, we invariably saw the three portraits of Lenin, Marx and Trotsky displayed above the main entrance. The three portraits and the red flags.

Since it was impossible for us to do anything about the pace of our journey, we patiently resigned ourselves to waiting and delivered ourselves into the hands of fate.

It took the rest of the day, the whole night and part of the next morning to reach Petrograd, during which time we engaged in discussions and conjectures concerning what we would see.

From nine in the morning, when we arrived at the Petrograd station, until noon, when an automobile from the Third International was located for us, we had to remain in our sleeping car. The spectacle we witnessed during those three hours gave us an idea of the suffering imposed on the Russian people by the blockade, the sacrifices imposed upon them by the Revolution and the stoicism with which they endured all of these things.

During this time more than a half dozen trains arrived at the station; trains in which one could hardly discern one passenger carriage. All the cars were the kind of boxcars that are usually used for cattle.

From these boxcars, once the train had come to a stop, an immense multitude of persons of all ages disembarked, their faces reflecting the terrible martyrdom they had undergone. Almost all of them were burdened with baggage of greater or lesser size, in which they carried provisions.

They were residents of Petrograd who had scattered over the countryside in search of the means of life. They went to the most distant houses in the country acquiring what was indispensable for subsistence, and the peasants obtained in exchange clothing, shoes or furniture. The peasants refused to take paper money.

Many of these people, who thus scoured the province of Petrograd in search of food, would later ply their trade on the black market once they returned to Petrograd with their goods. They sold them or traded them for other things; and this is the only way they could survive. This kind of trafficking attained enormous proportions. And no matter how many repressive measures were enacted against it, it continued unabated; the situation may have actually become worse. However many risks the black market speculator had to take, he still had to exchange the goods he managed to smuggle into the city.

One's attention was immediately drawn to the motley and eccentric clothing worn by the population. It was like an immense bazaar where clothing of all colors and kinds, used, slightly used and new, was piled up and distributed at random.

It was not rare to see a young person wearing a new wool cap, or almost new, a slightly worn silk blouse and a smock of the most ordinary fabric, or even with patches made of a different fabric.

You might see others with high top shoes, almost new, with socks instead of full-length stockings. Nor was it rare to see a woman dressed in a man's jacket and shoes without socks or stockings.

Most women wore their hair cut short, Roman style. We later made inquiries, during our stay in Moscow, about the reason for this hairstyle and we were told that it was a result of necessity.

There was a shortage of combs, hairpins, mirrors, and soap; all the things that were indispensable for the most elementary coiffure. This was why they had to sacrifice their flowing locks.

In this first encounter with the revolutionary reality, without looking through rose-colored glasses, and without any fancy wrappings, we began to get a glimpse of the Russian tragedy.

What impressed us most was the seriousness and the sadness that was reflected on every face.

Not one smile, not one flash of cheerfulness, not even the least perceptible manifestation of contentment. Nothing. A grimace of sadness, of profound sadness, was all we could see. And an impenetrable silence. It seemed that those mouths had never spoken or laughed.

We saw the pain and we wanted to know the cause of it; but we found ourselves face to face with the unknown, and the unknown never allows you to penetrate its mysteries until reason has penetrated its sanctuaries.

Someone hails us. It is the comrade who is responsible for the Estonian diplomatic pouch who is notifying us of the arrival of the automobile that will take us to the “Hotel International”, once a luxurious and inviting abode of tourists prior to 1914, now eclipsed by the “Astoria”, built just a few steps away and converted after the revolution into the residence of all the foreigners who came to Russia, although preference is given to those who come to Russia in pursuit of official business.

The station we finally arrived at was the famous Nevsky Prospect.

The station at Nevsky Prospect was one of the busiest and most important in Russia as well as the best maintained, prior to the war. This was the starting point of all the trains that departed for the interior of Russia and through which the luxury express line of the Warsaw-Berlin-Paris train passes. When we were there it was in a most dilapidated condition.

Windows without glass; many broken and almost fallen out of their frames, since even hinges were in short supply; the ground full of holes, with the asphalt surface almost entirely torn up; a few enclosed walkways that were supposed to serve to channel the crowds of travelers towards their respective platforms were damaged and their walls knocked down, the floor and the doors of the hall that led to a big square were covered in filth and debris that gave us an impression of pain and sadness; and in contrast with this picture, as framed against its background, all the soldiers and employees of the station, dirty, shabby, and clothed in rags, walk from one side of the station to the other without saying a single word, with an air of profound dejection.

As we were leaving the station to go to our automobile, because the public knew that this automobile was in the service of the Third International, the unemployed and starving multitude wandering about in the vicinity of the station and the plaza approached us and thronged around us. But not one word, not one gesture. They seemed to be statues or creatures that had lost the ability to speak. For the inhabitants of Petrograd it was a spectacle displaying something they had long been deprived of: the sight of the arrival of foreigners.

Once we were all seated, the automobile sped down the Nevsky Prospect, but before reaching the end of the avenue made a hard left and then crossed various intersections and dropped us off at the door of the hotel.

In the entrance hall two women stood guard, with rifles on their shoulders, to whom a secretary of the Third International who accompanied us presented our authorization papers.

After being led to the first floor, the same papers were presented to the commandant of the hotel and, after he alerted the hotel staff of our arrival, after a long wait, we were told which rooms we were to occupy.

After having washed and put on clean clothes, we were awaiting the arrival of a high official of the Third International who was supposed to examine our credentials when one of the women who worked for the hotel appeared and asked for comrade Pestaña.

You can understand how upset and shocked I was, when I heard this hotel employee tell me that someone from Petrograd wanted to speak with me.

“Tell him that I will be at his disposal in a few minutes.”

In my impatience to discover who wanted to see me, I ran up the stairs to the next floor.

I knocked on the door of the room that I was told my visitor occupied and, once I opened the door, I was face to face with Victor Serge (Kibalchich), who had not been heard from since his disappearance from Barcelona. I hadn't the least suspicion that he was in Russia.

We greeted one another with a strong fraternal handshake and, in Spanish, which he spoke with some difficulty, he asked me for news of all the anarchist comrades of Barcelona, of the organization, of the magazine *Tierra y Libertad*, where he had published such beautiful articles, and of a whole series of things, concerning which he had been unable to keep informed due to the blockade.

I answered his questions as quickly as possible and in turn asked him what was going on with his life and what was his opinion of the revolution.

"Come tonight," he told me, "to the hotel 'Astoria'. Ask for my room number, which I will give you now, and we shall have a nice long conversation about everything. Along the way you can see Berkman and Emma Goldman, who are staying in a room near mine, whom you will get a chance to know personally. The conversation will certainly prove to be interesting for you and for us."

"And how did you know I was here?" I asked him.

"I serve in a high position in the Third International. One of my responsibilities is to be immediately informed of who is coming from Europe and, when I saw your name, I came over to welcome you."

Now accompanied by Kibalchich, we descended to the first floor, where we awaited the arrival of comrade Tom Rech, a delegate of the American communists to the Third International, [*just who this is cannot be determined with certainty; perhaps John Reed?*—translator's note] who had been in Russia since the time of the First Congress held in the previous year, to whom we handed over our mandates and from whom we received our instructions.

"Tomorrow," he told us, "we shall depart for Moscow at two in the afternoon. The session of the Executive Committee of the Third International will deliberate regarding the petition of Cachin and Frossard to admit the French Socialist Party into the Third International. You may take part in the debate. Now you can eat, since you have received your itinerary, and then you can visit a Soviet institution."

I should mention that our journey from Berlin to Petrograd and then to Moscow was made in the company of Rosmer, the delegate of the Committee of the Third International from Paris, his companion and Abramovich, already mentioned, although the latter departed from us in Petrograd, where he was replaced by Murphy and another person.

We ate a quick meal, since we were eager to reconnoiter the capital founded by Peter the Great and to view from up close the havoc wrought by the war, the revolution, and, above all, to mix with the people, since we were unable to speak to them because none of us spoke Russian.

The first place we went was the Cathedral of St. Isaac, which was located right in front of the Hotel International. Its huge doors were wide open.

Inside we found a large scaffold, raised for some construction purpose, but one could see that it had been unused for a very long time. The declaration of war had interrupted this work, like so many other enterprises.

Within the basilica, crowded around a priest and an altar full of icons, we found about three hundred people, most of whom were women. We also noticed the presence of a few soldiers of the Red Army.

The priest spoke in a sad and prophetic tone; his voice, in Russian, was awe-inspiring and resonant.

He seemed to be accusing his penitent listeners.

We departed, but not before admiring the magnificence of the building.

We walked towards the Neva, a river that, as everyone knows, divides Petrograd and connects it with the naval base at Kronstadt.

We came to the Troitsky Bridge, which spans the river between the Winter Palace, formerly the customary residence of the Czar in Petrograd, and the Admiralty.

The panorama was quite appealing. To the right was the Winter Palace, which the Bolsheviks first wanted to transform into a Museum, but then shut down; to the left, the Admiralty. The Troitsky Bridge in front of us, and also in front of us, although on the other side of the Neva, the Stock Exchange, also closed. A little further away, threatening and somber because of the tragedies it evokes, is the famous Peter and Paul Fortress.

We reclined on the bridge, watching the river but without any intention of crossing it. We paid a visit to the Palace of Labor, a pompous title that was given to a workers dormitory. We visited various offices of the Palace of Labor, whose organization was not yet totally closed down.

The entire organization had not been closed down due to the difficulties encountered on a daily basis in the stockpiling of materiel as well as bureaucratic red tape.

You will forgive me for repeating that, in all the official departments and buildings of the State, which were very numerous, the busts of Karl Marx appeared with a fetishistic abundance. You could not enter a department or an office, or pass by a government building, without the appearance of the bust of the founder of historical materialism inducing silent gestures of reverence.

Even so, the abundance of these little sculptures was nothing compared to the quantity of portraits of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky and Zinoviev, which are everywhere.

These portraits were normally seen in groups of three, with two of the figures, Marx and Lenin, being represented in almost every group, and if either one of them was missing it would be Marx. For Lenin's portrait was never omitted. Trotsky and Zinoviev were variably

represented. Whether Trotsky's or Zinoviev's portrait was displayed depended on their popularity in the office or department in question.

We shall not speak of the red flags. There were tens of thousands of them. Indoors and outdoors, in every corner, you see nothing but red flags. While the buildings are *dressed up* in red bunting, the Russians walk about the streets in rags.

After having inspected most of the Palace of Labor, we walked to the Ouritsky Square, and then, to the Palace Square, upon which the main doors of the Winter Palace open. It is a circular plaza of regular dimensions, at the entrance to which, on the side where the Admiralty is located, the famous events of 1905 took place. That was where Father Gapon, the agent provocateur in the pay of the police, led the workers demonstration. The defenseless crowd, which was only requesting bread from the *Little Father* of all the Russians, was machine-gunned from the Admiralty and the Winter Palace.

We walked at random through the various streets to get an idea of the city and the damage inflicted by the war and the revolution.

The spectacle could not have been more depressing.

Where there were once elegant and spacious shops, cafes or restaurants, nothing remained. Everything was closed and shuttered by the neighborhood Soviets. You could see, through holes, broken windows and shattered doors, the filthy and dust-filled interior of these shops. The shelves of some stores seemed about ready to collapse; the counters and furniture, covered with a thick layer of dirt and dust, were rendered useless.

And this sad wreckage offered for our consideration was all that remained of the almost-Asiatic splendor and luxury accumulated by the brutal and cruel nobility of Czarist Russia!

The streets presented the same depressing aspect. Some of them were impassable to traffic.

It was hard to get anywhere in the streetcars. Service was cut back for lack of parts. On the other hand, public transportation was free or almost free, and all forms of transport were always jam-packed with passengers. Due to the large crowds of passengers, there was a constant succession of hilarious incidents, such as I remember from my time in Madrid during the good times of the Romanones.

I have already commented on the general appearance of the people. There was, however, one exception: the sailors.

The sailors comprised an aristocracy with regard to their pay and the esteem in which they were held. It was to them that the Bolsheviks owed their seizure of power, since it was the sailors of Kronstadt who initiated and almost single-handedly carried out the coup d'état that overthrew Kerensky and stopped Broussilov's offensive, when the latter abandoned the front and led his army towards Petrograd to fight the Bolsheviks. The sailors of Kronstadt and Petrograd were the armed force upon which the Bolsheviks relied, and were in turn paid back with the enjoyment of all the privileges that the Soviet Republic could lavish on its most distinguished defenders.

Later that evening, at nine o'clock, exhausted by so much walking, we returned to the hotel. If it had not been for the silence, we would not have had any idea of how late it was, for, despite the advanced hour, it was like day, a white night, and there was not the least indication that it would get any darker. This phenomenon, which we had already experienced during our passage through the Gulf of Finland, was nonetheless still so unfamiliar to us that we lost any idea of what time it was.

After we had our dinner, since it was still broad daylight, we went to the hotel "Astoria", where Kibalchich and our other friends were waiting for us.

We entered the Guard's office and asked for permission to enter the hotel, since we wanted to speak to Kibalchich. The guard checked our papers and authorized our visit.

Kibalchich, like Berkman and Emma Goldman, occupied several rooms on the upper floors—fourth or fifth floors—and since the elevators were out of order, we had to walk up the stairs.

We had some trouble finding their rooms, disoriented by the vast labyrinth of hallways and stairwells.

When we arrived at Kibalchich's room he told us that Berkman and Emma were not at the hotel, that they had left, either earlier that day or the previous day, on an official mission outside the city and were therefore unavailable for an interview.

We expressed our regret at their absence and told Kibalchich the reason for our visit.

We wanted information; but reliable information, information that does not have the ambiguous and always deceptive character of official information. Need I mention that it is to Kibalchich that I owe the best reports and the most profound criticisms of centralism and the dictatorship of the proletariat?

When I recall the words and advice of Kibalchich not to let myself be deceived by the ostentatious and theatrical information that the official institutions would provide to us, and the reports that persons hostile to Bolshevism provided to me through either official channels or on their own initiative, it makes me laugh at that gigantic battle that is currently being waged to harness the anarchists and the syndicalists to the chariot and the retinue of the victor!

Neither hatred nor sectarianism guide my pen: but when I see the role that is currently being played by the individual who first tried to convince me of the truth of all the Bolshevik tricks and deceits in order to make me believe, as he did, that it could not have been done any other way, and that we have to imitate them, if we do not want to bring about the failure of the revolution, the truth, I think, is either that Kibalchich is not sincere now, or that he has lost the critical and rational spirit that once characterized him.

"Just imagine," he told me, "to what extremities centralism could be pursued, taking into account how far it has already gone. I am one of the high officials of the Government. You see it; I live in better accommodations. I have an intellectual's ration card and I earn one of the highest salaries. Furthermore, my privileged position, because my work is indispensable for the revolution and the party, causes me and my colleagues to be treated differently, and we enjoy a whole series of privileges that Soviet employees of the same category who serve

in other departments do not enjoy. Very well; pay very close attention to what I am going to tell you.”

“When I arrived here from France, I brought a pair of boots that were in good condition. By being careful and making a few minor repairs, they were pounding the pavement until last winter. But the day came where I could no longer wear them. It was physically impossible. Three months before that, at the beginning of winter, I had requested a pair of boots from Zinoviev; he promised me they would be delivered; and he gave me a voucher so I could get them from the supply depot. Three months passed and I was still unable to obtain these boots. Disgusted and exasperated by such a bothersome delay, I thought: ‘I won’t take another step. Without shoes I will either stay home or go to the office in my bare feet.’”

“A few days passed. But I was tormented by the cold and the rain and suffered a great deal due to my lack of shoes.”

“I spoke a second time to Zinoviev, and I informed him of my wretched situation.”

“He filled out another voucher, and then an Expediting Order so that the boots would be delivered to me.”

“I had to go to seven different offices. In each one I had to undergo a whole procedure and register the boots that were going to be delivered to me. It took another three days for me to be cleared to enter the storage depot where the shoes were located. And, imagine my surprise, *amigo* Angel, when I saw that there were no more than twenty-five pairs of boots in the warehouse! And what was more surprising than the fact that there were only twenty-five pairs of boots in the inventory of the warehouse, was the fact that in order to obtain a pair of these boots, I had to go to seven different offices staffed by more than fifty employees. The bureaucracy that centralism has been forced to create paralyzes and destroys any attempt at reform and renewal.”

Our conversation wandered over many other fields of inquiry; I will postpone relating some of them for now because they belong to another part of my account; but I will provide a summary of the other issues we spoke about.

We became immersed in an interesting conversation in which he analyzed the activities of the anarchists in the revolution and he informed me about some things that I shall attempt to summarize as accurately as possible.

“The activities of the anarchists in the revolution,” Kibalchich began, “are of the greatest interest and merit the attention of the anarchists of Europe and the entire world. See if this is not the case, and judge for yourself whether it is true that, after having been a decisive factor in the progress of the revolution, they are now (note well that I said *they are now* rather than *we are now*, since I belong to the Party, and I am officially a communist, which is why I do not want to represent myself to you as an anarchist with a clear conscience), they are now reduced to a satellite of Bolshevik Power, and either accept the dictatorship of the proletariat or else become prison fodder. You will see that the difference is significant.”

“You know well that, in Russia, before the revolution, most anarchist groups, due to the country’s poverty, which did not permit the devotion of resources to propaganda, had

generalized the struggle in the form of direct armed attacks on banks or persons carrying large sums of money, some of which was then devoted to propaganda.”

“This system, which has the advantage of not requiring the expenditure of considerable economic efforts on behalf of the dissemination of ideas, is ultimately totally negative and harmful in its effects on the morality of the individuals involved. They say that function determines the morphology of an organ; in this case this is fully confirmed: the function of armed assault and violence determines the development of the individuals who carry it out, and engenders in them the habits of the remorseless expropriator. And while the constant risks taken by such an individual who devotes his life to such an occupation nourish the highest degree of bravery, it is also true that they extirpate all sense of organization and cohesion for any task other than that of robbery and expropriation, which have molded his temperament.”

“And so it was that in Russia, during the first moments of the Revolution, the anarchist groups were the first to attack and confront the enemy; and later, during the coup d'état that overthrew Kerensky and put Lenin in power, it was the anarchists who usually were the first to take the initiative, always fighting in the front ranks at the most dangerous locations. In the defense of Petrograd, when Yudenitch and his armies had reached the outskirts of the city, the anarchists, whose trenches you saw from your train car, were in the front line and occupied the most dangerous and exposed positions. They dragged the people to the trenches and they remained there until the end, while Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev and company prudently left for Moscow. But after this, after their heroic defense in the trenches and after fighting so valiantly, you no longer saw them anywhere. They closed themselves up in their houses or their clubs, and made speeches, without any serious involvement in the prosaic details of a reality that was, at that time, superior to any abstract conception of ideas.”

“Some comrades spoke out, and even today they are still doing so, and tried to make them see the dangerous situation of the revolution; but most just carried on as before and neither wanted to listen nor were capable of listening to their warnings.”

“And they are still making speeches and pronouncing a continuous stream of sophistry, full of elegant and passionate language, unaware of the harm they are inflicting on themselves by their actions, which, fundamentally, the anarchists must reject if they are employed systematically.”

“I already told you that individual or group expropriation is practiced constantly by the Russian anarchists, and this is recommended in their propaganda as a necessity. As I said; this practice leads to harmful effects on behavior and morality.”

“Whereas in the first revolution, above all due to the feeble resistance offered by the bourgeoisie to the overthrow of the Czarist regime, collective expropriations did not play an important role, they were numerous in the second period.”

“The slogan, ‘All Power to the Soviets’, was no sooner shouted in the streets, or rather, its program put into effect—since the slogan itself was first propagated from the first day of the March revolution—collective and spontaneous expropriations became very numerous, and during this period you saw these anarchists who had practiced expropriation as a system of propaganda, go into banks and loot them, seizing millions of rubles, or gems and valuables of all kinds, and go to the houses that seemed to be the most luxurious and comfortable, and

evict their inhabitants onto the street and move other people in, without wanting to be bothered by any other responsibilities.”

“The criminal—in the way this word is used by capitalist regimes and literature—is awakened in these individuals, eclipsing and destroying the idealist, the man of conscience and anarchist ethics.”

“No matter how many suggestions were made to them that they should desist from their appalling labor, they were ignored; all these warnings, recommendations and appeals made to them by their own comrades in ideas, to prevent them from destroying by their example the transformative meaning of the change from individual to collective property that the revolution was impressing on everything, clashed with the habits acquired after a few experiences with expropriations carried out against the Czarist capitalists.”

“But even this would not have been enough to arouse the animosity of the population against them if, by an incomprehensible paradox, they had not also refused, even, to take their place in the factory and workshop. In the name of freedom, interpreted in such a way that it means anyone can do as he pleases, there was no way to make them see reason. The practice of expropriation for propaganda purposes, in the past, had led to the elaboration among their ranks of an anti-anarchist understanding (there is no other way to say it) of their own ideas.”

“This is why, when the Bolsheviks appealed to them to submit to the Bolsheviks’ mandates, the people, who had seen the anarchists, scornful of danger, fighting bravely, but then witnessed them distancing themselves from collective problems in order to wall themselves off in a position that has more in common with the old, destroyed reality than with the gestation of new realities, then failed to come to the aid of the anarchists and the Bolsheviks were victorious.”

“If the anarchist groups, with a few exceptions, had not been imbued with this bastardized sentiment that has nothing in common with the anarchist philosophy but is instead the result of the unfolding of an incomprehensible paradox, due in part to the degree to which these ideas are tolerated in the anarchist movements of almost every country, have no doubt my dear friend, the Bolsheviks would not have been victorious in Moscow; they would not have even dared to confront the anarchists in such a case. The people, who know them well from having seen them fight so courageously against Czarism, would have stood by their side and would have defended them.”

“Now more than ever, with the evidence of this comparative study of practice in relation to ideas, I understand the reason why you Spanish anarchists systematically reject individual expropriation in your groups.”

“Persevere in your conduct and do not allow this theory of individual expropriation, on the pretext of providing resources for propaganda, to infiltrate your groups. If these ideas infiltrate into your groups someday, the harm that will be inflicted on them will be incalculable.”

At the time, Kibalchich was right. But could we say the same thing now?

“With regard to this issue, the Russian Bolsheviks were completely in the right, despite the complaints of the anarchists.”

“And as proof of the influential role the anarchists could have played in the subsequent unfolding of the revolution, if it had not been for these defects I just described, you may judge for yourself by considering the great number of those persons who were or still are anarchists, like me, for instance, but who then renounced their own comrades, and now occupy positions and perform jobs preferentially granted to them in the Soviet regime. There are many occasions when questions of the greatest importance are subject to our judgment. You will have an opportunity to be convinced of this as you spend some time among us.”

Our conversation also touched on the topic of the cruelty that was attributed to the Bolsheviks in Europe.

“It is true,” he told me, “there is no doubt that in a great many cases it was unnecessary; but not always. The Extraordinary Commission, the tribunal presided over by Dzerzhinsky, the Robespierre of Bolshevism, is a terrible thing. It arrests, imprisons, judges and shoots without giving the defendant time to mount any kind of defense; he cannot even discover the real reason for his death. There are truly monstrous cases. I will tell you about some of them.”

“An engineer was arrested and accused of having sold three pounds of sugar in exchange for 36,000 rubles which, in reality, only possess a nominal value, and was brought before the Extraordinary Commission. The Extraordinary Commission condemned him to death.”

“The reason he received the death sentence was that, prior to the revolution, he was a member of the Menshevik Party.”

“The engineer’s wife alerted some of his friends to the engineer’s predicament, and they came to see me, and we filed a legal appeal on his behalf. We were promised that he would be pardoned; then, three days later we read in *Izvestia* that he had been shot that morning. I could tell you about hundreds of similar cases.”

“And what can you tell me,” I asked him, “about the black market?”

“Regarding this question, I cannot even provide you with a vague reflection of what is really happening. Speculation and robbery are the order of the day. State warehouses are sacked and looted right under the noses of the guards.”

“The following story is a typical case:”

“There was a shortage of butter in Petrograd. The local Soviet was unable to supply so much as a kilo of butter. The shortage was so bad that even the hospitals were unable to obtain this food. The speculators, fearful of suffering serious punishments, did not dare to reveal the truth about the stockpiles of butter they had concealed, or about how they prevented their hoards in the provinces from reaching Petrograd. But it was a good time to make windfall profits. So what should be done?”

“At one of the meetings of the Soviet, when the question was brought up for debate, a citizen came forward and said that he could deliver a truckload of butter for 100,000 rubles (which everyone knew that he had originally purchased for 8,000 rubles), but that he needed authorization for transport, since the truck with the butter was in the provinces.”

“The Soviet accepted the offer and authorized the transport of the butter. Two days later the truck loaded with butter reached the capital.”

“A delegate of the Soviet arrived to acknowledge the receipt of the butter and to make the promised payment.”

“All the terms of the agreement having been fulfilled, the truck was sealed and four guards were posted nearby, who were relieved every two hours.”

“The next day, two military trucks came to take the butter away. The seals were broken, they opened the doors, and ... there was nothing in the truck! It was completely empty! No one could discover either when or how the butter had been stolen.”

“The soldiers were interrogated; but each group of four put the blame on the unit they had relieved or the one that relieved them. The only certainty was that the whereabouts of the butter was unknown.”

“You must have seen numerous men and women at the train station,” he continued, “carrying luggage of all kinds; with ten or fifteen liter bottles, full of milk, because almost all these foods are destined for the black market. And don’t think that those who buy are only the dispossessed bourgeoisie or workers; we all buy on the black market, even us, if we did not we would starve to death. The rations we receive only represent a minor percentage of what is necessary to live; we need to find the rest and buy it from the speculators.”

“In Moscow you will see many curious instances of this kind of thing. Take a walk along the Sukharevka and see for yourself.”

“What’s that?”, I asked him.

“It is a market that the Soviet did not want to shut down because it was the market for second-hand goods. You have something like it in the *Encantes* in Barcelona, or the *Rastro* in Madrid.”

It was late. Just past two in the morning. Our interest in what he was telling us caused us to want to stay there until the time when we were scheduled to leave for Moscow; but because we did not want to take too much advantage of the comrade’s good will, we had to tell him that our conversation was at an end for now.

We said goodbye, and he promised to visit us in Moscow and to speak of many other things.

We went back to our hotel enchanted by the beauty of the night; but we were somewhat disturbed by what we had just heard.

The guard at the hotel was, like the morning of our arrival, mounted by two beautiful amazons with long blonde hair, and instilled us with a certain admiration due to the fact that they had cigarettes dangling from their lips.

Their somewhat masculine uniforms, the rifles on their shoulders and the cigarettes in their mouths, reminded us of that other kind of feminism that was popular in Spain.

They subjected our papers to minute examination, and with a gesture made us understand that we could proceed.

We went up the stairs. The desk clerk gave us the keys to our rooms and we took our rest.

The exertions of the day and the emotional turmoil of our experiences required a little relaxation, so we fell asleep almost right away after lying down.

Chapter 2

On the Road. Two Days in Moscow.

We got out of bed a little late. Our plan to get up at seven in order to take a walk before departing for Moscow came to nought.

We did not know anyone, we could not speak the language, but we wanted to put ourselves in contact with the people. How? It will be understood that it was not easy for us since we lacked the indispensable means for its realization. But our eagerness was more than a match for this situation, or at least impelled us to attempt to overcome any obstacles.

Lacking the primary vehicle for information, the ability to speak the Russian language, we tried to compensate for this shortcoming as effectively as possible, and there was no better way to do this than to walk around in every neighborhood and mix with the people. To see, to feel, and to get first-hand impressions.

When we awoke and saw that our room was flooded with light, we realized that we had slept longer than we intended. We had indeed. It was nine o'clock.

We got out of bed determined to do as much as we could to compensate for sleeping late with more energetic activity in pursuit of our goal.

We dressed, went downstairs to eat breakfast, and when we were ready to leave for our walk, we received a notice from the Committee of the Third International that we should await further orders.

Somewhat annoyed, we resigned ourselves to waiting. What else could we have done? Maybe the Committee had something interesting in store for us, and first things first. "We shall make the best of what time we have," we told ourselves.

We wasted the whole morning waiting for our orders. They did not arrive until noon, and as it turned out they were of no importance whatsoever. Their purpose was to notify us that the meeting of the Executive Committee would be held the next day and that we must attend, which we already knew.

We chatted for a while with Tom Rech, who was the bearer of the message from the Committee, waiting for lunch and our departure, since we were leaving for Moscow at two. We had foolishly wasted the entire morning.

The food we were served in the Hotel International, like the food we were served later at the "Delavoy Dvor" in Moscow, was an exceptional ration. In this respect as in all others, the delegates were the real aristocracy of the country. The poverty and hunger of the people contrasted with the treatment that we received. And how some of the delegates abused this advantage!

At one o'clock they came to tell us that the automobile was ready and waiting for us whenever we wanted to leave. Since we did not want to just hang around at the hotel, we chose to go to the station, and wait there for the train.

At the station we were witnesses to the same spectacle we saw the previous morning, upon our arrival in Petrograd.

All the trains, both those departing and those arriving, were full of bedraggled and miserable people who, with sacks, shawls, strips of cloth, baskets, bottles and other utensils, were coming to and leaving Petrograd, in search of the food that they could not find in their neighborhoods. The only difference between them was that those who were leaving Petrograd were not burdened with so much baggage as the ones arriving in Petrograd. The clothes and the shoes that they used in their transactions with the peasants did not take up as much space as the products for which they were exchanged, and that was why they carried more baggage on their return to Petrograd.

We were directed to the train that was to take us to Moscow, and we could observe that all of its cars were passenger cars, in a dilapidated condition, it is true, but at least they were passenger cars.

The sleeping car that we took from Reval was already coupled and ready to board.

We spent a couple minutes on the platform, but the heat, which was already stifling at that hour, made us decide to board the car. It should be borne in mind that, the clocks having been turned back three hours in order to save lighting costs, it was really only eleven o'clock in the morning, Europe time; which is why we said that the heat was already stifling.

The Russian countryside was monotonous and depressing. Forests and more forests; prairies and more prairies; always the same. Every now and then there was a lake or a stream and nothing else. The fir is the tree that is most abundant here. There were times when the train would go for miles and miles without seeing anything on either side of the tracks but the branches of trees. We were told that in the summer there are often forest fires in the forests along the train's route. The locomotive boilers were fueled with wood, and even though the smokestack is covered with an iron grating, numerous burning brands and sparks emitted by the firebox fly out of the smokestack. The heat and the dry sticks and leaves do the rest. Thousands and thousands of trees burn on these occasions, and nothing can be done about it, since it is almost always necessary to fight the fire a long way from where it started.

From the windows of the train we also see the miserable ramshackle *isbahs* of the Russian peasants.

The big cities of Russia are small by comparison with the one hundred and thirty million inhabitants of the country.

There are only two cities with populations of more than one million inhabitants: the two capitals, Moscow and Petrograd. There are no more than forty cities with between one hundred thousand and one million inhabitants, and about the same number of cities with a population between twenty thousand and one hundred thousand inhabitants. The rest of the population is distributed among towns and villages. From the train we saw a series of collections of *isbahs* that comprise villages or small towns.

At every station gangs of children surround the train, begging or trying to sell things; milk, apples or other kinds of fruit, for which they would not accept money in exchange. If you give them rubles they tell you that they do not want them; they want a scarf, or sugar or salt. Especially salt. Their happiness knew no limit when they got some salt. We also saw numerous women working on repairing the tracks. They constituted the majority of the work gangs on the tracks. We saw many on the boxcars shoveling ballast, dirty and disheveled.

At some stations we could observe the cause of the difficulties that afflicted rail transport in Russia. In the switchyards of some stations, you can see hundreds of boxcars and dozens of locomotives that were out of service, which, because they could no longer be repaired, had to be mothballed. It is here that one may observe the criminal and inhuman consequences of the blockade.

Almost all the materials needed for the repair of the Russian rail network were imported from other countries before the revolution. Once the blockade was established, it was not possible to find substitutes for these materials, and the authorities had no choice but to reduce rail transport service due to the lack of the necessary rolling stock.

We were also able to observe the influence exercised on the Russian people by religious ideas.

In many stations there were altars or small chapels adorned with icons, and most people made the sign of the cross three times when passing by one of the icons. This scene was repeated with great frequency in Moscow and the interior of Russia; but since we hardly ever saw it in Petrograd it struck us all the more forcefully.

Another peculiarity of Russian customs is that in every station, no matter how small, there is a pot of hot water, almost boiling, which is zealously tended by an employee of the station. From these pots the travelers obtain the water to make their tea.

Because there are no mountains in the provinces of central Russia, the water is not very good to drink during the summer, and in the winter it freezes due to the cold; hence the popularity of tea. And so that the traveler may prepare his tea in comfort, every station has hot water, which is distributed gratis.

In the afternoon the comrade in charge of the diplomatic mail, the same person who had accompanied us from Reval, notified us that Zinoviev wanted to speak with us.

We were shocked. We did not know that Zinoviev was on the train.

We had noticed, however, that at the end of the train a special car had been added, which no one ever boarded or left, except four soldiers who, with fixed bayonets, were posted near the four doors to the car once the train stopped in a station and would allow no one to approach

the car they guarded. We just assumed that they were the escort for the train. Only later did we realize that this was Zinoviev's special car.

Because we wanted to meet him and shake his hand, we did not delay. We immediately walked to his car, and were astonished at what we saw.

More than just a train car, this seemed to be the luxurious boudoir of a wealthy celebrity.

It had three compartments: one, which served as a conference room and dining car, sumptuously appointed, with furniture that was plain but of the best quality; another, which served as an office, with its writing desk, its bookcase and its comfortable bed; and a third that housed the kitchen.

"It is one of the items confiscated by the Soviet Government," Zinoviev told us, when he saw us staring at the furniture. "In Russia, during the times of the Czars, it was fashionable for the great dukes, princes and major landowners to travel in private coaches. They enjoyed the same kind of comfort when they traveled on the navigable waterways. On the Volga, which I like to visit, there are dozens of luxury steamboats."

"This car has been placed at my disposal by the Government, in my capacity as the current president of the Third International and a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party. It once belonged to a Grand Duke, who has on several occasions made vain appeals to have it returned to him. Neither this car, nor any other, will be returned to their previous owners. They are the property of the State and the State will use them for its purposes."

He continued, changing the subject:

"I have summoned you here to have a little conversation and to invite you to dine with me. I have already given the cook the order to prepare dinner for all of us. For now, we shall have tea."

Because a complete account of our exchange with Zinoviev must be reserved for a subsequent chapter, we shall limit ourselves to a brief summary.

Zinoviev asked us for reports on the social and political movements of the respective countries of the delegates who were present. We spoke about what we believed to be relevant and correct, and he told us about Russia, his personal enthusiasm for the Revolution, what the Party had accomplished in the Revolution and the work that it still hoped to carry out. Finally, he sang the praises of the "dictatorship of the proletariat", without which the revolution is impossible in any country.

Communism, especially the Bolshevik variety, according to Zinoviev, was the magic talisman, the *open sesame*, the panacea that must confer happiness upon mankind.

I ventured to object that I did not understand just what kind of communism was established in Russia, since, in my view, communism was only possible as a realization of the formula, "To each according to his needs, from each according to his abilities", and that, furthermore, I thought that, in a communist regime, wage labor, not to speak of wage differentials, is incompatible with what I understood by communism.

“The fact that there are thirty-four wage categories, and that State officials work six hours, while the legal working day in the factories is eight hours, do not seem to me to be communist practices,” I added.

“I know that you are an anarchist,” he said, laughing, “and that, for that reason, you are somewhat imbued with petit-bourgeois ideas; but you will see, you will see almost as soon as you have some experience with our methods, how you will be immersed in the practice of real communism.”

“In addition, the practice of communism,” he continued, “cannot be carried out on such a vast scale. Everything for the State, nothing for the individual. The State confiscates everything, it seizes everything and puts everything to use for the benefit of the community, which in this case is the entire country. The country, or more properly, each individual, must blindly collaborate under the strictest discipline for the benefit of the State and in the way and the form that the State commands. Because all the benefits of this collaboration accrue to the State, the latter then shares these benefits in accordance with the importance of the service performed by each person. This is the real communism, not the one propagated by the anarchists.”

“I do not understand,” I replied. “It seems to me that this has nothing to do with communism. At the most it is the collectivism that the Belgian socialist Vandervelde advocates in one of his books. Here there is an employer: the State; and a proletariat: the people. And if the worker has to work for any kind of pay, and if the surplus of what he produces cannot be distributed as he wishes, or be used in accordance with voluntary mutual contracts, and if the worker must accept them in the form that State wishes to deliver them to him, there is no communism; there is nothing but a more or less radical collectivism. That is all. As long as there are classes, social distinctions or categories, communism is not possible. And here there are, if not classes, at least categories, from the very moment that wages are not equal and each worker occupies the category that the Factory Committee assigns to him.”

“You will be convinced,” he responded, “that you are mistaken.” And then the conversation moved on to another subject.

It was getting late and dinner was served.

Once the dinner was over, we spoke a little more, although this time about trivial matters, and then retired to our car.

We went to bed and slept until the train was close to Moscow. Four automobiles were awaiting us at the station, which took us to the hotel, the “Delavoy Dvor”, which had just been renovated in anticipation of the arrival of the delegates to the Second Congress of the Third International.

A little later we left the hotel and went to the offices of the former German Embassy in Moscow, the official headquarters of the Communist International, where the meeting of the Executive was to be held.

