

I'm Just Loving BOLSHEVISM!

THE CENTENARY of the October Revolution has thrown many people into a romantic swoon. Faced as we are with a real crisis of democracy, in which most of our institutions are manifestly unfit for purpose, a time of revolutionary clarity, courageous leadership, and daring-do has immense appeal. Particularly as the fundamental nature of our country's crisis is masked by a determination to focus upon difficulties, which have no bearing and offer no solutions to our drift towards an unknown and perhaps catastrophic future. We have unending nonsense about Brexit and Brussels, a Parliament beset with nastiness concerning bad sex, and the routine disregard of women's physical autonomy. We live in a country that runs most of the world's tax havens, we have a slipshod buffoon as Foreign Secretary, a Prime Minister hanging on by her fingertips, and an opposition led by 'revolutionary' social democrats, who promise to run capitalism, as well as can be expected.

In the midst of our malaise it is perhaps understandable that the Bolshevik takeover of the Russian Revolution, famous for its sheer audacity, should grip the collective imagination. After all, this was the key event in the last century, which made confidence in a bright future manifest. More than heavier-than-air-flight, mass production, X-rays, the League of Nations, moving pictures or 'the talkies', it was Great October in which the Bolsheviks grabbed the bridle of the revolution that actually did prove to be the *Ten Days That Shook The World*. Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky, and Joseph Stalin, became the bearers of this bright future because they promised a world

without exploitation and oppression, they promised nothing short of the “emancipation of mankind”.

This future has always gripped my imagination, and I was powerfully reminded of this recently when a young man I know responded to an essay I’d just posted (‘October 1917: An Intoxication with the Future’)¹, with accusations of “cynicism” and of a “lack of faith in humanity”. His reaction was heartfelt; it was an irate defence of the future promised by Bolshevism, against an old fella, apparently sunk in scepticism and the caution of those who’ve lived too long. He reminded me of my Young Communist League membership card, which bore the legend:

Man's dearest possession is life. It is given to him but once, and he must live it so as to feel no torturing regrets for wasted years, never know the burning shame of a mean and petty past; so live that, dying, he might say: all my life, all my strength were given to the finest cause in all the world—the fight for the Liberation of Mankind

Here, in the purple prose of the Stalinist era, is the promise of redemption offered by Bolshevism. Of course, a modern young communist would greet Nicolai Ostrovsky’s thought with ironic disdain, preferring V. I. Lenin’s unvarnished take on the struggle for the future:

The cruelty of our life, necessitated by conditions, will be understood and justified. Everything will be understood.

The Russian Revolution had broken out several months before the Petrograd Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies opted for the overthrow of

¹ At www.studiesinanti-capitalism.net,
or at www.donmilligan.net ARTICLES
<http://www.donmilligan.net/index.php/articles>

Alexander Kerensky's dictatorship. Eight months earlier, at the end of February, the Tsar had abdicated in the face of waves of mutinies, strikes, and vast working class and peasant demonstrations. The fall of the Tsar resulted in the collapse of the entire aristocratic social structure that had governed the Russian empire for centuries.

By May a peasants' revolt was sweeping the countryside. Manor houses went up in flames, the aristocratic landlords fled to the relative safety of the large cities, while the peasants' ancient village communes redistributed the land amongst the families who worked it – their view was simple – those who till the soil, must own it.

It was this revolution which over the eight months from the end of February to the end of October 1917 that best reflected the outlook and aspirations of at least eighty per cent of Russia's population. This is why it was the peasants' party, the Socialist Revolutionaries, who won the elections for the Constituent Assembly hands down. It is also why, the Bolshevik soldiers closed this freely elected parliament in January 1918 within hours of its first sitting. The Bolsheviks, with the short-lived support of the majority of urban workers – little more than two per cent of the country's population – couldn't abide open elections, and within six months all the other parties of the Russian Revolution were closed down, their members murdered, in prison, on the run, or in exile.

This was brought about by the Bolshevik's decision to not only to rule by decree, but to establish a political police, the Cheka, with plenipotentiary powers to kill, torture, imprison, or exile, without legal restraint of any kind. Within months of its foundation in December 1917 its leader, Felix Dzerzhinsky, commanded a vast apparatus of repression, including hundreds of thousands of internal troops, and a burgeoning network of prisons and labour camps.

Lenin's view that cruelty was justified by "circumstances", is echoed by our modern apologists who appear to accept that extra-judicial killings upon a

grand scale, and the contrivance of famines of Biblical proportions was justified by the Bolshevik's promise of a brighter future.

