

IN A REVOLUTIONARY FACTORY

BY K. UKHANOV

[This sketch originally appeared in Pravda, the Moscow Communist paper. Whatever one may think of the argument, it is probably an accurate picture of the evolution of Labor sentiment in Russia during the war.]

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1914

A two months' strike. Solidarity with the Baku strikers the issue. War. Mobilization. Volunteering. Hurrah patriots. Second mobilization. Third mobilization.

The lathe man, who had come back to the shop from the salesroom to escape the draft, scratched his head. 'It won't be long now before they drive us out of here.' This was just after the first great defeat of the Tsar's army.

1915

'Ivanov!'

'Yes?'

'Have you seen the paper?'

'No. What's up?'

'They say General Rennenkampf has deserted to the Kaiser.'

'The devil! How long will it be before they get wise and string up those swine?'

'String up? There are other ways of doing it. They drowned a German over in the Zindel factory. He was a real one all right. He would n't go under. So the boys helped him.'

'I'll bet we've got some d——d scoundrels like that here!'

'Just my idea.'

It is early morning. There is a piercing whistle. What is the trouble? They are driving a German out of the

factory. The whole force refused to work with him. He lit out without looking behind him, the scoundrel. An excited crowd has gathered before the office.

'The Germans! They made all the trouble. They lowered wages, they ground us down. Clean 'em out!'

Timid clerks are peeping out the window. A burly fellow mounts the steps and roars: 'We've got to get the Germans and spies out of the place!'

The crowd echoes back: 'Good! Quite right! Clean the scoundrels out!'

Just then a timid voice rises above the crowd: 'Comrades!' A curious silence follows.

'Do you want to know the real cause of your misery? Do you want to know who is to blame for this massacre? Do you? Do you want to know who has made these rivers of blood?'

The crowd is as still as death.

'Ask yourselves if you're on the right trail. What is this war to us? For whose profit is it fought? Our class enemies have always stirred us up against each other. They have sowed dissension in our ranks. Before the war they told us the Jews were to blame for everything. They got up pogroms — to divert our attention from the really guilty ones. The Government is to blame. The Government wanted war. They are trying now to place the blame for their own blunders

on the men who are the least guilty of all — on the little group of Germans that has stayed here in Russia. International capital exploits us all alike. This question of Jews or Christians, Russians or Germans, means nothing to us. I tell you that, comrades.'

'Down with him! Out with him!'

A wild scrimmage follows. The air is filled with shouts, blows, and curses. Someone yells: 'Police!' A police lieutenant steps out of the office and asks: 'What's up there?' The crowd is suddenly silent.

'Your honor, we are giving the Germans the devil. Things are going badly with us. We can't let these fellows stay here and take the bread out of our mouths, and then sell us behind our backs.'

A new speaker presses forward.

'Gentlemen! We are compelled to ask a list of all the Germans employed in the shops.'

The crowd approves vigorously. 'Right! Choose a committee!'

Ignorance and prejudice have won the day. The workmen stand around in groups, excitedly discussing the situation. Here and there two or three Bolsheviki are violently protesting. The crowd is not satisfied. It breaks up in little parties, and slowly leaves the works.

The next morning.

'Kirilych! What did you think yesterday? I cannot get it out of my head — what that fellow said yesterday.'

'What do you mean?'

'Oh, go on! You heard what that fool said: the war means nothing to us — we're being exploited. The d——d blockhead, he's forgotten how those barons and *vons* ground us under their heels, the bloodsuckers! Wherever you look there is a German — in the shops, in the office, in the salesroom — and all holding the best jobs.'

'You ought to know better than to talk like that, old chap. There was a good deal of truth in what the fellow said yesterday. We don't know the whole story. I think there is something in what he said.'

'Do you mean to say you believed him? Why, that fellow — he looked like a tramp.'

'Just the same, he spoke well. I sympathize with those fellows.'

'Those fellows? Whom do you mean?'

'Why, with his fellows — you know, those Socialists! You could see he was one at a glance.'

'Why, you fool! They ought to send you to the front. They would teach you some sense down there.'

The condition of the workers gets worse daily, while the management grows more arbitrary and exacting. Wages are very low in the shell shops. [This is an error of fact. TRANSLATOR.] The men are in an ugly state of mind. A strike meeting is called. Someone gets the floor and says:

'Comrades! This war has no interest for us. Our class enemies started it.'

