

INSIDE THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

BY

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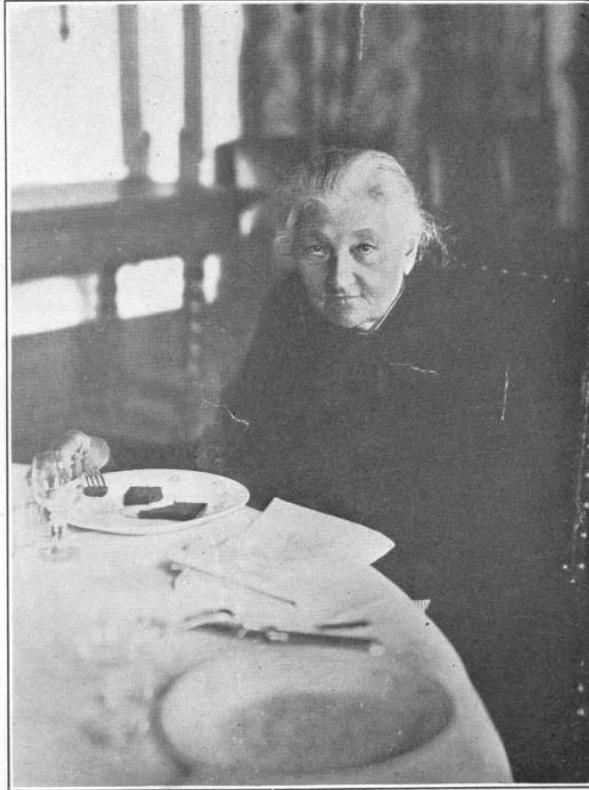
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Catherine Breshkovskaia, the “Little Grandmother of the Russian Revolution.”

**INSIDE THE RUSSIAN
REVOLUTION**

CHAPTER I

TOPSY-TURVY LAND

Early in May, 1917, I went to Russia, eager to see again, in the hour of her deliverance, a country in whose struggle for freedom I had, for a dozen years, been deeply interested. I went to Russia a socialist by conviction, an ardent sympathizer with revolution, having known personally some of the brave men and women who suffered imprisonment and exile after the failure of the uprising in 1905-6. I returned from Russia with the very clear conviction that the world will have to wait awhile before it can establish any coöperative millenniums, or before it can safely hand over the work of government to the man in the street.

All my life I have been an admiring student of the French revolution, and I have fervently wished that I might have lived in the Paris of that time, to witness, even as a humble spectator, the downfall of autocracy and the birth of a people's liberty. Well—I lived for three months in the capital of revolutionary Russia. I saw a revolution which presents close parallels with the French revolution both in men and events. I saw the downfall of autocracy and the birth of liberty much greater than the French ever aspired to. I saw the fondest dream of the socialists suddenly come true, and the dream turned out to be a nightmare such as I pray that this or any country may forever be spared.

I saw a people delivered from one class tyranny deliberately hasten to establish another, quite as brutal and as unmindful of the common good as the old one. I saw these people, led out of

groaning bondage, use their first liberty to oust the wise and courageous statesmen who had delivered them. I saw a working class which had been oppressed under czarism itself turn oppressor; an army that had been starved and betrayed use its freedom to starve and betray its own people. I saw elected delegates to the people's councils turn into sneak thieves and looters. I saw law and order and decency and all regard for human life or human rights set aside, and I saw responsible statesmen in power allow all this to go on, allow their country to rush toward an abyss of ruin and shame because they were afraid to lose popularity with the mob.

The government was so afraid of losing the support of the mob that it permitted the country to be overrun by German agents posing as socialists. These agents spent fortunes in the separate peace propaganda alone. They demoralized the army, corrupted the workers in field and factories, and put machine guns in the hands of fanatical dreamers, sending them out into the streets to murder their own friends and neighbors. Every one knew who these men were, but the mob liked their "line of talk" and the government was afraid to touch them. After one of the last occasions when, at their behest, the Bolsheviki went out and shot up Petrograd, Lenine, the arch leader, and some of his principal gangsters deemed it the part of discretion to retire from Russia temporarily, and they got to Sweden without the slightest difficulty, no attempt having been made to stop them. Some of the minor employees of the Kaiser were arrested, among them a woman in whose name the bank account appeared to be. But she too, and probably all the others, were later released.

