There Is No Communism in Russia

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I.

Communism is now on everybody's lips. Some talk of it with the exaggerated enthusiasm of a new convert, others fear and condemn it as a social menace. But I venture to say that neither its admirers—the great majority of them—nor those who denounce it have a very clear idea of what Bolshevik Communism really is.

Speaking generally, Communism is the ideal of human equality and brotherhood. It considers the exploitation of man by man as the source of all slavery and oppression. It holds that economic inequality leads to social injustice and is the enemy of moral and intellectual progress. Communism aims at a society where classes have been abolished as a result of common ownership of the means of production and distribution. It teaches that only in a classless, solidaric commonwealth can man enjoy liberty, peace and well-being.

My purpose is to compare Communism with its application in Soviet Russia, but on closer examination I find it an impossible task. As a matter of fact, there is no Communism in the U.S.S.R. Not a single Communist principle, not a single item of its teaching is being applied by the Communist party there.

To some this statement may appear as entirely false; others may think it vastly exaggerated. Yet I feel sure that an objective examination of conditions in present-day Russia will convince the unprejudiced reader that I speak with entire truth.

It is necessary to consider here, first of all, the fundamental idea underlying the alleged Communism of the Bolsheviki. It is admittedly of a centralized, authoritarian kind. That is, it is based almost exclusively on governmental coercion, on violence. It is not the Communism of voluntary association. It is compulsory State Communism. This must be kept in mind in order to understand the method applied by the Soviet state to carry out such of its plans as may seem to be Communistic.

The first requirement of Communism is the socialization of the land and of the machinery of production and distribution. Socialized land and machinery belong to the people, to be settled upon and used by individuals or groups according to their needs. In Russia land and machinery are not socialized but _nationalized_. The term is a misnomer, of course. In fact, it is entirely devoid of content. In reality there is no such thing as national wealth. A nation is too abstract a term to "own" anything. Ownership may be by an individual, or by a group of individuals; in any case by some quantitatively defined reality. When a certain thing does not belong to an individual or group, it is either nationalized or socialized. If it is nationalized, it belongs to the state; that is, the government has control of it and may dispose of it according to its wishes and views. But when a thing is socialized, every individual has free access to it and use it without interference from anyone.

In Russia there is no socialization either of land or of production and distribution. Everything is nationalized; it belongs to the government, exactly as does the post-office in America or the railroad in Germany and other European countries. There is nothing of Communism about it.

No more Communistic than the land and means of production is any other phase of the Soviet economic structure. All sources of existence are owned by the central government; foreign trade is its absolute monopoly; the printing presses belong to the state, and every book and paper issued is a government publication. In short, the entire country and everything in it is the property of the state, as in ancient days it used to be the property of the crown. The few things not yet nationalized, as some old ramshackle houses in Moscow, for instance, or some dingy little

stores with a pitiful stock of cosmetics, exist on sufferance only, with the government having the undisputed right to confiscate them at any moment by simple decree.

Such a condition of affairs may be called state capitalism, but it would be fantastic to consider it in any sense Communistic.

II.

Let us now turn to production and consumption, the levers of all existence. Maybe in them we shall find a degree of Communism that will justify us in calling life in Russia Communistic, to some extent at least.

I have already pointed out that the land and the machinery of production are owned by the state. The methods of production and the amounts to be manufactured by every industry in each and every mill, shop and factory are determined by the state, by the central government—by Moscow—through its various organs.

Now, Russia is a country of vast extent, covering about one sixth of the earth's surface. It is peopled by a mixed population of 165,000,000. It consists of a number of large republics, of various races and nationalities, each region having its own particular interests and needs. No doubt, industrial and economic planning is vitally necessary for the well-being of a community. True Communism—economic equality as between man and man and between communities—requires the best and most efficient planning by each community, based upon its local requirements and possibilies. The basis of such planning must be the complete freedom of each community to produce according to its needs and to dispose of its products according to its judgment: to change its surplus with other similarly independent communities without let or hindrance by any external authority.

That is the essential politico-economic nature of Communism. It is neither workable nor possible on any other isis. It is necessarily libertarian, Anarchistic.

There is no trace of such Communism—that is to say, of any Communism—in Soviet Russia. In fact, the mere suggestion of such a system is considered criminal there, and any attempt to carry it out is punished by death.

Industrial planning and all the processes of production and distribution are in the hands of the central government. Supreme Economic Council is subject only to the authority of the Communist Party. It is entirely independent of the will or wishes of the people comprising the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics. Its work is directed by the pollicies and decisions of the Kremlin. This explains why Soviet Russia exported vast amounts of wheat and other grain while wide regions in the south and southeast of Russia were stricken with famine, so that more than two million of its people died of starvation (1932–1933).