I will not relate a detailed account of all the incidents or the sessions of the Congress, since I have already done so in a pamphlet, which I published in my capacity as a delegate to the Congress under the title, “Considerations and Judgments Concerning the Third International”.

First, however, I would like to provide a summary of an interview I had with Drizo, or Lozovsky, as he is known by both names.

On the day following our arrival in Moscow, June 30th, in accordance with plans we made on the previous day, after the end of the meeting of the Executive of the Communist International, we had an interview with Lozovsky, a real journalistic type of interview, that was to prove most useful in our subsequent conduct during our visit to Russia.

It is a documented historical fact that the organization of Trade Unions in Russia arose after the movement of 1905. After having drowned the movement in blood, which was on the verge of overthrowing the Czarist regime, the nobility and the bourgeoisie recognized the necessity of conceding a margin of freedom to the aspirations of the people, and on the margins of this freedom so conceded, the first trade union organizations were born.

When we say that they were conceded a margin of freedom, we do not mean to say that they were allowed to develop freely, or with any normal degree of freedom; what we mean to do is to provide a general picture of the very beginning of a concession which the bloodbath had exacted from Czarism, already mortally wounded, and the reforms the people extracted from the temporary lull in the repression.

The reaction that followed the bloody events of 1905 was extremely cruel; but if the political parties that had intervened in the movement were decimated by the repression, so was the regime that exercised the repression.

The bourgeoisie and the nobility were convinced that it was much more practical to open up a safety valve for the growing unrest and protest on the part of the working class, than to oppose with systematic violence the discontent which indisputably existed among the population, and therefore tolerated the formation of workers associations for the purpose of pursuing class-based economic reforms.

The growth of the trade unions was so rapid and the trade unions were so firmly entrenched, that the Government, no longer daring to withdraw what it had conceded, created an organization of spies and agents provocateurs, which allowed it, under the aegis of false movements and always-anonymous denunciations, to carry out mass arrests, with which it achieved two goals: it neutralized the most energetic and capable workers by sending them to Siberia or to the gallows, and it temporarily broke up the organizations, which was necessary so that the bourgeoisie could get some breathing space and regroup.

The Russian political parties wanted their members to join the trade union organizations and take advantage of them for propaganda purposes, in the belief that the Government would assist them in this operation; but they soon realized that this was not possible. They discovered that not only could they not take advantage of the margin of toleration without serious risk to themselves, but that their best militants were being exposed to the wrath of a power that was as barbarous as it was dissolute. From that time forward, the political parties went their separate ways and the Trade Unions were free of their influence. Some still maintained relations with one or another party; but all their activities were carried out in a separate sphere.

Nonetheless, under the conditions of this separation that circumstances imposed on them with such irresistible force, the Trade Unions did not disappear, and extended their influence and their range of action, although gradually.

The declaration of war put the Russian Trade Unions, just like those of the other belligerent powers, in a tight situation; but later, unlike what happened in the other belligerent nations, the Russian Trade Unions managed to respond and created a powerful force. The political and economic decomposition of the country, which was the basis of the crucial weakness of Czarism, led to a vast growth in the power of the Trade Unions.

And Lozovsky had nothing to say about this stage of the growth of the Russian Trade Unions.

We do not want to distort the message of the president of the Russian General Confederation of Labor, and we shall follow our notes as faithfully as possible in presenting our summary of our conversation with him.

“Right after the March revolution, the first revolution,” he told us, “the Trade Unions grew at a shocking rate, and although they did so in a way that was different than the way they challenged the Czarist regime, they relentlessly pressured the Kerensky government to give full satisfaction to the demands of the people.”

“There was a time when it seemed that Kerensky was going to yield to the growing wave of organized mass unrest; but overwhelmed by the demands made by the foreign embassies, instead of leaning towards the popular cause, he joined the liberal bourgeoisie and the ‘cadets’ who represented them.”

“Then the Trade Unions, on their own initiative, led an aggressive movement against the government and the bourgeoisie, demanding an end to the war and an improved supply of the necessary means of life.”

“This movement, which began immediately after the first revolution and lasted until May, finally led to an impasse and a counterattack, and the bourgeoisie, which wanted revenge, began to engage in an endless series of lockouts and arbitrary decrees that in themselves caused the working class to react more violently than before.”

“I will present some snapshots of this vast struggle.”

“The workers, riding the wave of the events that would be generalized a few months later, began to take possession of the factories, putting into practice a procedure that had cost many years of imprisonment and many deportations to Siberia in the times of Czarism.”

“When the workers in a factory were not happy with the foreman, director or boss of their factory, and wanted to get rid of him, they proceeded in the following manner, which, I repeat, was already an old custom in Russia:”

“Each worker remained at his workplace, as if nothing had happened, and only set a guard at the door. When the first glimpse of the person they wanted to get rid of was announced, an alert was sounded, and everyone gets ready to act, but no one moves from their work stations or stops working.”

“When the victim had crossed the threshold of the factory, at a previously-agreed-upon signal all the workers advanced upon and surround him, forming a circle from which he cannot escape. Then a worker notifies him of the proposals of the workers, and if he voluntarily agrees to them, nothing happens; but if he resists, if he does not abide by their wishes, one of the workers gets a wheelbarrow, and they put the victim in it, and take him out of the factory, and when they get to the middle of the street they dump the wheelbarrow and there is our man covered in mud, everyone laughing at and making fun of him. Dirty, surrounded and embarrassed, he has to leave, because if he tried to go back to the factory his next ordeal would be worse. Something much more serious could happen to him.”

“Scenes like this took place on a daily basis in the streets of Petrograd and at the gates of the factories.”

“The workers’ unrest grew by leaps and bounds; Kerensky’s measures against the people and the imprisonment orders against the workers who evicted their bosses from their factories, only encouraged the workers and the Trade Unions of Petrograd and Moscow, and one could say that it was these elements that were the most direct impetus for the movement of the second revolution.”

“According to your account, the participation of the Trade Unions in the second revolution was quite significant,” I interjected.

“Without a doubt. And I can affirm that the Trade Unions were the spirit of the revolution.”

“And how did they perform afterwards?”

“Generally quite well, with certain exceptions.”

“The Trade Unions set themselves to work trying to organize labor and production, although they soon discovered that they could not do so. The corporatist spirit weighed more heavily in the scales of their decisions than did the interests of the collectivity.”

“So, for example, there is the case of the workers of the Provodnik factory who possessed naphtha (a motor fuel) in abundance. Since there was a shortage of naphtha to fuel the generators for the trolleys, a request was sent to Provodnik for some naphtha, which was categorically refused.”

“And what did the other workers do when informed of this refusal?”, I asked him.

“All the workers of the factory were invited to attend a meeting at the Labor Center, and there they were told that if they did not surrender some of their naphtha so that the trolleys could operate, they would be boycotted and would not be allowed to travel on the trolleys.”

“Did they comply?”

“What else could they do? Who could resist coercion on this scale, when there is a threat to the whole population?”

“So, it was moral coercion on the part of the other workers that made them surrender the naphtha.”

“There was no other way to force them to do so. Today, the whole affair would have been handled differently.”

“What is most interesting to me,” I replied, “is the confirmation of my assessment that the intervention of the Trade Unions in the revolutionary movement was important.”

“Of that you may be sure. Just as you may be sure that now, after the revolution, absolute harmony prevails between the General Confederation of Labor and the Communist Party. We work in common accord and following the platform of the party for the establishment of communism and the consolidation of the dictatorship of the proletariat. We proceed in absolute agreement with respect to these two factors. Party discipline imposes this duty, and we must submit to it.”

Our conversation had to come to an end, since Lozovsky was so busy with his responsibilities, and we said goodbye.

“One more thing,” he said to me, “do you want to join an excursion on the Volga that has been organized for the delegates? It will be very interesting! Since the Congress does not open until the fifteenth of next month, we will have enough time to penetrate into the heart of Russia, where you will be able to come into closer contact with the revolution. There are already more than twenty people signed up. All delegates.”

“We would also like to invite you to take part in a meeting that is being held tomorrow at one of the military camps on the outskirts of Moscow. We hope you do not let us down.”

“You can count on me to attend.”

I attended the meeting at the military camp the next morning. It was not at all to my liking, being an unrepentant anti-militarist, to contribute to militarist propaganda, but it gave me a chance to see the organization of a military base up close, so I took advantage of the opportunity.

We were received with all military honors.

The soldiers in the camp were drawn up according to their units, and among the ranks of the soldiers we walked to a pavilion occupied by the comrade commanding officer.

We were served with tea and then engaged in some conversation. The Extraordinary Commission of the camp, composed of men who were Party members, and whose mission was to spread communist propaganda among the soldiers, was placed at our disposal to ask them about anything we wanted to know.

So we started to ask them some questions.

“....?”

“The discipline is very strict. Without it we would not have been able to organize the Army. It was necessary to reinstate the death penalty and the most severe punishments, in order to prevent mass desertion. And not only is the soldier who deserts from the army punished, but

the village or the town where he takes refuge, if it does not denounce him, must pay a heavy fine for concealing him.”

“....?”

“The soldiers in the army read a great deal. If a soldier has a book that is almost disgusting, dog-eared and stained, he will nonetheless save it as if it were a precious jewel, an object of incalculable worth.”

“....?”

“They prefer literature. Also, the *communist literature* of the Party is widely circulated; but literature is preferred.”

“....?”

“Among the sciences, astronomy is favored, according to our calculations, by forty-five percent of the readers, a figure that is not approached by any other scientific discipline.”

“....?”

“As for the study of foreign languages, there is no language that comes close to Esperanto with regard to popularity, as it is studied by sixty percent of the students. We may say that, up until this point, it is the preferred language.”

“....?”

“The number of illiterates is declining significantly, and here we are approaching a situation where it is within our reach to reduce the number to zero. For now, when a soldier arrives who does not know how to read and write, the first thing we do is send him to the camp school. If he demonstrates a willingness to work hard and a desire to learn, he is immediately granted the enjoyment of normal treatment in the camp; if not, he is relegated to the most arduous fatigue duties in order to awaken in him the desire for learning. Not as a punishment, but as a corrective. And this procedure gives good results. We also can say that the cases where this is necessary are not numerous.”

“....?”

“We are always holding meetings. At least two or three times a week. Now, when we proceed to the place where you will have to speak, you will see the tribunal from which they are ordinarily addressed. Today we have omitted that stage so that you may speak.”

The man who seemed to be “in charge”, since every Commission has a chief, invited us to proclaim, wherever we went in the future, that the Red Army was organized and prepared to bring the revolution to every country. And that his desire was to be able someday to embrace in a town in central Europe one delegate of each one of the Red Armies formed in each country, since it was not possible to embrace every single soldier.

An officer notified the commander and the Commission that the troops were ready and waiting.

We went to the place where the meeting was to be held.

Along the way we passed in front of the ordinary tribunal, from which the orators ordinarily addressed the soldiers.

It was a platform of two square meters, mounted on four posts, about three meters high, with a ladder on the side for access. The four posts were fixed on a kind of wooden chassis with four wheels, which allowed it to be moved.

The scene of the meeting was a spacious parade ground in which, all along the outer boundaries, were gathered all the forces of the camp. We occupied the center. And, from there, we spoke, in French, which was then translated into Russian by comrade Lozovsky.

Chapter 3

An Excursion on the Volga

On the first day of June we left on a special train for Nizhny Novgorod.

The expedition was composed of twenty-seven foreign delegates, plus the Russians that the Committee of the Third International had assigned to accompany us and to serve as interpreters and intermediaries. The man “in charge” was Lozovsky.

Among the passenger list was the entire Italian delegation, with their venerable leader D’Aragona, the fence-sitter Serrati and the *amiable* and *listless* Bombacci, who was more interested in displaying his *good looks* than in studying what was going on in Russia. We were also joined by Cachín, Frossard, and Rosmer and his companion, from France.

We arrived at Nizhny Novgorod on the following day, at eleven in the morning, and were met at the station by the local Soviet Committee and all the official representatives of the government.

The local garrison troops, assembled around the station, received us with military honors. As soon as the train reached the vicinity of the station a band struck up the first few bars of “The Internationale”, the government’s official song.

Once the train had come to a halt, the music stopped. But we had hardly set foot on the platform and greeted the official representatives, when the band once again played the song and all those present, except for the delegates, stood at attention in a posture of military salute.

The military seriousness of these men left us speechless.

I had been under the impression that the Soviet would come to meet us, but without pretentious displays of any kind; I would never even have dreamed of what I saw; I would never have believed such a thing was possible.

Meanwhile, the people, the crowd, remained some distance away from us, since the cordon of troops that had formed prevented them from getting any closer. I think that even if they were

not prevented from doing so they would not have come any closer; but we shall refrain from commentary on this; we shall only relate the facts.

Once all the formal greetings and salutes came to an end, the scene rapidly changed and we boarded the cars that were waiting for us and left for the Volga, which a writer has referred to as “the backbone of Russia”.

The steamer was decorated and festooned with red flags and the placards of the Third International. Nor was the well known slogan, “Proletarians of all countries, unite!” missing.

Once we arrived at the steamer, we heard a tremendous noise that simultaneously sounded all around us. By order of the Soviet, all the sirens and horns of the ships and factories of the vicinity were saluting our arrival.

This din lasted for five minutes. Then, the band, which had just arrived, once again serenaded us with “The International”. Now this song was performed most majestically, since along with the sounds of the music the voices of the crowd singing the words joined in.

We were served a sumptuous banquet in the boat’s dining room.

The steamer possessed everything you could ask for with respect to comforts.

Just like the special rail cars that traveled the Russian rails in the times of Czarism, this steamer was one of the small specially outfitted steam-powered vessels that their owners used for excursions and scandalous orgies on the Volga.

The one we were using had once belonged to a famous nobleman.

Once the banquet was over, the car brought us to the city’s principal theater, where a meeting was scheduled.

The theater was full of people. Not one more person could have squeezed in there. Besides the curiosity that motivated them to hear what the delegates had to say, the local Soviet decreed that the day of our arrival would be a holiday, so that the people would come out to greet us.

Once the meeting was over, we returned to the boat, and it was decided that on the following day we would go upstream to visit the great metal factories of Sormovo; then, after visiting Sormovo, we would go downstream towards Nizhny Novgorod in order to then continue on towards Kazan, and then to Astrakhan, where Serrati proposed that we should disembark, if there was enough time.

The visit to the metal factories of Sormovo, which I believe, together with the metal factories of Putilov, in Petrograd, are the most important factories in Russia, brought us into contact, through the mediation of the official interpreters and delegates that accompanied us, with Russian workers.

Since it must be taken for granted that all our visits were always preceded by a notice from the Committee of the Third International and from the Soviet of the town we had just left, we were greeted by an official delegation in every town we visited.

Since Sormovo is not a municipality, properly speaking, but an industrial complex, some distance from any real cities, all those who live there work at its factories. When they are not working they have to leave the plant complex and the only authorities on the site are often the factory managers.

We were received by the factory manager, an enthusiastic communist who had lived for many years in Paris as an emigrant, and had returned to his country at the outbreak of the revolution.

We toured all the departments, most of which were in a very dilapidated condition, since the lack of raw materials prevented efficient work and postponed the repair of those defects that time and neglect cause.

These factories were built in order to compete with those of Putilov in the production of military goods during the Czarist era. They were unable to achieve their goal, and were redesigned for the construction of locomotives and agricultural machinery.

During the war they only made war goods, as they did at the time of our visit.

The workshops were quite impressive. Those that were in the best condition were the foundries and rolling mills and the ones that lathed and finished light artillery and machine guns. At the time of our visit they were building their first tank. They used a tank that the British had abandoned when the Red Army entered Baku as a model.

The British tank was partially dismantled and next to it was the new one they were building.

Once our tour of the factory complex was finished, a meeting was held, which was announced by the blaring of the plant's sirens.

Since the houses and apartments of the workers were within the factory grounds, the whole population attended the meeting to hear the speakers.

The attitude displayed by the great majority of those who attended the meeting was one of complete indifference. Seeing them, one would have thought that their sole desire was to adjourn this meeting as soon as possible so they can go home to eat dinner, since it was getting late in the day.

In the faces of most of the women who attended the meeting, one could detect scornful amusement and incredulity regarding what was being said.

We noticed that those who smoked cigarettes had no cigarette rolling paper; but ingenuity found a substitute.

With a scrap of paper from a magazine or any other source—the silk band in typewriters was much sought after—they made a finely crafted and elegant cone; then, on the open end of the cone they folded, in the shape of a square, a piece of about one or two centimeters in length. In this manner they improvised a pipe that they filled with tobacco, or something similar. The narrow part of the cone was cut off and now you have made a cigar. All you need is a match, and you can smoke. I have included an account of this procedure because it is so ingenious and because it shows how necessity is the mother of invention.

After having returned to the boat, we went downstream towards Nizhny Novgorod, where the boat docked and we had dinner. Once dinner was finished, we continued downstream towards Kazan, which we were scheduled to reach by the next day.

When the steamer was ready to depart, the serenade of the sirens and whistles recommenced, which lasted until we lost sight of the town.

The journey on the Volga was one of the most wonderful experiences of my life, and if I were capable of it, if my pen had the descriptive faculty of bringing to life on paper the beauty of a trip on such a great river, I would describe it for the delight of the reader. Not possessing such abilities, allow me to forebear from breaking the spell, and restrict my efforts to the task at hand.

Our reception in Kazan was not as impressive or as ostentatious as our reception in Nizhny Novgorod, perhaps because it was a less important city.

Upon disembarking we were met by the Soviet of the town and all the communist representatives. Again we were treated to the band playing "The Internationale" and all the military formalities.

We drove through the town in official automobiles, and at night attended another meeting.

I was beginning to get sick and tired of these public formalities.

The Soviet of the town had hardly just arrived on the stage, preceded by the speakers who were designated to address the crowd, along with all the delegates, and once everyone was seated, the band attacked "The Internationale".

The president of the local Soviet, who was the chairman of meeting, began the meeting with some opening remarks; after his opening speech, as he prepared to yield the floor to the first designated speaker, the band struck up more music and more "Internationale".

While the foreign speakers addressed the crowd, there was no applause, because the workers did not understand us; but once their speeches were translated into Russian, every paragraph was punctuated by applause, just as in the case of the Russian speakers; then the band played "The Internationale", which everybody had to stand there and listen to while the most fervent communists saluted with the military salute.

It was a veritable obsession. It ended up causing us such disgust that, to one degree or another, every one of us tried to sneak away if we heard there was going to be a meeting or an official reception.

That same evening we departed for Simbirsk.

Our reception at Simbirsk was just as elaborate as our reception at Nizhny Novgorod.

It was about one kilometer from the docks where we left the boat to the town, but we almost did not make it.

The cars were barely operational, but the Soviet did not have the means to repair them.

We were brought first to the social center of the Soviet, where we were treated to a snack.

After lunch we went to a large square, situated in the center of the town, in which all the troops of the garrison were assembled to attend another meeting with more music.

In the center of the military formation a stage was built in the shape of a funeral bier, about four meters high, for delivering speeches.

After watching the troops march in parade formation, some of us went to the theater and some to the Military Academy of the Red Army, where there was another meeting.

We watched a funeral procession that called our attention to a typical feature of Russia.

The casket was carried on the men's shoulders and was open. Its lid was carried by four persons who followed behind.

It is customary not to put the lid on the coffin until it is lowered into the ground. It would seem that no one wants to deprive the deceased from basking in the sunlight until the very last minute.

It will be understood that, now that we were in Simbirsk and on an officially authorized mission, there would be no lack of allusions to what was most important. And what could be more important for Simbirsk and for the communists than recalling that we were visiting Lenin's birthplace?

Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov Lenin, concerning whom Zinoviev said that his father "was of peasant origin" and that "he worked in the Volga region as the director of public schools", was the scion of the capital we found ourselves in at that moment.

All the speeches made on that day in Simbirsk were just so many panegyrics to the person who was the leader of the communists, "that revolutionary without peer, that man who knew how to lead the proletariat to the greatest epic achievement humanity has ever known".

Since I was not designated to take part in either meeting being held in Simbirsk that night, because I spoke at the one held on the square, I chose to attend the theater and get in touch with the civilian elements.

The crowd was large and it was hard to even approach the theater.

When I was seated in one of the chairs on the stage, Losovsky came to see me, in order to ask me if I wanted to attend the meeting at the Military Academy, since Serrati, who was designated to speak there with another delegate, was nowhere to be found.

I accepted his invitation, and immediately went to the Military Academy. We were served some tea and a sandwich in the Russian style, and then I had a little talk with Sadul.

Later we returned to the boat, in order to depart that same evening for Samara.

Near some shacks near the docks, among the piles of goods and the remains of things that had been abandoned there, we found about one hundred families squatting on the ground in the

most complete disorder. Promiscuity, filth and poverty betrayed a condition of profound suffering. I asked why they were there, and I was told that they were families who had fled to the interior of Russia the year before, due to the invasion of the White general Denikin, and that now they were returning to their homes.

They had been waiting for a boat for days, and meanwhile they had to camp out exposed to the elements and in the midst of so much filth, without anybody bothering about their awful situation.

That same night, we departed for Samara, where the official receptions, meetings and renderings of "The Internationale" were repeated.

We spent one day in Samara. From there we went to Saratov, after stopping in Marxstadt (city of Marx), which was an old German colony, first settled by the Germans who were coaxed to come here during the reign of Catherine the Great with privileges that were respected right up until the outbreak of the revolution.

In Saratov we left the river to return by train to Moscow, first passing through Tula and Ivanovo-Voznesensk.

Before we end our account of our excursion on the Volga and return to Moscow, we must mention a few things that will certainly be of interest to the reader.

Before arriving in Samara, we visited some mines that were just then being opened.

These were some very productive mines at Gips, a bituminous outcrop that was almost entirely composed of good coal.

This coal could be used as a fuel for kilns requiring a high temperature; foundries for steel and other metals, for example.

If it were to be subjected to further chemical reactions, one could obtain from this Gips coal substitutes for benzene and petroleum. The residues from this chemical process could also be utilized as a fuel for processing other minerals. The ash that results from the burning of this fuel can be used as a substitute for cement, since it has the same properties as cement.

Based on geological tests that were carried out on this coal seam, these mines almost certainly contain approximately 24 million "pounds" of coal. If one takes into account the fact that one Russian "pound" is equal to sixteen kilograms, one will get an idea of the immense wealth of this mine.

We passed through some Moslem villages, colonized centuries ago by Turkish immigrants, which still uphold their religious practices and customs, and we wanted to know what they thought about the Revolution.

The Revolution means nothing to these people. To the contrary, they complained a great deal about the government, because it did not tolerate the teaching of the Koran in school. They wanted their children to learn how to read; but only the Koran, they were not concerned about anything else.

We asked them if they were satisfied with the distribution of lands authorized by the government.

“Here,” they told us, “the land is the same as before. Everyone has what they need and they do not want more.”

The poverty of these people, who live in the most fertile part of all central Russia, as their villages are nestled in the area known as the “black earth” region, which produces most of the wheat consumed in Russia, was something that lacerates the soul.

Material poverty and spiritual poverty.

Their houses, like the people themselves, had a poverty-stricken, primitive and rudimentary look. They had no other wish than to learn how to read the Koran and vegetate in poverty.

We also visited some day care schools in the vicinity of Samara, where we were received with the same sumptuousness that characterized all our other receptions.

We were treated to a banquet and the little boys and girls declaimed speeches for the occasion.

I inquired about the rules that govern the admission of children to the day care schools. In these public day care schools, it would be logical to assume that there would be no admissions standards. I was told that all the boys and girls were the children of communists; since it was the communists who were responsible for the revolution, it was their offspring who were selected to enjoy preferential treatment. And in the day care schools, just as in every other Government institution, you are not admitted unless you are an active communist—a member of the party—and this applies to all jobs that have a limited number of openings. Where there are lots of jobs, non-communists are accepted.

We also visited the Chuvashia Republic, one of the many Republics that comprise the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic.

After we were told about the distinguishing characteristics of the country, we asked about the nature of the autonomy that these Republics enjoyed within the centralist Russian regime.

Our hosts responded with a full explanation. The Republics were autonomous, but they were obliged to abide by all the orders, laws and decrees proclaimed by the Soviets, and were not permitted to modify them in any way.

They were also obliged to adapt the laws and decrees issued from Moscow to the economic, social and political conditions of each country; to pay taxes, at the same rate and under the same terms and conditions as the other provinces; to deliver to the Red Army the men requested by the latter and to abide by the discipline of the Communist Party and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Since none of these explanations seemed to us to depict the autonomy they supposedly had and that they said that they enjoyed, we persisted in our objections and demands for clarification, and we came to the conclusion that all the autonomy they talked about was reduced to the fact that they could nominate residents of their respective Republics as

candidates for the positions of local officials and authorities, although the number of each and their actual power were determined in Moscow. In other words, there was no autonomy.

We wanted to know about the effects of the Revolution, not so much in its political aspect, but with respect to the distribution of the landed estates to the peasants, since this was a preeminently agricultural region.

Since we were speaking with the scions of this Republic, they told us that the decisions of the Government in Moscow, with respect to the land question, had produced appalling effects and had led to worse living conditions than those they had previously enjoyed during the times of Czarism.

“Here,” they told us, “in this country, since our ancestors first settled it, there was a custom that involved periodic redistribution of all the arable land. Every three years, after discussion in meetings and conclaves of neighbors, the land was redistributed, and to prevent someone from always being disadvantaged compared to others who received good land or land very close to the village, due to his being given a share of land that was relatively infertile or far from the village, the distribution was carried out in such a way that no one would receive the lands he cultivated during the previous cycle in the new repartition. Under this system, each farmer took turns cultivating good or bad lands, close to or far from the village, as the periodic redistribution determined.”

“Now, all of this has disappeared. The man who seized or was given good land or a parcel close to the village during the redistribution following the revolution, lives better, works less and obtains a greater profit than the man who was given infertile land or a parcel far from the village.”

“We see instances where lands that were previously cultivated now lie fallow, because they are far from the nearest village or produce a low yield, and the farmers who own them, having no hope of improving their condition by means of a subsequent re-distribution, abandon them and move away. And this does not even take into the account the many farmers disgusted with the current system.”

“Why do you not petition Moscow?”, we asked them. “Avail yourselves of your autonomous rights. Maybe you would be successful if you can get them to respect your autonomy.”

“We already tried,” we were told; “but we achieved nothing. And then, we waited so long for even the most cursory response, that it would have been better to leave things as they were! Besides, party discipline and our duty to prevent the counterrevolution from lifting its head obliged us to yield and to be patient with regard to many issues.”

In Saratov we visited a communist agricultural colony; we would call it a State Farm here in Spain. We went there hoping to see an instance of real communism being established.

This is what we were able to ascertain concerning its organization:

The “Communist Colony” was an old farm owned by one of the wealthiest landowners in the region.

Immediately after the revolution the Soviet of Saratov seized the farm and appointed a director and an agronomic expert to manage its operation.

The permanent employees earned a wage of two thousand rubles per month in addition to the standard food ration. The casual laborers received the ration and 75 rubles per day.

The director could fire any worker whenever he thought it was advisable, without giving any reason, and with only eight days notice, and the workers were obliged to work eight hours a day like any industrial job.

Shocked by this information, I told Lozovsky that there was nothing communist about this, and that it was just like any of the other enterprises I had seen up until then. He responded that it was an experiment in communism. I was confused by this answer and by this experiment in communist organization.

And keep in mind that in order to visit the “Communist Colony” and to have an opportunity to study its organization, I had to travel about twenty kilometers in a truck, on an almost impassable road.

In Saratov, because it was an important industrial center, and also because it is a transport hub for all the products of a region rich in grain, which earned it classification as a population center of the first order, the gala receptions never ended.

Visits to government offices; military parades and marches; visits to factories and industrial plants, speeches, meetings, tea and the ubiquitous musical band that never left us alone when we arrived in any city with its “Internationale” blaring away like there was no tomorrow.

The two days we spent in Saratov were very busy and profitable ones. Only one thing was lacking: that the people, the real people, not the people who played the parts of extras and chorus during our public appearances, receptions and rallies, would have really participated in the celebrations and joined in the proclamations of contentment and the brouhaha that seemed to accompany our presence.

In Saratov, as I pointed out above, we left the Volga, for my part with great reluctance, and took the train, the same one that we took from Moscow to Nizhny Novgorod, which had been sent to Saratov to pick us up.

We departed on the second day from the station, at night, towards Tula. It would still be many days before the Congress would begin. We were therefore in no hurry to get to Moscow so we chose to pay a visit to Tula.

Tula is also an important industrial center. Its industries are largely devoted to military production and this is also where samovars are made.

We visited a cartridge factory, whose workers were bitter and resolute anti-Bolsheviks.

Three months prior to our visit, they staged a strike which they lost; in retaliation the Bolsheviks imposed repressive conditions when they returned to work, and also condemned thirty-five strikers, who were considered the ringleaders of the conflict, to penalties that varied from one to eight years in prison.

It is necessary to point out—always in the interest of the most absolute impartiality and so that the reader's judgment should not be distorted—that the case of these workers given prison sentences for striking at the munitions factories of Tula should not be taken at face value, or as a stick with which to beat the Bolsheviks.

We shall say, without beating around the bush, that the penalties imposed by the Soviet seemed to us harsh and disproportionate; but we must also say that the strike was unjustified, as well as that it had a counterrevolutionary effect at the time.

The workers in the munitions factories of Tula, even under the Czars, enjoyed privileges and advantages that the workers in other factories did not possess. These advantages were also respected by the Soviet Government, insofar as they were consonant with the possible range of wages and working conditions that were maintained for the rest of the workers.

And enjoying these advantages, finding themselves in a position of superiority with respect to the rest of the workers throughout Russia, what justification can be given for this strike?

But there is one other factor that makes the circumstances surrounding this strike all the more tragic.

I have said that the munitions factories of Tula are the most important military plants in all of Russia, which is to say that they are the only factories in Russia that manufacture cartridges, bayonets and small arms for the Army, for which items they were the sole suppliers. In these factories, they decided to declare the strike and stage the conflict at the very moment when the whole world was anticipating the Polish threat to invade Russia. Would such a strike not leave the Red Army defenseless against the enemy?

We shall always say that this strike cannot be defended under such circumstances.

It could not be justified by the need for reforms, since the situation of these workers was better than that of any other workers in all of Soviet Russia. On the other hand, their strike could have led to the invasion of Russia by reactionary armies.

One can always label as excessive the penalties imposed on the thirty-five workers thought to be ringleaders of the strike; but their conduct, like that of their comrades, was neither appropriate nor just.

The commander-in-chief of the Red Army forces that guarded, and then suppressed the strike at these munitions plants was an anarchist, a member of one of the existing anarchist groups.

We wanted to talk to this anarchist; but since he did not know how to speak French, and we did not know how to speak Russian or English, which were the languages he spoke, we were unable to ask him any questions about what really happened during this strike.

Thanks, however, to a young man from the city who spoke fluent French, we were nonetheless able to get a completely different impression of the country's situation.

The way this young man expressed himself immediately left us in no doubt that we were speaking with a person who was not at all favorable towards Bolshevism and the revolution

itself, due to the fact that his account suffered from the same partiality as those of the government officials and government sympathizers, but in a totally opposite sense.

He confirmed the opinion I had formed regarding what the Russian people, the people of the villages and cities we had visited, really thought about us. He said that we were just a handful of individuals that the Bolsheviks had recruited in Europe and paid a large sum of money to play the part of delegates from the socialists and communists of the world, and that is why the people kept their distance from us and privately laughed at the farce we all represented. This impression was later confirmed by many people I would later talk to in Moscow. It was not, then, an invention of my interlocutor; it was true that all, or most, of the population thought in precisely these terms. From Tula—since we still had some time—we went to Ivanovo-Voznesensk, a famous center of the textile industry, known as the Russian Manchester.

We shall omit a description of all the official receptions, which were also quite dazzling, to avoid boring the reader with repetition.

In the office of the city Soviet, we had an opportunity to speak with the entire official cadre of the city, whom we questioned regarding the economic and political situation of the region.

“The economy,” we were told, “is in extremely bad shape. Of the hundreds of textile factories in the city and the province, barely two-dozen are in operation, and even these are not operating at full capacity. Most of the textile workers have had to emigrate, and take other jobs, if they can find any positions, or else suffer terribly from hunger and poverty due to a lack of resources.”

With regard to politics, the members of the Soviet boasted that Ivanovo-Voznesensk was one of the most solid bastions of Bolshevism.

“Here, in our city,” we were told, “the first Russian Soviet was formed in 1905, during that great revolutionary movement.”

“Even though no political party had resolved to create the Soviet, we took the initiative.”

“Now, from our Soviet, various comrades have been appointed to preside over the Soviets of several important regions of Russia, Saratov among others. This is proof of the confidence the party has in us; and we, obeying their orders, demonstrate the same degree of loyalty in return.”

In response to one of our questions, concerning whether the Bolshevik elements were predominant in 1905 in Ivanovo, they answered in the negative; at that time, the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries were dominant in Ivanovo. “Even quite recently,” they claimed, “in the revolutions of March and November of 1917, they were in the majority here; but the communist party has gotten rid of them. Some have become communists; others have left the city. We are very strict with these counterrevolutionaries.”

We left Ivanovo-Voznesensk on that same night and on the following day, July 14, at eleven in the morning we arrived in Moscow.

During the fourteen days of our trip, we covered hundreds of kilometers, we visited Russian cities, villages and hamlets, we participated in more than thirty rallies and we saw some of

the fundamental errors of Russian communism and the tremendous defects of communist centralization.

But what made the biggest impression on me was my visit to the day care school in Simbirsk.

When I found out that only the children of communists had the right to attend the day care schools, because their parents were the ones who made the revolution, the image of a bourgeoisie that was just as or even more cruel than the one that had been overthrown, and always more eager to pursue its own interests because it was new on the scene and needed to establish its predominance, arose in my mind with the rapidity of these visions that would never be erased from my mind. How much I would prefer to have been mistaken! How much I would have preferred that this could be no more than the work of a fevered hallucination experienced due to the prejudices that living in a capitalist regime had imposed on my thought process!

I must also mention a public marketplace, where all kinds of commercial transactions took place, in money and in kind, next to the docks at Simbirsk.

Most of the dealers were of Moslem origin, inhabitants of the region. The market sold everything. Not in great abundance; but everything was there.

I myself bought some of the sandals they wear in this country, for which I paid eight thousand rubles, and these were the cheapest ones I could find.

Bread, flour, meat, dried beans, hardware and housewares; you could find everything in this weekly marketplace, although the most abundant goods were clothing and, especially, shoes.

Let us say it again and once and for all, that the filthiness and the decrepitude we observed in the streets of Petrograd, and which we had only just glimpsed in Moscow, was the dominant note in all the other cities and towns we visited.

In Saratov it was indescribable. The piles of garbage and household wastes of every description were ubiquitous. There were streets that were almost impassable due to the stench.

Some groups of delegates, having just turned down a street, would turn around immediately and beat a hasty retreat. Such was the stench and the fetid odors that it was hard to breathe.

If the streets had not been so narrow and the houses so small (of one or two floors at the highest) it would not have been impossible to live in these neighborhoods.

Many houses were partially collapsed or looked like they were ready to collapse, due to an inability to repair them as a result of a shortage of materials, and this inability and the fact that many houses had been confiscated by the local Soviets, but were still uninhabitable, forced many families to live crowded together in small spaces, since they could not obtain the permission of the local Soviet to move into a house, and had no other way to get one; and the cost of this permission was unspeakable.

We were most interested in finding out whether the people were eager to learn how to read and write; we were assured that they were; although the results obtained so far were not as

brilliant as they were in Moscow and Petrograd. Most people, tormented by the scarcity of food and forced to scrounge for their daily survival, relegated culture to a secondary concern.

The very human desire to preserve one's own existence takes priority over the merits of cultural improvement.

One more observation that is most interesting: we never once saw a drunk on the streets. And everyone knows how much damage alcoholism has inflicted on Russia; Bolshevism can boast of this victory.

Chapter 4

4

Moscow, Again

Once we arrived in Moscow, getting from the station to our hotel proved to be no routine matter. Messages and notices; automobiles we were told to wait for that never showed up; we could not leave the station without authorization. In the end, we resigned ourselves to an indefinite wait. Finally, after four hours of waiting, several automobiles and three trucks arrived. Since there were not enough passenger vehicles for everyone, a grotesque and revolting scene unfolded. The rush for the automobiles was so brutal that three out of the six women in the delegation were pushed to the ground.

Someone told those responsible for knocking the women down that what they did was rude and vulgar, and a couple of them got out of the car and complained that such an outburst was unworthy of men who have any self-respect.

The rest of us made ourselves as comfortable as we could in the trucks.

Life at the hotel had not changed. But we met more comrade delegates; English and French. Others were expected, among them the ill-fated Vergeat, Lepetit and Lefevre, along with a few Germans; there was even some talk of a delegate from the Spanish Communist Party.

With regard to room and board, we were treated splendidly. We were the aristocracy with regard to these aspects of the standard of living.

We ate four meals a day. Breakfast, which consisted of a piece of cheese, bread and tea. Lunch, at noon, composed of bean soup, a plate of *kascha* (cooked buckwheat groats), a plate of meat, usually duck, bread and tea.

In the late afternoon, another ration of cheese, bread and tea. In both the morning and mid-day meals the cheese was often replaced by caviar, a food made of the roe of sturgeon, held in high esteem in Russia and all the northern countries.