A government like this could not bring peace and order into a distracted nation. It could not establish a democracy. It could not

govern. The sooner the allied countries realize this the better it will be for Russia and for the world that wants peace. It is not because I am unfriendly to Russia that I write thus. It is because I am friendly, because I have faith in the future of the Russian people, because I believe that their experiment in popular government, if it succeeds, will be as inspiring to the rest of the world as our own was in the eighteenth century. I think the most unkind thing any friend of Russia can do is to minimize or conceal the facts about the terrible upheaval going on there at the present time. Russia looks to the American people for help in her troubled hour, and if the American people are to help they will have to understand the situation. No discouragement to the allies, no assistance to the common enemy need result from a plain statement of the facts. The enemy knows all the facts already.

Everything I saw in Russia, in the cities and near the front, convinced me that what is going on there vitally concerns us. Every man, woman and child in the United States must get to work to give the help so sorely needed by the allies. Whatever has failed in Russia, whatever has broken down must never be missed. We must supply these deficiencies. Our business now is to understand, and to hurry, hurry, hurry with our task of getting trained and seasoned men into France. After what I saw in the neighborhood of Vilna, Dvinsk and Jacobstadt, I know what haste on this side means to the world. There are several reasons why the whole truth has not before been written about the Russian revolution. It could not be written or cabled from Russia. It could not be carried out in the form of notes or photographs. It could not even be discovered by the average person who goes to Russia, because the average visitor lives at the expensive Hotel d'Europe, never goes out except in a droshky, and meets only Russians of social position to

whom he has letters of introduction, and who naturally try to give him the impression that the troubled state of affairs is merely temporary. The visitor usually knows no Russian and cannot read the newspapers. There are two good French newspapers published in Petrograd, but the average American traveler is as ignorant of French as of Russian. Even if he could read all the daily papers, however, he would not get very much information. The press censorship is as rigid and as tyrannical to-day as in the heyday of the autocracy, only a different kind of news is suppressed. One of the modest demands put forth by the Tavarishi (comrades) when I was in Petrograd was for a requisition of all the white print paper in the market, the paper to be distributed equally among all newspapers, large and small. The object, candidly stated, was to diminish the size and the circulation of the "bourgeois" papers.

A great deal of news, as we regard news, never gets into the papers at all, or is compressed into very small space. For example there have been a number of terrible railroad accidents on the Russian roads. Most of these one never heard of unless some one he knew happened to be killed or injured. Sometimes a bare announcement of a great fatality was permitted. Thus an express train between Moscow and Petrograd was wrecked, forty persons being killed and more than seventy injured. This wreck got a whole paragraph in the newspapers, with no list of the dead and injured and no explanation of the cause. The fact is that the railroads are in a condition of complete demoralization and the only wonder is that more wrecks do not occur.

An acquaintance of mine in Moscow, the wife of a colonel in the British army, was anxious to go to Petrograd to meet her husband who was expected there on his way from the front. My friend's father, who is the managing head of a large Moscow business

concern, tried to prevail on her to wait for her husband to reach her there, but she was anxious to see him at the earliest moment and insisted on her tickets being purchased. The day after she was to have gone her father called on me and told me of his intense relief at receiving, an hour before train time, a telegram from the colonel saying that he would be in Moscow the next morning.

“And what do you think happened to that train my daughter was to have taken?” he asked. It was the regular night express to Petrograd, corresponding somewhat to the Congressional Limited between New York and Washington. A few miles out of Moscow a difference arose between the engineer and the stoker, and in order to settle it they stopped the train and had a fight. One of the men hit the other on the head with a monkey wrench, injuring him pretty badly. Authority of some kind stepped in and arrested the assailant. The engineer’s cab was blood-stained, and some authority unhitched the engine and sent it back to Moscow as evidence. The train all this time, with its hundreds of passengers, stood on the tracks waiting for a new engine and crew, and if it was not run into and wrecked it was because it was lucky.