There were "reasons of state" for it. The euphonious has from time immemorial masked tyranny, exploitation and the determination of every ruler to prolong and perpetuate his rule. Incidentally, I may mention that—in spite of country-wide hunger and lack of the most elemental necessities of life in Russia—the entire First Five-Year Plan aimed at developing that branch of heavy industry which serves, or can be made to serve, _military_ purposes.

As with production, so with distribution and every other form of activity. Not only individual cities and towns, but the constituent parts of the Soviet Union are entirely deprived of independent existence. Politically mere vassals of Moscow, their whole economic, social and cultural

activity is planned, cut out for them and ruthlessly controlled by the "proletarian dictatorship" in Moscow. More: the life of every locality, of every individual even, in the so-called "Socialist" republics is managed in the very last detail by the "general line" laid down by the "center." In other words, by the Central Committee and Politbureau of the Party, both of them controlled absolutely by one man, Stalin. To call such a dictatorship, this personal autocracy more powerful and absolute than any Czar's, by the name of Communism seems to me the acme of imbecility.

III.

Let us see now how Bolshevik "Communism" affects the lives of the masses and of the individual.

There are naive people who believe that at least some features of Communism have been introduced into the lives of the Russian people. I wish it were true, for that would be a hopeful sign, a promise of potential development along that line. But the truth is that in no phase of Soviet life, no more in the social than in individual relations, has there ever been any attempt to apply Communist principles in any shape or form. As I have pointed out before, the very suggestion of free, voluntary Communism is taboo in Russia and is regarded as counter-revolutionary and high treason against the infallible Stalin and the holy "Communist" Party.

And here I do not speak of the libertarian, Anarchist Communism. What I assert is that there is not the least sign in Soviet Russia even of authoritarian, State Communism. Let us glance at the actual facts of everyday life there.

The essence of Communism, even of the coercive kind, is the absence of social classes. The introduction of economic equality is its first step. This has been the basis of all Communist philosophies, however they may have differed in other respects. The purpose common to all of them was to secure social justice; and all of them agreed that it was not possible without establishing economic equality. Even Plato, in spite of the intellectual and moral strata in his Republic, provided for absolute economic equality, since the ruling classes were not to enjoy greater rights or privileges than the lowest social unit.

Even at the risk of condemnation for telling the whole truth, I must state unequivocally and unconditionally that the very opposite is the case in Soviet Russia. Bolshevism has not abolished the classes in Russia: it has merely reversed their former relationship. As a matter of fact, it has multiplied the social divisions which existed before the Revolution.

When I arrived in Soviet Russia in January, 1920, I found innumerable economic categories, based on the food rations received from the government. The sailor was getting the best ration, superior in quality, quantity and variety to the food issued to the rest of the population. He was the aristocrat of the Revolution: economically and socially he was universally considered to belong to the new privileged classes. After him came the soldier, the Red Army man, who received a much smaller ration, even less bread. Below the soldier in the scale was the worker in the military industries; then came other workers, subdivided into the skilled, the artisan, the laborer, etc. Each category received a little less bread, fats, sugar, tobacco, and other products (whenever they were to be had at all). Members of the former bourgeoisie, officially abolished as a class and expropriated, were in the last economic category and received practically nothing. Most of them could secure neither work nor lodgings, and it was no one's business how they

were to exist, to keep from stealing or from joining the counter-revolutionary armies and robber bands.

The possession of a red card, proving membership in the Communist Party, placed one above all these categories. It entitled its owner to a special ration, enabled him to eat in the Party stolovaya (mess-room) and produced, particularly if supported by recommendations from party members higher up, warm underwear, leather boots, a fur coat, or other valuable articles. Prominent party men had their own dining-rooms, to which the ordinary members had no access. In the Smolny, for instance, then the headquarters of the Petrograd government, there were two different dining-rooms, one for Communists in high position, the other for the lesser lights. Zinoviev, then chairman of the Petrograd Soviet and virtual autocrat of the Northern District, and other government heads took their meals at home in the Astoria, formerly the best hotel in the city, turned into the first Soviet House, where they lived with their families.

Later on I found the same situation in Moscow, Kharkov, Kiev, Odessa—everywhere in Soviet Russia.