At night, around ten, we had dinner. Dinner was always composed of the same foods served at lunch.

Every day each delegate was provided with a pack of cigarettes and a box of matches, including the non-smokers.

We also had access to a bathroom, a barber, and various automobiles for when we needed to go to the Kremlin or anywhere else. It is true that the abuse of the privilege to use the automobiles on the part of some delegates prevented others from using them when they really needed them. We must say that we always preferred to go on foot. It was more convenient and we did not have to be always waiting around for the automobiles, and allowed us to get some exercise, too. So we did not bother about what the other delegates were doing with the cars.

Our stay in the hotel allowed us to become acquainted with the psychology of many of those who wanted to be the future dictators of the proletariat of Europe.

There are those who, on a daily basis, make use of the hairdresser and if he does not style their hair just the way they want it, they treat him inconsiderately, and tell him that he could be dismissed from his job. One actually complained to the officer in charge of the hotel, earning the servant severe reprimands from his commanding officer.

There was even one person who left his shoes in the hallway every night, as they do in the hotels in Europe, so that the “comrades” of the hotel staff would clean and polish them, with the subsequent thanks delivered in the form of reprimands from the “comrade communist” delegate, when he discovered that a small spot was missed.

Others were even more disgusting. Taking advantage of the hunger suffered by the women who served on the staff as chambermaids, they asked special favors of them in exchange for a part of the ration to which they were entitled. Such moral depravity! And these people were, and some still are, the followers of Lenin in the apostolic succession of social regeneration!

Since it was very hot and almost everyone brought only winter clothing, the Committee of the Third International went to the trouble to distribute *rubashkas* or the typical blouses of the country, to the delegates; and some of the delegates who, because of the difficulties they encountered in trying to get to Russia, had no spare clothes at all, were provided with the necessary articles of clothing. Anyone who wanted could also get a pair of sandals. This distribution, which deprived Russians of the chance to receive these articles of clothing—the Russian people needed them more than we did, because we could always get everything we need on our return to Europe—aroused the avarice of one delegate, who went so far as to ask for clothing for his children in Europe.

Another delegate, because he dropped his watch on the ground and it stopped, pestered Zinoviev for eight days to give him another watch.

“Mine is broken,” he said. “It’s only fair to give me another.”

And to conclude with our relation of these moral indecencies: I will never forget that episode where a delegate from the German Independent Socialist Party complained to Lenin about the food we were given, saying that it was “pig-slop”, when, I must reiterate, our food rations represented an enormous effort, given the resources the country and the Government possessed at the time.

Those who spent their time in Russia like that, constantly bothering the Committee of the International with their complaints and demands, and those who consistently displayed a bourgeois mentality in a country where the bourgeoisie had disappeared: what would they do and how would they carry on tomorrow if a revolution puts them into power in their home countries? Furthermore, these same people are the ones who were saying then in Moscow, and are still repeating it in Europe today, that we possess a petit bourgeois mentality. What cynicism!

Our general impression of Moscow is one of a city that is in constant and agitated movement.

The Government headquarters, with the thousands of bureaucrats that surround it, causes life in its vicinity to be enormously intensified, which prevents Moscow from displaying the same sense of poverty that is evinced by the other cities in Russia. In Moscow this impression was only much weaker.

The garbage-cluttered and abandoned streets, full of potholes, almost impassable, hindered the circulation of official vehicles.

Many buildings were on the verge of collapse.

The Government confiscated the derelict buildings and closed them; some of them were still filled with goods and merchandise, but they remained closed. The merchandise that had not yet been stolen rotted and deteriorated inside the shops.

It was a telling sight to see the contents of certain display windows of stores that were well-known before the revolution, the objects the businessman wanted to entice the customers with, still intact but covered with a thick layer of dust.

In some display windows one could see objects that were desperately needed, and could not be found in the Soviet warehouses; but these goods, like those inside the closed stores, could not be touched because an inventory of them had not yet been carried out, despite the fact that four years had passed since the revolution. We have said "those inside the closed stores", whereas it would be more correct to say "those that should be inside the closed stores," since it often happens that, when the inspectors finally arrive to inventory and expropriate the goods that are supposed to be inside the store, they find the shelves they once occupied, but no merchandise.

And in the midst of so many closed buildings not being used for anything at all, one sees at night crowds of people sleeping on the ground and in the doorways of the buildings because they have no homes.

Another depressing spectacle, one that represents an enormous waste of time, was the distribution of emergency rations, clothing or railroad tickets. It was the latter, especially, that caught the attention of those who did not want to close their eyes to what was really going on.

In the train stations, as well as in the central offices that issued travel permits and railroad tickets, the lines of applicants were permanent. It was not rare to find five hundred or more people waiting in line. There are those who have to wait two or three days before being able

to get a ticket. And since it was not possible to abandon the line without losing your place, you either had to eat and sleep on the ground, or get someone else to hold your place for you. This is what usually happened.

This bureaucratic parsimony with regard to the distribution of emergency supplies, clothing, all other articles and rail tickets, led to the emergence of a very lucrative industry: that of those who permanently remained in the waiting lines.

Someone who has a voucher for clothing, provisions or tickets, and either cannot or does not want to stand in line, can obtain the services of a professional who, for a fee, will take the customer's place in line. Since he had to stand in line for one, it made no difference if he performed the same service for four or five persons and these four or five jobs made up a day's work.

It must not be assumed that this lucrative job—for there have been people who earn much more doing this than they would have if they had a regular job—was not a hard one. One needed to have a special kind of temperament to do it right. Besides the fact that you would have to spend hours and hours waiting, the filth of the environs and the close contact with so many people crawling with parasites made the job repulsive and difficult.

Just out of curiosity, we entered one of the ticket offices, located on the Square of the Moscow Opera, near the old Hotel Metropolitan, and although we showed up when the line had no more than a hundred people, the atmosphere was almost sickening.

The floor, like the walls, almost made you wretch with nausea, and there, passively waiting, the professional placeholders had to stand, waiting hours and hours for a ticket.

These expeditions and investigations allowed us to do without any kind of official reports or the guides and interpreters that were at our disposal at the hotel.

The preparations for the opening day of the Congress filled the days that followed with an unusual spate of activity.

The arrival of the foreign delegates, as well as the delegates from the interior of Russia, caused a great deal of commotion and activity throughout the capital.

In the hotel Delavoy Dvor one could hear people speaking in every language, and one saw faces that reflected the heritage of every race.

The preliminary meetings that were held by the Executive Committee of the Third International became more interesting and impassioned every day. In these meetings one could discern the emerging split that would later divide the world's socialist workers.

The dogmatic and inflexible admissions criteria of the Russian authoritarian communists allowed for no compromises. Under the shelter of the halo of the revolution, they imposed, rather than recommended, their policies.

The diatribes, the sarcasm, and worst of all, the smugness of those who really believed they were the only ones who carried out the revolution, slowly laid the foundations for the split that would be produced in the socialist camp by the famous Twenty-One Conditions of Moscow.

We, meanwhile, more interested in satisfying our wish to know what was really going on in Russia than we were in intervening in party squabbles, continued to take our walks through the streets of Moscow, visiting official or semi-official offices, asking, inquiring, attempting to lift the veil of mystery with which our ignorance of the language covered everything, in order to get as close as possible to reality.

Finally, on the seventeenth of July, we were notified that two days later all the delegates were to depart for Petrograd, because Petrograd was the birthplace of the revolution, and they wanted to render it the highest degree of homage of sympathy and admiration, celebrating in that capital the opening day of the Congress with a series of festivals and artistic demonstrations that had been arranged beforehand for this occasion. Only the opening session would be held in Petrograd; the Congress would continue in Moscow, to which we were to return on the twenty-first.

The preparations for the delegates' trip were carried out with dispatch, but not without a certain degree of rivalry beginning to emerge.

Zinoviev held that, since we were delegates to the Third Congress of the International, it was his responsibility to make our travel arrangements, while Trotsky, alleging the country's lack of security and the possibility of an attack on our persons by the counterrevolutionaries, held that the Commissar of War should have responsibility for the organization of our trip and for our personal security.

Trotsky won, so he organized our trip as the Commissar of War.

We were informed that our departure from Moscow would take place on the nineteenth of July, at two in the afternoon, in a special train, and that we would arrive in Petrograd at ten in the morning on the twentieth, the date the Congress was scheduled to begin.

At noon the automobiles began to arrive at the hotel Delavoy Dvor to take the delegates to the train station.

Along our route, at a safe distance, soldiers were posted on guard.

In the vicinity of the train station the soldiers were more numerous and prevented the public from approaching the main entrance. Their orders were to shoot to kill.

The platforms were empty except for the delegates. There were many delegates.

The foreign delegates numbered about sixty. We occupied two special train cars, although some of us had to stand.

The train was formed of various sleeping cars and their corresponding dining cars.

On the platform we saw Kamenev, Rykov, Rakovsky and other well-known communists.

The whole route was guarded by military detachments. At intervals there were guard posts, one on each side of the track and with a soldier with rifle in hand, constantly on the lookout. On the bridges there were two guard posts at each end.

In every station of any importance the train stopped and we were regaled with the sound of “The Internationale”, which began automatically as soon as the train had barely entered the switchyard of the station.

At some stations they took advantage of the trains’ stopping to hold *impromptu* rallies.

When night fell we relaxed. We thought that all the *spontaneous* demonstrations prepared by the Commissariat of War had come to an end and that they would not bother us anymore. A thoughtless error!

Even in the wee hours of the morning, when the delegates were peacefully asleep, the bands and the local Soviets flooded the stations singing “The Internationale” and shouting their ‘hurrahs’ for the Third International.

These untimely apotheoses were somewhat ridiculous and grotesque. But they were carried out perfectly. The Soviet State arranged it this way so that the Commissar of War could take the credit for being a perfect organizer.

Chapter 5

5

Our Reception, the Opening Day of the Congress, Meetings and More Festivals

Now we are in Petrograd.

The platforms at the station are packed with people. All the communists of Petrograd, with the Soviet in the forefront, are here.

In addition, the precautions taken and the mania to surround everything with military guards and perfect organization hindered the flow of traffic and people.

All the official and semi-official bodies sent a delegation, which all added up to several hundred people narrowly enclosed in the confines of the station.

The delegations to the Congress were slowly organized for leaving the station.

The full Committee of the Third International took the lead. Following them, the various communist personalities; then, the delegates, and lastly, all the banners of the city’s organizations.

Ah! We also had a band to accompany us; our parade had hardly been put in order when it struck up “The Internationale”.

But all of this had to be done on the open platforms, while the light rain had drenched our clothing. The truth is that the whole business was not so much pleasant and interesting as it was an accumulation of apotheosistic and regimented foolishness.

Once the delegates' parade had started and had arrived at the square in front of the station, the spectacle that greeted our eyes was even more ridiculous and grotesque.

On both sides of the station; surrounded by ranks of "men and soldiers", were all the little boys and girls of the Petrograd schools, with wreaths and bouquets of flowers in their hands, soaked to the bone, since they had been waiting there for more than two hours.

Periodically, when their teachers gave them the signal, these little creatures shouted, "Hurrah for the Third International!"

Behind the children were lines of thousands of workers from the factories, standing quietly under military discipline. The workers were brought here under the command of their managers and their Factory Committees.

The parade formed by these children and adults, mixed together in a common denominator of innocence, and whose members had stood in the rain for two hours under the orders of their superiors, marched from the station to the Smolny Palace, the official headquarters of the Committee of the Third International in Petrograd.

It was a heart-rending sight: the little children with their clothing sticking to their skeletal bodies, the rain dripping from their pale and gaunt cheeks, holding the festive bouquets in their hands and shouting their regimented 'Hurrahs' on command.

The trolleys, like most of the private and public buildings along the route of the parade, were covered with red flags and bunting, with inscriptions referring to the Third International and the unity of all the proletarians of the world.

Along with the ranks of the children and adult marchers, with the slowness and hesitancy caused by the progress of the numerous delegates, under the implacable rain, we silently approached Smolny.

The gardens around the Smolny Palace were invaded by the public.

The shouts and the "Hurrahs for the Third International" hardly stopped for a second. The bands, playing "The Internationale", completed the picture.

Apart from their orchestrated shouting, the faces in the crowd appeared to be impenetrable masks. Except for the enthusiastic communists, who were distinguished by the activity and the cheerfulness they displayed, one hardly heard any other word or even a whisper.

That was when the moral violence that, for the immense majority, led to their presence in that place became apparent.

Entering Smolny and taking our places in the great theater on its first floor, where lunch was awaiting our arrival, proved to be no easy matter. The hundreds of people who lined the hallways impeded our progress.

The great theater presented a dazzling spectacle.

Red flags and bunting, artistically arranged, conferred an attractive look to the majestic appeal of the theater.

Long lines of tables, covered with white tablecloths and with numerous place settings, awaited us.

At the end of the room, in the middle of the theatre, a stage stood, from which the speakers, who were already designated, were to address the Congress.

Getting to one of the tables proved to be no easy matter.

The place settings numbered no more than about five hundred, while the number of guests approached two thousand.

Finally, after some crowding and disturbances, we were seated.

During the lunch, which was splendid and abundant—if you kept in mind the hunger endured by the population of Petrograd, which could not even find bread—each delegate was given a red ribbon, the insignia of the Soviets, and a silver medal, engraved in relief with a design referring to the Congress and displaying its date.

When the time for the speeches had arrived, Zinoviev began with the keynote speech; he was followed by Serrati, representing Italy; Paul Levi, representing Germany, and so on, with each speaker from each country represented at the Congress.

When we were all ready to leave for the Tauride Palace, which once housed the old Czarist Duma, where the opening session of the Congress was to be held, a prolonged, loud, indescribable ovation made us look towards the stage.

Lenin had just appeared.

It was the second time we had seen him since our visit to the Kremlin. His sudden, instantaneous, almost magical appearance—which was all the more surprising considering that he had not traveled in either of the two trains and that we thought he was in Moscow—impressed all of us who were not already inured to the brilliant manipulations with regard to which the Bolsheviks were true masters.

Once the applause had ceased, which was crowned with three ‘Hurrahs’, Lenin took the podium to say briefly that we should walk to the Tauride Palace, where the Opening Session of the Congress would begin as soon as all the delegates had arrived.

The march to the Tauride Palace was just as tedious and as impressive as the one from the station to Smolny.

The rain was falling again and the route was lined with children and men who had to stand there until the end in order to shout their obligatory and usual ‘hurrahs’.

Entering the old meeting hall of the Duma proved to be an undertaking of epic proportions. Hundreds of people crowded the hallways and lobbies trying to get seats in the public galleries.

The delegates, who were recognized and allowed to pass all the checkpoints due to their red ribbons, required the assistance of the soldiers to make way for their passage to the meeting hall.

The atmosphere was stifling. Although the day had been a rainy one, the heat never let up. A heat imbued with humidity, one that was all the more terrible on that occasion due to the enormous number of people in the hall.

At each delegate's place at table were arranged all the various items that were being given to them for the Congress.

There was a briefcase emblazoned with the Congress logo and date, pads of paper for taking notes, pencils and a bound volume of the journal, *The International*.

Most of the bound volumes of *The International* were in English or German. There were hardly any French editions.

Zinoviev opened Congress proceedings with a speech welcoming the delegates, and saluting all those imprisoned and persecuted throughout the world by capitalist and bourgeois governments, and expressed his wish that the Third Congress of the Third International might be held in Berlin, Vienna, Sofia, Paris or London, once the detested capitalist regime has been overthrown and communism and the dictatorship of the proletariat have been established.

Only those delegates who had been previously designated by the Committee took an active part in this opening session. It ended with a speech in Russian by Lenin, which was not immediately translated into any other language due to the lateness of the hour.

In what used to be the old bakery and salon-café of the Duma, we were served a meal fit for a king, if one keeps in mind the situation in Russia at that time.

Once dinner was over, we departed for a plaza in one of the neighborhoods of the capital, a location that was designated for the inauguration, with our attendance, of some monuments commemorating the revolution.

Once this ceremony was over, we turned towards the center of the city and Ouritsky Square, previously the Winter Square, to attend a vast meeting of the International, for which purpose a stage was built in front of the main doors of the Winter Palace.

The crowd in the square must have numbered many thousands of people, and because the stage had been built next to the façade of the Palace, one could immediately see that most of the people in the crowd would not be able to hear the speakers.

This inconvenience was alleviated somewhat by improvised stages on automobiles that were placed at the other ends of the square.

When the meeting ended we went to the Palace of Labor, and in one of its halls we were served dinner, and afterwards took advantage of the occasion to discretely explore the building and visit the different departments and offices located there.

Among the new institutions we encountered was the Rhythmic and Declamatory Club. There, students were taught rhythmic and expressionistic dance, and dramatic speech.

“We had a considerable number of pupils at first,” one of the teachers told us, “but the number declined with each passing day. Not because their enthusiasm waned, or because of a lack of love for the rhythmic and declamatory arts; it is economic need, the need to obtain the indispensable basics of survival, which reduced the number of students.”

“Here in the circle,” she continued, “each student who attends receives a ration of food; but one ration is not enough to live on, especially for those of our students who have families or someone to take care of, which is often the case. We hope, however, that the situation will improve and that our students will be able to create a real generation of eminent artists.”

At the lower end of the hall where we dined a stand had been set up, on which a band accompanied our dinner with a selected suite of tunes, beginning and ending with “The Internationale”, which most of the delegates and the other persons present sang along with word for word and which everyone listened to while standing up. The hard-core communists stood at attention with the military salute.

During the intermissions, several Russian folk dances were performed which gave us a vivid impression of the country’s folk dance tradition. I need not mention that all of us were pleased, some by the novelty of the spectacle, and all of us by the skill with which the dances were performed.

I was told that the couple that had performed the dances, a husband and wife, hailing from one of the provinces of central Russia, was considered to be the best folk dance duo in the entire country.

The dinner came to an end and we went to the site where the former Stock Exchange was located, in front of which we were to witness a nighttime spectacle of great virtuosity that represented an allegorical depiction of the struggle of the workers against capitalism.

The theatrical performance took place on the plaza in front of the Stock Exchange building, which is quite large, and on the broad stone steps that led to it.

The performance was composed of several scenes.

In the first one sees the working class mired in the most abject slavery, while the patricians and aristocrats amuse themselves and pursue pleasure. Then one sees the proletariat engage in revolts against its rulers to overcome its enslaved condition, which are defeated and harshly repressed.

In other scenes, the proletariat is now presented as semi-industrial, with its guilds, in open rebellion against the decrees of the kings and feudal lords. The remaining scenes depict the organization of the social democratic parties, the workers organizations, the Communist

Manifesto of Marx and Engels, and culminating at last with the period prior to the European war.

When the war is declared in this scene, hundreds of figures appear, who imitate—since the spectacle was a mime—the intellectuals—in this case the leaders of the Second International—and then these intellectuals are confronted with the subsequent cry of *War against War!* and the call to respond to the war with a generalized insurrection. Because no one listened to them, the rebels became discouraged, and fell into the arms of capitalism which, victorious and smug, turned them into cannon-fodder. Then the Bolsheviks appear, awakening the people and leading them into struggle, and they lead the communist revolution to victory.

The spectacle ended with an apotheosis, in which hundreds of performers took part. The red star appeared in the sky and was guided in its descent towards the people by the Bolsheviks, a dawning sign of redemption.

The entire spectacle took place under bright floodlights.

The performance, which had been attended by thousands of people, ended around two in the morning.

In our automobiles we were brought to the station, since there was a shortage of housing in the neighborhood, so we slept in our sleeping cars on the train.

We were told before going to bed that an excursion to Kronstadt would probably be organized for us on the next day, but it never took place.

We spent almost the entire morning of the next day at the station. From one moment to another contradictory orders about what we were supposed to do would arrive.

Around noon we received a message that we would definitely return to Moscow at two in the afternoon.

Our return to Moscow was more peaceful than our trip to Petrograd. No Soviet commissions; no speeches or rallies, and, above all, not even once did we hear “The Internationale”, and that was certainly something!

I shall not end this account without mentioning that during our entire stay in Petrograd, starting on the twentieth, all the flags of the Trade Unions, Cooperatives, Clubs, and official and semi-official institutions, with tens of thousands of people, continuously accompanied us; not voluntarily, however, but by special decree of the city’s Soviets.

All the factories, workshops, construction sites, offices and other workplaces stopped work and their workers, like the children in all the schools, were led, guided by their Factory Committees and their teachers, to attend the arrival of the foreign delegates and to serve as an escort on our walks around the city.

Chapter 6

Wage Rates and Trade Union Organization

The Second Session of the Congress was scheduled to commence on July 23, at ten in the morning; all subsequent sessions would be held in the Hall of St. Andrew at one of the buildings of the Kremlin.

Although we arrived at the Kremlin promptly at ten that morning, the session did not begin until after noon.

This delay did not affect just that session; every subsequent session was subject to the same delay, or an even longer one. One day, the session was scheduled to begin at ten p.m., but it did not start until two in the morning.

During breaks we sought to obtain the most accurate reports we could concerning the proceedings.

The fact that Kibalchich and other employees of the Third International were in Moscow facilitated our efforts in this regard.

One of the people Kibalchich introduced me to as soon as I arrived in Moscow was Sasha Kropotkin, Peter Kropotkin's daughter, to whom I expressed how pleased I would be to have an opportunity to speak with her father.

I also visited the anarchist Club located on the Tverskaya, where I met, among other comrades, Askarov and Gordin. Through Schapiro, I was introduced to Maximov and others, as well.

In the anarchist Club, during one of my visits, we held a sort of conference where I spoke in French and Askarov translated my speech into Russian.

Speaking with the comrades of the Club, I discovered that many of them were inclined to accept centralism and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Gordin was their most visible spokesperson, the most cultivated, whom they called "The Universalist", and who had just recently been released from the prison at Butyrka, where he spent three months for the crime of having been elected to the Moscow Soviet by the workers of the factory where he worked.

Gordin's case is a curious one that bears upon the way the Bolsheviks understand the idea of freedom and what meaning can be attributed to the Soviets in their hands.

Gordin was a worker in a munitions factory. When the elections for the Soviet of the district that his factory belonged to were held, despite the fact that the communists always allowed only their nominees on the election list for the Soviet and did not allow any of their candidates to be defeated, the workers in the factory where Gordin worked chose him instead of the communist nominee.

When the votes were counted at the Soviet headquarters, and it was discovered that a communist was not selected and that Gordin was chosen instead, the Soviet exercised its veto powers and annulled the election, but only with regard to this particular delegate, and not with regard to the communists who were elected during that same proceeding.

A new election was held after ascertaining the number of voters and votes that a candidate required to be named a delegate in that factory. The result of the second election was the same as the first. Gordin was elected.

Another veto and another election. This was the third one.

But this one did not favor the Bolshevik communists either.

The official results gave an overwhelming majority to Gordin.

Then, the Bolsheviks, so *respectful* of the will of the workers and the dictatorship of the proletariat (?), annulled the election, threw Gordin in jail and allowed, for the moment, that his factory should be without representation in the district Soviet.

At this point we must confirm what someone has already written concerning Russia: that all elections to the Soviets take place under the surveillance and rigorous *control* of the Cheka, which is not imposed in order to inspire ideas of independence and respect for the will of the voters.

With Gordin imprisoned and the election annulled, it was proposed to the workers that they participate in another election, which they refused, and it was proposed to Gordin that he refuse to accept the post to which he was elected. Since Gordin obstinately refused to surrender his rights, the Bolsheviks saw no way to get what they wanted.

Nominating a new candidate would not work, since as long as the workers of the factory vote for Gordin, the communist will always be defeated.

Finally, as the comrades of Gordin came to understand that if they persisted in their conduct they would join Gordin in prison, they chose instead, if the Soviet were to hold another election, to abstain from voting, so that the official candidate would be elected despite obtaining a minority of the votes cast. And this is what happened.

Since the Soviet was apprised of the position of the workers in the munitions factory, it held yet another election in the factory, and the communist candidate was elected with about three hundred votes out of the more than two thousand eligible voters in the factory.

And this is why Gordin, like most of the members of the Tverskaya anarchist Club, gave in and reached some kind of accommodation to centralism and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Despite the fact that the activity of the members of the anarchist Club was not oriented towards disturbing the Bolsheviks, it received frequent visits from the Cheka. Otherwise, cases like Gordin's were common throughout Russia.

It was from these comrades that I obtained my first news of the Ukrainian insurrection, and the part played by Makhno in the fight against reaction. The Club existed on the proceeds from a restaurant its members had established, where they prepared meals that, sold for a slight profit, allowed some money for the Club.

The Club held frequent meetings; but it was necessary to exercise restraint and moderation.

Now and then a comrade arrived from the interior of Russia who provided news from his comrades and all of these reports indicated that the Bolsheviks were persecuting the anarchists who did not totally submit to their rule.

They referred to accounts in *Izvestia* and *Pravda* that pointed to the resurgence of shootings by the Cheka. The anarchist comrades held the opinion that the Government was afraid that the foreign delegates to the Congress of the Third International would request an amnesty and this is why, in order to avoid having to release the prisoners, it shot them instead. Those who were shot, although they were sometimes referred to as bandits and speculators in the newspapers, were for the most part labeled as counterrevolutionary elements.

Since we had conveyed to Lozovsky our earnest desire to get acquainted as closely as possible with the operation of the Labor Center, the Trade Union Central and everything that affects the question of labor organization, he placed an interpreter at our disposal and put us in touch with all the high-level offices that could help us in our quest.

I shall confess in advance that, even if our opponents may attempt to use this to their advantage, we were unable to get a clear understanding of the operation of the Trade Union organization in Russia. In its general outlines, yes; but in detail, no. We shall likewise confess, and not in order to divest ourselves of responsibility due to any incapacity or a lack of understanding that the pro-Bolshevik factions might attribute to us, but as a simple truth, clearly demonstrated by experience, that the majority, not to say all, of the employees and officials involved in the operations of that burdensome trade union machine, were completely useless when we asked them for explanations and details about the organization. Not even they knew how it worked.

For these and other reasons, it appeared that the Trade Union structure of Russia did not assume the form of an organization. The trade union organization was in continuous transformation, constantly assuming various forms and tendencies.

The precise knowledge of how the Trade Unions worked was in the hands of the workers who were their members and the numerous bureaucrats who led them, and was used for the purpose of establishing a norm of conduct in their relations with the State, which was supposed to redound, in the long run, to the benefit of the workers, since they assured them of a certain degree of independence from the tyranny of the Communist Party; but the latter, far-seeing and clever, sought to prevent this outcome by all the means at its disposal and there was no better way to do so than the constant replacement of one method of organization by another, whether or not each change was appropriate for the circumstances or not. In addition, this policy seemed to confer a certain eclecticism on the thinking of the Trade Union officials. Something like a fanatical zeal for discovering the best and the most perfect forms of organization. But, in reality, what the Party was really doing was carrying out a maneuver to assure its own domination, a crude and dishonest maneuver.

In our attempt to obtain as much information as necessary to understand what was going on, we first of all wanted to know about the wages of the workers, how they were distributed and who fixed their rates.

The chart showing the categories of wage rates contained thirty-six such categories, plus four extraordinary categories, which were only applicable to those persons who were considered by the Committee of the General Confederation of Labor, the Commissariat of Labor and the National Economic Council to be members of the categories. And while the thirty-six wage categories established limits for pay, whether in rubles or in kind, which can under no circumstances be exceeded, the four extraordinary categories had no limits, and the Commission with jurisdiction over them could set the wage rates and the distribution in kind at its discretion.

The base rate for these four extraordinary categories was the standard rate for one of the thirty-six basic categories; but the maximum rate for these extraordinary categories, as we have said, was not fixed. It was left to the discretion of the Commission.

It is this system that led to one of the most widespread deceptions perpetrated throughout the world concerning the Russian revolution, and which caused its most conspicuous personalities to be bathed in an aura of austerity and sacrifice that is far from the truth.

We were told that Lenin, Trotsky, Radek and the other leading personalities of the Communist Party and the revolution, as testimony to their love of the people and their sacrifice for the revolution, also submitted to all the privations and scarcities that the shortage of products forced upon them and that, since they considered themselves to be proletarians and workers, they assigned themselves a wage like everybody else and access to the same rations to which the intellectual workers were entitled.

Theoretically this was true. But in practice, it was otherwise.

It was a fact that Lenin, Trotsky, Radek and the rest of the commissars and aspirants to leadership roles, were considered and registered as intellectual workers with regard to the wage and the ration they were to receive, and with this little shell game and this procedure they tried to make us all believe in the disinterested attitude and the altruism of the Bolshevik commissars.

But there can be no doubt that, thinking that it would pass unnoticed or that no one would think it was relevant to their interests to know about it, they failed to mention that they had established the four extraordinary wage categories referred to above, which were applied to the political personalities of the Revolution. In accordance with these categories, the rate could vary from the bare minimum to a superfluity of riches. This should have been mentioned immediately and not the opposite, which is what was disseminated.

But to return to the thirty-six categories established in Russia in order to catalog every worker in one of them, we must first go over the following procedures:

In the lowest categories, from the first to the sixth, are included the porters and laborers in the factories, workshops, warehouses, etc., etc.

Because it seemed odd to us that such meticulous distinctions should be made between six categories when it seemed that one would suffice, they tried to convince us of our error, adducing reasons that we do not consider childish.

“So, for example,” they told us, “when a laborer comes to work at a factory for the first time, the Factory Committee classifies him for the first month under category number one, whose wage is two thousand rubles a month, because he has no experience in that position.”

“What specialized knowledge or technical abilities are required,” we asked, “of a laborer who is hired at a factory to haul stuff, to assist an experienced worker, to sweep the floor or do similar things? After ten minutes, by the second day at most, he is already *fully qualified* for his job. There is no reason for such a strict and arbitrary classification.”

“There might be some situations where what you say is true,” they responded, “but for the most part, no. It is undeniable that, after having worked several days, the new worker gets a better understanding of all the customs of the factory and becomes more accustomed to his duties.”

“We admit that criterion,” we countered. “In any case, two categories are enough, first and second, with a period of fifteen days for the transition from one to the other. But six categories seems excessive!”

“Perhaps you are right,” they replied, only adding by way of justification, “Those who established these categories had their reasons for doing so.”

Concerning these fine points, as is the case with regard to other issues related to the same question, we would speak later with Lozovsky. Thus far we had only obtained the regulation explanations that we were already familiar with due to encounters with other employees of the Trade Union Confederation. The fundamental principle was that of having worked for the maximum period of time at the same factory, since the time spent working in another factory of the same kind did not enter the calculations to determine the ability of a worker, so the usual practice is that every new worker admitted to a factory or a workshop is always classified at the lowest wage category.

We inquired about who established the thirty-six wage categories and what criteria were used, and we were told that they were established after an exhaustive investigation carried out throughout Russia by a commission composed of individuals from the General Confederation of Labor and from the Commissariat of Labor.

The project was an immense one, and it took about one year for the final reports to be completed.

The decree creating the commission was issued sometime during the first few months of 1918 and the commission’s final report was published in January of 1919. In February the wage categories set forth in the commission’s report were made obligatory, which was a great step forward and beneficial for everyone, we were told.

“And since then, how have the wage relations between the State and the workers been regulated?”, we asked.

“By contracts and agreements established in each particular case, or else by way of agreements applied to all similar industries in a municipality.”

“And these particular agreements—do they not lead to conflicts?”

“No. They are modified as circumstances require.”

“So now, once these general and compulsory wage categories have been established, do they regulate wages? There should be no exceptions. They should not need to be modified.”

“You are incorrect. These wage rates, so meticulously established, which required a year of labor to elaborate and systematize; which required hundreds of workers and thousands of reports to complete, HAD TO BE MODIFIED TWENTY-ONE DAYS AFTER THEY WERE DECREED, because the divergence between the official value of money and the market price of consumer goods, and even the nominal value attributed to money in the rationing system, demonstrated the uselessness of so much effort and so many reports. We had to return to the old game of particular contracts, although we took the wage categories that had been established as a point of departure.”

“In that case, the wage would be the same in all the provinces of Russia! A mechanic in Tobolsk, in Ekaterinoslav, in Odessa, in Moscow or in Petrograd, would surely be paid the same wages.”

“By no means. The price of subsistence goods in these cities varies widely, and these variations have a determinate impact on the wage rates.”

“With three thousand rubles in Simbirsk or Saratov you can live better than in Moscow or Petrograd and wages are regulated in accordance with and in constant reference to the lowest cost of subsistence goods in any particular location.”

“Could you tell me just what is the extent of these differences?”

“Not precisely; it varies according to the city or the province. But it can be said that it attains proportions that vary from between ten and twenty-five percent in terms of money. The equivalent in terms of the ration received by each worker is invariably the same for every region or province, always depending on the category the worker is registered to.”

“Could you also tell me how the Trade Unions are structured? By industry, by industrial group, or by trades, locally, or regionally?”

“The Trade Unions are organized by industries and by provinces.”

“By provinces?”

“Yes, by provinces. The Metal Workers Trade Union of Moscow, for example, is a provincial Trade Union, since all the metal workers of the province belong to it. The Factory Committees and the Regional Committees connect each worker with the Executive Committee of the Trade Union.”

“But when they have to meet to debate a question that affects all the members of the Trade Union, how is this arranged?”

“The meetings are held under the auspices of each separate Trade Union Local, although most often they are held in the factories.”

“The Executive Committee of the Trade Union issues a notice that is transmitted to every Factory Committee and Regional Committee, and these committees then pass the notice on to the workers at each workplace. The latter then meet, debate and reach some conclusion on the topic in question. Then the resolutions of the workers are submitted to the Executive Committee for the latter to decide, in accordance with the will of the majority or its own opinion.”

“This form of organization,” we objected, “is arranged so that the workers of the same Trade Union will never meet in a general assembly to debate any problem that is of interest to them. Rather than bringing them together, they are divided, since they have no way to establish direct relations with one another, but their relations are represented through their Executive Committees or Factory Committees.”

“Why do you need to have such general assemblies?”, they retorted. “From the moment when they can discuss all the problems and transmit their decision to the Executive Committee, for the latter’s ruling, that is all you need. Also, you should recall that, when it is thought to be necessary, the Trade Union can hold General Congresses or Conferences that are attended by the delegates of each workshop, which is why they were elected to their posts.”

“Whatever you say; but the essential thing is that the workers of each factory do not have any direct relation with the workers in similar factories or with the workers of the same Trade Union. Rather than united, they are separated. The Trade Union is not an institution constructed on the basis of the individual initiative of the worker, but it is the Executive Committee that does all the thinking and deciding in the name of the Trade Union. That is, the impulse does not come from below, as it should, but from above, which is contrary to any sense of freedom and voluntary organization. And this system of organization: who consented to it?”

“It was consented to by the workers themselves meeting in the Trade Union Congress on the basis of a plan that was previously elaborated by the Commissariat of Labor.”

“Their delegates to this Congress: what tendencies or what ideologies did they advocate?”

“All of them were members of the Communist Party, except for a small percentage that were not members of any party; but they accepted the point of view of the majority.”

“And besides the Trade Union, what other institutions exist?”

“There are the National Industrial Federations, to which the provincial Trade Unions of each industry belong.”

“Then there are the Provincial Federations of Trade Unions, and the General Confederation of Labor, formed on the basis of the National Industrial Federations and the Provincial Trade Union Federations.”

“The delegates for the Congresses of the General Confederation of Labor, and for the National Industrial Federations, and those who comprise the Committees of these institutions: how are they chosen?”

“The workers of each factory meet and nominate various delegates for a provincial Trade Union Assembly; at this provincial Trade Union Assembly, delegates are chosen for a provincial Conference or Assembly of all the Trade Unions, and then, at the provincial Assembly of Trade Unions, the delegates are chosen who must attend the relevant Congress, either that of the General Confederation of Labor or that of the National Industrial Federation. At these Congresses, the members of the respective Committees are chosen.”

“So the delegate or the delegates to each Congress: they are not directly elected, it is not the Trade Union itself that chooses them?”

“No. We already told you how it works. Sometimes, when it is urgently necessary for the purposes of holding a regional Congress or an Assembly, instead of having the workers meet separately in each factory, all the workers of a district or a certain number of factories will meet together in one place, without any distinctions with regard to trade or industry, and all of them together choose their delegates.”

“The choice, in these cases, would be very difficult, since the workers do not know each other, each worker will want a delegate who best represents his interests to prevail.”

“That almost never happens anyway, because the Communist Committee has already prepared the list of those who must be chosen for the delegation.”

“The choice of the workers representatives to the Congresses is therefore not direct; the workers are twice removed from the decision.”

“Precisely. First they choose the delegates to the provincial Assembly of the Trade Union, then the latter choose whoever they want to represent them at the provincial meeting of all the Trade Unions, and the latter, in turn choose the delegates to the Trade Union Congress.”

“And the topics or resolutions presented for debate at the Congress: who elaborates them?”

“The Executive Committee of the General Confederation of Labor, when it is a national Congress of the entire organization; or the Committee of the respective Federation, when the Congress is a Congress of an Industrial Federation.”

“This means that the worker, the real worker, the Trade Union member, is a passive element with regard to most of the problems that his Trade Union must resolve. He is only called upon to ratify—since it is not possible for him to revise them—the decisions of the Committees.”

“It depends on what you mean by *passive element*. It is obvious that the workers are not called upon to directly discuss the questions involving their Trade Unions and that it is the latter which must address them, but you have to also take into account the lack of culture of the Russian worker. And, besides, he is often saturated with Menshevik and counterrevolutionary influences.”

“The managers, the engineers, the foremen and the supervisors in the factories: who chooses them?”