About the middle of August an American correspondent traveled on that same express train from Petrograd to Moscow. The night was warm, and as the Russian occupants of his carriage had the usual constitutional objection to raised windows, he insisted on leaving the door of the compartment open. In the middle of the night a band of soldiers boarded the train and went into every one of the unlocked compartments, five in all, neatly and silently looting them of all bags and suitcases. The American correspondent lost everything he possessed—extra clothes, money, passport, papers. There was a Russian staff officer in that compartment and he lost even the clothes he traveled in, and was

obliged to descend in his pajamas. The conductor of the train admitted that he saw the robbery committed, that he raised no hand to prevent it, nor even pressed the signal which would have stopped the train. "They would have killed me," he pleaded in extenuation. "Besides, it happens almost every night on a small or large scale."

There is only one way of getting at the facts of the Russian situation, and that is by living as the Russians do, associating with Russians, hearing their stories day by day of the tragedy of what has been called the bloodless revolution. This I did, as nearly as it was possible, from the end of May until the 30th of August, in Petrograd, Moscow and behind one of the fighting fronts. In Petrograd I lived in the Hotel Militaire, formerly the Astoria, the headquarters of Russian officers and of the numerous English, French and Roumanian officers on missions in Russia. This was the hotel where the bitterest fighting took place during the revolutionary days of February, 1917. The outside of the building is literally riddled with bullets, every window had to be replaced, and the work of renovating the interior was still going on when I left. Under the window in my bedroom was a pool of dried blood as big as a saucer, and the carpet was stained with drops leading from the window to the stationary washbowl in the alcove dressing room. Over the bed were two bullet holes.

Since the revolution the Hotel Militaire has been a garrison, soldiers sleeping in several rooms on the ground floor and two sentinels standing day and night at the door and at the gateway leading into the service court. I do not know why, when I asked for a room, the manager gave it to me. Two other women writers had rooms there, but one was in a party which included American officers, and the other was introduced by an English officer

attached to the British embassy. However, I took the room and was grateful, because whatever happened in Petrograd was quickly known in the hotel. Also, it faced the square on which was located the Marie Palace, where the provisional government held many of its meetings, and where several important congresses were held. Whenever the Bolsheviki broke loose this square always saw some fighting. It was an excellent place for a correspondent to live.

I spent much of my time in the streets, listening, with the aid of an interpreter, a young university girl, to the speeches which were continually being made up and down the Nevski Prospect, the Litainy and other principal streets. I talked, through my interpreter, with people who sat beside me on park benches, in trams, railroad trains and other public places. I met all the Russians I could, people of every walk of life, of every political faith. I spent days in factories. I talked with workers and with employers. I even met and talked with adherents of the old régime. I talked for nearly an hour with the last Romanoff left in freedom, the Grand Duchess Serge, sister of the former empress, widow of the emperor's uncle. I went, late at night, to a palace on the Grand Morskaia where in strictest retirement lives the woman who has been charged with being the closest friend and ally of Rasputin, the one who, at his orders, is alleged to have administered poison to the young Czarevitch. I traveled in a troop train two days and nights with a regiment of fighting women—the Botchkareva “Battalion of Death”—and I lived with them in their barrack behind the fighting lines for nine days. I stayed with them until they went into action, I saw them afterward in the hospitals and heard their own stories of the battle into which they led thousands of reluctant men. I talked with many soldiers and officers.

Russia is sick. She is gorged on something she has never known before—freedom: she is sick almost to die with excesses, and the leadership which would bring the panacea is violently thrown aside because suspicion of any authority has bred the worst kind of license. Russia is insane; she is not even morally responsible for what she is doing. Will she recover? Yes. But, God! what pain must she bear before she gets real freedom!

CHAPTER II

“ALL THE POWER TO THE SOVIET”

About the first thing I saw on the morning of my arrival in Petrograd last spring was a group of young men, about twenty in number, I should think, marching through the street in front of my hotel, carrying a scarlet banner with an inscription in large white letters.

“What does that banner say?” I asked the hotel commissionaire who stood beside me.

“It says ‘All the Power to the Soviet,’” was the answer.

“What is the soviet?” I asked, and he replied briefly:

“It is the only government we have in Russia now.”

And he was right. The soviets, or councils of soldiers’ and workmen’s delegates, which have spread like wildfire throughout the country, are the nearest thing to a government that Russia has known since the very early days of the revolution.