It was the Bolshevik system of "Communism." What dire effects it had in causing dissatisfaction, resentment and antagonism throughout the country, resulting in industrial and agrarian sabotage, in strikes and revolts—of this further on. It is said that man does not live by bread alone. True, but he cannot live at all without it. To the average man, to the masses in Russia, the different rations established in the country for the liberation of which they had bled, was the symbol of the new regime. It signified to them the great lie of Bolshevism, the broken promises of freedom, for freedom meant to them social justice, economic equality. The instinct of the masses seldom goes wrong; in this case it proved prophetic. What wonder, then, that the universal enthusiasm over the Revolution soon turned into disillusionment and bitterness, to opposition and hatred. How often Russian workers complained to me: "We don't mind working hard and going hungry. It's the injustice which we mind. If the country is poor, if there is little bread, then let us all share that little, but let us share equally. As things are now, it's the same as it used to be; some get more, others less, and some get nothing at all."

The Bolshevik system of privilege and inequality was not long in producing its inevitable results. It created and fostered social antagonisms; it alienated the masses from the Revolution, paralysed their interest in it and their energies, and thus defeated all the purposes of the Revolution.

The same system of privilege and inequality, strengthened and perfected, is in force today.

The Russian Revolution was in the deepest sense a social upheaval: its fundamental tendency was libertarian, its essential aim economic and social equality. Long before the October-November days (1917) the city proletariat began taking possession of the mills, shops and factories, while the peasants expropriated the big estates and turned the land to communal use. The continued development of the Revolution in its Communist direction depended on the unity of the revolutionary forces and the direct, creative initiative of the laboring masses. The people were enthusiastic in the great object before them; they eagerly applied their energies to the work of social reconstruction. Only they who had for centuries borne the heaviest burdens could, through free and systematic effort, find the road to a new, regenerated society.

But Bolshevik dogmas and "Communist" statism proved a fatal handicap to the creative activities of the people. The fundamental characteristic of Bolshevik psychology is distrust of the masses. Their Marxist theories, centering all power in the exclusive hands of their party, quickly resulted in the destruction of revolutionary cooperation, in the arbitrary and ruthless suppres-

sion of all other political parties and movements. Bolshevik tactics encompassed the systematic eradication of every sign of dissatisfaction, stifled all criticism and crushed independent opinion, popular initiative and effort. Communist dictatorship, with its extreme mechanical centralization, frustrated the economic and industrial activities of the country. The great masses were deprived of the opportunity to shape the policies of the Revolution or to take part in the administration of their own affairs. The labor unions were governmentalized and turned into mere transmitters of the orders of the state. The people's cooperatives—that vital nerve of active solidarity and mutual help between city and country—were liquidated. The Soviets of peasants and workers were castrated and transformed into obedient committees. The government monopolized every phase of life. A bureaucratic machine was created, appalling in its inefficiency, corruption, brutality. The Revolution was divorced from the people and thus doomed to perish; and over all hung the dreaded sword of Bolshevik terrorism.

That was the "Communism" of the Bolsheviki in the first stages of the Revolution. Everyone knows that it brought the complete paralysis of industry, agriculture and transport. It was the period of "military Communism," of agrarian and industrial conscription, of the razing of peasant villages by Bolshevik artillery—those "constructive" social and economic policies of Bolshevik Communism which resulted in the fearful famine in 1921.

IV.

And today? Has that "Communism" changed its nature? Is it actually different from the "Communism" of 1921? To my regret I must state that, in spite of all widely advertised changes and new economic policies, Bolshevik "Communism" is essentially the same as it was in 1921. Today the peasantry in Soviet Russia is entirely dispossessed of the land. The _sovkhozi_ are government farms on which the peasant works as a hired man, just as the man in the factory. This is known as "industrialization" of agriculture, "transforming the peasant into a proletarian." In the _kolkhoz_ the land only nominally belongs to the villaoe. Actually it is owned by the government. The latter can at any moment—and often does—commandeer the _kolkhoz_ members for work in other parts of the country or exile whole villages for disobedience. The _kolkhozi_ are worked collectively, but the government control of them amounts to expropriation. It taxes them at its own will; it sets whatever price it chooses to pay for grain and other products, and neither the individual peasant nor the village Soviet has any say in the matter. Under the mask of numerous levies and compulsory government loans, it appropriates the products of the _kolkhoii_, and for some actual or pretended offenses punishes them by taking away all their grain.

The fearful famine of 1921 was admittedly due chiefly to the _razverstka_, the ruthless expropriation practiced at the time. It was because of it, and of the rebellion that resulted, that Lenin decided to introduce the NEP—the New Economic Policy which limited state expropriation and enabled the peasant to dispose of some of his surplus for his own benefit. The NEP immediately improved economic conditions throughout the land. The famine of 1932–1933 was due to similar "Communist" methods of the Bolsheviki: to enforced collectivization.