'Question! Get down to business!'

'The situation of labor is getting worse daily. We propose the following.' The man reads a resolution.

'Not strong enough. Say they must treat us more considerably.'

'Fire the foreman of the shell shop.'

The crowd approves vociferously: 'Down with him! Down with him!'

'Comrades, I have made that amendment.' He reads something. 'Do you approve?'

'Aye.'

The strike is lost.

'I'd like to know where these d——d agitators come from. They've made things worse than ever with their smart schemes. They told us we'd get what-

ever we wanted if we only struck. Now see where we are!’

‘Ha! I told you so. I told you no good would come out of it. Have they got many on their side?’

‘A whole lot of fellows!’

‘Are n’t there a good many innocent folks among them?’

The food situation gets steadily worse. A new mobilization is ordered.

END OF 1916

Disasters at the front. Mass meetings. Singing the Marseillaise. Food Committees. The Bolsheviks incessantly repeating: ‘The war means nothing for the working class. End the war.’ People begin to listen silently.

‘Hey, Demidov gave it to the Government at the meeting yesterday!’

‘I suppose they’ll jug the poor devil for it.’

‘Do you think so? But the war —’

‘The devil take the war! What does it matter to us, after all, whether the Germans or the Chinese win it? We’re a lot of stupid fools. Ah! . . .’

‘By Jove, but he did give it to them! We must n’t let them arrest him, eh?’

‘Sure not. We must n’t let them stop a man’s mouth when he tells the truth.’

‘Do you know, there has been a strike on for three days at Petrograd. Some workingmen were shot.’

‘A Bolshevik again.’

‘What was the trouble?’

‘Ah, high prices. The mob cleaned out the provision stores.’

‘So? If it comes to that, it’s time we were taking a hand.’

‘They have drunk our blood long enough, these d——d capitalists.’

FEBRUARY 1917

‘Comrades, the Petrograd proletariat has struck to a man. They want the war stopped at once. They want the whole imperial gang — the Romanovs — tried for their crimes. We must back

up the Petrograd workers, or they’ll be beaten. We call upon every one of you to rise as one man and defend your cause at any price. We must elect delegates to the Soviet, which has been organized to defend the interests of labor.’

All the men elected are Bolsheviks. Red flags, red ribbons, red rosettes everywhere. Soldiers coming back from the front. ‘Hurrah, Kerenskii, hurrah, Miliukov! Hurrah for the Provisional Government! Hurrah!’

‘Hi there, you fellow with a beard! Where are you going?’

‘To the meeting of the Social-Revolutionaries.’

‘Don’t let them take you in. Come to the Bolsheviks!’

‘Not on your life. They’re only big talkers and nothing else. They want to get everything at once. The Social-Revolutionaries are practical fellows. They’re more modest. Rome was n’t built in a day.’

Reaction begins to lift its head.

‘Comrades, all power to the Soviets! The compromisers, the Mensheviks and Social-Revolutionaries, have again sold out the workers and peasants. We must rally against the enemy. To arms, or you are lost!’

‘I don’t know yet what the Bolsheviks want. The Tsar is overthrown. We have a revolutionary Government and our Soviet. These fellows are insatiable. They want all the power to themselves. Just wait and see.’

JUNE 1917

Lenin is a German spy. The Bolsheviks are traitors.

‘Have you seen the paper? Lenin is a German spy! And to think that I believed him! I said to myself: “At last we’ve got an honest man who is a true friend of Labor.” All bosh! The rascal came through in a sealed car!’

'Sure, they've got it on him this time.'

'But, my lad, I can't really believe it!'

'Ah, just read the papers! Just see how the Bolsheviks are going around white in the gills, with a hangdog look! You can tell they're guilty a mile off. Just compare them with the Social-Revolutionaries! They're the boys. They know what they want. They are for a National Assembly. What better could we have? They're bold boys — and what speakers! They're honest fellows, you can tell it at a glance.'

'Now, brother, stop a bit. Honest fellows? They've got scoundrels in their ranks too.'

'Quite true. But the Bolsheviks — why, they're just a pack of scoundrels, curse 'em!'

Reaction grows stronger. There are defeats at the front. Bolshevik propaganda everywhere. A scene at a mass meeting: —

'Comrades! The next speaker is Comrade Chamkov, the Social-Revolutionary.'

