

Foreword

In revolution as in war it is inevitable that the victor should receive more attention than the vanquished. A lost cause is soon overlaid by the dust of neglect, and its surviving image is grossly distorted by prejudice and purposeful misrepresentation. The adherents of "agrarian" socialism in Russia, and more particularly the Socialist Revolutionaries, who had made the peasant cause their own, experienced the common fate of losers, but neither this fate nor the exceptional vindictiveness of the "industrial" socialists who came to power in Russia can altogether account for the barrier of ignorance and error behind which the truth has been concealed.

As related in *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*, to which this book is the sequel, the Socialist Revolutionary movement had, by the fall of 1917, disintegrated into three warring factions—right, center, and left—not one of which has received its due in history. Their role in the revolution as well as their essential character has been misinterpreted, willfully distorted, or simply ignored, and the stereotype of error, once created, has been endlessly copied by uncritical writers, either from the source or from one another. The Bolsheviks are only partially to blame for this situation. In part the SR's themselves are responsible, since in the heat of factional strife they did not hesitate to malign one another. As for the rest, the fault lies in the way in which history is written, or, rather, with those who write it.

The right SR's have fared best so far as friendly treatment is concerned. They backed the Provisional Government and so have been considered exponents of democracy, they inveighed endlessly against the evils of Prussian militarism and endlessly extolled the virtues of Allied unity, they were against violence and bloodshed

everywhere except at the front. Hence the indulgence granted them by Western writers. But indulgence leads to superficiality, and the true role of the right SR's inside and outside their party has remained obscured behind the screen of virtue erected by themselves and accepted by others.

The left SR's, on the other hand, have been viewed as irresponsible people who helped the Bolsheviks into power, then belatedly broke with them when the terms of the treaty of Brest Litovsk were disclosed. As a matter of fact, they were far more independent of the Bolsheviks than were the right SR's of the Constitutional Democrats, and Brest Litovsk was merely the occasion, not the cause, of their break with Bolshevism. The martyrs of Social Revolutionism were more often than not the left SR's, since they stayed and took it while other SR's were finding refuge in Paris and in Prague. Their competition was peculiarly unwelcome to Bolshevism because of the combination of genuine revolutionary fervor with championship of the peasant cause. As a result, they were smashed by a regime which always insisted on having its left flank clear, and this smashing, together with the reluctance to flee abroad and the absence in exile of outlets for publication (aside from one small firm in Berlin), has helped to make left-wing Social Revolutionism a dark province of the revolution and to excuse in some measure the ignorance concerning its aims and its actions, its fate and its character.

The center SR's have fared worst of all, since not only their role in the revolution but their very existence has been disregarded. The Bolsheviks are doubtlessly responsible for the conventional division into right and left SR's, but the practice of speaking in these terms has spread to non-Soviet sources, with the result that numerically the largest segment of the movement and by rights its dominant faction has been deprived of its identity and classified under the name of numerically the weakest segment. As this study will show, the lumping together of right and center SR's is not wholly devoid of logic; yet when all is said and done, the center had its own position, distinct from either wing. If it did little to defend that position, the explanation is to be found in the quality of its leadership and in the grievous conditions of the times, which

were allowed to deflect it from its purpose. Its influence on the course of events is important, but, unfortunately, only in an indirect or negative sense.

To set things in their proper perspective, both within the SR camp and outside, in relation to other movements, to determine the part played by the SR's in the October Revolution, and to analyze the causes of their failure have been the purpose of this study. Two related matters that have merited a large amount of attention are the fate of the peasant movement in the months immediately following the October Revolution and the makeup, record, and potentialities of the All-Russian Constituent Assembly. The significance of these matters has not preserved the first from oblivion nor the second from falsehood and error, so that the information herein presented, whether once known and then forgotten or never known and left in darkness, will help to reveal the true situation and overcome two generations of neglect and misconception.

Secondary sources have contributed virtually nothing to this study. With two or three notable exceptions, primary sources have contributed only in piecemeal fashion. Always it has been necessary to reconstruct the story, with aid from some of the participants, and then interpret it in the light of long years of study. These alone make possible the uncovering and analysis, which distinguish historical scholarship from an exercise in writing, of deeper-lying threads of development and causal relationships. To compare the book to a building, the factual framework is the foundation and the interpretation the superstructure; never have preconceived notions been allowed to influence the selection or marshaling of material. But wherever the author has felt himself to be on firm ground as a result of thorough investigation and seasoned judgment, he has not hesitated to make evaluations and present his conclusions in unequivocal language, doubtless to the displeasure of those who begin with objectivity as a principle and end by erecting it into a fetish.

It is fitting to acknowledge the help I have had from certain individuals and institutions. The inner working of the political society being studied were first revealed to me by V. M. Chernov, ostensibly the head of that society and undoubtedly its chief in-

tellectual force. The innate kindness that came out as weakness on the revolutionary stage in 1917 was a priceless boon to a struggling student. The criticism of Chernov's actions and character voiced in this study has been dictated solely by historical necessity and in no way reflects a lack of gratitude for services rendered; rather, it betokens regret that he failed to defend a position which in the author's opinion was the correct one in 1917 (excepting always the refusal to admit compensation for landowners). In passing it may be noted that few critics of Chernov have been more unsparing than Chernov himself.

From my friend Alexander F. Izjumow, once director of the archives in the Russian collection at Prague and now dead as a result of the callousness of the Soviet government, I have learned the valuable lesson that while it is no part of a scholar's duty to please readers or critics, it is his duty, from the vantage ground of mastery of his subject, to draw out the threads of development and point up the issues, clearly and unmistakably, without the endless equivocation that is the refuge either of the timorous scholar or of the one who has not been scholarly enough.

Boris Nicolaevsky has given advice on certain bibliographical matters and has placed several rare and valuable materials from his private collection at my disposal.

To my friends at the Hoover Library, where much of the research and most of the writing were done, I wish to express my appreciation for favors too numerous to mention, as well as for a congenial and stimulating atmosphere in which to work.

The Russian Institute of Columbia University, with which I have had the good fortune to be associated as a Senior Fellow and as a visiting professor, has assumed the main burden of publishing this study. I wish to thank its members, severally and collectively, for all that they have done. The plan of publication was suggested by Professor Philip E. Mosely, to whom a special word of thanks is owing, now that it has at last been carried out.

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ness in working out arrangements amid considerable difficulty is gratefully acknowledged.

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My wife Jakoba and daughter Ingrid have assumed a major share of the drudgery connected with a task of this kind. That they have done so as a matter of course does not mean that their services should be overlooked or their kindness left unacknowledged.

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*Hoover Library
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