“At the beginning of the revolution the workers chose them; now the Soviets choose them. There were cases where the workers chose the former owners or managers, and even the engineers and foremen, and it was necessary to put an end to this.”

“And these elections of the former owners or managers: what was the basis of their authority? Were they obeyed because of their abilities or because they put pressure on the proletariat?”

“One must assume that they were obeyed for the former reason, due to their abilities, since pressure could no longer be a prod to obedience because there was no longer any way to enforce it.”

“So why should their nomination not be respected if their authority was based on their abilities?”

“Because most of those nominated under these circumstances, not to say all of them, were counterrevolutionaries.”

“And the Factory Committee: who chooses it?”

“The workers of each factory.”

“And who provides the list of candidates? Are the workers free to choose whoever they want?”

“Not at all; the list is always provided by the local Soviet or by the members of the Communist Party who work in the factory. The list is not open to revision by anyone. No name on the list may be deleted.”

“So, under these conditions, no one can be elected to the Factory Committees unless he is a communist.”

“No, that is not true; sometimes non-party individuals appear on the lists.”

“And what functions are exercised by the Factory Committee?”

“It represents the workers to the Trade Union and the Government. It exercises vigilance to make sure that the workers work and produce the necessary output; it establishes the wage rates; it imposes penalties and fines on the workers who do not do their duty; it fires those who do not respect the terms of their contracts; it sends requests to the Labor Center for any workers the factory may need; it classifies each worker according to his category; it exercises surveillance to assure that raw materials are not wasted; it serves as a repository for all the workers’ demands and complaints; it serves as an intermediary between the workers and the manager or the foremen; it conducts the elections in its factory and, finally, undertakes measures to keep order, to enforce discipline and make sure that everything flows smoothly and production proceeds without interruption in each factory.”

“Can the workers depose or request the dismissal of their Factory Committee or any one of its members?”

“Of course. All the posts in the Committee are recallable and therefore can be dismissed by those they represent.”

“How do the workers go about dismissing one of their Factory Committee representatives?”

“They request that the Factory Committee call a meeting and when the Committee has agreed to do so, they attend the meeting. At the meeting they air their grievances and the Factory Committee takes note of them and transmits them to the Trade Union Committee, which then examines them and proceeds according to its discretion.”

“But this is a contradiction! The workers have to request permission to hold a meeting from the same individuals they are seeking to depose. The latter, those who are the objects of the complaint, are the ones who have to register the complaint and then set the process to address it in motion, without the least intervention from those who submitted the request. As a result of this kind of procedure, successful recall actions must be rare indeed.”

“Extremely rare. It hardly ever happens. But you know that Party discipline requires that a Factory Committee that has been petitioned by the workers seeking to depose it, is obliged to notify the Trade Union of the desires of the workers that the Committee represents.”

“Good; but against Party discipline you have to consider personal self-interest. One proves one’s party discipline by not ever submitting a request for recall. Besides, all the bureaucratic hoops you have to jump through, the fear of retaliation, the presence of the Cheka at every meeting, the fact that there are no newspapers where one can denounce abuses and arbitrary acts, the fear of being labeled a counterrevolutionary; all these things drown out any inclination to protest and any attempt at rebellion.”

“....”

“The Factory Committees: how long is the delegate’s term?”

“Six months.”

“Can they be re-elected?”

“Yes. They can be.”

“Once a Factory Committee has been chosen, are its members considered to be workers or State employees, with regard to their wages and rations? Are they obliged to work or are they exempt from labor?”

“The members of the Factory Committee, once the latter has been designated, cease to be considered as workers and are transferred to the category of State employees. They have no obligation to work and if they work, they do so voluntarily. Their mission is surveillance, to make sure the others work.”

“So they would be a kind of workplace police force.”

“That is a very harsh expression. It has none of the features of a police force. We have already said what its mission consists of.”

“And when a worker has been browbeaten and humiliated by a Factory Committee or else assigned to a lower wage rate than he thinks he deserves, what hoops does he have to jump through or how hard does he have to work to make the Trade Union protect him in either case?”

“Because we assume that the Trade Unions must have the responsibility for the defense of the organized workers in such cases.”

“Of course. The Trade Union attends to the needs of the worker in such cases and defends and protects him. When his rights have been violated or he has been assigned to a lower wage category than he believes he deserves, he goes to the Factory Committee and submits his complaint in writing.”

“The Factory Committee then forwards the complaint, always strictly following the regular procedures, to the Local Committee of the Trade Union, which in turn sends it to the Executive Committee of the Trade Union to which the complainant belongs.”

“The Executive Committee of the Trade Union rules either in favor of his complaint or against it, and the verdict is passed down to the original source of the complaint, that is to the worker who initiated it, but it must pass through the same channels that the complaint did in the first place when it found its way to the Executive Committee of the Trade Union.”

“Since the Factory Committees are elected for six months and no more, and although it often happens that the incumbents are re-elected, sometimes a newly-elected delegate will receive a verdict regarding a complaint against one of his predecessors.”

“In such a case the new Committee must abide by the verdict it has received from the Executive Committee of the Trade Union.”

“That is what usually takes place. But you must not overlook how difficult it is for a Factory Committee to resolve a dispute that arose even before it was elected. The faults or shortcomings of one person should not be paid for by another.”

“Of course. But for the worker who was personally wronged or lost pay due to being assigned to a lower wage category than he was entitled to: who is going to compensate him or indemnify him? Because if the rights of the Factory Committee should be respected, no less respect is due to the worker whom the Factory Committee has wronged. Within a communist regime where Power is exercised in the name of the working class, it is only just that justice should be done for the worker. I am not saying he should be conceded privileges: just that he should be entitled to justice.”

“And that is just what happens. Not one single complaint submitted by a worker has ever been ignored.”

“We do not deny that. What we deny is that this system can effectively attend to the workers' complaints. First of all, because of all the complicated procedures he must negotiate, none of which can be omitted; secondly, because the complaint must be judged without his being

present to present his case, which is the most important thing. The Executive Committee of the Trade Union, in order to preserve the prestige of the Factory Committee and that of the Communist Party, which it represents in the workplace, must always find in the Factory Committee's favor. Hence the few successful recall actions against the Committees and the fact that the workers are not interested in them."

"To the contrary. The workers are extremely interested in the Factory Committee."

"The communist workers are. But we doubt very much that the other workers are." Finally, we left it at that.

By means of the summary of our interview concerning the nature of the Trade Unions in Russia, which we have tried to reproduce as accurately as possible in the above dialogue, the reader will be able to form an approximate idea of the nature of the trade union organization, the role it plays in the Bolshevik economy and its usefulness in defending the interests of the workers against the Bolshevik State.

Our journey from one secretariat to another in search of information that would give us some idea of the nature of the trade union organization was not without difficulties, since, besides the division of functions in each secretariat, it was very hard to obtain detailed information about an institution undergoing constant change, affecting every domain under its jurisdiction and, most importantly, the extremely complex character of an institution that even its own creators were beginning to be unable to understand. These were unsurpassable obstacles for anyone who, like us, needed precise ideas and concrete data.

But the essence of all these difficulties can be condensed in the words of Lozovsky, who expressed the real role of the Trade Unions in Russia.

Lozovsky said that the role of the Trade Unions in Russia was to implement the Party's *platforms*, the economic orientations dictated by the latter and the defense of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Anything that did not fall within this framework was counterrevolutionary and the Trade Unions would not engage in such a thing nor would the Party tolerate it.

The enormous number of communist employees in the Trade Unions absorbed any impetus to raise the level of the masses self-initiative.

If we were to take another Trade Union as an example and were to choose the Railroad Workers Trade Union, we must confess that the results would be identical. Counting just the employees in the higher bureaucratic posts of the rail network, at the beginnings and the ends of the lines, at the switchyards and repair depots, in the operational and managerial offices, there are thousands. Then, in each station, however small it may be, there is the Extraordinary Commission, composed of at least three individuals, exercising surveillance and command functions. Each train, whether carrying goods or people, also carries its Extraordinary Commission. You may assume that most of the members of these Commissions perform no active service; their mission is solely and exclusively that of surveillance. We do not believe that during the times of Czarism, when the Russian railroads were exploited by individual enterprises, that the number of those persons employed in surveillance, inspection and management of the railroads could have even come close to the number of those persons employed under the Bolshevik regime while we were in Russia.

If the income from transport would have to be used to pay so many employees, it is unlikely that it would have been enough to pay their wages.

Chapter 7

7

A Great Festival and Banquet

The Bolsheviks proposed to entertain us in grand style. They wanted to make our stay in Russia as pleasant as possible. They filled our leisure moments with amusements; perhaps in order to divert our attention from the constant reminders of misery one saw throughout Russia.

As for the food that, as we have already pointed out, was abundant and extraordinary, and as for the exceptional conditions in which we traveled, our hosts took innumerable precautions and lavished attention and care on us wherever we went.

We enjoyed all kinds of petit-bourgeois favors and distinctions. One night at the theater we saw how one of the spectators was removed from his seat so that a delegate could be seated. Everywhere we went, there were parties, rejoicing and banquets in our honor. Dramatically staged receptions, military displays, rallies, banquets and celebrations of every kind were not spared in honoring the foreign delegations. One could not but be touched and flattered by all the attention.

Did we need all that display of superfluity and pompous vanity? Had we traveled to Russia in order to be toasted and entertained, or had we traveled there to express our support for the people who made the revolution, to suffer with them, to endear ourselves to them and to fortify our resolve by the sight of their sufferings and their misery?

Were we just so many tourists who were enjoying the splendors and the sumptuous entertainments that a revolutionary Government could offer us, or were we the spokesmen of a cry of sympathy escaping from the breasts of millions of men who shout their curses against injustice and turn their eyes towards the country that is burning with the flame of social regeneration?

Did they seek, with their post-revolutionary spectacles, with these new Weddings of Camacho el Rico, to overwhelm the sound of the cries of so much pain, so that their echo would not reach us?

We did not hear them. What is certain is that they sought to separate us from reality with all the festivity.

The parties, banquets, marches, rallies and other celebrations with which we were received in the cities of the Volga and the grandiose and imposing display staged on July 20 in Petrograd, would be eclipsed by what they were preparing for us now. Did the Bolsheviks want to make us feel the scale of their power or of the sympathy (?) felt for us by the people of Moscow?

The time had come to “shoot the moon” and they certainly did a good job of it.

Among the preparations for the great festival that they were organizing, the most “*épatante*” was the huge stage constructed in the center of Red Square.

Almost adjacent to the wall of the Kremlin, leaving only the space occupied by the tombs of the communists buried there, they built an imitation of a mountain made out of wood.

At the center of this mountain was the stage, in the form of a square tower covered with a figured cloth.

On the two sides of this central stage, they built two lower stages of a greater size, each of which could hold hundreds of spectators. The delegates occupied the two front rows of these lower stages and various Government officials occupied the other rows of seats.

The festival consisted of an Exposition of war materiel, artillery, machine guns, tents, camps and the accommodations of the General Staff, all set up in pavilions that were built for the occasion. Not a single tool of labor or a single agricultural machine was anywhere in sight.

A great parade of the entire Moscow garrison and a rally and parade of all the workers of Moscow completed the program.

The festival took place on Tuesday, July 27.

The parade began at the Theater Square. From there, the soldiers and workers marched towards Red Square, and entered the latter by the street that lies between the famous Chapel of the Iberian Virgin and the walls of the Kremlin. Once they departed the Theater Square, all the participants in the parade marched in military formation, even the workers.

The parade crossed in front of the Stages and continued towards the Holy Door of the Kremlin, where they began to disperse.

In front of the stages we occupied, there were four bands that took turns constantly playing marches and “street songs”. At the same time a tethered balloon was raised next to the Holy Door, while two airplanes flew over the Plaza, dropping communist literature.

We need not mention that Red Square was sealed off by the military, and that no one could get near it or the stages except for delegates or the special guests.

The parade began at eleven in the morning, ending at four in the afternoon. During the parade we had to remain on the stages in the asphyxiating heat.

The bands never stopped playing and the parade proceeded with a mathematical precision.

First the troops in twenty-five groups, headed by the General Staff and ending with the mounted Militia Regiment.

Then came the workers of all the districts of Moscow. In order of appearance, they were: the districts of Khamovniki, Zamoskvarechye, and Red Presnia, those of the Municipal District of Sokolniki and Rogosjko-Simonovsky. The last were those from Baumanskaya.

The beginning of the “procession”—as the program called it—was heralded by an artillery salvo.

We estimated that more than three hundred thousand persons passed before us.

The attendance of the workers from all the factories, workshops and offices of Moscow in the parade was compulsory, by Government decree.

The decree was published in *Pravda* and *Izvestia* on the day before the parade.

At nine in the morning, all the workers from all the factories, workshops and offices were obliged to go to their usual places of work.

After a roll call and inspection, they were led, under the surveillance of the Committees of each factory or workshop, to the staging site for the start of the parade.

Each group of workers gathered at the location set aside for their district, and waited for their turn to join the parade.

Failure to attend the parade was punished by suspension of rations for eight days.

Even so, the organizers of the parade were not sure that the people would attend despite the threat, and adopted another expedient. They distributed clothing.

Some received a shirt; others, pants; some shoes; and there were some who were lucky enough to obtain two articles of clothing in the distribution.

This procedure was more likely to compel the attendance of those who did not want to attend than any other device.

Failure to attend the parade, besides resulting in the forfeit of the workers rations, also entailed missing out on the clothing distribution that would take place. A serious consequence under the circumstances.

Several battalions of the Petrograd garrison also participated in the parade and rally. They arrived the night before in four special trains.

The organization of the parade was in many other respects an enormous task.

The spacious plaza and the gardens in front of the Great Theater of Moscow and the old Hotel Metropole were overflowing with workers and soldiers.

Each group, depending on whether they came from the factory or the barracks, went to the place they were assigned with their comrades from their neighborhood or the military unit.

The first ranks began to arrive very early in the morning. Out of curiosity we went to the staging site and asked some of the people who were there who spoke French, how long they had been there.

“Some groups,” we were told, “especially the soldiers, who are scheduled to march first, have been here since seven in the morning.”

The looks on the faces of that crowd of people jammed together there was truly moving, since one could see that the great majority of them were forced to be there, compelled, against their will, in violation of their consciences.

It will suffice to say that they saw us and recognized that we were foreigners as well as the delegates in whose honor the festival was being held, for which reason they beheld us with a certain scorn that was not unmingled with curiosity.

Soon, however, the shouts and orders of the presidents of the Factory Committees or of the commanders of the column made them forget us, and we were asked what we were doing there.

Since it was a beautiful morning, we had an enchanting view of the whole crowd all decked out in flags and standards with the green of the gardens at the bottom and the façade of the Great Theater as backdrop.

The continuous and uninterrupted flow of men arriving in the square made it difficult to focus much of our attention on details because we wanted to take in the whole spectacle.

However, perhaps due to the very fact that so many thousands of persons were crowded into the square, we did not fail to acquire a general impression of their faces and demeanor.

Those closest to us, who were wearing the new shirts they had received the day before, were wearing frayed pants covered with multi-colored patches.

Others, wearing their new pants, were almost barefoot and their elbows poked out of the holes in their sleeves.

There were also some men who were either less fortunate with regard to the distribution of articles of clothing, and so had neither new shirt nor new pants, or else they were saving the clothing they received for one of their relatives or close friends who had greater need of it.

As the day passed and new contingents augmented those that had arrived earlier, it became impossible for the curious and the spectators to walk around the square.

In our eagerness to see everything, since we could not ask any questions of the members of the crowd, we were constantly walking from one side of the square to the other, and once found ourselves pinned between two groups, and had to almost force our way out.

When the crowd made it impossible to freely circulate in the square, we chose to return to the stage. The parade was almost over. We had to take our places as spectators of honor, first class, that were reserved for us.

The parade passed by in ranks ten men across, in military goosestep, rigidly marching, in perfect formation, the men turning their heads slightly towards the stages as they passed before them.

In addition to the monotony and the unpleasantness of the parade, one must also add the deafening noise of the airplanes and the clashing of the cymbals of the bands that never stopped playing.

For each section of twenty rows of marchers who passed by, the first two or three rows shouted, when they came abreast of the central stage: *Hurrah for the Third International!* We were convinced that this was one more fraud, and that they did not shout these *Hurrahs* voluntarily.

Amidst the materiel of war that was on display, we came to the end of the area where the pavilions of the Exposition had been erected, and everything was made clear.

At the entrance to Red Square there was an officer of the Red Army, who had previously been an officer in the army of the Czars, whose job was to review the parade one more time before it entered the square.

He informed the various groups of men regarding which rows were to shout their mandatory shouts and “hurrahs”.

We witnessed this and were overcome by a great wave of sadness.

The farce that was being put on there could not have been more undignified or more disgraceful.

These poor men dragged there by force, to give the impression that the people were cheering for us! And then, even to be given their orders about what they were supposed to shout for us.

Once the parade was over, some delegates were taken to the airfield, where an air show was held in our honor.

It was indeed an unfortunate occasion. Because one of the airplane's steering flaps was broken, the pilot made an awkward emergency landing and crashed the plane into one of the stages that had been constructed for the delegates.

Seated in the first row of the stage was one of the delegates who had just arrived in Moscow a few days before, a member of the Swedish delegation. One of the blades from the plane's propeller struck him in the head and shattered his skull. He died that night in the hospital.

As a result of the accident and as a gesture of mourning for the delegate the festival was suspended.

Although we had been invited to the air show we did not want to go. Based on what we had already seen that afternoon, we had no illusions about playing our parts in any more of the festivities.

We preferred, instead of going to the airfield, to take a walk around Moscow, and to try to gauge the residents' impressions of the day's activities. We were interested in finding out what the people thought about the parade and about us.

We confess that we have nothing to report with regard to this question. Not being able to speak Russian, we were unable to acquire first-hand information; which is the real information.

It was hard to ask questions, and even harder to get any responses. Since they knew that we were foreigners and delegates besides, their lips were sealed, guarding their secrets like the tombs of the pharaohs.

We gave up and went back to the hotel.

That evening we attended the banquet. Although we were personally opposed to going, we went anyways.

What I had seen that day put me in a bad mood. However, I yielded to the insistent pleas of our ill-fated Parisian comrades Petit and Vergeat. The three of us went, not from any eagerness to attend the banquet, but so that we would have something else to report.

The banquet was held in the old Palace of the nobility of Moscow.

In the central hall, and on four rows of tables, which took up a great deal of space, we saw numerous place settings.

The foreign delegates, in whose honor the banquet was being held, numbered about one hundred, and counting the Russians there were more than two thousand persons present in the Hall.

The banquet could not have been more splendid. We were served soup, fish, meat and white bread, all in abundance.

We were also served a fruit-flavored spirituous beverage, coffee and tobacco.

During the banquet, a band played versions of various songs, without forgetting three or four renditions of "The Internationale".

A chorus, and the famous Chaliapin sang beautifully.

While the delegates, who had eaten dinner at the hotel, dined sumptuously, the musicians and the singers had not eaten, nor did they have any hope of eating. The people of Moscow went without the most basic things.

In order to make this display possible, all the children of Moscow had to go without their daily bread ration. And we were under the dictatorship of the proletariat! How could we forget!

The day after the parade and the banquet, Lozovsky, who was not unaware of how we felt, asked us about our opinion of the previous day's festivities:

“It should never have happened,” we responded. “And if you want the working people of Moscow to render sympathetic homage to the foreign delegates, it would have been preferable to schedule a rally for next Sunday, and then to have a parade with those that attend.”

“No one would come,” he responded.

“Good,” we said. “Then we would know how things really stand, rather than having gone through what seemed to be a great occasion, but was really just a comedy, at which we were ridiculous spectators.”

“You are always the same!”, Lozovsky said. “You have very strange ideas, comrade Pestaña.”

And he made a hasty exit after saying these last words.

Chapter 8

8

The Housing Problem

Since we wanted to know how the Bolsheviks had tackled the various problems posed by economic and social life, we devoted ourselves to the difficult task of inquiring about everything that relates to these problems, starting with the housing question. Since this problem was a major issue in Europe and in Spain, we wanted to know how the revolution had addressed it.

The official reports we were able to obtain were not explicit enough. Although they spoke of a rigorous and mathematical distribution of housing, the people, the persons to whom we spoke to and to whom we revealed our interest in this issue, intimated a certain animosity towards the official position.

All sources agreed—official reports and first-hand accounts of individuals—that there was an equitable and rational distribution, at first sight. Once the question was subjected to closer analysis, however, one noticed that whereas the official reports depicted an optimal result, when we questioned individuals they maintained that the official intervention could not have had less fortunate results. Who was right? This is what we were most interested in discovering.

The official distribution assumed the mathematical principle for its point of departure, meaning that only one living space is granted per person, except for doctors and certain other technical operatives who needed another habitation for an office or consulting room. The strictness of the official regulations did not apply to those who enjoyed official favor. Influence was more effective than all government regulations. The reports we gathered from individuals explicitly mentioned the numerous exceptions in favor of influential persons or high-level Bolsheviks. This was the status of the housing problem as the inhabitants of Moscow saw it. Combined with the other problems, it made the situation of the people who had made the revolution more uncertain.

Two causes contributed to this aggravation: the fear of the official orders, which often exhibited the character of looting or partisan vengeance, and the scarcity, getting worse every day, of housing. The latter was especially alarming.

The number of habitable houses declined every day, many of them collapsing for a lack of repairs of the damage caused by time and the country's weather. The concentration of government services in Moscow also contributed to the problem.

Rents were reduced, but this did not help much, since what really mattered was being able to find a place to live, which was impossible.

To carry out the distribution of housing the same procedure was followed that was implemented for the distribution of everything else; the Council of Peoples Commissars created a kind of Commissariat of Housing, in which everything that concerned this issue was centralized.

On each street or each group of streets, and sometimes for just one side of a street or for a group of houses, a neighborhood commission was formed. This commission was always presided over by a *tried and true* communist, by a man who enjoyed the confidence of the party, who was considered to be an employee of the State, and who received a wage as if he worked in a factory.

The task of the neighborhood commissions was to carry out statistical surveys of the houses under their jurisdiction. They were responsible for supervising the transfers of residents from one house or apartment to another; for hiring porters or superintendants for each house, and, finally, for investigating who, why and when anyone visited houses under their jurisdiction. They were like the watchdogs of every house, of each particular domicile. They could even arrest any callers who seemed to be acting suspiciously. Their prerogatives also included collecting the rents and arranging for repairs. The animosity with which each resident viewed the *comrade* president of the commission that had jurisdiction over the house he lived in bordered on hatred.

This is what the Government did. Now we shall see what the people did.

We owe the precious information we shall relate below to Kibalchich and to a former president of a Petrograd Neighborhood Commission.

The November revolution, which accelerated the course of events that had begun in the March revolution, made it possible, with the absolute dominance of the popular classes, to carry out the total and complete expropriation of the nobility and the capitalists.

The expulsion of the major landowners from their estates was followed by the expulsion of the industrialists from their factories, and then by the expropriation of the urban landlords and real estate interests.

The workers in the working class neighborhoods, the proletarians, who had lived up until then in pestilential pigsties, took their belongings and moved into the best houses they could find that were available.

Injustices and outrages, inevitable under such circumstances, made their appearance.

In some, although not many cases, the inhabitants of expensive houses were evicted, thrown into the gutter without anywhere to live.

As a general rule, the rich were obliged to occupy a limited number of houses, and working class families were moved into the rest. But the distribution process often proved to be arbitrary.

In addition, it was necessary to plan ahead for the consequences that such an upheaval would give rise to, and the questions of repairs, lighting, water, etc., had to be dealt with.

Soon, with the profound intuition of the people which only needed an occasion for its exercise, neighborhood commissions were organized that provided for the needs of each street and each building.

The amount of rent for each habitation was established; statistics were gathered showing the available accommodations; the necessary repairs were estimated and carried out—something that would not continue in the future; more equitable distributions were made than those of the original round of allotments, and, finally, everything was organized in as orderly a way as possible, in accordance with the agreements and the consent of the majority of the neighbors.

These commissions held frequent assemblies where problems were resolved in the simplest and most harmonious manner.

“Satisfaction was general,” Kibalchich said, and the former president of the Commission whom we were interviewing agreed. “Despite the profound chaos caused by the revolution, disagreement or litigation between neighbors was very rare.”

In a disinterested and altruistic manner that cannot be praised too highly, they resolved problems and everything went perfectly smoothly.

But necessity, which has always been the mother of all inventions, made them aware of the fact that they had only gone halfway towards their destination.

Each House Committee, or Street Committee, realized that the problem was more complicated, and that by working in isolation it was stultifying its possibilities for improvement. Inevitably, they had to expand or perish. And so an agreement was concluded.

The Committees of contiguous houses, or adjacent streets, federated with each other; some dissolved, others were organized; this resulted in an expansion of all of them and mitigated the difficulties that were encountered during the early stage.

Soon the Federation of Committees of the entire capital had been formed, and without any official regulations, without real orders, or municipal laws of any kind, the residents of Petrograd, on their own initiative, had almost single-handedly solved the housing problem.

Rents were controlled, and were considerably reduced; the necessary repairs were made; workers who lived too far from their workplaces exchanged residences with others, and accommodations were distributed more in accordance with strictly equitable criteria.

Throughout this period, which lasted about a year and a half, there was not even one single eviction, nor did even one family lack a place to live.

Planning ahead for the future, a certain percentage of each rent bill was sensibly set aside for a fund to build new homes, and to provide a subsidy for building maintenance.

Health and sanitation in the houses was measurably improved, and their cleanliness was exemplary.

In each house, all residents were obliged, except in case of circumstances beyond their control, to take their turn every week cleaning the stairs and attending to the requests that were submitted to the Committee, and to either fulfill them or give an account to the assembly as to why they were not satisfied.

Everyone could come and go as they pleased, receive any guests and let anyone stay in their homes without interference.

Liberty: the complete freedom of each as long as it does not harm another.

This was not to the Government's liking. The dictatorship of the proletariat, the centralization of everything, *naturally* clashed with the spirit of liberty reflected by this institution created by the people.

It was not, however, in the Government's interest to destroy it. It had demonstrated its usefulness in practice. Rather than destroy it, it was in the Government's interest to seize control over it. And that is what it did, although not without a struggle and not without protests.

It began by installing a communist as president of each Committee or Commission. As for those Committees or Commissions where one of its supporters could not be elected as president, it dissolved them on the pretext of counterrevolutionary conspiracies. It limited the number of Committees and, as the *coup de grâce*, it assigned a salary to the presidents, it made them functionaries of the State and it granted them the right to enter any home and arrest, as we have said, anyone that seemed suspicious.

The communists adjusted quite well to this police role; party discipline demanded it. The others did not accept it, and there were mass resignations, leaving the field completely open to the communists.

From that moment on, my informants claimed, the House Committees or Commissions lost their efficient character and became just one more aspect of the cumbersome communist bureaucracy.

Residents no longer expressed any interest in the housing problem; favoritism emerged as the decisive factor and the Bolsheviks, masters of the situation, destroyed the most beautiful thing about collective activity: individual initiative.

No one wanted to be president of their Committee because they did not want to antagonize their neighbors, nor did anyone want to bear the burden of its responsibilities. They also abhorred the idea of becoming parasites. They refused to assume responsibility for the office

that conferred upon its holders the authority to inform on, arrest and kick down the doors of their neighbors. From then on, the Committees or Commissions that had performed so many notable services, and had prevented so many injustices and arbitrary actions, which had so fairly and humanely dealt with the serious problem of housing, ceased to exist, in order to be replaced by a caricature of a Commission which only attracted the most Olympian scorn of the citizens. Thus died one of the most popular institutions that the feverish passion of the revolution had engendered.

With its stump-like foot, the elephantine state squashed the most promising sprout of popular spontaneity.

Chapter 9

9

Public Education

In our narrative or exposition about what we saw in Russia, not everything we have to relate is harsh, acerbic and distressing. There is one aspect of our journey that can be compared to the oasis that the traveler finds in the desert.

Are we implying that everything related to public education in Russia must be unconditionally accepted? Not at all. The organizational mistakes made by the Bolsheviks with regard to the arrangement of social and economic life in Russia cannot but be manifested in the educational domain as well; but thanks to the intentions of those who have administered it and the results it has been able to obtain, these mistakes acquire an abstract character and it must be concluded that, all things considered, the educational system that has been established has redounded to the benefit of the culture of the people.

We need not repeat here what we said earlier about the prevalence of illiteracy in Russia before the war and immediately after the revolution. We shall nonetheless provide some statistics that are by themselves more eloquent than any commentary.

Petrograd, the capital of the empire, with more than one and a half million inhabitants, registered a *60% illiteracy rate* in 1914, according to the official records of the Czarist regime.

In 1920, of the population of Petrograd, which had been reduced to 800,000 inhabitants—due to both the transfer of all government services to Moscow and the flight of the bourgeoisie—according to statistics provided by the Bolsheviks during our stay, only thirty thousand people could not read or write.

We are inclined to admit, in the form of a disclaimer with regard to official exaggerations, that the figures we were given were somewhat exaggerated; and we are willing to assume that, bringing the figures up to where our suspicions would put them, that they should be increased by about 25%. Even in this case, the number of illiterates was considerably reduced.

What methods did the Bolsheviks use to achieve this rapid decline in illiteracy? Masters of the State, systematic in all their undertakings, they were systematic in their approach to education as well. From making attendance at school compulsory for a certain number of hours per day, to denying anyone who refused to try to learn how to read and write the right to work in a factory, they tried everything. It can be said that they used every form of coercion, both moral and material, to achieve their goal.

Those who say that the people feel no need for knowledge are fundamentally mistaken. The people possess and feel the eagerness for knowledge. In the Russian schools we have seen typical cases.

It was very common to see a middle-aged or even a grey-haired man, exhausted by his day's labor, making an extraordinary effort to decipher the hieroglyphics which his eyes beheld in the written word, and striving to penetrate the mystery of these signs.

He understood that the broad horizons that were opened up to his mind after the revolution, could only become really accessible if he knew how to read and write, and this is why he was so eager to learn.

Once schooling was made available to him, he attended with the reverence of one who expects the miracle of his happiness.

But it was not just the adults whom the Bolsheviks compelled to go to school; the same orders applied to the children. And if not everything they did was done wisely, one cannot blame them for not trying to rectify their errors.

The organization of Bolshevik public education, as is true of all Bolshevik organizations, is absolutely centralist.

The teacher, especially the elementary school teacher, is the last cog in the gears that drive education. He cannot originate any initiatives, much less implement them. If a teacher has any such ideas, he can present them to his superiors for their deliberation, and apply them if authorized to do so by the annual curriculum the higher authorities establish; but that is the limit of his prerogatives. The teacher must always adapt to the norms established by the curriculum approved by the Commissariat of Public Education.

This curriculum is the synthesis of a general conference attended annually by all the teachers of Soviet Russia, but, for this very reason, it is a synthesis rather than the diversity of features that education needs, and therefore has harmful effects.

Its application would be salutary if the curriculum were taken as a point of departure, as a schematic, as a generalization to unify the results of education, allowing each teacher to build on it, to interpret it according to his best understanding, to distill its best essence from it, the guiding elements of the labor with which he has been entrusted. But that is not how it is enforced, and this explains those aspects of education that have not proven fruitful.

With regard to the forms of organization, we shall say that the Commissariat of Public Education is composed of a "college", a kind of Committee, subdivided into various sections. These sections, of which there are six, each with its president, are as follows: Arts,

Organization, Social Education, The Scientific Sector, Extra-curricular Labor, and the Committee for Public Education.

The presidents of each section, who are answerable in turn to the Commissariat of Public Education, form the “college”.

Everything pertaining to education, from the acquisition of teaching materials for the smallest school serving a collection of “isbahs”, to the granting of a doctoral diploma in a scientific field, must pass through its hands. Nothing escapes its scrutiny.

Is it necessary to build a school in one of the most remote villages of Russia? Without the approval of the “college”, it cannot be built.

Does a school need to acquire new teaching materials or replace the old ones? It cannot be done without the consent of the “college”.

One teacher, whose daily experience as a teacher led him to seek to introduce a certain modification in the annual curriculum that was currently in force, took notes, wrote a Report, submitted it to the nearest Committee for Public Education, the latter forwarded it to the higher body to which it is subject, and in this way it finally reached the “college”. If the “college” authorizes the modification in the curriculum, he may implement his innovation; otherwise, he may not.

The sections whose presidents compose the “college” are themselves subdivided into five subsections, which are economics, finance, assemblies, the central coordinating office, and materiel. We must point out that some of these sections, such as Art and Extra-curricular Labor, are subdivided into seven subsections and eleven subsections, respectively.

But this series of subdivisions and the sections of which they are components does not stop here, whether with regard to any of the higher sections—that is what we shall call those sections whose presidents compose the “college”—or with regard to any of the subdivisions of the latter, which together form the extremely complicated Bolshevik organization.

There are sections like that of State Publications, Education for Minority Nationalities and the General Office of Archives, which occupy a place apart, that is, they do not belong to any of the sections that are directly subordinate to the “college”, not forming an autonomous section within the latter; but they are directly linked to the “college”, not being connected to it via one of the previously-mentioned sections.

The school curriculum is mixed, composed of both the American system and the Montessori system.

The shortage of textbooks was not the result of any pedagogical method, but due to the lack of materials for their manufacture.

School attendance was compulsory (we must point out that this was dependent on such factors as the scarcity of school buildings and teachers, and the general poverty, and was not immediately implemented) beginning when the child could walk. At this age the children are admitted to the Nursery Schools, and after three years they are transferred to the Day Care School, where they remain until they are seven.

This latter type of school, or Day Care School, was not uniform, since a project was underway to create two kinds of schools. One where the child would remain all day, sleeping at home, and the other in which the child would remain in the school day and night. In both types the State paid for the child's tuition and room and board.

The age limit at the Day Care Schools was seven. After they reach this age, the children had to attend what we would call elementary school. They were to attend this school until the age of sixteen.

When they turned seven the children leave the Day Care School to attend the practical school (this is what we were told it is called here), and this is when their education really begins.

After admission, the sick and the abnormal children are selected and sent to special schools established for them.

Now in the practical school, the life of learning really begins for the child. In addition to learning his ABCs, he gets as much of a practical education as possible. Thus, to impress upon the child the usefulness of geometry, he is introduced to the discipline by being taught how to measure the bench where he sits, the dimensions of the school's garden, or the size of the classroom. The same methods are followed to initiate him into the discipline of the technical knowledge of agriculture, or drafting. In this respect, the initiatives of the Bolsheviks are quite noteworthy and we should take advantage of the results of their educational experiments, disregarding all partisan feeling.

We must acknowledge the good work of the Bolsheviks in public education. Their procedures, although not perfect, are vastly superior to those of the bourgeoisie.

There are also opposing tendencies among the teachers and principals with regard to reforms that they think should be introduced in order to obtain improved results from the child's passage through school. Uniformity, in this case as in all others, does not exist. And although centralization drowns out the voices of those who do not abide by the criteria of the "college", it is true that non-conformity is manifested.

While one side defends the convenience afforded by the age limits for children to remain in the various kinds of schools, another faction wants the child's attendance at these schools to be measured by the child's ability.

They claim, and not without reason, that a seven year old may have acquired more knowledge than most ten year olds. And while one is younger, even though more educated, once he graduates from the Day Care School to the practical school, he has to be registered in the first grade, while the other, older and less educated, is already in the third or fourth grade of the practical school.

This argument is rendered all the more convincing by the fact that the schools are divided into various grades.

The selection, they say, must be made on the basis of abilities, not by age. And this criterion seems to us to be the most just, although it is not the official criterion in Russia.

The practical schools of which we have been speaking are divided into two levels: the first includes those from seven to twelve years old; and the second, those from twelve to sixteen.

This division is purely technical, that is, it has no other purpose than to facilitate the work of the teachers.

This same division, by levels or by course materials, is the basis of all the Bolshevik public teaching institutions, from elementary school to the High School or the University.

The statistics we were provided, showing the number of existing schools, were quite incomplete but did not fail to display a constant increase and an overwhelming improvement over the Czarist regime. Just to give the reader an approximate idea of the deficiency of education in the Czarist regime, out of a school-age population of eight million children, one third of them were unable to attend school because there were no schools where they lived.

For those who were too old to attend these schools, there were clubs and school libraries that served the purpose of adult education resources; those admitted to these institutions paid according to their means.

At the age of sixteen, when the child graduates from practical school, he may pursue the studies of his choice.

The choice to pursue a higher education does not exempt the student, after a certain age, from manual labor, except for the twenty-five thousand students who receive full scholarships from the State. The latter students previously numbered only fifteen thousand; only a few days before their number was increased to twenty-five thousand and the State provided for all their needs. The remainder, numbering 116,947 students at the time, had to work at least four hours a day in manual labor.

At first, examinations had been abolished; but they were considering reinstating them. For some courses they had already been reintroduced.

There was a considerable number of clubs, libraries and lecture halls for students, although study materials were scarce. The only thing that there was plenty of was Bolshevik literature. There was a veritable superabundance of it.

We were told that more than one hundred thousand libraries had been established, and twelve thousand lecture halls.

There were more than one hundred popular universities.

The last decree of the Commissariat of Public Education during our stay in Russia concerned private libraries. It was decreed that every library of more than five thousand books must be confiscated so that their books could be distributed to the public libraries. The libraries of scientists were exempt from the decree; *or at least those whom the Government recognized as scientists*, who needed them for their research or scientific studies.