The same result as in 1921 followed. It compelled Stalin to revise his policy somewhat. He realised that the welfare of a country, particularly of one predominantly agricultural as Russia is, depends primarily on the peasantry. The motto was proclaimed: the peasant must be given opportunity togreater "well-being." This "new" policy is admittedly only a breathing spell for

the peasant. It has no more of Communism in it than the previous agrarian policies. From the beginning of Bolshevik rule to this day, it has been nothing but expropriation in one form or another, now and then differing in degree but always the same in kind—a continuous process of state robbery of the peasantry, of prohibitions, violence, chicanery and reprisals, exactly as in the worst days of Czarism and the World War. The present policy is but a variation of the "military Communism" of 1920–1921, with more of the military and less of the Communist element in it. Its "equality" is that of a penitentiary; its "freedom" that of a chain gang. No wonder the Bolsheviki declare that liberty is a bourgeois prejudice.

Soviet apologists insist that the old "military Communism" was justified in the initial period of the Revolution in the days of the blockade and military fronts. But more than sixteen years have passed since. There are no more blockades, no more fighting fronts, no more counter-revolution. Soviet Russia has secured the recognition of all the great governments of the world. It emphasizes its good will toward the bourgeois states, solicits their cooperation and is doing a large business with them. In fact, the Soviet government is on terms of friendship even with Mussolini and Hitler, those famous champions of liberty. It is helping capitalism to weather its economic storms by buying millions of dollars' worth of products and opening new markets to it.

This is, in the main, what Soviet Russia has accomplished during seventeen years since the Revolution. But as to Communism—that is another matter. In this regard, the Bolshevik government has followed exactly the same course as before, and worse. It has made some superficial changes politically and economically, but fundamentally it has remained exactly the same state, based on the same principle of violence and coercion and using the same methods of tenor and compulsion as in the period of 1920–1921.

There are more classes in Soviet Russia today than in 1917, more than in most other countries in the world. The Bolsheviki have created a vast Soviet bureaucracy, enjoying special privileges and almost unlimited authority over the masses, industrial and agricultural. Above that bureaucracy is the still more privileged class of "responsible comrades," the new Soviet aristocracy. The industrial class is divided and subdivided into numerous gradations. There are the _udarniki_, the shock troops of labor, entitled to various privileges; the "specialists," the artisans, the ordinary workers and laborers. There are the factory "cells," the shop committees, the pioneers, the _komsomoltsi_, the party members, all enjoying material advantages and authority. There is the large class of _lishentsi_, persons deprived of civil rights, the greater number of them also of chance to work, of the right to live in certain places, practically cut off from all means of existence. The notorious "pale" of the Czarist times, which forbade Jews to live in certain parts of the country, has been revived for the entire population by the introduction of the new Soviet passport system. Over and above all these classes is the dreaded G.P.U., secret, powerful and arbitrary, a government within the government. The G.P.U., in its turn, has its own class divisions. It has its own armed forces, its own commercial and industrial establishments, its own laws and regulations, and a vast slave army of convict labor. Aye, even in the Soviet prisons and concentration camps there are various classes with special privileges.

In the field of industry the same kind of "Communism" prevails as in agriculture. A sovietized Taylor system is in vogue throughout Russia, combining a minimum standard of production and piece work—the highest degree of exploitation and human degradation, involving also endless differences in wages and salaries. Payment is made in money, in rations, in reduced charges for rent, lighting, etc., not to speak of the special rewards and premiums for _udarniki_. In short, it is the _wage system_ which is in operation in Russia.

Need I emphasize that an economic arrangement based on the wage system cannot be considered as in any way related to Communism? It is its antithesis.

V.

All these features are to be found in the present Soviet system. It is unpardonable naivete, or still more unpardonable hypocrisy, to pretend—as the Bolshevik apologists do—that the compulsory labor service in Russia is "the self-organization of the masses for purposes of production."

Strange to say, I have met seemingly intelligent persons who claim that by such methods the Bolsheviki "are building Communism." Apparently they believe that building consists in ruthless destruction, physically and morally, of the best values of mankind. There are others who pretend to think that the road to freedom and cooperation leads through labor slavery and intellectual suppression. According to them, to instill the poison of hatred and envy, of universal espionage and terror, is the best preparation for manhood and the fraternal spirit of Communism.

I do not think so. I think that there is nothing more pernicious than to degrade a human being into a cog of a soulless machine, turn him into a serf, into a spy or the victim of a spy. There is nothing more corrupting than slavery and despotism.