In the "circumstances" the Council of Commissars apparently shared no responsibility for the "circumstances" which they had had a hand in creating; they were apparently not responsible for the collapse of the economy as they closed down commerce and markets of all kind, murdered factory owners, dubbed managers and merchants, "speculators", and threw them promptly into gaol. The peasants refused to sell at prices fixed by the state, so the state sent phalanxes of men dressed from head to toe in black leather, armed with revolvers and machine guns, to steal the product of the farmers' hard labour. The Bolsheviks were apparently innocent of the resulting "circumstances".

This further narrowed the base, which the communist government could call upon in the war with Admiral Kolchak and Generals Denikin and Yudenich. Bolshevik policies guaranteed armed resistance to communist rule by country folk; Bolshevik actions even amongst urban workers, soldiers, and sailors, prompted numerous revolts. Generalised repression, together with their insistence upon the establishment of a one-party state, meant that Mensheviks, anarchists, Socialist Revolutionaries, and anti-colonial nationalists of many stripes, became committed enemies rather than allies. The Bolsheviks at every turn compounded their own isolation, and their own difficulties because of their insistence on total control, and by their commitment to the wholesale nationalisation of the economy and the suppression trade.

Their intransigence was no mere aberration. It was a direct consequence of their absolute commitment to the "emancipation of mankind" and to a future in which all would live in harmony without exploitation or oppression. From their point of view, this future demanded the shoehorning of the entire society into the required shape for the commencement of its

transformation into a glorious future. All social relations and relationships would be remodelled and crammed into the future at gunpoint.

Merely “Bourgeois Humanism” was replaced by “Militant Humanism” committed to the destruction of all those who had in any way benefitted from the exploitation and oppression of mankind.

Enthusiastic voluntarism, the belief that courage, resilience, determination, and fortitude, will breath life into our dreams, and offer us redemption for our criminal past, gripped communism by the throat. It has resulted in one tragedy after another. For example, Mao Zedong’s *Great Leap Forward* in which millions died of starvation because of the Party-State’s foolhardy policies. The survivors were soon to be confronted by the *Cultural Revolution*. The past, and everything associated with it, swept away by a revolutionary torrent. Millions of lives were scarred, disfigured and often ended, at the hands of those drunk on certainty. Pol Pot, Enver Hoxha, Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu, bloody despots all, along with Saint Ernesto “Che” Guevara, murdered in the forest by the proxies of Yankee Imperialism; a sacrifice in the struggle to stir the weary masses into the life of the future.

One can engage in unending defence of the potential offered by Bolshevism, one can argue that without the Soviet Union Hitler would have won, and just as convincingly, that without the Third International and the “World Revolution” it promised, no rise of fascism, no Hitler. The grandeur and ambition of the October Revolution renders such absurd counter-factual histories unnecessary when set beside the mythology of the “cultural and artistic gains” made possible by “Lenin’s political acumen”.

The radical peculiarity of those who think that the Bolsheviks done good – when we all know that they only did well in their unrealised future, must be acknowledged. In the minds of their leaders from Lenin and Trotsky, to Stalin and Zhdanov, revolutionary society, its social relations and cultural

production, must be judged not from its past or its present, but from the future it is engaged in building.

This is the key to loving Bolshevism, the surrender of the present to an as yet unrealised future, surrender to an intrinsically authoritarian ideology, which insists upon maintaining the dictatorship of a party elite, and the denial of freedom of speech, publication, assembly, and association.

The radical paradox at work here is that the cheerleaders for the promise of Bolshevism are, by and large, great believers in free trade unions, freedom of speech, and the untrammelled right to demonstrate, under capitalism. However, under communism, under the rule of Bolshevism and its apostolic successors, things are different. A different standard of social discipline is demanded of those engaged in the emancipation of mankind and the construction of a future without oppression in which “everything will be understood”, and the miseries of those crushed by the virtual reality of our future, will be redeemed.

The “lesson of October” is don’t take power without the fully conscious support of the overwhelming majority of the population. Communism – the democratic management of the workplace and the economy – is only possible when the millions of small business people, and of the middle and professional classes, along with the great majority of working class people, are explicitly on board with a multi-class programme for the democratic management of economic life. This is the “lesson of history” – the lesson taught us by a century of communist dictatorships.

It is the lesson that the enthusiasts for Bolshevism refuse to learn.