We made two visits to teaching institutions during our stay in Moscow. One was a Popular University and the other a Day Care School in an impoverished neighborhood.

In the Popular University we were greeted by all the professors with the dean and a commission of communist students at the head of the procession.

We toured all the departments. We visited the classrooms, the library, the dining hall, the playing fields and the dormitories; since almost all the students were communists sent to Moscow by the provincial Soviets at the behest of the Party in order to provide them with an education in Marxist theory, they had no family nearby and hence our impression that the majority of them were imprisoned there.

We inquired concerning admissions criteria, and we were told that the criteria were established by the Party, and that preference was always given to communists.

Almost all the current students, we were told by the dean, were communists from the provinces, who came to broaden their knowledge of Marxism in order to return home to become propagandists and exponents of communism.

Here they were being prepared, by means of oral and written exercises, for the knowledge of philosophy, although preferentially Marxist philosophy.

The courses deal with various subjects and are of various durations.

There are courses that last only six months. These are taken by comrades who came to receive instruction for the labor of organization for the Party and the masses.

Those who take the one-year courses are also organizers and exponents of Marxism: writers, orators, etc. And those who take the higher-level courses study all the aspects of philosophy in general.

“And what kind of relations prevail between the professors and the students?”, we asked.

“They are characterized by open camaraderie,” we were told. “When the student first arrives, he is already committed to take a particular course. In the admissions questionnaire that is periodically sent to the provincial Soviets, it is indicated that each student must choose the course of study that he prefers, a decision he makes at the moment that his request for enrollment is submitted.”

“And who selects the professors?”

“The professors are named by the *College* of the Commissariat of Public Education.”

“So the students at the Popular University cannot select their professors or depose a professor whom they do not like or whom they believe to be incompetent?”

“They cannot. The brief duration of the courses does not provide enough time for the students to select professors.”

“And what procedure is followed in order to determine, once the student has completed his course work, whether he has successfully fulfilled the course requirements?” In other countries this is ascertained, or is supposed to be ascertained, by means of examinations. Since examinations have been abolished in Russia, this method cannot be followed.

“The professor keeps a notebook with comments on each student, and he submits a report to the Commissariat of Public Education for each one, with a favorable or unfavorable assessment.”

“And you do not believe,” we asked, directing our question to all the professors present, “that this promiscuous lifestyle, crowding the students together in the classrooms, the dining halls, the recreation facilities and the dormitories will not be harmful to individual morality? This communism that affects everything, including the most intimate individual sentiments, appears to us to degrade the personality of each individual by mixing it up in a hybrid and confused whole.”

“We have not perceived this to be the case. And even if it were, there is nothing we can do to prevent it. These Universities are created in accordance with the rules established by the Party, and it is not in our power to revise or modify them in any way.”

“How many students are presently attending this University?”

“Over two hundred. The lack of provisions forces us to restrict admissions.”

“What ration is assigned to the student?”

“Ration B, which is the ration for the liberal professions.”

Once our interview was over and we had completed our tour of the University departments, we went to a classroom, where the students were gathered to receive us.

One of the students then addressed his colleagues, and as a good Marxist and disciplined Bolshevik, he spoke to them of Sovietism, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the victory of red communism and the mission that the Communist Party must play in the world revolution.

A professor welcomed us and thanked us for coming to see them.

Then a student, the tried and true communist who represented the Communist Party at the University, spoke of the achievements of the Communist Party, the unmatched valor of its men, of the great revolution that they had carried out to emancipate the people; he also spoke to us of the glorious and unforgettable Red Army, the most solid support of the Socialist Republic and the strong right arm, in days to come, of the world revolution. We were in the midst of a full messianic apotheosis.

Once the speeches were finished we departed, accompanied to the door by the students and the professors.

The visit to the Day Care School was scheduled for a Sunday afternoon.

A party was being held for the students, and our presence was solicited. They also proposed to treat us to a picnic.

This Day Care School was attended only by children under twelve years of age, which is why there were no male teachers, except for physical education teachers.

The number of female teachers was rapidly increasing. Many of them had not obtained degrees. They were the daughters of nobles or bourgeois who had died or been ruined by the revolution, and who, upon finding themselves living in poverty, chose to become teachers in order to provide for their basic needs.

Because our visit was announced in advance, the whole school was lined up to receive us.

We arrived a little late due to heavy traffic.

From the school entrance to the classrooms and dining hall where the party was being held, the boys and girls were lined up on both sides of the road. The teachers, with the schoolmaster at their head, waited for us at the door.

After having exchanged hearty greetings, the teachers led us to the special seats reserved for us.

The party began with the reading of allegorical poetry and the singing of children's songs.

The happiness on those children's faces was immense. They clapped, they laughed, they shouted; they got up from their seats and went from one bench to another; they also sang along with the singers on the stage, filling the large hall with the echo of their voices.

Once the first part of the festivities was complete, and an intermission of ten minutes was announced in order to prepare the stage for part two, a chorus of squeals and laughter broke out, an infernal cacophony that reflected the innocence and simplicity of the crowd.

In the second part of the party, a theatrical piece was presented that depicted a children's symposium.

The diminutive actors, boys and girls from the school, played their parts to perfection, and the audience, impressed by the spectacle, maintained the most reverent silence.

The screeches, shouts and whispers of the first part of the party gave way to gravity and seriousness in the second.

Only when the play was over did the applause and the commotion resume.

During the intermission after part two, lunch was distributed to the children and the guests.

It was an intermission that was suffused with a sense of moral outrage.

The teachers, obliged to play hostess to the visitors, gave the impression that they were under great duress in playing their roles.

The conversations, especially those that took place at the tables occupied by the delegates, were composed of monosyllabic utterances. In response to the questions they were asked, the teachers answered "yes" and "no". They employed few words. Only the headmistress and two or three other teachers who were communists, who belonged to the Party, were more outspoken.

The third part of the party was devoted to gymnastic and rhythmic exercises.

We found it strange that the gymnastic exercises, even those performed by the girls, were of a military character. We did not see what purpose they could serve, and perceived their unsuitability. Rather than developing the physical abilities of the children or establishing harmony between all the parts of the body, they appeared to deform the body by an excess of rigidity and violence in the exercises.

During an intermission, a few of us spoke to the children.

The first spoke in Russian. Then Rosmer's companion spoke to them in French. We noticed how shocked the children were to hear a language they could not understand.

Once the words of Rosmer's companion were translated into Russian, the children applauded and laughed and blew kisses to her.

The third delegate to address the children was the delegate of the Austrian communists.

As stiff as a statue, barking out the guttural sounds of German even more loudly than usual, and with a pomposity that was completely inappropriate considering the circumstances, he delivered a speech to the children about Lenin, Communism, Sovietism, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and a series of other matters of that kind that seemed to make the children nervous or ready to break down and cry.

The children remained serious and quiet, waiting for the translation. When his speech was translated into Russian, they appeared to be even more serious than when they first heard it in German.

Which is natural, since they did not understand a single word; they did not know what he was talking about.

This pleasant party was concluded with some popular folk songs, in which the children all joined, making for a touching scene of solemnity and harmony.

We made our departure. The cars that were waiting for us brought us back to the hotel. We spent the rest of the afternoon and evening discussing our busy day.

The innocence and the candor of those faces we had seen helped somewhat to strengthen our resolve to bear the monotony of the sessions of the Congress.

The strident shout of "all power to the dictatorship of the proletariat" was replaced by the sweet sounds of the children's songs.

Chapter 10



At the Department of Agriculture

Since Russia is an overwhelmingly agrarian country, we were especially interested in getting acquainted with the operations of this department, and even more than its operations, we wanted to know what results were obtained by the revolution in the countryside. Our wishes were only satisfied in the most cursory way.

Not being able to speak the language and convinced that we would not be able to find a reliable French interpreter in every Governmental Department we visited, we requested an interpreter from the commandant of the hotel. At this time none was available. Then, comrade Borghi, from the “Unione Sindicale Italiana”, and myself, who were the delegates that were most eager to go to the Department of Agriculture, had resort to an *unofficial* interpreter, and I believe this is why our visit to this department was almost entirely fruitless.

Despite the efforts of Sasha Kropotkin, who was our interpreter, the reports that we obtained from the employees of the department were very incomplete. We immediately noted that, almost as soon as we began to ask our questions, our interlocutor made an effort to avoid answering them or answered with evasive responses. This bad faith was most disconcerting, since it was entirely unjustified.

However, among the reports we obtained and others that were obtained by a few other delegates, we may draw an overall picture of our experience in the Department of Agriculture.

On the other hand, we must point out, because it is obviously so important, that this Department was unaware of seventy percent of the matters that arose in Russia as a result of the land problem.

Data were scarce and incomplete. Russia’s most decisive problem, the problem of the land, and the problem of the relations of the peasants with the Government, evolved at the margins of the Department that was responsible for their solution.

Whoever has read anything about the situation of the peasant in Russia during the Czarist regime, will concur with us with regard to the great interest aroused by knowledge of what was going on with the land.

In the old regime, the surviving instances of primitive communism were evident. No matter how many attempts to destroy these survivals were made by the great landlords, the small landowners and the authorities, they all failed.

The *Mir* (a communistic organization of labor) and the *Artel* (a collectivist organization of labor) had survived every attempt to absorb them. With this in mind, we were most interested to learn more about these organizations. But no one could tell us much about them.

Already during our excursion down the Volga, we reached the conclusion that the land problem in Russia actually was not a problem at all, at least with regard to the characteristics that this problem usually assumed in the rest of Europe. In almost every European country the land problem is one of scarcity; in Russia this is not the case. In Russia the problem was, and still is, rather than anything else, a problem of means of communication. There are, in the heart of Russia, almost entirely virgin lands. Man, due to the lack of means of communication and transport, has almost had no chance to settle there.

This is why the data that the Department of Agriculture could provide had for us a signal importance.

We have already pointed out that the Soviet Government declared the land to be national property and distributed it in the form of individual and collective allotments. The collectives came to represent the transformation of the former *Mir* into communist estates.

But as interesting as this was, this was not what concerned us most.

We knew, and the Bolsheviks themselves had confirmed it, that the decree nationalizing the land more or less conformed to the terms of the decree issued by the All-Russian Peasants Congress held at the end of July, 1917, while Kerensky was still in power.

From the reports we compiled in our investigations, we drew the conclusion that the real distribution of the land had already taken place prior to the promulgation of the Bolshevik decree.

When we asked our official informant whether our information was correct, he confirmed that it was, but nonetheless objected that the first distribution, in many regions, had been a ploy on the part of the landowners in an attempt to exempt themselves from the impact of the official decree issued by the Bolsheviks.

It often happened, he said, that the landowners reached an agreement with their former workers, declaring before the local Soviets that the lands of the former had been distributed among the latter.

The workers, gullible and afraid that the new conditions would not last, granted their acquiescence to this trick, and the landowner continued to enjoy the full proceeds of his estates, although clandestinely.

Once the fraud was discovered, the Committees of the Poor Peasants were formed, that is, committees of those who never had any property at all and who left the cities in droves for the countryside to participate in the distribution of land.

The members of these Committees, since they had made no agreements of any kind with the landowners and, in addition, understood the scope of the revolution better than the peasants, discovered the deception and proceeded, with the agreement of the local Soviets, to carry out a new distribution of the land.

These actions on the part of the Committees and the new distribution of land that they were attempting to implement resulted in the first bloody clashes in Russia after the revolution.

The former landowners, along with the workers who had benefited from the first distribution of land, resolutely opposed the distributions made by the Committees of the Poor Peasants, and the Government had to intervene to settle their disputes.

But the conflicts became more acute. Those who were dispossessed by the Committees of the Poor Peasants organized resistance, which assumed the features of a civil war. The Government, however, could not abandon the Committees of the Poor Peasants, since it had formed them and granted them almost omnipotent powers, and was faced with a conflict that endangered its own security and very existence.

Then, our informant continued, came the decree issued in 1919 dissolving the Committees of the Poor Peasants. This decree constituted one of Lenin's most important victories in the Communist Party.

The opposition to this decree was extremely powerful; but Lenin succeeded in making his opponents see the dangers to which Russia was exposed by the risk of a veritable civil war, one that was a thousand times more dangerous than the coup attempts of Yudenitch, Deniken and the other lackeys of the world bourgeoisie.

It took all of his authority as leader to overcome the opposition.

From that moment on, the functions performed by the Committees of the Poor Peasants were transferred to the local Soviets, thus averting one of the greatest threats ever encountered by the Soviet Government.

“And the small landowners, those who already owned a few hectares of land under the Czarist regime that allowed them and their families to live decently without exploiting the labor of others; how have they been treated by the revolution? What measures were taken by the Government to dispossess them of their land?”

“None. They have continued as before. Only, once the harvest has been brought in, and the part that corresponds to their ration according to the official statistics has been set aside, they must deliver the rest to the employees of the Commissariat of Provisions. With regard to how they cultivate their land, nothing has changed; in all other respects they are subject to the regulations dictated by the Government.”

“Yes,” we responded, “something like that happens to the owners of a small house. They are still the owners of the house, but they cannot do what they want with it. It is a circumscribed

right of ownership; more imaginary than real; something quite different from the way the right to property is understood by the world bourgeoisie and the legal codes of all the nations.”

“It has to be that way,” our informant responded.

“Is it true,” we asked, “that in very many cases, the peasants abandon the land that they were given by the distribution of lands and join groups of other peasants that move to another location to work fallow lands regardless of any official approval?”

“Yes,” our informant responded, “many such cases can be cited, especially in Central Russia and the Ukraine.”

“In these regions, the peasants follow their natural impulses and pool their labors and move from one place to another to cultivate lands that have been abandoned. But the Government has always opposed these procedures.”

“And why do you think the peasants obey this impulse?”

“To avoid the official taxes and confiscations of the Government. Since we cannot pay for their products in kind, whether with machinery, clothing or other household articles, they do not want to give up their surplus. They consider the Russian ruble to be without value. Until quite recently the Czarist ruble had more value among the peasants than the Soviet ruble. Now that is changing. The stability of the Government is contributing to this transformation.”

“Is there any fear that there may be a possible return to the regime of private property in the land?”

“That is impossible as long as the communists are in power. The land has been declared to be national patrimony, and no one may sell it, inherit it or alienate it in any way; anyone who ceases to cultivate the land, or dies, loses all rights to its usufruct; because the right to dispose of the parcel under these conditions reverts to the State, the individual cannot acquire any property rights at all. Therefore, private ownership of the land cannot return.”

“We agree with what you have told us. But then,” we continued, “the small landowner, who still occupies the parcel of land he owned under the old regime without having been affected by any official regulations except for the requisition of his surplus products after harvest; can he or can he not sell, transfer, devise by will or alienate land that he owns under all the power of the law?”

“We cannot say anything about such an individual case, since nothing has been legislated in that regard. Although it may be assumed that his property rights are precarious, since all the Russian territory has been proclaimed to be State property.”

“It would seem,” we objected, “that this would be the spirit and the letter of the law. But we know that there is currently a great deal of speculation in land and in these properties in particular; that private contracts are being entered into between the actual possessors and the new distributees; that a significant traffic in these properties is being carried on, which it would appear do not conform with the letter of the law as we understand it.”

“It is possible that this kind of private trade exists, a new aspect of speculation; but this has no effect on Soviet policy, and cannot be the cause of a return to the past.”

“However,” we objected, “the confidence and boldness with which these people are carrying on their work gives no reason for being optimistic about the future.”

“Could you provide us,” we asked, “with some statistical data regarding the communist organizations, Communes or farms, which the Soviet State or individuals cultivate and under what conditions they maintain relations with one another, and if the amount of land under cultivation has increased or diminished?”

“With pleasure. The figures that we shall provide with reference to the Farms and Communes are official data. Besides these institutions there are many other organizations, but we can only provide statistics on those that are officially recognized by the Government. Statistics regarding the lands distributed to individuals cannot be provided, because we have been unable to obtain them.”

“Not even approximately?”

“No; we are only given vague estimates about them.”

“In that case, what we want to know is whether the amount of land under cultivation is increasing or diminishing and why.”

“The amount of land under cultivation has decreased since the revolution by almost forty percent, according to the data we have in this Department. The reasons for this decrease are quite complex and varied; they respond to different phenomena.”

“There are, for example, regions where the peasants cannot cultivate the land because they do not have the tools to do so. There is a shortage of seeds, which are consumed due to a general shortage of food; rather than starve the peasants eat the seed corn. There is also a shortage of animals for traction. The horse, without which the Russian peasant would be unable to cultivate the land, has experienced a significant decline. In some regions there are almost no horses at all.”

“We do not need to point out that, with regard to machinery and other manufactured appurtenances for farming, including fertilizer, an absolute scarcity prevails.”

“Before the war, Russia imported such farm inputs from Europe; the blockade has completely cut us off from these supplies and from the necessary replacement parts and additional imports that would provide for expansion.”

“Another cause, and perhaps the most serious one, is the passive resistance of the peasants in their refusal to cultivate the land. They work, but only enough for their own subsistence.”

“The peasants are hostile to compulsory requisition, and do everything they can to prevent it. It is far from an isolated case—indeed it is quite frequent—for peasants to construct underground granaries in the forest, in secret places separated from their homesteads and barns in order to conceal their grain from the requisition. Since they cultivate just enough food to feed their families, if they did not adopt such precautions they would starve; because

by taking its share, the Government would make it impossible for them to survive from one harvest to the next.”

“Why is it that, despite the fact that the Soviet Government ratified the land seizures carried out by the peasants during the course of the revolution, the peasants now refuse to help the Soviet Government?”

“Because of egoism and speculation. The peasant wants to enjoy the freedom to sell his products to whomever he wants and when he wants. To exchange them or offer them for sale at the price he sets. What he does not want, what he rejects and detests with all his might is government interference in his affairs. This is a manifestation of the petit bourgeois state of mind.”

“Is it not instead the desire to live in full freedom, to arrange matters according to one’s own opinions, to organize production and consumption on the basis of free communism rather than the state communism like the one that is being imposed on him?”

“No; what he wants is to make money. To get the most advantage possible out of his labor. To obtain the maximum profit from what he produces, and nothing else. You forget that the Russian peasant is illiterate and very ignorant. His life consists almost entirely of instinctive, rudimentary and animal feelings, without hardly a trace of idealism.”

“Immersed in the barbarism of slavery and tyranny for many centuries; having witnessed how his exploiters expended on untrammelled luxury and scandalous orgies the means that he considered indispensable for living; degraded, mocked and scorned, the fear of starvation and the misery of the past has awakened in him the emotion of greed.”

“Anxious to have more and more; the more the better to be in a situation to ride out the times of scarcity.”

“He is a communist; but he is so by instinct, but not by any higher reasoning. He knows, by experience, that labor in common yields more than individual labor, and hence his communism. Now, when he has obtained the freedom to work on his own account, he also wants to enjoy the freedom to dispose of what he produces in order to derive the most benefit from it.”

“It is true that all of this is very complex.”

We were told that there were at that time fifteen thousand Communes and Artels scattered throughout the provinces of central Russia.

There were 17 Communes and 123 Artels in Nizhny Novgorod. In Astrakhan there were 19 Communes, 591 Artels, and 15 affinity groups.

In Saratov, there were 66 Communes and 226 Artels.

In the Smolensk district there were 200 affinity groups, 98 Artels and 33 Communes.

The quantity of arable land assigned to each Commune or Artel, as well as to the affinity groups, varied considerably.

The Government appropriates all of the products of the Communes and Artels. The rationing and distribution of each individual member's share is conducted by special government institutions created specifically for this purpose.

It was surprising to note that, in view of the centralist and uniform standards that prevail throughout the entire Bolshevik apparatus, not all of the Communes and Artels were subject to the Department of Agriculture. 2,800 of them were subject to the Department of Agriculture, while the rest were subject to the Council of National Economy.

In order to coordinate the daily activities and overall development of the Communes and Artels, there are, besides the Department of Agriculture in Moscow and the appropriate Section of the Council of National Economy, also Commissions in each province that inspect and exercise surveillance over the conduct of these farm enterprises.

The distribution of fertilizers, as well as that of agricultural machinery, is carried out in accordance with a strictly delimited set of priorities.

Requests for fertilizers first have to be submitted to the provincial Agricultural Committee, which then puts them in order of priority. Then, when the distribution is ready to begin, they are classified; first of all the State Farms, then the Communes, then the Artels, and finally the affinity groups.

Another typical case, which is illustrative of the slight enthusiasm with which the peasants receive the Bolshevik decrees that affect them, is the continuous state of dereliction of the official institutions—Communes, State Farms and Artels—and the emigration of their workers to work independently.

The individual who gave us the information we have been relating, also confirmed what we were told by the people we had spoken to privately: that groups of peasants were abandoning the official institutions, or the lands that they had obtained in the initial distributions, and were jointly cultivating waste lands or lands that no one owned or claimed. This was the real communism rising above all official obstacles.

It is from these groups that the affinity groups are formed which, in some provinces, such as the District of Smolensk, numbered as many as two hundred according to official statistics.

And you must also consider that Siberia and the Ukraine, the two regions of Russia that are most favorable to the affinity group as a system of organization, are not covered by the official statistics.

The case of the Chuvash Republic is quite typical in this regard, and fully confirms what we have said.

The decrees of the ruling party, rather than improving or stimulating the development of the communist institutions and spirit of the Russian peasant, have become a hindrance, an impediment and an obstacle that stands in the way of his full development and evolution.

The Russian peasant did not yearn for a barracks or monastic communism, such as the Bolsheviks were imposing from their position in the Government; he yearned for a free, autonomous and independent communism, one that grew from his own will and his fecund

and creative efforts. And because he was denied this right, struggle ensued, a struggle that has cost thousands of lives and rivers of blood.

Communist soldiers and delegates responsible for carrying out the requisitions were killed and barbarously mutilated, villages burned to the ground and children, women and the elderly hunted down like wild animals and used for target practice by death-dealing machine gunners: this is the balance sheet of Bolshevik policy.

When the Russian peasant was compelled to work under onerous conditions, and saw that all his traditional institutions, such as the Artels and the Mirs, were transformed according to the caprice and the whim of a Government that took them over and appropriated by force all the products that he harvested, he rebelled and pursued his protest and his resistance as far as acts of violence.

The Bolsheviks are very fond of statistics and graphs; they have a real weakness for this kind of explanation; however, we may be very much mistaken, but we believe that they will never produce the statistics for all the murders committed, for all the villages laid waste and burned and all the victims who were sacrificed to this erroneous policy. Only time will tell.

Chapter 11

11

Policy relating to Food Supply

The ferocious struggles underway between the Russian Government and the peasants, due to the requisition policy of the former that has been so fully described in the bourgeois European press, which delights in reproducing the most insignificant details and which we viewed with a great deal of suspicion prior to our arrival in Russia, was a question that we wanted to get to the bottom of and to understand in detail, so that, upon our return, we would be able to disprove them, or else verify them, if it turned out that they were true.

Thus, we had no sooner crossed the frontier and made our first contact with the Bolsheviks, than we made frequent attempts to direct the conversation to this subject, and while we were not rewarded with any explicit clarifications in these conversations, they were not for that reason devoid of any usefulness, since they provided us with an introduction to the question.

But these simple introductions were not enough. The mission that sent us to Russia could not be satisfied with simple isolated suggestions. It required more; it required complete data that could serve as a basis for solid judgments.

The worldwide Press campaign against the Soviet regime attained the scale of an all-out attack.

The voice of reaction rose clamorously, deafeningly, stridently and with more or less certain proofs, with a huge stockpile of data and factual detail, and insistently confronted us with the accusations launched against the defenders of the Russian cause and drowned out our voices.

It was a necessity to counteract these effects. But an inescapable necessity. Love for the Revolution and the freedom of the Russian people, while indispensable elements for arriving at a fair judgment, could not be the only arguments marshaled against these accusations whose purpose is to distort the facts about the Revolution.

And if we broke through the blockade that surrounds Russia and crossed its frontier after so many hardships, it will be understood that we had not endured so many vicissitudes and overcome so many obstacles for the sole pleasure of being able to say: "We made it to Russia." This would be an achievement, but we did not do it just out of personal vanity.

Our social activity and the experience that we have derived from it, along with the study of historical facts, has led us to a conclusion, one that we still hold; that without economic freedom, political or social freedom is a myth.

The pompous phrases, the moving oratorical style of polemical speeches, more or less democratic, the exuberant and declamatory speeches of man, are just so much fireworks, roman candles, and smoke, which dissipate if they are not accompanied by an economic improvement in the lives of the people. When man is no longer economically enslaved, no political servitude will be possible. When the bourgeoisie cannot lead the proletariat by his stomach, the ideas and actions of the proletariat will be suffused with freedom.

Because this is our standard for judgment, one can understand the attention we were obliged to devote during our stay in Russia to everything that had any relation with the economic liberation of the proletariat.

In the capitalist regime, the worker experiences hunger. Sometimes, entire peoples and regions have disappeared, decimated by this terrible scourge; but this is not because enough has not been produced to feed everyone. The phenomenon exists because the distribution of what is produced is arbitrary and cruel, because it bears the hallmarks of a Herodian massacre directed against the people. So how did the Bolsheviks proceed in Russia? Were they successful? We shall provide concrete evidence with regard to this question.

The March revolution first transferred power to the Cadets, and then to Kerensky, and did nothing to organize a more humane system than the one that had just permanently disappeared.

Russia's economic situation at that time was still very difficult; hunger and the most atrocious privations had held sway over the people; the years of war, together with the difficult conditions which Russia had long endured, made a major contribution to the accumulation of hardships.

In Russia, of course, as in all the capitalist countries, those who suffered first and most intensely from the economic privations imposed by the war were the workers; for this same reason, the men who led the first revolution should have implemented a more equitable and more humane distribution of basic needs to the people. They did not do so and things remained the same in that regard.

During the period between March and October the situation got worse; it deteriorated to levels that were almost unprecedented. This grave situation, however, favored the Bolsheviks, and gave them the leeway to carry out their work. Their principle concern was with production.

But if the momentary situation did not pose grave dangers to the Bolsheviks, there was no doubt that they would have to face such dangers in the future.

The total disorganization of trade, the suppression of all the stores that formerly sold consumer goods—both large and small—the confiscation that the Government carried out for its own use of all the wealth produced and hoarded, gave it complete freedom of action on the road it had proposed to follow, and to create as many institutions as it thought would be necessary for the purpose of organizing distribution.

These advantages, that seemed so favorable, were seized upon by the Government, which immediately created the Commissariat of Food Supply, staffing it with tried and true communists and trusted Party members.

The first thing the Commissariat did was to fix the price of food products, since, although it was disorganized and timorous, free trade still existed.

The results of this decree could hardly have been more disastrous. Because the decree fixed the prices of goods far below the prices they were being sold for on the market, and because the decree also threatened anyone who refused to observe the price limits with harsh penalties, all the products disappeared from the market and in a few days their prices rose more than three hundred percent.

Threats, requisitions, imprisonments, and even executions: everything was tried; but always with negative results. The goods did not reappear, and those that were sold on the black market fetched astronomical prices.

In the meantime, the staff at the Commissariat of Food Supply was working feverishly. Reports accumulated. One statistical abstract followed another, and these were succeeded by others and yet more reports; but the situation of the people's food supply did not improve. Speculation was rampant. You could not have bought a pin for the price fixed by the decree; instead, one could obtain anything for the black market price.

The peasant Soviets in the province of Moscow contacted the Commissariat of Food Supply and requested that it establish some order and normal activity in the relations of buying and selling or the exchange of products, between the city and the countryside.

Among the products that were affected by severe shortages was milk. It could not even be found for hospital patients.

This shortage was all the more striking insofar as Moscow had always enjoyed an abundance of milk, due to the enterprising spirit of an industrialist of the capitalist regime.

A wealthy and ambitious man, a few years before the revolution, had organized the purchase of milk in the neighboring villages.

Agreements were made with the peasants, according to which all the milk that was produced by their cows would be gathered, and then shipped in casks they owned, and distributed in numerous stores established in Moscow for this purpose.

The peasant Soviets requested that the Commissariat of Food Supply should respect this organizational arrangement, due to its good results, even if the entrepreneur who owned the company that operated the service was expropriated, as had indeed taken place already.

They also requested that the Commissariat of Food Supply should appoint one or more individuals to take over the expropriated company with full power to negotiate the price of milk with the peasant Soviets.

The Commissariat considered the request of the peasant Soviets, approved their proposal and promised to quickly comply with their requests.

The peasants went home satisfied, because they believed that the Commissariat would solve the problem.

Weeks and months passed; it was half a year before the Commissariat issued its official response, upholding the previous price decrees for milk products.

The Commissariat of Food Supply ruled in favor of maintaining the price of thirty rubles for a liter of milk, when the price on the free market was two hundred and fifty, and thus, while the Government could not supply the population with milk, the black market was overflowing with this product.

This example, cited as a broadly relevant case that shows how the Bolsheviks proceeded with regard to the problem of food supply, can be repeated for all other food products.

The uniformity, unilateral orders and the rigid mentality adopted for one question was also adopted for all the others. This explains the constant series of rectifications, which bordered on the incredible.

Once the statistics concerning the inhabitants were in the hands of Soviet Russia, it was hoped that there would be products to distribute. The Government's first requisitions were soon used up, except for those that were rotting in the warehouses, awaiting the compilation of statistics, while the people went hungry.

Now that the State had become the sole purchaser of everything that was produced, it attempted to enforce its requisitions and price fixing, which the peasants evaded by every means at their disposal: leaving the lands untilled or farming only as much as was indispensable for their own families; armed resistance; executing and stoning to death the communists and the soldiers sent to requisition their products.

The first arrangement for the accumulation and distribution of products that the Commissariat of Food Supply established was surely one of the most extravagant and absurd systems one could imagine.

This is how they went about it.

Having acquired statistical knowledge of the amount of products—a purely approximate, rather than precise knowledge—produced by each province, the Commissariat established in each provincial capital one or more large warehouses for products. The Soviet of each village, town or hamlet of “isbaks” provided statistics reflecting what each cultivator had harvested, and the cumulative product, without leaving any part thereof for the farmer, was sent by the Soviet to the provincial warehouses.

Once all the products of the province were gathered in the provincial warehouse, those that were earmarked for each town or village, in accordance with the number of residents and the quantity, as set forth in the rationing system decreed in Moscow, that was assigned to each individual, were returned to the village or the town from where they originally came.

By means of this brilliant communist innovation, before a peasant can eat a kilo of beans harvested from his own crop, they had to be sent hundreds of kilometers, in accordance with the wise Bolshevik and Leninist decrees.

But since absurdity cannot long prevail, because reason resists its continuation, the protests of all the Russians who were not Commissars, or leaders, or dictators, caused the latter to see the error of their ways and to correct them.

The errors of Bolshevik political economy are legion. When history finally makes an account of them available, humanity will be shocked. If their purpose had been to make the situation worse, they could not have been more successful.

The centralization of all the distribution services produced incalculable damage and even more incalculable losses.

The peasants who saw the clumsiness of the State and its errors, due to the consequences and harm that they brought in their wake, organized violent resistance and refused to have any dealings with it.

They also demanded that the requisitioned products should be paid for with other products, since the Bolshevik money, due to the fact that it was produced without limit, was enormously depreciated.

“We do not refuse,” they said, “to produce as much as we can, but only that the delivery of our surplus products, after we reserve for our own use those we need, should be in exchange for what we need to live. What we refuse to do is to deliver the products in exchange for worthless paper money and to support the thousands of useless drones who lurk in the offices of the Government, and who are the ones who oppress us now and who enslave us, now that for each deputy we send to the Soviet, they have the right to send five.”

The Government’s attempt to fix prices was therefore completely ineffective. The seizure by the Government of everything that was produced, the requisitions and the threats, which were carried out all too often, did not improve the situation; to the contrary, they aggravated it.

The time came when the ration that the Government gave the people was reduced to one-quarter of what each individual needed to live, according to official data.

The whole situation was only made worse by the centralization of all the methods of distribution.

In Moscow all the census data for the whole population of Russia was centralized, where the individual ration was calculated. Therefore, the production statistics also had to be gathered in Moscow.

We therefore found that the system worked as follows. First: after each peasant harvests his crops, he sends them to the local warehouse—whether of a city, village, town or hamlet of “isbahs”--; second: once the products are in the warehouse, the local Soviet carries out an exact statistical survey of them, which must be transmitted to the provincial Soviet; third: the provincial Soviet sends all the statistics collected from all the localities under its jurisdiction to Moscow, to the Commissariat of Food Supply, so that they can be analyzed, the provincial exchange is established and a ration is fixed for each individual; fourth: the statistics are returned to each provincial Soviet; and fifth, the provincial Soviet will distribute the statistics to each local Soviet, so that the latter may proceed to distribute the products assigned to each category of the population.

Then there are the surplus products. The local Soviet sends them to the central provincial warehouse, which will distribute them in accordance with the orders it receives from the Commissariat of Food Supply in Moscow.

All these operations imply a waste of time and many sinecures: thousands of employees, who are, according to Lenin, “the most noxious plague that has attacked Bolshevism”.

The inconveniences of this centralization constituted the most formidable battering ram used against the Bolshevik’s economic policy, and the “new economic policy”, which was advocated by Lenin himself and implemented after our departure from Russia, is the most convincing proof of this.

Before we conclude this chapter, however, we would like to relate some facts that are certainly quite instructive. They shed light on the disastrous results of the centralization policy that was, and still is, so highly praised.

The province of Moscow is a major producer of potatoes. The harvests are usually very good. The hunger which seized hold of the population of Moscow, after the blockade cut off external supplies, was somewhat mitigated for a few months by the potato harvest.

Due to the fact that the Russian winters do not permit the sowing of crops in early spring, most of the legumes and root crops are of the kind that we call “late planting” crops in Spain, in other words, those that are harvested at the end of the summer.

The potato harvest in the province of Moscow in 1919 was a very large one. The residents of the city were pleased, because they were notified concerning this abundant harvest of potatoes by the news spread in the city by the peasants from the surrounding farmlands, and expected that the food distribution would fulfill their needs.

During the first two weeks of September of 1919, rumor had it that the potato warehouses of Moscow were crammed full of potatoes.

Everyone awaited the imminent beginning of the distribution of the potatoes. But the distribution never took place. The distribution did not take place because the very abundance of the harvest obliged the authorities to revise or prepare new rationing schedules.

The days passed by. The people were beset by hunger, a hunger that was all the more cruel since everyone knew about the existence of the huge potato harvest, and became impatient, fearing the worst. In the meantime, the Commissariat of Food Supply and the Council of the National Economy, with their centralized bureaucratism, were still working, compiling lists and reckoning numbers, submitting reports and calculations, as if they wanted to be complicit in what was going to happen.

And the people's fears were realized. The climate put the finishing touches on the whole Bolshevik system of centralizing mathematics and scientificism, destroying in just a few hours the hopes that a million hungry people had with regard to that immense harvest of potatoes.

The frosts of the end of September, which are persistent in Russia and herald the first snows of the winter, destroyed all the potatoes in the warehouses. And this took place just when the Bolsheviks had announced they were almost finished with their statistical reports on the revised ration schedules.

And with the painful sadness that only hungry people with no means to satisfy their hunger can possess, the people of Moscow saw how thousands and thousands of kilos of frozen potatoes, unsuitable for human consumption, were thrown into the streets, shoveled into huge piles. Nothing was left to distribute to the people.

The wisdom and the delights of centralist political economy could not be more comforting.

Another interesting case, worthy of not being imitated, took place with regard to the Petrograd fishery, in the Neva River.

After the ice melts, when the temperature rises and people can fish in the Neva, the schools of small fish swarm there in such abundance that all one needs is a pole and a few hours on the shore in order to catch a few pounds of fish.

But the Bolshevik State, concerned that *no one under its control should have to worry about getting enough food*, devised a measure that would assure all the residents of Petrograd some Neva fish on their table. Was there not a king who wanted to put a chicken in the pot of each one of his subjects? Why shouldn't a Bolshevik Government put a fried fish on the plate of every resident of Petrograd? Nothing could be more just.

The Government forced all the fishermen of Petrograd to join a trade union, and imposed upon them the obligation to sell all the fish they caught to the city's Soviet. This measure was rounded out with the most absolute prohibition against anyone who was not a member of the Trade Union fishing in the river. Anyone who violated this regulation was threatened with severe penalties.

The professional fishermen, who were members of the Trade Union and to whom the monopoly of fishing in the Neva had been granted, were pleased, since they expected to be able to make a living on fishing.

But no one expected what actually took place. Along with the obligation to sell their catch to the city Soviet that was placed on the fishermen in exchange for conceding them their monopoly, the most absurd commercial theory made its appearance. The Petrograd Soviet fixed the price of fish, using the norm imposed with regard to the milk price rates as a model. It fixed the price at a much lower level than the fish were selling for on the open market and in the mutually adjusted sales.

The fishermen protested; they wanted to make the local Soviet see how inappropriate the price controls were. But the Soviet was not convinced by their arguments, and instead threatened them with severe penalties if they did not comply with the price controls. The result?

The fishermen refused to fish; they abandoned the entire enterprise; only a handful gave in. But since the catch brought in by these few fishermen, after subtracting the fish they were entitled to, could not even cover a quarter of what the population needed, and since the prohibition on unauthorized fishing was still in effect by virtue of the monopoly granted to the Trade Union, the people of Petrograd had to go hungry, forbidden to do so much as drop a line with a hook into the river.

Something similar took place with regard to the fishermen in Lake Ladoga.