'Give him the hook!'

'We've had enough of his kind.'

'Comrades, I only wish to say —'

'Shut up! Shut up!'

'Comrade Belobrysov will address us.'

'What party?'

'Bolshevist.'

'Put him out!' is heard here and there.

'Let him speak! Let him speak!' thunders the crowd.

'Comrades! Many months have already passed, and the Mensheviks and the Social-Revolutionaries are still talking and doing nothing. We see that the bourgeoisie are getting bolder and bolder every day. No one stops to consider the interests of Labor. The only way to avoid returning to our old slavery is to put all authority in the hands of Labor's representatives.'

'Quite right! Quite right!'

'We will now listen to a word from Comrade Zadvorkin.'

'What party?'

'Menshevist.'

'That's enough. Kick him out!'

'We must give him a chance to speak.'

Wild tumult follows.

'Comrades! We see that the Bolshevik Party is ready to betray the interests of the workingmen in order to promote its own factious interests. We must prevent that little gang of adventurers, which is capable of nothing better than —'

'That's enough. Kick him out!'

The Second Pan-Russian Congress has declared that all power must be given to the Soviets. The meeting adopts a resolution endorsing this. The Bolshevik speakers argue: —

'Comrades! We have talked long enough. Every man must see for himself that the battle has begun. To the barricades! To arms for the defense of the workers' Soviets!'

'Right you are! Lead the way! We'll follow!'

OCTOBER 1917

The first important victory. The workers have returned to their jobs. Treason everywhere. Bridges blown up. Shooting from ambush. Blockade. Hunger, cold, sickness. Death stalking everywhere.

'The d——d Bolsheviks!' is hissed from every corner. 'They're to blame for all this.'

'Comrades! Don't lose heart. We're suffering. We have no bread. Starvation and death stalk at our side. But who is guilty? The old imperial Government and its allies. The imperialist war continues.'

'Again the imperialist war!'

'And they'll give us no peace. They have surrounded us with an iron ring. Comrades, we must hold out. One

more effort, and we shall conquer. We must conquer.'

'But all the trouble comes from dispersing the National Assembly! You are only demagogues yourselves. You know no other weapon but violence!'

Scowling glances; hungry, and bitter at heart, they separate.

'What the Bolsheviks say is true; but my God, we can't hold out much longer. When I got home last night my wife was crying. I was going to ask her why, but I saw at once what it was. Our boy was lying there, hardly breathing. For three days he had had

nothing but one black biscuit. He was dying of hunger. I thought to myself, "What's the good of it all if my boy has to starve?" And believe me or not, I'm a rough fellow, but I cried like a baby.'

'Don't give up. It won't last much longer, brother. Things are sure to get better. A comrade came back from Siberia the other day. He said that they have finished Kolchak. Siberia has food enough.'

'Yes, I know we must have patience, but it comes mighty hard. If things were only not so disorganized everywhere. . . .'

THE DUMB BOY

BY SINDULFO DE LA FUENTE

From España, April 28
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DON BERNARDO GONZÁLEZ would have been happy, with that ephemeral happiness that is granted mortals, had it not been for a family affliction.

He was proprietor of an excellent tailoring business known as La Capadocia. This name was recommended by a cloth-drummer from Tarrasa, who suggested it when he noticed that the old sign on the establishment read: 'Great Parisian Tailor Shop. Capes a Specialty.'

'Did it ever strike you that a Parisian tailor shop doesn't make capes? Now if your specialty were overcoats! Your specialty is capes. You ought to call your place La Capadocia.'

This struck the enterprising proprietor as a shrewd and plausible suggestion, and a new sign, with the new

name painted in dark-red letters upon a sky-blue background, speedily replaced the old one.

As I have said, Don Bernardo had every reason but one to be a happy man. His business yielded ample profits. Capes sold readily in the Andalusian capital, where any citizen who wore a ragged one was stamped as a hard drinker — as indeed a majority of them are. And most of these capes came from the shop of Don Bernardo, and were made from cloth supplied by the Tarrasa drummer. However, Don Bernardo had a son who saddened his heart.

This son, the offspring of his marriage with Doña Luz, a robust lady reputed to have been blessed with slender graces in her youth, was from birth a hardy