There is a psychology of political absolutism and dictatorship, common to all forms: the means and methods used to achieve a certain end in the course of time themselves become the end. The ideal of Communism, of Socialism, has long ago ceased to inspire the Bolshevik leaders as a class. Power and the strengthening of power has become their sole object. But abject subjection, exploitation and degradation are developing a new psychology in the great mass of the people also.

The young generation in Russia is the product of Bolshevik principles and methods. It is the result of sixteen years of official opinions, the only opinions permitted in the land. Having grown up under the deadly monopoly of ideas and values, the youth in the U.S.S.R. knows hardly anything about Russia itself. Much less does it know of the world outside. It consists of blind fanatics, narrow and intolerant, it lacks all ethical perception, it is devoid of the sense of justice and fairness. To this element is added a class of climbers and careerists, of self-seekers reared on the Bolshevik dogma: "The end justifies the means." Yet it were wrong to deny the exceptions in the ranks of Russia's youth. There are a goodly number who are deeply sincere, heroic, idealistic. They see and feel the force of the loudly professed party ideals. They realize the betrayal of the masses. They suffer deeply under the cynicism and callousness towards every human emotion. The presence of _komsomolszi_ in the Soviet political prisons, concentration camps and exile, and the escapes under most harrowing difficulties prove that the young generation does not consist entirely of cringing adherents. No, not all of Russia's youth has been turned into puppets, obsessed bigots, or worshippers at Stalin's shrine and Lenin's tomb.

Already the dictatorship has become an absolute necessity for the continuation of the regime. For where there are classes and social inequality, there the state must resort to force and suppression. The ruthlessness of such a situation is always in proportion to the bitterness and resentment imbuing the masses. That is why there is more governmental terrorism in Soviet Russia than anywhere else in the civilized world today, for Stalin has to conquer and enslave a stubborn peasantry of a hundred millions. It is popular hatred of the regime which explains the stupendous industrial sabotage in Russia, the disorganization of the transport after sixteen years of virtual military

management; the terrific famine in the South and Southeast, notwithstanding favorable natural conditions and in spite of the severest measures to compel the peasants to sow and reap, in spite even of wholesale extermination and of the deportation of more than a million peasants to forced labor camps.

Bolshevik dictatorship is an absolutism which must constantly be made more relentless in order to survive, calling for the complete suppression of independent opinion and criticism within the party, within even its highest and most exclusive circles. It is a significant feature of this situation that official Bolshevism and its paid and unpaid agents are constantly assuring the world that "all is well in Soviet Russia and getting better." It is of the same quality as Hitler's constant emphasis of how greatly he loves peace while he is feverishly increasing his military strength.

Far from getting better the dictatorship is daily growing more relentless. The latest decree against so-called counter-revolutionists, or traitors to the Soviet State, should convince even some of the most ardent apologists of the wonders performed in Russia. The decree adds strength to the already existing laws against everyone who cannot or will not reverence the infallibility of the holy trinity, Marx, Lenin and Stalin. And it is more drastic and cruel in its effect upon every one deemed a culprit. To be sure, hostages are nothing new in the U.S.S.R. They were already part of the terror when I came to Russia. Peter Kropotkin and Vera Figner had protested in vain against this black spot on the escutcheon of the Russian Revolution. Now, after seventeen years of Bolshevik rule, a new decree was thought necessary. It not only revives the taking of hostages; it even aims at cruel punishment for every adult member of the real or imaginary offender's family. The new decree defines treason to the state as

"any acts committed by citizens of the U.S.S.R. detrimental to the military forces of the U.S.S.R., its independence or the inviolability of its territory, such as espionage, betrayal of military or state secrets, going over to the side of the enemy, fleeing to a foreign country or flight [this time the word used means airplane flight] to a foreign country."

Traitors have, of course, always been shot. What makes the new decree more terrifying is the remorseless punishment it demands for everyone living with or supporting the hapless victim, whether he knows of the crime or not. He may be imprisoned, or exiled, or even shot. He may lose his civil rights, and he may forfeit everything he owns. In other words, the new decree sets a premium on informers who, to save their own skins, will ingratiate themselves with the G.P.U., will readily turn over the unfortunate kin of the offenders to the Soviet henchmen.

This new decree must forever put to rest any remaining doubts as to the existence of true Communism in Russia. It departs from even the pretense of internationalism and proletarian class interest. The old tune is now changed to a paean song of the Fatherland, with the ever servile Soviet press loudest in the chorus:

"Defense of the Fatherland is the supreme law of life, and he who raises his hand against the Fatherland, who betrays it, must be destroyed."

Soviet Russia, it must now be obvious, is an absolute despotism politically and the crassest form of state capitalism economically.

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