They, too, were conceded a monopoly on fishing in the lake, after having been forced to join a trade union, and the Moscow Soviet bought all their fish, at the price set by the Soviet.

Because this price was so low that the sale of their catch failed to compensate them for their expenses and basic needs, the fishermen of Lake Ladoga refused to fish. But since the entire catch from Lake Ladoga is consumed in Moscow, and because the fishermen's strike caused a shortage of fish in that city, the Soviet decreed their mobilization and issued an order to them to go back to work.

The measure could not have been less effective or more counterproductive. When a detachment of troops was sent to Lake Ladoga to force the fishermen to go back to work, the fishermen emigrated *en masse*, and of the several hundred fishermen who originally formed the Trade Union and made their living from fishing, only thirty were left.

But the most serious accusation that can be made against the errors of Bolshevik political economy and the violence and extortion to which it led, involves the story of a railroad worker in the province of Saratov.

The father of a numerous family, the rations he received were insufficient. Hunger, and with it, desperation, led him to an understandable resolution. He took the only pair of shoes he owned and departed for the countryside and exchanged them for a couple of kilos of flour.

Upon returning to his village, shoeless, but with a little flour that would placate the hunger of his family for a few days, he was detained and the flour was confiscated.

All his pleadings, all his supplications, and all his lamentations, broke against the barbarous official regulation.

In desperation, he went to the outskirts of the village and hanged himself from a tree.

Thousands of cases like this can be cited. If we have referred to this case in particular, we did not do so in order to pull on the heartstrings of the reader; we did so in order to give some idea of the profound tragedy that the people of Russia are suffering as a result of the misdeeds of their leaders.

And do not tell us that these disasters are attributable to the shortage of goods; this is a half-truth at best. We do not deny that there was a shortage of products in Russia; but we do claim that this shortage was in part caused by the clumsy and by all measures arbitrary economic policy pursued by the Bolsheviks.

We shall conclude by pointing out that all this information was provided to us by Victor Serge (Kibalchich), and was confirmed by other high level employees of the Soviet Government. We say this because the eloquence of our pro-Bolshevik elements, who are such prodigious fantasists, could very well be used to accuse us of pouring forth a series of calumnies to discredit the red dictators.

The requisitions, together with the existence of the Cheka, are the two blackest marks against Bolshevik policy.

We have hinted here and there in previous chapters concerning the resistance, sometimes passive and sometimes violent, with which the Russian peasant always opposed the requisition policy.

How many victims were there? We were unable, despite assiduous efforts, to acquire even an approximate idea. We saw graphs and tables dealing with the question. We possess photographs of villages and towns that were destroyed because they refused to hand over their products; but our reports go no further than this.

The requisitions are the logical consequence of the food supply policy implemented by the Bolsheviks.

When did they decree the requisitions? How were they carried out?

During the very first moments of the revolution, there was no reason for requisitions. The peasant, like the worker in the city, exchanged what he possessed and delivered everything, sometimes even what was indispensable for his survival. The instinct of solidarity in the people, in the great majority of them, produced magnificent results. But when official action intervened to regulate and control everything, the result was conflict.

By Government order free trade was suspended and products requisitioned for the purpose of statistical analysis; this paralyzed all trade, leading to poverty.

Since the official prohibition of free trade was absolute, any infraction was punished; but infractions were necessary because of the shortages that were getting worse every day.

Before banning free trade, the Government should have prepared the instrument that would replace free trade, and that would provide for the needs that were provided for by the market,

because, whatever one may say against commercial thievery, one must acknowledge that it fulfills a need in the distributive machinery of products for modern populations.

But this did not happen. The Bolshevik Government, drunk on theory, but without any grasp of reality, suppressed free trade without having established the distributive institution that would replace it.

The immediate and most urgent consequence of this measure was the most absolute paralysis of everyday commerce, and its greatest impact was on the households of the workers.

It is true that the Government remembered to establish large warehouses for the distribution of products; but the effectiveness of these warehouses can only be gauged after the products are requisitioned, inventoried and brought to the warehouses.

This process had to take several days, and in the proletarian home, in Russia as in every other country, one lives day to day, and with the stores closed, the workers had nowhere to go to get provisions.

The first thing they did was to resort to the black market, and thus to engage in what the Bolsheviks called speculation, but which was an imperious necessity, in order to obtain what could not be obtained legally anywhere.

During this transition period the Cooperatives played a major role; but they were insufficient. How could they, numbering only a few dozen, supply a population of almost one million residents?

The exchange of products, one by one, and hand to hand, clandestine and burdensome, soon attained a formidable scale, and accustomed the peasants to the practice of usury, which was favored by having to carry on their business in secret.

After a few weeks, the Government purchasing and distribution warehouses opened, and the remedy proved worse than the disease, because the peasant, enticed by the fabulous profits to be made from the black market, did not want to sell their products to the Soviet for the price the Government fixed.

Then the requisitions began. The Bolsheviks thought they could fight fire with fire.

Insofar as the requisitions were restricted to the city, and were limited to the confiscation of all the products brought to the city for sale or to be stored or hoarded in secret caches, they did not have tragic consequences. These consequences came later.

In parallel with this Government policy of forced confiscation and requisition, the Government also implemented a program of price controls that were set by the Soviet of each municipality, in accordance with instructions received from Moscow.

The peasants, not wanting to comply with either decree, organized passive resistance. They did not deliver their products; they would rather hide them.

Then the Bolsheviks organized a Government offensive against the peasants.

They organized groups of individuals, or soldiers, under the command of trusted communists, which proceeded from one village to another requisitioning and confiscating everything.

The peasants shifted from passive to active resistance. They confronted the groups and military detachments responsible for the requisition orders. But they did not yet engage in violent conflict. The active resistance consisted in letting one part of their lands lie fallow, thus discharging their shared bitterness.

The Government responded with draconian measures, which led in many cases to the execution of the most stubborn resisters.

The result could not have been worse, because the peasants then shifted from active resistance without violence to active and violent resistance.

Elsewhere in this book we have already spoken of the means with which the peasants defended themselves, to which we make reference.

What did the Bolshevik Government do? What measures did it implement? How did it attempt to resolve such an extremely violent situation, brought to such an extreme by its own errors?

It proclaimed even more draconian and violent countermeasures and treated the peasant as an enemy of the people. It gave full powers to the commissions responsible for the requisitions, ordering them to seize everything without hesitation.

But it did not stop there: when it saw how powerless it was against the resistance of the peasants and that, in addition, the people responsible for the requisitions were withdrawing from the countryside in fear, it granted the requisition squads twenty-five percent of the confiscated products as a reward.

The effect was magical. Hunger accomplished what conscience refused to do. The requisitions were implemented mercilessly. Instead of playing the part of Government agents fulfilling a sacred mission, the requisition squads fell upon the villages like bands of conquerors devoted to pillage, greedy for spoils and wealth.

They confiscated everything; they took everything away; they seized everything. When there was nothing else to take, they even took the rations that were legally assigned to the families they were pillaging.

When, during our excursion on the Volga, we slipped away from our official guides and asked some peasants for details about the requisitions, they remained completely silent, but their eyes blazed with hatred and they clenched their fists threateningly.

The requisition teams paid so well that men with good jobs and high-level positions in other government departments resigned their positions and requested posting to the requisition teams.

During one of our trips, our train stopped alongside one of the trains carrying one of the requisition teams. Its commander was a medical doctor who gave up his practice and his clinic in order to accept this commission.

Since the two trains had to wait in the station for more than an hour, we were interested in getting detailed information about the team's mission, and we went over to their car to ask them some questions.

We were received by the commander.

He responded to our questions by saying that requisition was necessary, because the peasant, imbued with petit bourgeois ideas, did not want to deliver his products to the Government, and instead wanted to sell them on the black market or to speculators in order to obtain enormous profits.

"And how do the peasants receive you?", we asked.

"The way you would expect. They receive us with hostility. Whenever they can they impede and obstruct our efforts. They are opposed to any requisition of their possessions."

"And how do you go about carrying out the requisitions? Who do you approach first?"

"We are assigned the place or places we are to work at in advance."

"Once we arrive, we immediately demand that the Soviet Committee of the village meet with us; we ask the Committee to identify the farmers who have refused to comply with their scheduled delivery of their products; and we ask where the products are hidden and approximately in what quantity."

"When we have a detailed list of the malefactors, we proceed with a squad of Red Army soldiers, whose support we request from the nearest army post, to the place where our work must be carried out, and we go from house to house demanding the delivery of the hidden products."

"And if they refuse to turn them over?"

"We arrest the suspect; we bring him to the local Soviet and put him in jail."

"And if he still resists? And if, despite arrest and imprisonment, he persists in refusing to deliver the products, what do you do then?"

"We search his house, the places where we suspect he has concealed the goods and which we have been informed are suspected to be his hiding places, until we find them. There are cases when the peasant, after a few hours in jail, *voluntarily confesses* where the products are hidden."

"Do you have any rights to a commission or reward in the form of a portion of the products that you discover?"

"If the peasant, upon being asked for the first time to deliver the products, does so voluntarily, no; but if he refuses and our investigation uncovers them, then we get twenty-five percent of the proceeds."

"So in that case you have a major interest in *discovering* the hiding places?"

“You would assume so, although we have even more of an interest in carrying out the mandate and orders of the Government.”

“And how is it,” we objected, “that you, being a medical doctor, and in view of the shortage of doctors at the battlefield for treating wounded soldiers, have preferred this disagreeable task instead of your chosen profession?”

“We all do our part for the victory of communism and to fight the counterrevolution. And this job requires intelligent men who support communist policy.”

“Of course. But there are many men who support communist policy, and some of them are very intelligent, who would be glad to perform this task, without drawing on those who are needed at the battlefield, such as doctors, for example, and who cannot be replaced because of the qualifications of their profession.”

“The Party can be served in many ways,” he responded.

“And you,” we continued, “were you sent here by the Government, by some provincial Soviet, or did you apply for the job?”

“I voluntarily requested this posting.”

“And why didn’t you request posting to the front, to Poland, where the Red Army is fighting in defense of the Revolution?”

“It’s none of your business,” he responded somewhat gruffly.

The arrival of a communist from our entourage put an end to our dialogue, which was interesting in so many respects, revealing the why and the wherefore of many things.

Upon the request of this communist we were shown the quantity of requisitioned products, which was by no means small, and he also told us about the quantity that was to go to the requisition team as their reward. This, too, was not inconsiderable.

These products, which were supposed to be sent to Moscow and placed at the disposal of the Commissariat of Food Supply, had already been shipped from one place to another for many days, following the circuitous course and zigzags of the requisition team. Before reaching its destination, it was quite possible that half of it would be lost in transit. Hunger played its part; corruption did the rest.

Chapter 12

12

At the Department of Rail Transport

It had been made clear to us, through various channels, that one of the biggest obstacles standing in the way of the normal flow of economic life was the disorganized transport system, so we decided to visit the Department of Rail Transport.

“The Kerensky Government,” we were told immediately, “did nothing to address the problems that were getting worse every day. While that man was in Power, as was the case with regard to all other problems, he left no trace of anything that is worth mentioning. Caught in a web of commitments he made to the European Foreign Offices, he could not get rid of the diplomats and wasted time trying to secure agreements and make deals, instead of using it to carry out the work that the extraordinarily difficult circumstances required.”

“The transport problem in Russia, a country of vast distances, goes back to time immemorial. It was, so to speak, the problem behind all other problems. Along with the age-old problem of the land, one must also take into consideration, as a problem that affects all the others, the problem of transport.”

“Taking this already existing condition into account and adding the burden of the war, which disrupted the already diminished organization and reduced all the materiel of the rail system to a deplorable condition, one may easily get some idea of the extremely serious situation of Russia, a country that is dependent on imports for this kind of industrial product.”

“Only one final blow was needed to disorganize everything, making the situation even more terrible and precarious.”

“During the last months of Czarism, the chaos on the rails was so bad that neither men nor munitions could be sent to the front with the necessary regularity. Sometimes the soldiers had to march for hundreds of kilometers in order to open up some space on the congested rail lines.”

“The first revolution in March, with the disorder, the uncertainty and the provisional measures that accompany every new situation, disorganized the small part of the rail transport system that had until then escaped the initial confusion.”

“Kerensky’s Government, which, instead of attending to the transport problem, just folded its arms and only thought about resolving the political situation, caused what was until then a temporary state of confusion to become a chronic condition.”

“With the rail system in this condition, almost entirely disorganized, its equipment in deplorable condition and without any means to replace it, the October revolution, our revolution, came along and delivered the *coup de grâce* to what little remained of a functioning rail network.”

“One of the first decrees of the Council of Peoples Commissars, as you know, was to confer a legal and juridically sound form, that is, a definitive character, upon the proposal that was just elaborated by the All-Russian Congress of Peasant Soviets held at the end of July 1917, relating to the distribution of the land.”

“The effects of this decree had an enormous impact at the front. The armies abandoned the trenches *en masse*, throwing their guns away, or turning them on their leaders and commanding officers who tried to stop them from deserting, and took the trains by assault. What took place at the front was indescribable.”

“Everything was resolved by brutality, bullying, violence and brawls. These multitudes, leaderless, spurred on by their anxiety not to miss out on the land distributions and to get home as soon as possible, respected no law.”

“Might made right. The strongest, the fists that were quickest to strike, or the boldest, imposed their law.”

“There were many cases where the soldiers would rush onto a train, grab those who were already seated in a passenger car, and throw them out the window so they could take their seats. The demobilized soldiers took the trains by assault, broke the windows and tore the doors off their hinges to improvise seats. In the cars the soldiers piled on top of one another until they touched the roof. They even constructed scaffolding on the sides of the trains, on the flatbed cars, on the roofs and on the locomotives, upon which they traveled all crowded together.”

“The cars and the many locomotives that broke down had to be abandoned, and the soldiers had to push them off the rails and go on foot to the next station, where they continued their journey by repeating the same violent scenes.”

“When the soldiers that Czarism sent to the front had returned by means of this procedure, it was calculated that one quarter of the railroad materiel was completely broken down, another quarter was still in service but not operating at full efficiency, and the rest could only be utilized at the cost of expensive and difficult repairs.”

“At that time,” they continued, “this Department was formed and we assumed responsibility for transport.”

“When Krassin was named President of the Council of Railroad Administration, the workers went on strike, which lasted for a month and a half, a worthy finishing touch to the disorders that had prevailed since the beginning of the war. The strike affected all personnel, workers, office employees and administrative staff without exception, aggravating the situation even more.”

“In January 1918 the reorganization of the rail system began by dismissing all the high level employees and administrative staff and appointing the Extraordinary Commissions responsible for surveillance over the labor of the directors and administrators of the various rail networks.”

“An enormous effort was dedicated to the organization of these Extraordinary Commissions,” our informant continued. “Within a short period of time there was one in every station and one traveled on every train, under whose jurisdiction and command all the railroad employees without exception worked.”

“During the period of time that elapsed between the October revolution and the reorganization of the transport system, some very strange things took place. For example, each station only sold tickets for the next station on the line, and that one only sold tickets for the one after that. The traveler had to buy a ticket in each station if he wanted to continue on his journey. The money collected from ticket sales was shared among the employees.”

“With the reorganization this state of affairs came to an end and normal service began to be reestablished.”

“We also undertook, insofar as circumstances permitted, the repair of the salvageable materiel. The repairs proceeded at a slow pace, of course; this was due to a number of causes, among which the lack of raw materials, tools and skilled workers, were the most important.”

“Then we introduced a division of functions in the rail system, creating a technical school, which anyone who sought employment on the rail network had to attend for six months. We also created a political section, responsible for organizing the technical schools and carrying out communist propaganda among the rail workers.”

“A Central Railroad Committee was formed to serve as an intermediary between the various sections of the Railroad workers Trade Union and the Department of Rail Transport.”

“A working plan was established for the repair of the locomotives and rolling stock and in order to build new rail cars and locomotives which, according to our calculations, would allow for the normalization of rail service and bring the railroad network’s performance up to the pre-war level by 1925.”

“Incentives were introduced in the repair workshops, granting quadruple rations to the worker who doubled the production quota. If, on the other hand, he fell short of the quota, the Factory Committee of the workshop was authorized to reduce his ration by one-half. The machinists also received bonuses for working more efficiently or for working longer hours.”

“The minimum quota of each worker was established by reference to pre-war statistics, and railroad employment was militarized; the workers who were mobilized for railroad labor were subject to military jurisdiction and were tried by military tribunals.”

“A study was undertaken to standardize the production models for locomotives and passenger cars.”

“Trade union membership was compulsory,” we were told, “and two percent of every railroad worker’s monthly wage was deducted for financing the Trade Union.”

The information we were provided by the Department of Rail Transport was corroborated by our interviews with individuals. But since further consideration can shed light on a new facet of the problem, we feel obliged to review some points that were already mentioned in passing.

The rail strike that was declared to overthrow the Bolsheviks was promoted by the Social Revolutionaries, since they had many supporters among the railroad personnel. And while it is true that the Bolsheviks broke the strike, they could not prevent the formation of a powerful opposition to their centralist and dictatorial methods.

The immediate cause of the strike was a government decree that could not have been more absurd.

Because the Bolsheviks were the most powerful supporters of the capitalist method of the most absolute division of labor, they sought to implement this principle with regard to the allocation of the available railroad materiel.

They compiled the most complete set of statistics possible and divided the materiel for transport into two principle categories, which were in turn subdivided into three categories each. In the first category were included all the military transports: men and equipment. In the second, which was subdivided into two subcategories, were commodities of a general description and travelers. Each category was to be allocated the materiel earmarked for it, with the express condition that no military train was to transport commodities or civilian travelers, and that no civilian train was to transport soldiers or military equipment.

The result of this decree was disastrous.

It was often the case that a military train would depart from Moscow for Odessa or some other destination completely empty, due to the fact that no military detachments were scheduled for transport to Odessa, while commodities or travelers destined for Odessa would be waiting for another train that was not available because of a lack of means of transportation. And the opposite also took place, where soldiers and military equipment would be waiting at a station, but could not take the civilian train because of the infallible decrees of the Bolsheviks.

It often happened that commodities or passengers would be waiting at the station, while the trains were traveling hundreds of kilometers without any cargo at all, but going to the destinations of the commodities and passengers waiting at the stations; this was because the trains were not assigned to the commodity or civilian passenger category in the station, but to another category, for which no one had any information about what station this category was located at. It was necessary for the Rail Workers Trade Union to bring this absurd situation to the attention of the Council of Peoples Commissars, presided over by Lenin. Only then was the decree rescinded.

The rail workers arose in opposition again, this time to the creation of the Central Committee that was supposed to serve as an intermediary between the Trade Union and the Department of Rail Transport.

At first the rail workers thought that the organization of the Central Committee was in response to their desire to abolish the Department or the Commissariat of Transport; but once they saw that both these institutions continued to exist, the rail workers submitted their demand that both should be abolished, claiming that the Trade Union alone was capable of organizing the transport system, in direct contact with the Commissariat of Labor or the Council of National Economy. This demand was elaborated and approved at a National Congress of the Rail Workers Trade Union. The Council of Peoples Commissars rejected the rail workers' demand. But the rail workers did not give up.

At the National Congress of Rail Workers, held in 1919, the opposition to all the Bolshevik decrees was so powerful that the abolition of the Central Committee and of the Department of Transport was debated and approved by an overwhelming majority of the votes cast, which, as one would expect, caused great consternation among the members of the Political Committee of the Communist Party.

The Political Committee met in emergency session, called upon all the communists who were delegates to the Congress of the Rail Workers Trade Union and ordered them to present a resolution to the Congress on the following day that demanded the revocation of the previous resolution concerning the suppression of the Central Committee and the Department of Transport. It also put pressure on the non-party delegates, and the original resolution was rescinded, but not without the communist delegates themselves feeling the depressing effects of their success that was obtained at such a high cost.

Once the rail workers delegates realized that any resolutions they passed against the wishes of the Party Committee would be annulled, they shelved all debate on the subject and rapidly brought the Congress to an end with the election of the National Committee of the Trade Union.

But even this election led to dissatisfaction.

The Communist Party proposed that the Committee should be composed of twenty individuals and that, if possible, all of them should be loyal communists.

In an attempt to avoid totally knuckling under to the Party, the election resulted in a Committee composed of ten communists and ten non-communists. In this way the rail workers sought to obstruct the Bolshevik dictatorship.

This composition of the Committee led to the result that was desired by the rail workers: no decree was enforceable, because it was blocked once it came up for a vote in the Trade Union Committee.

The invariable outcome of every vote on Bolshevik decrees was a deadlock.

Threats and appeals, requests and insinuations, the Bolsheviks used every method to force the rail workers to do their will; but nothing worked.

In view of their failure, they resorted to a despotic act: they dissolved the National Committee of the Rail Workers Trade Union and nominated an Extraordinary Commission answerable to the Party—made up of loyal communists—to replace it, which was obliged as a matter of Party discipline to submit to all the Party's demands.

We must emphasize that the rail workers' opposition was directed against neither the reorganization of rail transport nor was it directed in any way against collective interests or the revolution.

What they opposed, what they wanted and why they fought, was to prevent the collective personality of the Trade Union from being nullified between the Central Committee and the Department of Rail Transport. They wanted everything related to rail transport to be the responsibility of the Trade Union and also sought the elimination of all those useless institutions that, besides having become the nurseries of bureaucrats and sinecures, served no other purpose than to complicate the operations of the railroads.

As for the Extraordinary Commissions, they were granted absolute powers, and everything was under their jurisdiction. They constituted a kind of police force with executive powers.

In the stations, the Extraordinary Commissions capriciously issued and revoked orders. Since every complaint against their abuses had to pass through their hands before being submitted to higher authorities, we need not mention that none of these complaints ever reached their ultimate destination.

They arrested and imprisoned anyone they wanted, and their accusations were enough to condemn both railroad employees and travelers to months in prison.

Furthermore, they became so numerous that not even during the times of Czarism, when the railroads were operated by various individual companies, did the number of administrative employees who did not perform any useful services on the railroads ever approach the number of those who were engaged on the Extraordinary Commissions.

In the stations the Extraordinary Commissions were responsible for surveillance, enforcing compliance with official regulations, to make sure that there were no disturbances of public order and to register the complaints of the travelers.

The Commissions that traveled on the trains, since they did not check the passengers' tickets or perform any other useful service, were only responsible for *escorting* the trains.

As a result, whereas passenger coaches were scarce, and passenger trains were composed almost entirely of boxcars, an exception was always made for the passenger car reserved for the Extraordinary Commission, who never had to travel in a boxcar, and occupied the only passenger car on the train.

And they traveled in comfort. It did not matter if the train was crammed full of passengers, or that some had to be left behind for lack of space. No one was allowed entry to the compartment of the train reserved for the Extraordinary Commission except for authorized persons, influential individuals or people who were friends of a member of the Commission. Only favoritism permitted one to acquire a seat on the car reserved for the Extraordinary Commission.

And we are speaking from experience.

Chapter 13

13

At the Commissariat of Labor

The Commissariat of Labor was located on the top floor of a large department store in Chinatown, confiscated, like so many other buildings, by the Bolsheviks.

We were introduced by our "*cicerone*" and interpreter to the comrade commissar who, already informed of our impending visit, gave us a warm reception.

We must start by saying that, in order not to mislead anyone who reads this chapter with the hope of learning the great lessons that one might expect to learn from a regime that calls itself communist, the information provided by the Commissariat of Labor revealed nothing new.

Almost all, not to say all, of the information they provided us that was of any interest, was already known by us. That having been said, we shall resume our account.

We received a very dubious impression of the usefulness or importance of the role assigned to the Commissariat of Labor.

We believe, and we shall express it without any euphemisms, that it was an institution whose purpose was secondary. This impression would soon be fully confirmed.

With regard to the basic issues of labor, its intervention was limited at best, and non-existent at worst.

The rail transport question was outside the purview of the Commissariat. The same was true of Agriculture. Its activity was restricted to industrial labor properly speaking. Even in that domain, however, its action, as a principal or exclusive element, was extremely restricted by the scope of action reserved by the activities or functions of the Council of National Economy.

Not only was the mission that should have been performed by the Commissariat of Labor thus circumscribed and diluted among various institutions; its powers must be further qualified by subtracting the influence of the General Confederation of Labor and the Third International.

Many of the questions that affected the Trade Unions and labor were addressed, debated and resolved in principle, without the Commissariat of Labor ever playing any role at all.

It is true that, afterwards, in order to confer upon such decisions a legal patina, the rubber stamp and acquiescence of the Commissariat of Labor was required; but its seal of approval was only sought long after the issue in question was a total *fait accompli*.

This is why our visit was such a brief one; they only provided us with statistics, which we shall not recount due to their purely internal, ephemeral or circumstantial interest.

As a general rule, these statistics provided the unemployment figures for various times of the year; their rise or fall; subsidies granted to the unemployed and the elderly; occupational accidents and other similar things.

Among the information they gave us, our attention was drawn to the fact that, although there was a recognized retirement age, it was necessary to obtain a detailed medical report that proves the applicant's complete disability, or else the Commissariat of Labor would assign the elderly person to some other kind of work that was compatible with his degree of disability as set forth on the medical report.

Taking advantage of our visit, we thought we would clarify a doubtful issue. We had in our possession a copy of the Labor Code—a draconian and brutal Code, which imposes duties on the workers but grants them no rights in return—and we wanted to know what contributions were made in its elaboration by the Trade Unions and what role the Commissariat played in its framing.

It seemed incredible, and it still does, that a Commissariat whose duty was to defend the interests of the workers and which proclaims that it is run by the workers, would have subscribed to such a Code.

The more information we obtained about this issue, the more we were compelled to draw the conclusion that we had already assumed: the Russian Labor Code was the work of the Communist Party and its elements, which includes the Commissariat.

When they spoke to us about the “dictatorship of the proletariat” in order to justify the unjustifiable and we had the famous Russian Labor Code before our eyes, we were put into the difficult position of having to ask whether all the Russian proletarians, or their representatives, were crazy for having approved of that document. In no country with a capitalist regime was there such a rigid law that was so contrary to the interests of the working class.

Anyone who undertakes to translate this Code will be providing Spanish-speaking workers with the most damning case against the Bolshevik regime.

The Bolsheviks, who are ordinarily so assiduous in disseminating their literature and their politics, clam up and have nothing to say about their economic literature and economic legislation. They interpret Marx according to their tastes.

The warriors of historical materialism, the drum-beaters of the class struggle who reduce all the aspirations of the people to the chemical processes of the stomach, those who say that it is their vocation to redeem the people from their economic dependence, and exercise the proletarian dictatorship in order to achieve this, inexplicably remain silent concerning the greater part of their regulations on compulsory labor.

Their propaganda says nothing about the famous Labor Code; they have also silenced everything that refers to the militarization of labor; it would seem that they feel that none of these things concern the world proletariat. To us, on the other hand, it seems to be of the utmost concern to the world proletariat. Even more importantly, we believe that the heart of the revolution is revealed in this domain, in the laws and decrees that guarantee and assure the full freedom of the workers; in the way labor is organized; in the social structure that renders the exploitation of man by man and the subjection of one class by another impossible.

What, after all, is the real situation of the Russian worker in the face of Bolshevik legislation and, consequently, of the militarization of labor? The situation of a slave, that of a man upon whom duties are imposed without being granted any rights. It is true that these duties are disguised with the paradox of being imposed for his benefit and in his name; but the reality is more unpleasant than the Bolshevik hair-splitting and fantasies, once the deception is unmasked and the decoy is revealed for what it is.

Dictatorship of the proletariat? Let us see.

Once the worker has been enrolled in the section of his trade in the Labor Center, he is entirely at the disposal of the Ministry of Labor.

If, due to real or fictitious necessities, since the worker is entitled to no explanations, the Ministry decides that he must be transferred to work in Odessa, although he normally lives in

Moscow, and has his family in Moscow, the worker must go without any right to appeal the order he has received.

He is a worker mobilized in the name of the dictatorship of the proletariat, for which reason the latter can dispose of him at its whim.

If, once the worker has arrived in Odessa, the Ministry decides that he must go to work in Tobolsk, or any other Siberian town, he must depart immediately, on the day and at the time the Ministry indicates.

Under these conditions the worker is a mechanical toy in the hands of the Communist Party. The latter can do with him what it will, when it wants and in any way that it wants.

We thoroughly discussed this problem in our conversation with the comrade Commissar of Labor. And when we told him that we thought that the militarization of labor was absurd and arbitrary, and that even if one had to admit that on certain occasions and for certain trades it was necessary, it was a cruel system, he replied that without it the victory of the revolution would have been impossible, since so many workers had refused to work in one or another trade, and preferred to work in a different one, which caused an imbalance in the national economy.

We admitted he had a case; but we rejected the premises upon which his case was constructed. We said that it seemed to be a more rational procedure to convince the specialized worker or workers in a trade who are required in another location other than their hometown, that their attendance elsewhere was necessary and that they should go there to work, although temporarily. But we did not understand why a general and rigorous measure should be applied.

“In that way the Government, which must be the sole authorized agent for organizing the political and economic life of the country in the name of the Revolution, has more freedom to run things, and need not provide any explanations. In such a case,” he claimed, “it needs the most blind, the most complete and absolute obedience to all the decrees of the workers State. If it had to follow the procedure you suggested, it would never be able to achieve this result.”

“That may be true,” we objected, “but the worker would have more freedom, he would feel like he was playing a more active role in the consolidation of the revolution, he would take a more active part in it, since his participation would be requested rather than *imposed*, he would not be *compelled* to provide it.”

“In dangerous situations,” we claimed, “it would be a rare case, indeed one could consider it abnormal, for an individual to refuse to cooperate in the labor of popular liberation, which would also be, after all, his own liberation.”

“Did you perhaps forget,” he responded, “that the counterrevolution is constantly on the offensive; that the expropriated bourgeoisie is engaged in conspiracies on a daily basis to return to the past; that all the forces opposed to the dictatorship are united in their opposition to the Communist Party and that the Party has to confront them with all the means at its disposal?”

“So, then,” we replied, “the militarization of labor, instead of an economic measure for organizing the life of the country, is a political measure directed against the political parties or sectors that do not accept the communist points of view?”

“Oh, no! Not at all. The militarization of labor affects everyone, and everyone must submit to it. The communists in the Party just like everyone else. There are no exceptions.”

We laughed at this statement and said, “Well done”.

“We would like to know,” we said, “what is the official position of the Commissariat of Labor with regard to Trotsky’s proposal to organize production in Russia by utilizing the military form of organization.”

According to reports that had come to our attention, Trotsky proposed to divide Russia into ten military regions, within which labor would also be included. Under this system, the soldier and the worker would be subject to the same organization, although naturally performing different roles.

“We are completely in agreement with it if the Party should grant its approval.”

“Then the Commissariat of Labor, in its multiple and varied activities, follows the line laid down by the Communist Party. And just as in the case of the General Confederation of Labor, the worker cannot, in the regime of his dictatorship, do what he will, but only what the Party wills. This entire business seems somewhat paradoxical to us.”

“Because you have not lived in Russia, you are unaware of the fact that here the Communist organization and the Communist Party are one and the same. I myself,” said the Commissar of Labor, “although I am a member of the Party, was not appointed to my position in this Commissariat by the Party, but by the General Confederation of Labor.”

“When this Commissariat was created, the Party asked the Trade Union organization to assume responsibility for appointing the individual who should run it, and in its name and representing it I am here.”

“Which is all the more reason why these decrees concerning labor seem so strange to us.”

“The militarization of labor, the Labor Code and all the other measures implemented to organize production, and which we consider to be contrary to the collective interests of the workers—we do not think they would have been undertaken if there was freedom of choice. But since it is this freedom that seems to us to be lacking, we assume all the rest follows from it.”

“We are going through difficult circumstances and cannot grant this freedom of choice to which you refer.”

“But,” we objected, “by violating the will of the workers, you will not be able to harmonize their aspirations with the work of the Government, and even much less so with the spirit of the revolution. The effects of this policy of violent compulsion will be negative.”

“To each act of moral or physical violence committed by the Government against the proletariat, imposing laws in whose preparation and adoption the proletariat did not participate, the proletariat will respond with a greater degree of passive resistance, when it is not violent resistance, and the divorce between the Communist Power and the worker will become more acute with each passing day.”

“No; because our policy will prevail.”

We made our exit. Our disillusionment had no limits. We left convinced of the uselessness of the institution that we had just visited.

Chapter 14

14

“Communist Saturdays”

During one of the intermissions between sessions of the Congress, while one of Zinoviev’s speeches was being translated, we asked Lozovsky about what we perceived to be a lack of enthusiasm for the communist regime among the people, and even more their lack of enthusiasm for the imposed organization of labor.

We supported our argument with the data from the charts that were displayed there, in the main hall where the Congress was being held and in the hallways that led to it. There were industries in which production had declined by sixty percent. We found this confusing.

It is true that this decline was explained by the migration of the workers, who did not want to remain in the factories. Life in the countryside was easier and less impoverished; so they emigrated to the countryside. But, even taking this factor into account, with respect to production as a whole, when one scrutinized the details—provided by the ubiquitous charts—one saw that the quantity of production or output per individual had also declined. Why?

We could only see one cause: the lack of enthusiasm, the absence of a sense of mutual understanding and voluntary agreement between the people and their rulers. And it was natural for us to arrive at this opinion.

Lozovsky, who was already familiar with our natural reservations concerning Bolshevik rationales, wanted to completely dispel our suspicions, and told us about the “Communist Saturdays”.

“Communist Saturdays” had only recently been organized. And even if the enthusiasm of its early stages had not completely disappeared, the communists themselves, due to statistical evidence that we shall publish at a later date, recognized that the program’s progress fell short of their expectations.

During our discussion with Lozovsky it occurred to him that the delegates should have an opportunity to see the results of the “Communist Saturday”.

The “Communist Saturday” was ultimately nothing more than the performance of voluntary labor without any compensation.

With the “English work week” in effect in Russia, it was thought advisable to take advantage of Saturday afternoon by attempting to interest the worker in some voluntary labor.

We accepted the proposal to see the “Communist Saturday” in operation, and since we also wanted to know just how much the workers generally were interested in increasing the output of a production system that was supposed to directly benefit them, we went to visit some workshops and factories where the “Communist Saturday” was in progress.

Somewhat suspicious with regard to any information we obtained through official channels, after everything we had seen, we wanted to know whether the disinterestedness, self-sacrifice and enthusiasm that we were told was exhibited by *all* the workers for the “Communist Saturday” was indeed the case.

Having become accustomed to noticing a marked divorce between the government decrees and the people who were supposed to abide by them, and since we were told that the establishment of “Communist Saturdays” was not an official government act, but a popular initiative, we thought that for once we would finally discover a point of agreement between those who ruled and those who had to obey.

Therefore, after the end of a session of the Congress, one Saturday morning, in the automobiles previously put at our disposal, we departed to visit a metal workshop.

We visited various departments of the workshop, and then we asked some questions.

Two hundred fifty workers normally worked in this workshop, but only seventy-five volunteered for “Communist Saturday”.

The output per worker on “Communist Saturdays”, compared to the output on normal workdays, was twenty-five percent higher on average.

We were shown the charts exhibiting these production statistics which, according to the manager of the workshops, precisely supported his claims.

On the following Saturday another visit was organized, this time to some docks where lumber was being unloaded from barges moored on the shores of the Moscow River.

Here, too, we were given an enthusiastic account of the “Communist Saturdays”. Persons who during the other days of the week contrived to avoid working, and sold things on the black market or did other things of that kind, worked with zeal on the “Communist Saturdays”. As proof, we were shown four or five persons who were working. It is true that these persons were registered at the Labor Center as unemployed, and always managed to find a way to remain in that status.

The enthusiasm of many of the foreign delegates to the Congress, after these tours, knew no bounds. The most pompous and emphatic adjectives were not enough to describe the enthusiasm of those who, charmed by the delights of the communist regime and the dictatorship of the proletariat, not only worked the forty-eight hours of the normal working

week to increase production, but also devoted up to four hours of their Saturday afternoons, on their days off.

Any objections to this picture were considered heretical, and when faced with the *enthusiasm* of those who *did not work but ate*—instilled by those who hardly ate at all but worked—there was no other remedy except silence, if one did not want to be treated as an enemy of the revolution, or viewed as someone who could not understand the profound lesson that these things taught us.

It would have been a vain enterprise to attempt, even with so much information at our disposal, to make them understand the miserable reality of all this enthusiasm, for not even ten percent of the workers participated in “Communist Saturdays”, which proves their ineffectiveness. The Party comrades, riding the wave of their enthusiasm, did not want to understand anything.

Instead, we were the ones, with our objections, who saw and understood nothing. And even if they were to accept our argument concerning the insignificant number of workers who participated in “Communist Saturdays”, they would still support it—a concession that we were obliged to make—because it was still such a beautiful thing.

If participation in Communist Saturday, if working without pay for four hours, were to be the result of a freely accepted and absolutely disinterested initiative, who would deny that it was a satisfactory and sufficient demonstration of the mutual interpenetration of the workers and the Bolshevik government? Because we did not believe this to be true, we always had our doubts about the Communist Saturdays, and in discussions on this question we expressed these doubts.

We did not enjoy official favor, now that the officiousness of the guides that were always put at our disposal by the Third International had failed to prevent us from interviewing unofficial sources, and we asked questions we thought were relevant and important, without tedious prepared testimonies and pre-established formal presentations.