The most striking parallel between the French and the Russian revolutions lies in the facility with which both were snatched away from the sane and intelligent men who began them and placed in the hands of fanatics, who turned them into mad orgies of blood and terror. The first French revolutionists rebelled against the theory of the divine right of kings to govern or misgovern the people. They wanted a constitution and a government by consent of the governed. But the mob came in and took possession of the

situation, and the result was the guillotine and the reign of terror. Miliukoff, Rodzianko, Lvoff, and their associates in the Russian Duma, rebelled against a stupid, cruel autocrat who was doing his best to lose the war and to bring the country to ruin and dishonor. They wanted a constitution for Russia, and, for the time being at least, a figurehead king who would leave government in the hands of responsible ministers. But the Petrograd council of soldiers' and workmen's delegates came in and took possession of the situation, and the result is a country torn with anarchy, brought to the verge of bankruptcy, and ready, unless something happens between now and next spring, to fall into the hands of the Germans.

These councils of workmen are not new. In the upheaval of 1905-06 a man named Khrustaliiov, a labor leader, became the head of an organization called the Petrograd Council of Workmen's Deputies. It was made up of elected delegates from all the principal factories in and near the capital, and during the general strike which forced Nicholas to convene the first Duma, the council assumed general control of the whole labor situation, managing matters with rare good sense and firmness. Witte, who became premier in those days, negotiated with Khrustaliiov as with an equal. For a time he and his council were a real power in the empire. A dozen cities formed similar organizations. There were councils of workmen's deputies, peasants' deputies, even, in some places, of soldiers' deputies. The reaction which came in July, 1906, swept them all into oblivion, and I never found anybody who knew what became of Khrustaliiov. But the tradition of the council of workmen's deputies was unforgotten. Perhaps the council even existed still in secret; I do not know. It was quickly revived in March, 1917, and before the political revolution was fairly accomplished it had added soldiers to its title and had curtly informed the provisional government and

the Duma that no laws could be made or enforced without first having received the approval of the working people's representatives. No policy in peace or war could be announced or put into practice; no orders could be given the army; no treaties concluded with the allies; in short, nothing could be done without first consulting the 1,500 men and women—five women—who made up the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates.

If the country had been in a condition of peace instead of war this would not have been at all a bad thing. The working people of Russia, under the electoral system devised by the old régime, had very little representation in the Duma, and they had a perfect right to demand a voice in the organization of the new government. But unfortunately the country was at war; and more unfortunately still, the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates was made up in large part of extreme radicals to whom the war was a matter of entire indifference. The revolution to them meant an opportunity to put into practice new economic theories, the socialistic state. They conceived the vast dream of establishing a new order of society, not only for Russia but for the whole world. They were going to dictate terms of peace, and call on the working people of every country to join them in enforcing that peace. After that they were going to do away with all capitalists, bankers, investors, property owners. Armies and navies were to be scrapped. I don't know what they purposed doing with the constitution of the United States, but "capitalistic" America was to be made over with the rest of the world.

Many members of this council are well-meaning theorists, dreamers, exactly like thousands in this country who read no books or newspapers except those written by their own kind, who "express themselves" by wearing red ties and long hair, and who

exist in a cloudy world of their own. These people are honest and they are capable of being reasoned with. In Russia they are known as Minsheviki, meaning small claims. A noisy and troublesome and growing minority in the council are called Bolsheviki (big claims), because they demand everything and will not even consider compromise. They want a separate peace, entirely favorable to Germany. I talked to a number of these men, but I could never get one of them to explain the reason of this friendship for Germany. Vaguely they seemed to feel that socialism was a German doctrine and, therefore, as soon as Russia put it into practice, the Germans would follow suit. Not all the council members are working people. Some have never done a hand's turn of manual work in their lives. Many of the soldier members have never seen service and never will. The Jewish membership is very large, and in Russia the Jews have never been allowed any practice of citizenship.

Lastly the council is liberally sprinkled with German spies and agents. Every once in a while one of these men is unmasked and put out. But it is more than likely that his place is quickly filled. It is a most difficult thing to convince the council that any "Tavarish," which is the Russian word for comrade, can be guilty of double dealing. The council defended Lenine up to the last moment. Even after he fled the country the Socialist newspapers, *Isvestia*, *Pravda*, and Maxim Gorki's *Nova Jisn*, declared him to be the victim of an odious calumny. It was this Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates that first claimed a consultive position in the government, and within a few months was parading the streets with banners demanding "All the Power to the Soviet."

I cannot say that I unreservedly blame them. They were people who had never known any kind of freedom, they had been poor

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