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172

Box
62

Folder
71

What shall we think of the Bolsheviki?, 1921.

North Church
Forum?

Published by The Lincoln Club
Cleveland

April, May 1921

What Shall We Think of the Bolsheviki?

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April 24

By way of introduction let me say that all of my information regarding the Bolsheviki comes second hand. I have read almost everything written about them and their program that I could lay my hands upon, and from all this evidence, both favorable and unfavorable, I give you the results as they appeal to my mind. I am not a Communist nor a revolutionary Socialist. I have a deep, abiding faith in democracy—old-fashioned democracy—and it is from that viewpoint that I shall speak to-night.

What kind of men are the Bolsheviki? I believe that, with rare exceptions, they are sincere, even fanatically sincere, men, and with a few men of real genius. They are men who believe in work, and their aims are unquestionably vastly superior to those of the regime they replaced; but they are, fundamentally, men who believe in the proposition that the end justifies the means. They know more of theory than psychology; more of formula than of fact.

They are naive in their theory. As Wells says, they are the most simple-minded group in Europe, and that goes hand in hand with great simple-mindedness and extreme dogma. They are not pragmatists or experimentalists. They have designed a garment for Russia to wear, regardless of whether or not it will fit.

I am not a dogmatist in opposition to revolution. When the stream of life is dammed, so that the natural flow of progress is stayed, it is the first duty to smash the dam; but when the dam is broken, we must always remember, the deluge that ensues may sweep much to destruction. When, however, the stream of life is not dammed, and there is full opportunity for the stream of human life to flow forward, then there is no need or excuse for revolution. Revolutions let loose all that is lowest in human animality. All the passions and the hates and the lusts which civilization holds in check revolution lets loose once more, and it may take generations to rebuild what was destroyed.

Revolution is not the best means of accomplishing the working class demands. Socialism requires a highly centralized social organism, and revolution tends first, not to turn over to the working class this going machine, but rather to destroy it. Further, no revolution can be successful unless the people have been educated up to its ideals. A change of government does not educate people over night, and the Russian peasant is still the same stolid, ignorant and su-

perstitious man he was in 1917. The millenium can not be ushered in by machine guns. If the working class is not educated up to its own needs—if, by its own efforts, its members can not gain in a democracy what they need—then a small minority can not give to them these things, nor, if given, would they be of any permanent profit.

Dictatorship is an abomination, whether by the divine right of kings or by the divine right of a proletariat. Democracy, with all of its weaknesses and shortcomings, still has this basic truth—that the people must, by and of themselves, work out their own salvation. It may be slower, but its successes are permanently assured.

The Russian Revolution was organized primarily for the proletariat, and they are the ones who have gained least. The peasants are relatively well off; but the proletarians are hungry, poorly clothed, and their labor conscripted. Production has broken down most miserably. Even now Russia can not say that she is ruled by her working class. She is, in fact, ruled by a small and energetic group of class-conscious Communists, which is ruthlessly engaged in stamping out all opposition to their dominion.

This much should be said of the Bolsheviki: They have given evidence of an organizing ability of a very high order, and in the educational world they have done many splendid things. They have founded schools—many of them—where before there was none.

I am a democrat and have no fear that truth can not endure the light of day. I believe in our democratic system, but I want a fair trial for the Russian system. I was one of the first to advocate the lifting of the blockade, for, if Bolshevism is a fallacy, the surest method of proving that fact is to give it a fair chance to succeed.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

Q. Was not the Russian Revolution the breaking of the dam you referred to? A. The first Russian Revolution was, but, in my opinion, the Bolshevik Revolution was not.

Q. Since the Russian dictatorship of the proletariat has given the people an opportunity to acquire an education, why oppose it? A. I do not admit that such a dictatorship is the only agency that would have given such opportunity.

Q. You said the millenium could not be ushered in with machine guns. Isn't it a fact that all the ministers were recently preaching the making of the world safe for democracy by the use of guns? A. I don't intend to defend all the things that have been advocated by various clergymen.

Q. What other method of progress is there besides revolution? A. There are a host of remedies offered—Single Tax, co-operation, etc.