The initiative to introduce “Communist Saturdays” originated at a meeting of the Party in Moscow and had Lenin’s support. So it was not a popular initiative. But to avoid giving the impression that it was a Government program, the Party sought out some loyal communists and told them, off the record, that they were to propose in the factories where they worked that each worker should participate in “Communist Saturdays”, as if it was their own spontaneous and voluntary idea.

The Factory Committees in these factories, which had already been notified about the proposal, although they pretended *they had not been notified in advance*, gave their passionate support to the proposal and appealed to the workers of their factories and workshops to participate in the program.

The workers who were real communists, those who suffered all the setbacks of the regime without wanting to be commissars or anything like that, the workers who, not wanting honors, were always ready to make sacrifices for the party and the revolution, accepted the proposal with enthusiasm, with joy, with pleasure, desirous of helping the cause. But the rest of the workers rejected the proposal and the few of them who participated did so out of self-interest.

The Bolshevik Government, seeking to get the workers and the people in general interested in the initiative and to get the “Communist Saturdays” off to a good start, lavished praise upon it, devoted laudatory articles to it in newspapers and made long speeches about it.

A great deal of ink was used up, but production hardly increased at all.

Faced with the negative result of the program, since only communists, rather than everyone, had participated in these Saturdays, the Government resorted to another, more practical procedure: it distributed food and clothing to those who attended the “Communist Saturdays”. And this did make some difference; not much, however.

The Government distributed one pound of bread, or half a pound, depending on what was available; sometimes flour, or else a dried, salted fish. These bonuses attracted many workers. This was natural. A pound of bread was worth, in terms of rubles, a month’s wages.

But when they saw that the distributions were not continued, and that on one Saturday, after finishing work, they had to walk home without the promised bonus, they began to desert, and the number of workers enrolled in “Communist Saturdays” declined considerably.

For us, this was just one more vanished illusion; one more disenchantment to add to all those we had been experiencing on a daily basis.

The claims made by Lozovsky and his minions were inconsistent and incompatible with observed facts, because they were either based on the naïve confidence of an absolute faith in Bolsheviks policy or else resulted from their intention to make us swallow anything they told us.

Chapter 15

15

Propaganda Trains and Ships

One of the organizations that was most highly praised by the communists of our acquaintance, concerning which they spoke with almost religious fervor and to which they attributed almost miraculous virtues, was the institution devoted to propaganda.

“This organization,” they told us, “will sooner or later (although we hope it may be sooner) penetrate the hearts of the masses, the amorphous masses without ideals, with the almost divine breath of Communism.”

“This is why our Party will be strong and indestructible; it will make the great Russian people understand the meaning of the revolution; it will rid them of the pernicious influences of the past, showing them the wide road to the future.”

“We have done much in the schools,” they told us, “but we have hardly even begun. Besides, the school is only the initiation. The children attend school to complete their education and become men; for the adult this is not possible. Once he gets to know the basics, he has to leave school.”

“Society needs his productive force and therefore cannot allow him to devote his time exclusively to study.”

“And while we have, with the schools, opened up to the adult the broad horizons that the old regime had systematically closed to him to keep him in ignorance, we cannot abandon him when we have only begun to teach him how to negotiate the ways of life.”

“We pin our hopes on these organizations. We expect great results from them.”

“Since your arrival in Russia you are sure to have noticed at one station or another the propaganda trains, the trains that are reserved for bringing the voice of communism to the countryside.”

“They are magnificent instruments of popular education. The impression they produce in the peasant, with his naïve soul that is however thirsty for knowledge, defies description. You must see for yourselves to really get a sense of it; mingle with the peasants when they come to admire these trains. Behold the admiration that shows on their faces as they contemplate the symbolism of the painted images on the canvas that covers the train! And see how they understand it!”

“You will have to visit one of these trains; unfortunately, however, there are none in Moscow at the present time. In any event, it would not be easy to visit one here, because they almost never stop for more than a few hours, just long enough to load the communist literature they have to distribute on their itinerary.”

“It would be interesting, very interesting. If you visit one, it will give you a most pleasant impression.”

We first saw a propaganda train at the Petrograd station the day we arrived in Petrograd.

As we were boarding our train, we noticed another train had stopped on a sidetrack, and that its cars were covered with canvas that was painted with symbolic figures accompanied by Russian words.

We did not take a closer look at this train due to a lack of time; but we did make some inquiries about it. They told us it was one of the propaganda trains.

A few days later, in Moscow, we were able to inspect one up close, and were struck particularly by the symbolism of its painted figures and the bright colors in which they were painted.

These trains were composed of various numbers of cars. Some had four, others five, and yet others six. The one we saw in Moscow had six cars. It was one of the largest and best equipped.

The personnel who traveled in this train, both those who were involved in the propaganda function and the railroad employees, lived a life in common in the passenger coaches. They were well supplied with food and other needs; they were also supplied with a considerable

quantity of communist propaganda leaflets and books for distribution, crisscrossing the immense spaces of Russia in every direction.

Both sides of the car along its entire length were covered with the symbolic painted figures. On some, although not all, the canvas sheets covered the whole side of the car from top to bottom, and sometimes extended a meter higher than the roof of the car.

The painted scenes depicted various themes that referred to the different causes of the class struggle.

There were pictures of groups of workers in aggressive and threatening postures confronting other groups of people who represented the bourgeoisie.

There was no lack of scenes that depicted the victory of the revolution in which, on the piles of rubble that remained of the old world, a worker stood with the red flag and the Soviet insignia, waving the flag and calling upon the workers of the world to revolt.

One scene depicted the industrial workers, shaking hands with and embracing the muzhiks, representing the fraternity of the workers and the peasants under the Soviet flag and insignia and Communist Power.

All of these scenes were painted with backgrounds of vivid and bright colors, rife with symbolism, cubism and impressionism.

The propaganda methods of the Bolshevik propaganda train were as simple as they were effective.

Having arrived at some locality, the peasants were invited to attend the Conferences and events organized by the Propaganda Commission on the train.

Communist literature was distributed to those who attended.

The local Soviet was responsible for publicizing the event and making sure the peasants of the village attended.

We toured the interior of the train and spoke with the propagandists, and saw one of the steamships used for propaganda purposes among the towns on the Volga.

In one of the towns we visited, one of these steamships docked and we went to take a look at it.

The hold of the ship had been converted into a common area and dining hall for the ship's crew and the propaganda team, and an auditorium for plays and meetings.

Conferences, meetings, lectures, courses in scientific Marxism and motion picture shows were held on the ship, all of which, as one would assume, was carried out within the framework of the purest Marxist orthodoxy.

We spoke with the leader of the propaganda team, and asked him regarding some details of the team's work.

He told us of the enthusiasm with which the peasants and the workers greeted the arrival of the propaganda ship.

“But what they most admire,” he said, “are the cinema shows, since these give them a more flexible sensation of the reality and the materiality of things than literature.”

“They are eager to learn and to ask questions. All their questions have the impertinence of a child’s questions. They are constantly asking questions, without pause or rest, in their insatiable zeal to find out about everything.”

“They happily accept the literature; although at this point we cannot really say if they read the literature with the same enthusiasm that they display when they listen to speeches or watch the images on the screen.”

“As for the sessions we devote to films, our auditorium is always, without exceptions, filled with spectators. And what is most interesting is the fact that they follow the progress of the episodes with the simplicity and earnest attention of a child.”

“This attention can be explained,” we were told, “by the fact that under the old regime, spectacles of this kind were hardly ever staged in the rural areas. For the Russian peasant this is the vision of a new world, one that he could not even have imagined in his ignorance.”

“The films we show,” he added, in response to our inquiries, “represent all the episodes of the revolutionary struggle against the white armies and the former bourgeoisie. We thus impress the peasant, and this works in favor of communist policy, while it weakens our enemies. We want to penetrate to the deepest corner of the peasant’s soul, and rid him of his prejudices and errors by leading him towards Marxist communism.”

“We are convinced that this is a task that will take a long time and a great deal of patience and perseverance; but we have devoted a great deal of effort to achieve this goal and we are ready to devote even more. We will do whatever is necessary to help bring about the definitive victory of our ideas.”

“We regret,” he continued, “that we do not have enough time to allow you to get a closer look and see for yourselves regarding the truth of our claims. If we could schedule a cinema show for tonight you would see the crowds of spectators and the interest and attention shown by the audience in the scenes portrayed.”

“Before the films are shown to the people they first have to pass through censorship by the Party,” he answered in response to our question. “Since the production of these films is paid for by the State, one must assume that only content that the State authorizes can be produced.”

“All the films consist of communist propaganda. To produce films of any other kind would be a serious mistake at this time. The struggle we must wage against the enemies of Soviet Russia does not allow for any relaxation or weakness. We need a strong hand to impose communism, and we need severity to prevent deviations.”

We left. Our curiosity was satisfied. We cast one more look at the sides of the steamship, covered in symbolic images and exhortations to the class struggle.

The Bolsheviks want to make the muzhiks understand Marxist dogma not by means of study and the intellect, but by means of the faculty of sight and emotional excitement. The method utilized to achieve this goal could not be more appropriate. Will they succeed? That is the enigma.

Chapter 16

16

At the Central Office of Cooperatives

Our visit to the Central Office of Cooperative was arranged at the last minute.

The notes and summaries we managed to jot down during our visit were not written in the notebooks we usually used for this purpose, but on loose sheets of paper; we misplaced these sheets after our arrest in Italy, while we were on our way back from Russia, and we were unable to locate them after our release from prison.

Having crossed the threshold of the Central Office of Cooperatives we walked down a hallway. Then we climbed some stairs, walked through some very quiet rooms and called out announcing our presence as we had at the front door, with the same result. The building appeared to be uninhabited. Silence everywhere. No building superintendant, no soldier, no employee to greet us.

Finally, after having called out to announce ourselves several times, we heard a faint voice emanating from a nearby room, inviting us to come in.

We were received by a very old man; and, after we told him why we were there, he replied that there was little he could tell us.

“The Cooperatives actually no longer exist,” he began to tell us. “The Bolshevik Government, adding one more blunder to all the mistakes it had already made, nationalized all the Cooperatives. With these decrees the Cooperatives were transformed into simple stores for the distribution of the products requisitioned or bought by Bolshevik delegates in the provinces. This is why I say that I have nothing of any interest to tell you.”

Because we persisted in our appeals for information, brought up the fact that we were foreigners and delegates to the Congress, and pointed out to him how knowledge of the magnitude and extent of the Russian Cooperative movement would be of great interest to the Cooperators of the countries we represented at the Congress, he finally agreed to provide us with the details we sought.

“Cooperation in Russia,” he told us, “as a class organization with a social and political content, dates back to 1905. Before that time, the cooperative movement existed in our country, but without any particular political tendency. The purpose of that early cooperative movement, which we call primitive cooperation, was purely and exclusively economic and embraced a wide array of political tendencies.”

“The ‘Mir’ and the ‘Artel’ are the most well-known variants. The former has a manifestly communist aspect, while the latter is of a collectivist nature.”

“In most of the ‘Mirs’ labor, like the distribution of the products of labor, was carried out in common, while in the ‘Artel’, each member received a share corresponding to the labor he contributes. So many hours of labor correspond to such a quantity of products. That is its principle.”

“The ‘Mirs’ and the ‘Artels’ generally operate in different areas, as the ‘Artel’ is usually formed for manufacture, while the ‘Mir’ prevails in the labors of the countryside, the cultivation of the soil, and associated trades.”

“This differentiation can be easily explained.”

“In our country, due to the long winter, during which the peasant cannot work the land, he generally spends his time making wooden objects that he then sells in the local town’s market.”

“The competition between the vendors of these wooden objects was what led to the creation of the ‘Artels’.”

“Because the peasants cannot work together as a result of their dispersion across the endless Russian steppes, they embraced the collectivist system, that is, one according to which each worker receives the proceeds corresponding to the number of objects he brought to market.”

“This same reason, the endless winters and the short springs and autumns—which hardly last a couple of weeks each—causes the labor of cultivating the land, sowing, weeding, fertilizing and harvesting, to require more activity and therefore a more intense accumulation of effort. This is why labor in common is preferred for this aspect of agriculture.”

“But, I repeat, all these institutions, ‘Mirs’ and ‘Artels’, operated for the individual interests of each member, without any connection to others, with a few exceptions.”

“In 1905, the movement began to flow in other channels.”

“The influence of social ideals, which had enjoyed a certain wave of support in Russia as a result of the movement that took place during that year, did not fail to have an impact within the ‘Mirs’ and the ‘Artels’.”

“Little by little, this influence led to the creation of Cooperatives for production and consumption.”

“Many of the new Consumer Cooperatives were almost exclusively supplied with products manufactured or grown by the ‘Mirs’ and the ‘Artels’, and the latter institutions often sent all their products to various Consumer Cooperatives.”

“This Cooperative movement was so popular that, here in Moscow, at the beginning of the war, there was one Consumers Cooperative that provided a retail outlet for more than one hundred producers cooperatives, or ‘Mirs’ and ‘Artels’.”

“And that Consumers Cooperative was not the only one. I could cite numerous other examples.”

“There was a considerable number of cooperatives at that time.”

“In 1914, there were some four million cooperators in all of Russia. Since then, and until the recent Soviet decree that resulted in the incorporation of the cooperatives into the Bolsheviks’ nationalization scheme, the number of cooperators had increased enormously. It was estimated at eleven million.”

“But it was not just by the number of cooperators that one can gauge the influence and extent that cooperation had attained in Russia; such a view would lead one astray. Its influence is best measured by the services that it performed for its members and for the State itself. It is our belief that the latter, the services the Cooperative movement performed for the Government, are what led to the recent decision to nationalize the Cooperatives.”

“More than once, faced with terrible supply bottlenecks and shortages for its own institutions—the Army and other organizations—the Council of Peoples Commissars requested help from the Cooperatives, which fully complied.”

“The powerlessness of the Government and the Soviet institutions to achieve their purposes, contrasted with the diligence, the energy and the competence demonstrated by the Cooperatives, which gained nothing from these deliveries and, left to their own initiative, solved problems that could not be solved by means of confiscation, seizure, or even by shootings.”

“The Government, stirred into action by these realities, which were so superior to its economic conceptions and centralized and authoritarian organizations, reflected that, the quickest and most effective way to escape its predicament and to make the Bolshevik economic institutions function was to make these cooperative institutions, which had previously been autonomous and independent, into Government and Party institutions, since their experience and abilities would pull the Bolsheviks’ chestnuts out of the fire. Their mistake could not have been more obvious.”

“The Cooperatives, which were flourishing just a little while ago, are withering away now as if a wintry gale had passed over them.”

“Only a few months were needed to finish this work of destruction.”

“Today, it can be said that the Cooperatives no longer exist. All those people who devoted so much to their growth and development have left them; each Cooperative is now under the leadership of a loyal communist appointed to that position, a man beholden to the Party, although he may be incompetent to perform his responsibilities; audited and subject to the jurisdiction of the Council of National Economy; the Cooperatives are now forbidden to do business with individuals or even with their own members; obliged to get their supplies from the State stores, the former members of the Cooperatives have lost all right to participate in the operation of their Cooperatives ... of the original ideal that the Cooperative once represented, nothing remains in the Russian Cooperatives, since they are, I repeat, nothing but extensions of the producers’ stores of the Soviet State.”

“Reduced, therefore, to impotence, the cooperators have nonetheless refused to abandon the ideal to which they had devoted their lives. The day will come, and we do not think it will take very long, when all of this will change. And if we cannot use the old cooperatives, since they can hardly be used any more, we will create new ones so we can pursue our ideal of redemption and mutual aid among the people. All that will remain of our present bitterness will be a painful memory that will encourage us—you may be sure of it—to persevere with more enthusiasm in our labors.”

There was such an undercurrent of pain in his words that we left him without asking any more questions. We did not want to make him undergo the painful experience of reliving any more such memories.

Chapter 17

17

Other Visits

Our desire to compile as many reports as we would need to form as accurate a judgment as possible about the real situation in Russia constantly drove us to go wherever we thought we could pursue this goal.

One dear person, to whom we are indebted for precious reports, and who accompanied us more than once on our visits, told us about the Sukharevka.

We left for the Sukharevka a few days later. Since we did not go to ask any questions, or to make any inquiries, but to look; since it was the eyes that had to make their report, we preferred to go alone in order not to miss any details.

The Sukharevka of Moscow is a kind of Boulevard, without any trees, and very wide.

During the times of the Czars, the Sukharevka was the site of a daily market similar to the *Encantes* of Barcelona or the *Rastro* of Madrid. It was the market for the old and the picturesque.

Given the nature of this market, the Bolsheviks left it alone, and proclaimed no decrees against it.

Trade was persecuted both wholesale and retail; stores were closed and any persons who took part in commercial transactions were severely punished; there was only one place where every kind of commerce, as long as it was lawful, was tolerated: the Sukharevka.

The importance that this market acquired was considerable. Its transformation was rapid, and the various goods and objects that were now being sold there were unlike any that ever were brought there during the previous era.

Alongside a used pair of shoes, a diamond or pearl is exhibited that is worth millions of rubles.

Just like the pair of pants with holes in the knees, displayed next to a fur coat for which a fabulous sum of money was asked.

In a pile of old boots and used shoes, one may admire an elegant pair of Louis XV riding boots.

Everything was bought and sold there. Just as many people came to sell as to buy.

There were displays of hats, cookware and eating utensils; for a few hundred rubles they would sell us a slice of meat, or a piece of fish and a slice of bread. And the requests of the buyers were continuous. They could hardly be satisfied by the vendors.

They also sold milk, at 75 rubles per bottle. The price varied according to the quantity.

They sold fresh and aged meat. Passing by one of the people who sold meat was sometimes a veritable torment.

White bread and black bread. Apples, pears; beans of every kind; perfumes and soaps of greater or lesser scent. Everything was sold and everything was subject to trade.

The violence and brutality of the Cheka had no effect on the imperious necessity of making a living.

The raids of the hated police were very frequent at the market, although they were more often occasioned by the desire of the police to loot and pillage than to enforce any official decrees. On the day following the raid, and often merely a few hours afterwards, the market of the Sukharevka resumes its traffic as if nothing had happened.

And passage through that market was no easy matter. At certain times and places it became extremely difficult. The crowd must have numbered in the thousands.

The sight of some of the things offered for sale made us recall how ineffective the government was, with its centralization and confiscations.

Thus, for example, during a visit we made a few days before to a Maternity Ward, we heard how the director and the women responsible for the babies lacked bottles for feeding them milk, while at the Sukharevka we saw huge stacks of baby bottles.

Needles, pins, thread and buttons were rarely distributed by the Government, because it did not have them; at the Sukharevka, however, they were abundant. And so was everything else.

The official decrees against individual trade could be harsh and cruel; but even harsher and crueler was the need to live. The Sukharevka proved this quite well.

Sometimes the people arrested by the Cheka during its raids on the Sukharevka are shot after being condemned for speculation. One would think that these shootings would have sowed terror and panic and that this extra-legal market would be temporarily shut down. Not at all.

Those who are wracked by hunger or driven by greed return to their posts. They assume that what happened to their colleague who was shot could also happen to them; but hunger,

looming terrible and threatening over them, drives them once again to the market. To live, they have to do it; and it has to be done despite the Cheka and the shootings.

We also paid a visit to the Cheka. We had heard people speak of the Museum created by the famous and much-feared police, and we wanted to see it. We were ready to find out about everything—why not acquaint ourselves with the great achievements claimed by that famous institution of revolutionary security?

Because that is what the Cheka was: the police of the Communist Party and the domain of the executioners working for the Extraordinary Commission presided over by the current Commissar of the Interior, comrade Dzerzhinsky.

For ordinary crimes and public safety functions, there were patrols of soldiers. The Cheka's mission was to seek out counterrevolutionaries, serve as guards for the Commissars and carry out the death sentences that the Revolutionary Tribunal dictated. This mission was a dreary and hateful one; but the Bolsheviks could not do without it.

The admiration for the Cheka was such that, on more than one occasion we were overtaken by awe for these praises.

If one were to believe some communists, without the Cheka the revolution would have been defeated, and Russia handed over to the insatiable voracity of the counterrevolutionary hordes.

So how could we pass up an opportunity to visit the Museum of such an institution that was both useful and *revolutionary*?

Upon our arrival at the building housing the offices of the Cheka, a woman, with the demeanor of an important person and a certain look of superiority, began to interrogate us.

Once she verified our identities as delegates to the Congress of the Third International, whose status in Russia can be compared to the status of Ambassadors in capitalist countries, she asked for our forgiveness and cleared us for entering the building.

In addition to the official interpreter who accompanied us, we were assigned a Cheka employee as a guide, who held a high-level position in the Museum.

On the first floor we entered a hall where objects were displayed.

The hall was not a large one, nor were there many objects on display. The museum nonetheless revealed the cruelty of the struggle waged between the various anti-Bolshevik groups and the Bolsheviks.

The first thing we saw was a black flag, partially burned, torn and full of bullet holes. In a glass display case, there were revolvers, grenades, and bladed weapons blackened by fire.

We inquired about the origin of these artifacts.

“They are,” we were told, “the weapons that were found with some burnt bodies in a house occupied by anarchists, after their bomb attack against the Bolsheviks on Leontyevsky Street.”

“When the identities of the authors of the bomb attack on Leontyevsky Street, which cost the lives of fourteen communists and wounded more than thirty, were discovered, their safe house was located, and because they responded to orders to surrender by shooting at the agents of the Cheka, the Cheka set fire to the house in an attempt to compel them to surrender. The black flag you see here is the banner of the group that carried out the bomb attack and which was waving on the balcony of the building.”

They showed us the jacket that Kolchak was wearing when he was shot after his defeat in Siberia.

We saw flags and standards taken from the counterrevolutionary armies and the political groups or gangs which, at one time or another, took up arms against the Government.

They called our attention to some primitive-looking weapons, among which we saw some kind of pistol constructed from parts scavenged from a Mauser rifle.

There were rough spears, long poles with one or two metal spikes at the end. There were other poles, shorter ones, which instead of spikes had a chain and a steel ball in a hexagonal shape on the end.

A blow from one of these maces would have been fatal or would have at least caused serious injury.

Bladed weapons of all kinds and shapes, and a display of instruments whose sole purpose was to kill or injure people.

In response to our questions, we were told that all these weapons had been seized during skirmishes with the detachments of soldiers responsible for violent requisitions of the peasants' produce.

Because the people had been disarmed by Government decree, the peasants confronted the soldiers with makeshift weapons and defensive tactics.

Then we were shown some photographs. Here we saw proof of the horrors of Bolshevik economic policy.

Groups of dead Red Army soldiers, their bodies mutilated by the muzhiks. Sometimes, after having been stoned and mutilated, they were burned. Their killings were driven by hatred and vengeance.

Together with the photographs of the dead Red Army soldiers, we saw other photographs of villages that had been laid waste by soldiers sent to carry out reprisals after having machine-gunned all their inhabitants. Men, women, children and old people; all were killed. The procedure was efficient and ... practical.

The soldiers arrived. One unit of machine gun troops surrounded the village; they opened fire and continued firing until fire had consumed everything.

A trial? A verdict against the possible authors of the soldiers' deaths? Why? They were counterrevolutionaries. They all had to be exterminated. Genghis Khan would have laughed from his grave.

One note of useless cruelty, of a refinement of primitive Tartar barbarism, was shown to us in the form of a pair of gloves made from the skin of the hand of a Red Army soldier taken prisoner by Kolchak. Nothing reveals the barbarism of this admiral better than this wrinkled skin with the fingernails still attached; it gave us cold shivers of horror.

If his other cruelties and tortures were not enough to execrate the memory of Admiral Kolchak, the protégé of the English, who are so civilized, and of the Americans, who are such lovers of "Freedom", the sight of this skin torn from the living hand of a Red Soldier would be enough to cover him with opprobrium and shame.

Sickened by this sight we left the Cheka Museum; and the memory of what we left behind there haunted us for several days.

All the horror of civil war, with its cruelties and its tortures, with its hatred and its vengeance, with its zeal for annihilating the enemy, was encapsulated in that exhibition.

No doubt ashamed of its own work, the party terror was hidden in the shadows of the hall we just left. That was where it belonged.

Ferocious diatribes were spoken, written and disseminated against the Russian Cheka; veritable atrocities were attributed to it. The most vehement protests of the Russian people had been raised against this institution. It was in no way inferior to any of the police forces of Europe or the entire world with respect to the terrorist system it had elaborated.

It wielded absolute power. Above the will of Lenin and the Council of Peoples Commissars, the all-powerful will of the Cheka always prevailed.

Responsible to no one for its actions, it was answerable only to the Extraordinary Commission, and the latter was exempt from any control by the Communist Party; its activity controlled by the will of one man, with full powers and absolute independence, one can easily deduce what the Cheka represented in Russia.

The Cheka was almost entirely constructed on the basis of elements of the Czarist political police; it acts on the pretext of alleged or real counterrevolutionary activities; its members are paid very well, and enjoy perquisites and privileges that are sometimes superior to those enjoyed by the leader of the Government. The Cheka actually vetoed requests of the leader of the Government on the pretext of his personal security. The Cheka could do everything; it was everything.

As proof of the privileges enjoyed by its members, we shall cite the following example.

Upon returning to our Hotel after our visit to the Sukharevka market, we were thirsty and found nothing to drink.

We took a walk and spoke to the owner of a small restaurant, in which a spirituous fruit flavored beverage was sold.

We entered, ordered the fruit drink and we were served; we paid 700 rubles and left.

We later inquired as to the reason why that restaurant had not been closed. It was owned by one of the leaders of the Cheka in Moscow.

The prohibition of all private commerce did not apply to that high personage. At his restaurant things were bought and sold, despite all the decrees that had been and will be issued.

We do not want to engage in recounting the many abuses imputed to the Cheka that we were told about. These alone would fill many pages; there will surely be no lack of people who will undertake this task.

But while we are discussing this topic, we can affirm that the abuses that it has been accused of have even been admitted by the Bolsheviks.

Everyone knows how much they like to compile statistics and charts that depict the results of their work.

The Cheka, no less than the other institutions, also has its statistical book and its charts. Such are the many horrors that it relates, that the Council of Peoples Commissars ordered that it be withdrawn from circulation during the very month of its publication, threatening anyone who had a copy and did not surrender it with severe penalties.

This fact is more damning of the Cheka than any other argument.

Chapter 18

18

A Visit with Kropotkin

Kropotkin's views on the Russian revolution were unknown in Europe at the time of our visit.

The silence maintained by the master generated various interpretations. For some, it was the sign of conformity and support for the Bolshevik regime; for others, his attitude towards the events that had unfolded in Russia was the only logical and legitimate one.

Was it not natural for us to try to find out what he was thinking, now that we had the opportunity?

Apart from this circumstance, which was certainly very tempting, there was also the personal, intimate and very special satisfaction of having a chance to meet him, to speak with him, to

make his acquaintance, for just a few minutes. We went to listen to the words of one of the most vigorous and respected minds of Europe and the world.

Our desire to meet Kropotkin was facilitated by our friend and comrade Souchy, a delegate of the German syndicalists, who was in Russia for the purpose of study and gathering information. Souchy introduced us to Sasha Kropotkin, the daughter of Peter Kropotkin, who lived on Leontyevsky Street.

Through the intercession of Souchy and Sasha, we paid a visit to Sasha and arranged to see Kropotkin in Dimitrov.

We cannot recall whether it was a Sunday at the end of July or at the beginning of August when we left early in the morning to see Kropotkin.

The station was far away; we brought along some packages of food that the comrades of the Anarchist Club had given us for Kropotkin at the last minute before our departure.

We found a car and for five thousand rubles the driver took us to the station.

At the station we had to stand in line to get our tickets. Some people, who occupied the first places in line, had been waiting since the day before. They had spent the night in the station. If we had to stand in line it was most likely that we would not leave until evening.

Sasha told us to approach the Extraordinary Commission of the station and tell them that we were delegates to the Congress of the Third International so that we could leave on the next train.

We had always hated to make use of such privileges and only did so in really exceptional cases.

But we went to see the president of the Commission. All of this trouble could have been avoided if we had requested a travel pass to Dimitrov while we were at the Hotel, but we wanted to dispense with official sanction in the interest of operating with more freedom. As it turned out, as shall be seen, it did not work out that way, although in the end the result was the same.

No sooner had we presented our credentials as delegates to the president of the Extraordinary Commission, than we were given tickets. In addition, we were given seats in the coach of the Extraordinary Commission.

Once the train was underway, we ventured to converse with some of the other passengers, using Sasha as an interpreter.

Our first interlocutor was a soldier, who spoke to us with enthusiasm about the almost messianic mission the Red Army had to fulfill. According to him, the ranks of the Army were being filled with the best possible troops; if it would be provided with the best modern weaponry and thus equipped, under the flag of the red star and under the motto of *death to the bourgeoisie!*, the Red Army would help to establish communism throughout the entire world. He was possessed, a mystic, a fanatic of an idea that he neither understood nor was

even conversant with, but which is instilled in him by other reasons, subjective reasons, without value.

It made us sad to listen to that dialectic of the bulletin of the Red Army, which thus influenced and deranged virgin minds that did not have any kind of ideas at all.

His prophecies, his assertions about the imminent and irresistible march of the Red Army across the world, saluted and greeted by the applause and the rejoicing of the conquered peoples, and the apotheosis with which the peoples would receive it, seemed to be more like the Apocalypse than the reasoning of a person with even one speck of common sense.

This conversation soon came to an end. We did not want to follow the neophyte communist on his triumphal march across the world, much less while traveling on a train that could hardly go faster than twenty kilometers per hour.

Examining the other passengers, we focused on a soldier who was wearing a woman's "necklace". It was a gold chain with pearls, with a diamond in the center. This bauble was undoubtedly the product of pillage.

The soldier was the son of some humble villagers, from a village near Dimitrov where we were scheduled to make a short stop.

The very ease with which he wore the necklace proved that he knew neither the use nor the value of the jewelry he was wearing.

The sixty versts that separated Moscow from Dimitrov, seemed to multiply fantastically, since we had already spent more than three hours on the train and still had not set foot on the ground.

The passengers were constantly moving from one car to the other. Everyone was looking for more comfortable seats, in vain.

Since Dimitrov was the last station on the line we were traveling, the numerous passengers had quickly lined up to exit the train before it even stopped.

Always guided by Sasha, we took a street or alley that led to the center of the town; but before we reached the town center, we turned right and began going uphill.

After having walked about forty steps, we turned to the left and came upon a street that passed between gardens, in the middle of which were what looked like Swiss Chalets.

Halfway up the street, Sasha pointed out a door and said, "We have arrived. Since papa does not know what day you were coming to see him, he is not here to receive us. But that does not matter. We will take him by surprise and he will be all the more pleased." And so we entered.

We walked through a spacious garden, lush with greenery, towards a small Chalet in the middle, and when we had gone a few steps, Sasha's mother came to greet us.

Mother and daughter tenderly embraced.

After the compulsory introductions, Kropotkin's inseparable companion, who had become a gardener to help meet the needs of survival, firmly shook our hands, showing her lively satisfaction with our visit.

While Peter's companion and I exchanged a few words, Sasha entered the house and greeted her father and announced our arrival.

He quickly appeared, framed against the doorway, the great figure of the master.

He was somewhat gaunt, and reflected on his face was an ironic grimace impressed by his moral suffering.

In the presence of this world-renowned figure, whose white beard gave him a somewhat apostolic look, we were profoundly moved.

While Kropotkin's companion prepared chairs for us to sit on the broad porch of the house, Peter came to us and firmly embraced us. We were overcome by emotion.

We were face to face with one of the most powerful intellects of European thought, and the full sense of our insignificance made us feel like little children.

Kropotkin, who was quite familiar with the Spanish anarchist and syndicalist movement, asked us to fill him in on the latest news.

We spoke at length, explaining in detail the intense activity of the anarchist movement during the last five years, carefully avoiding any mention of its position on the war.

Sasha had carefully coached us in advance. The heart attacks to which Kropotkin was prone were triggered when he became engaged in heated debates. And since any mention of his position on the war would force us into a heated debate, the best thing to do was to avoid any mention of it. And although Peter did refer to the question, we managed to avoid any serious discussion on the issue by merely saying that we had adopted a different position because we thought that it was more in accord with our approach to anarchism.

We spent the whole day in the company of the Kropotkin family, who devoted all their attention and interest to us.

We returned to Moscow that night.

Twice more we visited Kropotkin; once in Dimitrov, where we went to see him again, and once in Moscow, at Sasha's house.

He had traveled to Moscow, despite all the difficulties and hardships of the journey, in order to visit Lenin and speak with him. But Lenin did not want to see him. On the pretext of pressing business, he did not want to set aside a few minutes to listen to him. While it is true that Lenin sent his personal secretary to see what Peter wanted, it was nonetheless a haughty insult to refuse to see the man who was going to request that Lenin not allow a horrible crime to take place. It was not carried out thanks to Kropotkin's intervention.

The crime involved the death penalty that the Soviet Tribunal was seeking to enforce against ten cooperative members who were denounced by an agent of the Cheka as counterrevolutionary conspirators.

This Cheka agent had fantasized a wicked terrorist plot where there was nothing but the mild protest of a few discontented individuals.

From what Kropotkin told us, we understood that the accused, who faced a possible death sentence, were having a friendly conversation in their local social center. One subject led to another, and finally the conversation came around to politics, and someone ventured to suggest, which was agreed with by the others, that a conspiracy of all those who are discontented with the Bolshevik regime would be necessary in order to destroy that regime.

These words reached the ears of the Cheka agent and he transmitted them to the Extraordinary Commission, which ordered the arrest and trial of the ten individuals.

When Peter found out about what happened, and he discovered that they were going to be tried and that the Soviet prosecutor was seeking to impose the death penalty, he sought an audience with Lenin in order to tell him that “the shooting of those ten men would be the greatest shame, the blackest stain that Bolshevism has ever incurred”.

And he was successful. They were spared the death penalty; but not the ten years in prison to which each of the men was condemned.

Concerning the topics of our discussions with Kropotkin, I have omitted a great deal in order to assure the quality of these pages, but I would like to state that they were very interesting.

The concept of revolution that we owe to Kropotkin was very rich in insights and lessons for everyone, but especially for us anarchists.

The complexity of the Russian revolutionary movement is crystallized in its most eminent intellect, its most sincere and truthful interpreter.

It is so unfortunate that Kropotkin had not lived a few more years, so that his thought could have been distilled in a few more pages!

He did not have much to say about the Bolsheviks. He considered them to be consummate *Babeufistes*. For him, Lenin and his theories, like the communism of Karl Marx and all the Marxists, were nothing but Babeuf's theories dressed up with a few fashionable expressions.

One day he asked us if we would write about Russia after we returned to Spain.

“If you write a book about Russia, call it *Comment on fait pas une revolution* [“How Not to Make a Revolution”]. Because every critique directed against the Bolsheviks and their interpretation of the revolution must aim precisely at proving that it is not possible to make a revolution by adopting their systems and premises.”

Anxious to discover what questions he was most interested in at the moment, he responded to our questions as follows:

“Fearing that the Bolsheviks would neutralize anything I could write about the revolution, I wrote nothing about it; I stopped taking notes. We are also too close to the events and to its people for the thinker to avoid being excessively influenced by one or the other. This is the principle reason for my abstention.”

“But in order to make some use of my time, I wrote on ethics, for reading a page of Bakunin gave me the idea of doing this, and it is to this project that I have devoted my hours and my days; but the work has proved most burdensome for me.”

“The lack of contact with the intellectual world outside Russia and the difficulties caused by the regime and by my health have accumulated, so that I cannot work as much as I should, and it is only by means of extraordinary efforts that I can achieve what I have set out to do.”

We asked about his financial situation, which was not very comfortable. He managed to survive, not only on the ration assigned to him by the Commissariat of Food Supply (the intellectual’s ration), but also from what was sent to him by comrades from all over Russia.

“I don’t live well,” he told us, “but even so I consider myself fortunate. Millions of Russians are much worse off than me.”

“Don’t you want to go to England or some other country?”

“Passionately,” he replied.

“Why don’t you submit an emigration request to the Council of People’s Commissars?”

“Because I don’t want to get a negative answer from the Cheka, from that shameful blot that will dishonor the Bolshevik regime, the master and mistress of the actions of all the Russians.”

“Only those who have the favor of the Cheka, even if they were miserable bandits under the Czarist regime, can obtain a permit to emigrate.”

“I prefer to die in Russia, to waste away in this inactivity, to endure hunger and cold, rather than submit to the commands of that institution.”

It was time to leave.

The samovar, with its potbellied shape rising above the table shooting steam towards the ceiling, cast a small shadow between us.

The day came to an end. The evening added a note of sadness to Kropotkin’s words. Did it presage his approaching death?

The previous winter had been very cruel for Kropotkin. Without firewood, almost without light and food, the privations had scourged his constitution, which had also been undermined by his advanced age.

What was about to happen would be even more cruel.

Russia's economic situation was becoming more serious and worse every day. Take heed, Kropotkin!

The generosity of the comrades, the solidarity and support they gave by sending him what they could, was the barometer that signaled a notable decline.

The packets of food became less frequent. Sometimes they were accompanied by apologetic letters. "We would have sent these little gifts sooner," they would say, "but we could not. If you only knew, Peter, the hardships we had to go through to feed ourselves in this little one-horse town!...."

With such words those generous comrades would ask forgiveness, lost in some little village in the immense spaces of Russia, for not being able to give him more effective assistance, and they mention the privations they have had to undergo in order to fulfill an elementary duty of solidarity.

When we were getting ready to return to Moscow, we shook hands firmly; we embraced and received his fraternal kiss.

"Give my regards," he told us, "to all the anarchists of Spain, of whom I have such fond memories. Look," he added, displaying a beautiful gold watch, "I don't know if you will remember...."

"Yes, we will remember," we interjected.

"Tell them that I still have it. That I will never forget this beautiful memento of the Spanish anarchists, thanks to the initiative of the comrades of La Coruña."

"The inscription on its inside cover ["From the anarchists of La Coruña, to Peter Kropotkin, on the occasion of his silver wedding anniversary"] will always be a pleasant reminder of the Spanish comrades."

Chapter 19

An Interview with Lenin

The Second Congress of the Third International had come to an end.

The ideological position of the various delegates who had attended had become somewhat clearer.

There were some implacable elements; others, on the other hand, had come to make some concessions, little by little.

But—and this was a curious phenomenon—when the Congress adjourned, the majority of the delegates began to engage in furious activity.

There were some, among them Bombacci, a member of the Italian delegation who, during the Congress, missed three sessions for every one he attended, and who, once the Congress had come to an end, was witnessed to be constantly coming and going, tireless, busy, restless. He was constantly visiting the Committee of the International and holding secret meetings with it.

Serrati was just the opposite. While the Congress was in session, Serrati was the indispensable man, the obligatory orator at all meetings of any importance, the man who was consulted about everything, for every reason and with regard to all matters. Why the discrepancy?

The facts came out later, but this is not the place to present them.

Something similar took place in the other delegations.

But our surprise knew no limits when we saw how previously intransigent delegates would afterwards be all smiles and advising agreement and compromise.

Summonses were continually being sent to the delegates requesting that they visit the Committee. We must mention that our delegation and one other delegate never received any such summonses. And the delegates met with the Committee. We do not know what their meetings were about; but the defections from the camp of the intransigents were to be noted after each such meeting. At the last one, Lenin was in attendance.

Because the questions that were being discussed did not interest us and, besides, everything had already been arranged behind the scenes, and since we wanted to return to Spain as soon as we could, we took advantage of the opportunity to meet Lenin and then to say goodbye to him.

As they were translating his speech into English, and we saw him getting ready to depart, we approached him and caught up with him at the door of the cafeteria.

“When do you plan to leave?”, he asked us.

“Very soon. We only need to get some more information; once we get it, we will leave.”

“Stay a little longer.”

“No,” we told him. “We cannot extend our investigations without spending a lot more time, given the reports that we have. Our presence here a few more weeks will not be productive. And our comrades in Spain would be displeased with the delay.”

“Since you will be spending at least a few more days in Moscow,” he said, “wouldn’t it be nice for us to have a private conversation together?”

“We would be most pleased. We have not suggested such a thing because we did not want to bother you.”

“Not at all,” Lenin responded. “But since I am very busy and I may forget to notify you when I am free, would you call me next Tuesday on the telephone? On Tuesday I will let you know when we can get together to talk.”

The next day, Thursday, was the last day of the regular proceedings of the Congress, and there it was agreed to hold the closing session on the following Sunday at three in the afternoon at the Moscow’s Bolshoi Theater.

We spent Saturday and Sunday putting our notes in order. We also decided on our last investigative projects we were thinking of carrying out.

On Monday morning we devoted ourselves to organizing our notes from the last few sessions of the Congress, and we remained in the hotel.

At approximately eleven, the hotel commandant sent us an urgent summons to report to his office.

By means of the interpreter we were informed that Lenin had asked for us and had ordered that an automobile should be put at our disposal.

We did not expect this. We had hardly gathered together all our notes and notebooks scattered around on the work table, when the interpreter came to notify us that the car was waiting.

Accompanied by a military officer we left at once.

We entered the Kremlin by the door through which the delegates were usually admitted.

Once we got out of the car, the commander of the guard asked for our names, and after checking them against the names on the order brought by the military officer who accompanied us, he spoke with the latter in Russian and allowed us to enter.

Once we reached the first floor landing, we underwent the same procedure with another pair of soldiers.

We proceeded up the stairs.

At the second floor landing we were approached by a non-commissioned officer in command of a patrol of four soldiers, who asked us for our identification. However, because the way I pronounced my name did not seem to match the name on the order, or perhaps because it was routine procedure, he had to make a phone call to verify my identity.

Once he received confirmation of my identity over the phone, he allowed us to continue down the hall in the direction of Lenin’s office. In front of the door to his office, however, there was a table, with a registration book.

The officer who accompanied me approached the commandant and handed him the order he brought with him and then withdrew. His mission was complete.

The commandant once again asked us for our names and checked them against the order and then wrote them in the book on the table in front of him.

The whole ordeal was finally over; he rose from his chair and accompanied us to the door, which he opened and invited us to enter an office in which, in an atmosphere of profound silence but great activity, six typists were working.

After a few minutes in this anteroom we were led into Lenin's study.

Lenin's office was modestly furnished. Anything superfluous had been removed.

A large map of Russia; another smaller map depicting various other countries; a work table piled high with documents and papers; a few chairs; a few stools and armchairs. This was the furniture in his office.

Lenin appeared.

Smiling, he offered us his hand, which we shook with real feeling and we sat down face to face.

He was happy, cheerful, satisfied.

"Are you pleased with how we communists have treated you?", he asked.

"Very much," we answered. "You have taken care at all times to look after our needs and have been most solicitous and we have been most grateful. If this was not so, if our discretion has with regard to one matter or another exceeded the limit of what was appropriate, we ask your forgiveness."

"Not at all. From the very first, we have had the best impressions. It does not matter that you do not share our views, or that you are not one of us. We know that you have maintained your principled disagreement at all times apart from any improper indiscretions in view of the seriousness that is called for."

Following a brief pause, he then added:

"Let us cut to the chase. Can you expand on some of the details of the report that you presented to the Third International, on the situation of the various political and social forces in Spain?"

I provided him with the details he asked for and then he said:

"So, you will continue to reject the dictatorship of the proletariat, centralization and the need to form a Communist Party in Spain in order to carry out the revolution."

"We shall remain true to our opinions, our positions and our principles."

"You have not been convinced by Russia's accomplishments?"

“What I have seen in Russia, what I have observed in Russia, and the conclusions that we have drawn from the whole situation verify our opinions.”

“We have not concealed from you the fact that, when we came here from Paris, we were continuously plagued by one doubt in particular. Faced with the unknown, with conjectures and with doubtful information, we often asked ourselves this question: Are we anarchists mistaken with respect to the most fundamental tenets of our doctrine? And I will not conceal from you the fear with which we perceived the approaching moment when we might have to deny those ideas that we advocated with such passion and that formed what little intellectual heritage our lives possessed. One does not painlessly renounce the ideas that have been so dear to us, if you give the question some honest thought. To do so would be to tear a page from the history of our lives. Such amputations are always painful. But what we have seen and observed in Russia have confirmed and fortified our convictions.”

“So you still believe that the dictatorship of the proletariat is not necessary? How do you think the bourgeoisie can be destroyed? You do not think it can be done without a revolution!”

“By no means. The bourgeoisie will not allow themselves to be expropriated without a fight. They will confront the attacks of the people with the most implacable resistance, and a revolution is inevitable. It will be more or less violent; this depends on the resistance offered by the bourgeoisie; but a bloody revolution is inevitable.”

“However, the difference between the Bolshevik approach and our approach becomes clear at that juncture.”

“The revolution is an act of force. This is undeniable. But the revolution is not the dictatorship of the proletariat.”

“Dictatorship is the imposition of rule, of authority, on the part of some people, whether few or many, who run everything as they see fit, in their own name or that of the collectivity, against others, who must obey without they right of appeal, on pain of punishments and violence that are carried out by persons who are authorized to do so at the command of others, with indisputable authority.”

“That is not revolution. The revolution is the people in arms, who, tired of enduring injustice, of being deprived of their rights, of exploitation that denies them the right to live, protest against this situation; they take up arms, spill into the streets and impose by the force of numbers the social organization that they believe to be the most just. This certainly implies violence; but there is no dictatorship.”

“It is of course possible, by way of an arbitrary and captious argument, with a certain ingenious subtlety, to unite these two extremes: revolution and dictatorship. But the truth and the reality, which are hidden behind the value and the content of each of these two concepts, instantly demonstrates for us the artificiality of such reasoning and the weakness of such argumentation.”

“To make our position more clear, that is, more explicit, we can synthesize it in the following manner: the Revolution is the cause; the dictatorship can be the effect of this cause. To

confuse the one with the other does not seem to be such an easy thing to me, when it is not the result of premeditated imposition from above.”

“But is the revolution not an imposition? Does it not compel the bourgeoisie to abandon their class privileges?”

“It is true that the revolution is an imposition; but the revolutionary action of the people is not a dictatorship. And if you want to split hairs over the specific meaning of every word and every concept, in order to draw conclusions that support any thesis whatsoever, I will tell you that the people will not ‘compel the abandonment of the privileges of the bourgeoisie’, but that the people ‘expropriates the bourgeoisie’, which is not the same thing.”

“When one ‘compels’, this implies that there was a preexisting agreement, that there was a command, by means of which orders are given, and when orders are given, there is a dictate; but when the people ‘expropriates’, there is neither a command, nor an order, nor a previously existing agreement. This expropriation has a clear revolutionary value. The other methods do not.”

“But I believe that it is of no use to split hairs over concepts.”

“Speaking, therefore, of general concepts, we believe, now more than ever, that the dictatorship of the proletariat, the organization or the constitution of a class Government—the seizure of Power, to dictate laws to those who dictated them yesterday—is not an indispensable feature of a revolution that has a social character, which is the kind that is demanded by our times. It is enough to expropriate the bourgeoisie and arm the people in order to achieve this end.”

“As for the defense of the Revolution and its conquests, it is the very succession of events that has transpired in Russia which shows how the people know how to defend themselves, going so far as to sacrifice their own lives.”

“The servitude of the people is maintained by the economic dominance of the bourgeoisie. Deprive the bourgeoisie of the means of exercising this dominance, and the servitude of the people will come to an end. Entrust the organization of labor and the distribution of products over to the trade unions and you will see how the bourgeoisie will not dare to lift a finger. That is our personal view, born from what we have observed here, in Moscow and in Russia.”

“I see that there is no way to convince you. So, you will not accept centralization and discipline?”

“The results of your centralization clearly display its failure in the political and economic fields. Based on the reports we have gathered in the various Commissariats, the conclusions we have drawn concerning political and administrative centralization are diametrically opposed to those drawn by your Party. Bolshevism claims—so we have deduced from the speeches made at the Congress—that the political and economic difficulties encountered in Russia are the result of a lack of centralization and discipline, and calls for more discipline and more centralization.”

“We are of the contrary opinion.”

“The more centralization and discipline that you impose, the greater the difficulties and the harder they will be to overcome.”

“Wrong; you are mistaken, Pestaña.”

“Possibly, although we do not think so. Only time will tell. Of course, in times like these, such a conclusion is painful! But no other conclusion is possible.”

“Anyway, and without spending any more time than is absolutely necessary on these theoretical questions, we have to think that we live to subvert the capitalist regime, and this cannot be achieved unless we make the revolution.”

“That is the most important thing. And although the situation is not the same in every country, and avoiding or correcting the errors we have committed, what is essential now is to make the revolution in the other countries. Emancipate the proletariat from the bourgeois dictatorship.”

“And with respect to this question: how would you characterize the delegates who have attended the Congress, as revolutionaries?”

“Would you like an honest answer?”

“That is why I asked you.”

“OK. Even if by telling you this it will cause you to be somewhat disappointed, or make you think that I am a poor judge of men, my assessment of the majority of the delegates that attended the Congress is that they are a deplorable lot.”

“Except for a few rare individuals, all of them have a bourgeois mentality. Some because they are social climbers, and others because that is how they were raised and educated.”

“And what is the basis of such an unfavorable judgment? It cannot be based on what they said at the Congress!”

“Not exclusively; but I base my judgment on the contradiction between the speeches they made at the Congress and their everyday lives in the hotel. The little things they do every day tell you more about men than all their words and speeches. From what they do, rather from what they say, that is how you can get to really know people.”

“Many grains of sand make the mountain. The mountain does not make the grains of sand. The infinite series of small things that we do day after day are a better demonstration than anything else of what really lies at the bottom of every one of us.”

“How, Lenin, can you expect us to believe in the revolutionary, altruistic and emancipatory sentiments of many of these delegates, when in their everyday lives they carry on, more or less, just like perfect bourgeoisie?”

“They grumble and complain that the portions of food they get are small and the cooking mediocre, forgetting that we foreign delegates are privileged with regard to our meals,

forgetting the most important thing: that millions of men, women, children and old people are going without, not to speak of the extras, but of what is strictly indispensable.”

“How can one believe in the altruism of these delegates, who bring unfortunate starving women to the hotel to eat, in exchange for sex, or give presents to the women who serve us at the hotel in order to take advantage of them?”

“What right do these delegates have to speak of fraternity, when they insult, humiliate and threaten the male servants in the hotel, because they were not always instantly on hand to satisfy the delegates’ most trivial whims? They consider the men and women of the people to be servants, nursemaids, lackeys, forgetting that some of them may have suffered wounds and risked their lives in defense of the revolution. What good did it do them?”

“Every night, just as if they were tourists in capitalist countries, they put their shoes outside their doors for the ‘comrade’ servant of the hotel to clean and polish them. You have to laugh at the ‘revolutionary’ mindset of these delegates!”

“And the haughtiness, the snootiness and the contempt with which they treat anyone who is not influential in the Government or the Committee of the Third International is irritating and exasperating. It makes you think about how these individuals will act if tomorrow the revolution were to occur in their home countries and if they were the ones to be giving the orders from a position of Power.”

“The speeches they made at the Congress do not matter! That they should speak of fraternity, of companionship and comradeship, and then act like slave-masters, is simply ridiculous, when it is not vile and detestable.”

“And, finally, these lucrative backroom deals that we have become aware of and which have sickened us with the sight of so many defections; this continuous coming and going with their hands out and putting a price on their support, smacks of the most abject skullduggery and the most disgraceful riff-raff. This is all so vile, disgusting and shameful, it is as if a mother were to sell her daughter to satisfy the caprice of the most abominable and foul persons.”

“Why should we believe in the revolutionary spirit and the seriousness of such people?”

“Because they want the revolution in their respective countries? Of course they do; but they want it to take place without endangering their sacrosanct persons and for the exclusive benefit of their own base appetites.”

“Naturally, we are not saying that, within the communist parties and among their supporters, whom these delegates represent, there are not hundreds of individuals of good faith, willing to make sacrifices and worthy of all respect and consideration. These stand apart. Our criticisms are only applicable on an individual level and are directed at the delegates who have attended the Congress.”

“This is our opinion, expressed sincerely.”

“I agree, Pestaña, I agree ... although I think your judgments are somewhat exaggerated.”

As he spoke these words, Lenin rose from his chair. Our interview had come to an end. Perhaps we had overstayed our welcome; but it would have constituted an indiscretion on our part to end a conversation without knowing just how much of his time he was willing to grant us.

Before we took our leave of Lenin he asked us if we would be coming to Russia for the next Congress.

“Try to come, and bring some of your friends. Come and study on the terrain of our accomplishments. By then the situation will have improved, and maybe you will be able to reach conclusions that are closer to ours than the ones you have today.”

“Will you write something about what you have seen and what you really think of us?”

“Quite possibly,” we responded.

“If you do, do not forget to send it to me. I would be very pleased to receive it and to read it.”

We shook his hand cordially and left.

After this conversation we felt a profound sympathy and an unlimited respect for Lenin.

We did not share his ideas, nor do we share them today; but all our friends with whom we have spoken concerning him, when we refer personally to Lenin, know that we preserve for him the consideration and the respect that we believe he deserves.

A few days after this conversation with Lenin we were at Sasha Kropotkin's house, and by chance her father was there. It was the day that he went to Moscow to interview Lenin, in an attempt to intervene on behalf of the cooperators who were under threat of a death sentence.

The purpose of our visit was to inform Sasha concerning a request we submitted to Lenin during our meeting with him.

Because of Sasha's contacts in London, and also because of her extensive knowledge of the subject, Lunacharsky, the People's Commissar who was also quite experienced in the same subject, delegated her for a mission to the English capital to buy educational materials for Russia's schools.

Once the Council of People's Commissars approved the proposal, the Cheka was asked to provide the necessary passports, and the Cheka refused to do so.

No matter how many requests they received to hand them over, they refused. There was no way to overcome this opposition.

A few days before our visit to Lenin, the Cheka had just refused the third request for the passports. Sasha, who knew that we were scheduled to have an interview with Lenin, proposed to us that we should make it a point to stress how important it was for the Cheka to release the passports. Lenin's response could not have been more favorable: he assured me that Sasha's passport would be delivered.

Not only Kropotkin, but also his companion and his daughter, asked us about our overall impression of our interview with Lenin and our opinion of Lenin's views with respect to the course of events.

"Personally," we said, "we received a very good impression. As for what Lenin thinks about the course of events, he thinks like a man who has been wrong and is sincerely trying to find a way out of a bad situation. If he makes the right decision, then all is well; if not, then the revolution will falter and decline."

That is more or less what we could deduce on the sorrowful basis of one of its manifestations.

Chapter 20

20

The Return to Spain

The Congress of the Third International had come to an end.

The Committee's activities were absorbed by the organization of the Congress of the Asian peoples that was being prepared by the Third International for September 13 in Baku, and the orders that were being given to the delegates who were now departing for the other countries of Europe and America.

The disorder was almost universal.

The twenty-one conditions imposed by Moscow on the socialist parties that sought to become members of the Third International and the communists who had not already unconditionally submitted, demanded from them an internal effort that would come to replace their externally directed work, which was previously predominant.

A group of delegates to the Congress, including the entire Italian delegation and the ill-fated French comrades Vergeat and Lepetit and the communist Lefebvre, among others, had departed for a trip to the Ukraine—which we did not join because we could not spare the time from our investigations—and we were waiting for them to return.

We had previously agreed with Vergeat and Lepetit that they would provide me with reports and documentation of their trip and that they would deliver them to me when they returned to Moscow.

The intervening days were a little monotonous and boring. Everyone was looking out for themselves, and the wait for interpreters or some kind of permit often seemed endless, so the hours passed very slowly, and no one knew what to do to fill them.

We submitted requests for passports, and after two days we were notified that our requests were approved. But first we had to go to the headquarters of the Cheka, so that the Chekist police could photograph us. This photograph was absolutely indispensable for avoiding any interruptions on our journey.

We felt humiliated. Our instinctive sense of revulsion towards the Cheka increased from that moment. But we were to undergo an even greater indignity as a result of the attitude of the Bolshevik delegates who not only thought this regulation was just but even praised it. The moral character of these creatures nauseated us.

The appearance on the scene of a new face diverted us from these preoccupations and made us forget the incident of the anthropometric police dossier. We were working in the hotel room when someone loudly announced himself at the door.

We told the visitor to enter and a person whom we did not know appeared in the doorway.

Without any introductions, without saying who he was, or even giving us his name or what he was doing here, and employing a ridiculous and arrogant tone, he asked in correct Castilian Spanish:

“So, have you changed your minds?”

We were stupefied by this intrusion. Who was this person, who, in an imperious and authoritarian tone of voice, had the audacity to come in here and interrogate us right to our faces?

In more correct, although less Bolshevik language, we answered without giving any appearance of having been cowed by his rude manners.

“What!”, he said, shocked at our reply. “After what you have seen in Russia, the grandiose spectacle of the revolution, the ineffable achievements of the communists and the dictatorship of the proletariat, and you still think the same way you did before?”

“Just the same as before,” we responded calmly. “Exactly, after having seen all these things and for that very reason, we still think like we did before; I am more convinced of the correctness of my ideas than ever.”

“Then you have seen nothing of the revolution?”

“I have certainly seen the work of the revolution better than you have,” I replied.

“Before you leave Russia I want to have an interview with you, in the presence of the Committee of the Third International, because I am Merino Gracia, the delegate of the Spanish Communist Party.”

“Ah!”, we responded. “You are Merino Gracia?”

“Yes!”, he answered. “I am Merino Gracia!”

“We have no objection to attending this meeting; all we ask is that it should take place as soon as possible. We leave it up to you to make the arrangements.”

The meeting could not be held, because Merino Gracia left the next day for the Baku Congress. And thus ended this picturesque incident.

During those days we once again devoted ourselves passionately to the tasks required to reach an agreement with the organization of the Red Trade Union International.

The arrival in Moscow of comrade Borghi, the delegate of the “Unione Sindicale Italiana”, who would try to turn us against D’Aragona, the representative of the “Confederazione Generale del Lavoro”, and the departure of Lozovsky for London, who was then replaced by Tomsky, a more intelligent and more tolerant man, caused us to once again get involved in organizational work, forgetting all those little irritations of those unexpected encounters and the monotony of the passage of time.

These meetings became more tempestuous. They were tempestuous without any real cause. A Tempest in a teapot.

Borghi, who, as we said, had just arrived, demanded the support of the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, due to the fact that it was the organization that was most closely related to the organization he represented, for the admission of the Unione Syndicale Italiana, and also its opposition to the admission of the Confederazione Generale del Lavoro, represented by D’Aragona, an eminently reformist organization, for even its secretary, D’Aragona, was a member of a national league for disabled Italian war veterans, of which the King of Italy was also a member. An extremism of which the Bolsheviks were not uninformed.

Borghi’s mission managed to both make the time pass more slowly and arouse passionate debate.

For our part, we accepted his demand, and at one of the sessions of the organizational Commission we submitted a proposal to that effect.

Tomsky’s surprise knew no limits. He marshaled all his cleverness in an effort to make us withdraw our proposal.

Our refusal exasperated him. He said that it was impossible. The Confederazione Generale del Lavoro could not be excluded.

When we showed him documentation that proved that this organization, besides the fact that its secretary belonged to the same organization whose president was the King of Italy, was also still a member, although D’Aragona had said it was not so, of the Amsterdam Trade Union International, thus demonstrating unacceptable duplicity, he proposed to postpone the debate until the following day, in order to consult the Committee of the Russian central organization.

After having accepted his proposal, we continued to debate the points on the agenda.

Once the next day’s session began, we re-submitted our proposal, but Tomsky passionately opposed it, and no matter how many reasons we provided showing how contradictory their position was, we were rebuffed systematically by him and the other delegates.

The time came when we thought our role in forming the Red Trade Union International had come to an end, because the votes in favor of our proposal and those against it were always equal and neither side would be convinced of the other’s arguments, and there was no way to reach an agreement.

We then requested to adjourn the debate in order to reach an agreement with Borghi and to see if there was some way to salvage the situation. Once the session was adjourned, we met with Borghi. As a result of our consultation, we agreed to withdraw our proposal to exclude the Italian Confederation Generale del Lavoro, on the condition that the Union Sindicale would be admitted as a member in equal standing in the deliberations of the Committee and in the future International Congress that was being prepared, and supplemented this proposal with a declaration to the following effect: "The organizational Commission of the Red Trade Union International views with sympathy the openly revolutionary attitude and the spirit of class struggle that the Unione Sindicale Italiana has propagated among the Italian workers."

Tomsky replied that he accepted the first part of the proposal, but not the second, because, although in a somewhat indirect manner, he ruled against a vote of censure against the Confederation Generale del Lavoro.

We tried to make him understand that it was not our intention to merely condemn the Confederation Generale del Lavoro; but rather to encourage the Italian proletarians who were members of the Confederation to emulate those who were members of the Unione Sindicale. But he was not convinced.

Firmly entrenched in our position, because we believed it was logical, we rejected all attempts to get us to withdraw our proposal.

Once again we were bogged down in our continuing labors and endless debates. We asked Tomsky for another postponement of the deliberations in order to reach an agreement with the representatives of the Russian labor organization, and the session was suspended until the following day so that Tomsky could consult with his organization.

When we met again the next day, Tomsky proclaimed that in the name of the revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat the Russian Communist Party could not accept our proposal, and therefore appealed to us to withdraw it.

We were baffled by Tomsky's declarations, for we could not understand what the revolution or the dictatorship of the proletariat had to do with a proposal that sought no more than to express sympathy for an organization, without condemning or expressing scorn for any other organizations.

We attempted to engage Tomsky in a debate about his position, but it was useless. He made it clear to us that either we withdraw our proposal or else the organizational Commission would bring its activities to an end.

Now it was our turn, faced with this *ultimatum*, to ask for an adjournment of the deliberations for a few minutes so we could decide what to do.

With Borghi, who attended, as one would expect, all the deliberations of the Commission, we withdrew to the hallway and engaged in a short exchange of views, for the situation had become grave. Our dilemma was as follows: either yield, or break with the Red Trade Union International. Which of the two propositions must we decide to carry out? We opted for the former. We gave in. It seemed to be the most logical thing to do.

Once the debate resumed we took the floor and withdrew our proposal, but not before having expressed our dissatisfaction with the interference of the Russian Communist Party in the deliberations of the Commission. We said that the will of the delegates had been subjected to coercion so they would impose upon us a mistaken position, and that if we, the representatives of the Spanish and Italian organizations, submitted, it was not because of this coercion, which we reject, but so as to not render the tasks of the Commission fruitless and to preserve the unity of the proletariat, although we foresaw that in the future, should this interference continue, it would become very difficult to preserve that unity.

Once this incident had concluded, we continued to debate the other questions.

Another one of the issues that created uproar, and led to violent debates, concerned the text of the official announcement of the International Congress of the Red Trade Union International.

The communists proposed that all the Federations and executive bodies that had joined the Amsterdam International must be excluded, and that the trade unions that belonged to these organizations and wanted to attend should be invited instead. But conditions were placed on the exclusion of the Federations. This seemed too complicated to us and we rejected it.

We proposed that a straightforward appeal should be made to all the local, regional or even national trade union organizations, whether they were based on industries or embraced all the trades or industries in a particular locality, that wanted to attend, with the sole restriction, in order to prevent any untoward surprises, that the right to vote at the Congress would be denied or the numbers of votes allowed would be restricted, for all those organizations which really belonged to the Amsterdam International.

At first this proposal did not meet with approval. It was said that our proposal would open the door to endless troubles and the possible invasion and dominance of reformist elements.

It was furthermore suggested to us that the invitation to attend the Congress should stipulate that all those organizations that attend must accept in advance the dictatorship of the proletariat. We rejected this, too, and we proposed that such an obligation should be discarded. We maintained that, in order to attract to the future Congress as many workers organizations as possible, so that it would really be a universal Congress of trade union organizations, it was necessary to reject all dogmatism and all compulsion *a priori*.

Finally, after long deliberations, it was agreed not to mention the dictatorship of the proletariat in the Congress's appeal, and to invite all those revolutionary trade union organizations that engage in the class struggle that wanted to attend to come to the opening Congress.

The debates were quite arduous; and although on the surface we emerged from them united, our moral unity was almost completely shattered, more than one would have thought necessary.

Any objection to the dictatorship of the proletariat and to the subjection of the Trade Unions to the Communist Party drew the ire of the Bolsheviks and led to heated and interminable debates.

However, after many compromises and agreements, concessions and deals, we managed to set forth the general outlines of the appeal to attend the next Conference of the Red Trade Union International, which was supposed to take place in Holland or Italy, but which could only be held in Russia because neither of these country's governments would allow it to be held in their countries.

Once this issue was resolved, we definitively made our exit.

* * *

The most interesting aspect of this final stage of our visit to Russia was life in the Hotel.

Each day saw some more people leave. In the hallways one no longer noticed the hustle and bustle of fifteen days before. Some new faces came to occupy the recently vacated rooms; but they did not really compensate for the agitation and constant motion of the recent past.

We noticed that the economic situation of Russia was rapidly deteriorating.

Not only had the ration they provided us in the Hotel been reduced, one meal being entirely eliminated and the quantity and quality of the others diminished, but every day brought new orders.

First they gave us some vouchers that we had to hand over at every meal. This was meant to subject us to a rigorous control over the number of rations that were distributed, but the results were not very good.

Then they gave us some sheets of coupons. At each meal one of the coupons had to be cut off the sheet and handed to the Hotel's chief of the distribution of the food supply. This did not work very well either, because they took the coupons away from us and gave us some other coupons that looked the same, and were only differentiated by having different numbers stamped on them.

The white bread had totally disappeared from the table. And the black bread that replaced it was of the worst quality and doled out in very small portions.

The sugar for our tea was also eliminated. They gave us some caramels to sweeten our tea.

The distribution of tobacco and cigarettes, which had previously been a daily routine, now took place on only every other day. The smokers were angry and discontented.

Even so, our situation was enviable.

I think that, besides the commissars and a few other personalities, we were the best-fed people in all of Russia.

We need not mention that the automobiles had completely disappeared, much to the satisfaction of some of us, who were sick of the abuses we had witnessed.

We made an arrangement with Vergeat and Lepetit that, because of the lack of time, since they, too, wanted to return to France as soon as possible, we would exchange our reports and

documentation in Paris. The tragic death of these comrades on the North Sea prevented this exchange from taking place.

When we secured our passports, we left Moscow on September 5 and, after arriving in Petrograd on the 6th, we left that same night for Reval with Borghi.

After having spent seventy days in Russia, in the country of the revolution, we returned to the capitalist world.

During the few hours we spent in Petrograd, we were surprised to meet two Spaniards: one a Catalan, and the other a Valencian.

The Catalan was a cook; he was in the service of Zinoviev, the leader of the Third International, at the beginning of the revolution. The Valencian was a pastry chef and confectioner. The two of them, during the times of Czarism, had occupied important posts in the best hotels of Petrograd, Moscow and other Russian cities. They had saved a few thousand rubles and deposited the money in a Bank to keep it safe. When the revolution confiscated Bank deposits and assets, the cook and the pastry chef were left without a penny to their names, which led them to curse the revolution and all revolutionaries. But when we asked them if they wanted to return to Spain, they replied that they did not.

“This will all change,” they said, “and when it does there will be a shortage of people with our job skills, and since we know the country and its customs we will be able to recover what the revolution confiscated from us. And besides,” they added, “the worst of it is over and we want to see it through to the end.”

We bid them farewell until they return to Spain as “capitalists”.

Finally, on morning of the 7th of September, we once again crossed the border between Russia and Estonia.

We left behind us, in spite of the “dictatorship of the proletariat”, the Cheka and the arbitrary acts and persecutions carried out by the Bolsheviks, the seeds of a new world, the glow of a brilliant social dawning. The greatest effort ever made by any people for their liberation.

It does not matter that the insane fanaticism of a party has blighted this effort; the people have made it, and this is the most important thing for those of us who have always had faith in the people.

Chapter 21

21

Conclusion

There is still a great deal we have left unsaid.

We have nonetheless attempted to relate what we considered to be of the most interest for understanding Soviet Russia and the Party that rules it.

Were we to have included everything else we saw, and discussed it in general terms rather than in detail, we would have needed many more pages. To discuss it all in detail would have required another volume.

The disorganization caused by Bolshevik organization alone would have required whole chapters.

The fact that, in order to obtain the services of an interpreter when we needed one we either had to submit a request to the Third International or else go to three or four departments, will give the reader some idea of the extremely complicated Bolshevik organization.

But there is more: the division of functions was so meticulously observed that even people who worked in the same department and carried out functions that were completely mutually interdependent, could not explain exactly what their function was or its necessary and possible ramifications.

Even the organization of the Congress of the Third International itself, which was attended by a total of less than one hundred foreign delegates, required the labor and the constant attention of dozens of employees for almost three months, and when the Congress began everything or almost everything had to be improvised.

The mere fact that the Bolsheviks, installed in Power and the absolute rulers over all, only provided us with one interpreter to translate every language, will give you an idea of the nature of Bolshevik organization.

People coming and going; employees constantly bustling about and receiving orders from someone; yes, a great deal of motion; but nothing but motion. The practical, the positive, the real, which would have quickly brought the labors, the deliberations and the resolutions of the Congress to fruition; that was another matter entirely.

One month for the sessions of the Congress alone. Thirty days of deliberations; the fact that we met three times on some days, will give an idea of what could be done. We could barely follow through on a half dozen of them, however.

And that was the style of the proceedings at all levels. If the Soviet institutions had been organized for the express purpose of wasting time, it would have been hard to fulfill this goal more completely.

In this case, as in all similar ones, the intuition of the people and necessity overcame these deficiencies and torpors, always discovering the quickest and most suitable solution. Nowhere has there been such a contrast between the vitality and the activity of the people, on both an individual and collective level, with the sluggishness and laziness of government institutions, as was exemplified by what we saw in Russia. The case of the Cooperatives that we discussed above, along with many other such cases we could adduce, serve as testimony and proof of what we say.

Even official declarations corroborate our assertions.

In the hallways leading to the Throne Room, where the sessions of the Congress were held, there were posters with graphics showing comparisons between the minimum amount of food

needed to keep a person alive and the amount that was officially rationed to each person. There could not be a more unfortunate comparison.

The official ration was equal to twenty-five percent of the individual's minimum daily requirement. The balance, or the remaining seventy-five percent, had to be obtained despite all the official obstacles, hindrances and impediments. Did the people succeed in making up the difference? Not all of it; but they did manage to get a large part of it.

These same posters speak to us of the fact that the individual manages to obtain 50% of his minimum daily requirements by relying on his own resources. The other 25% is deemed to be impossible to find, and it was this lack that plunged the people into misery and pauperism.

The reality, then, was quite unfavorable for the Bolshevik State. It was absolute master and ruler of all; the only buyer and the only seller; in its hands were the means of circulation and exchange of products of an entire country, and yet it was incapable of providing each individual with more than 25% of what he needed, while the individual, despite having to navigate his way through all the obstacles the State erected to impede his efforts, nonetheless managed to procure with his own resources twice what the State gave him—is this lesson about the incapacity of the State not much more convincing than all the fantasies concocted in Bolshevik literature in its defense?

But why follow such a road!

And please note that it never occurred to us, for the purposes of adducing yet more evidence of the State's failure to organize social life, to use the scenes of horror and misery we witnessed, or the degradation of the people due to the effects of poverty, as an argument.

We shall only mention in passing that in this minor treatment of State incapacity, we do not restrict its scope to the Bolshevik State; we apply it to all of them, because all of them have provided the most obvious proofs of their incapacity.

We have seen in Red Square, in Moscow, at the very doors of the Kremlin, dozens of people, including women and children, sleeping on the hard ground, when we went home to sleep after a day attending the Congress.

We also saw, one Sunday evening, a man pass by dressed in suit that was in reasonably good shape, but his feet were bare, no shoes at all, he had no shirt, and wore no hat. These clothes were no doubt all that he had left, and he wore them on Sunday to take his walk.

And why mention the women who had shoes but no stockings, or went about with nothing on their legs, because a woman who had stockings considered herself fortunate, or those who had cut their hair short because they could not comb it, for a lack of the most basic instruments to do so?

And the women who sold themselves for a meal, after having gone days and days from one government office to another, in search of a job, but without finding one?

And the half-dressed men? Or those who improvised suits from mismatched remnants of clothing, serving as visible denunciations of poverty and scarcity, with all their cruel consequences?

Why speak of the children of eight, nine, twelve or fifteen years of age, who sought in the black market and illegal trade what the official institutions could not provide them?

Are the Bolsheviks, the Russian rulers, the men who hold Power in the name of the working class and of the suffering people, solely responsible for these miseries? With the same frankness with which we reject and combat their political procedures, and the sophistries they utilized to seize and stay in Power, we likewise refuse to make them responsible for all the evils that afflict the Russian people. They are responsible for part of them, yes, the smallest part, we must make this clear in advance.

The material responsibility for all the misery we witnessed in the seventy days we spent in Russia, fall as an insult, a stigma and a terrible accusation, on the European bourgeoisie and governments. They are responsible, most responsible by far.

Without the blockade, without the *Cordon Sanitaire*, without the guards that the Entente posted at the gates of the countries on Russia's borders, these miseries would have been on a much reduced scale; the Russian people would have been capable of a much more effective degree of self-defense and would not have come to such extremities as they suffered.

The Bolsheviks must be absolved of this sin. They already have on their consciences as socialists and as actors in the drama of the dawning of a new world, enough faults, without also burdening them with ones they did not commit, those for which they cannot be held responsible.

If each person is only held accountable for the faults that he has himself committed, in this case we must blame, because the blame is theirs, the European governments, and hold them responsible for this immense crime against humanity committed in Russia.

In this particular case, the Bolsheviks can mount the tribunal as accusers, rather than step into the dock as the accused, and act as judges rather than as criminals, and play the role of victims rather than perpetrators. For once we have to begrudge them the right to this belligerence. They have good reason.

We have fulfilled the mission we set out to undertake.

Dispassionately, without sarcasm or insults, we have related what we saw during our stay in Russia.

Whoever reads our account without any prejudices or preconceived notions of any kind, with the desire to understand rather than to judge, will do us the justice of acknowledging that, in our exposition of the facts, we have mixed the smallest possible quantity of partiality and we have conformed to the standard that we set forth at the beginning: to neither criticize nor to condemn; we are merely relating what we saw. And we believe that we have complied with this rule.

That is why, to conclude our narrative, we shall make a promise; if the public likes our work, we shall write a second part that we shall entitle: "Seventy Days in Russia—What I Think."

Just as we restricted ourselves to narration in the first part, we shall criticize and pass judgments of what we saw, according to our opinions, in the second. The labor of making an objective accounting would thus be followed by that of critique.

So, then, if our labors are complemented by such a culmination, we shall feel satisfied; if not, we shall regret it, but that is all.

Angel Pestaña
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