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From Russia with Critique
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Why bother with the Russian Revolution? The Soviet Union, rightly, has been classed as a failed, horrific, experiment since its collapse in 1991 so what is the benefit to have yet another book on it? There are three main reasons why this excellent book is worth your time.

First, a great many socialists still believe in what one of its authors, Alexander Berkman, labelled *The Bolshevik Myth* and are busy trying to reproduce what the Bolsheviks did. They need facts, not fairy tales. Second, revolutions have a habit of breaking out when least expected and learning the lessons from previous ones makes sense. Third, these are the works of two of the world's leading revolutionary anarchists seeking to do both of these important tasks when it was deeply unfashionable to do so – in the 1920s and 1930s.

While Berkman and Emma Goldman should be well known in anarchist circles, it is worth recounting their histories – particularly as shows why they were so well situated to learn the lessons of the Russian Revolution. Both were immigrants to America from the Tsarist Empire; both became active revolutionary communist-anarchists in the 1880s; both were imprisoned and then expelled to

Soviet Russia from America for their opposition to the imperialist slaughter of the First World War; both arrived in Russia in January 1920 willing to put their anarchist fears over state socialism aside to work with the Bolsheviks and help the revolution they had been dreaming of for decades; and both, by December 1921, had left Russia to warn the world's working classes not to follow the Bolshevik path.

It is often forgotten or overlooked that the 1917 revolutions were viewed positively by most socialists – particularly anarchists who saw both the February and October revolutions as following libertarian lines. Workers and peasants formed councils, industrial workers started to expropriate their workplaces, peasants ended landlordism by seizing the land. Direct action was the means used and the Bolsheviks, by supporting this and articulating the demand to end the war, gained much credibility within anarchist and syndicalist circles.

Goldman and Berkman were no exception but unlike many, they actually got to see the Bolshevism up-close. Their unease increased until they finally broke with the regime (but not the revolution, quite the reverse!) in early 1921, with the Bolshevik crushing of the revolt of the Kronstadt naval base and town for soviet democracy as recounted by Berkman in "The Kronstadt Rebellion" included in this volume. Fittingly, the book's title comes from the appeal (161) they sent to the Soviet Authorities urging them to use negotiation rather than force during the revolt (a fact strangely unmentioned in its introduction). The book collects most of their key short works from immediately after they left Russia (1922) to 1938 and comprises thirteen pieces, a combination of articles, pamphlets and one book chapter written by Goldman and/or Berkman (bar one, "The Russian Revolution and the Communist Party", which was the product of four unnamed Moscow Anarchists). So the book includes articles which should be well known in anarchist circles (having been republished before) but also some extremely

we need to place workers' self-management (freedom within the workplace) at the core of socialism otherwise we end up replacing one set of bosses with another, namely state bureaucrats.

To conclude: *To Remain Silent is Impossible* is an excellent collection of most of Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman's key writings on the Russian Revolution. They present the grim reality of so-called "revolutionary" Russia (a party dictatorship presiding over a state-capitalist economy), how the revolution failed and, equally as important, the lessons learned so that this failure is not repeated. It is essential reading because history has shown anarchism was right on Marxism. As it collects in one volume many of the most important articles on the Russian Revolution by Berkman and Goldman, many of which have not left the archives of anarchist newspapers for many decades, this is a must-have for historians as well as radicals.

Given that next year marks the one hundredth anniversary of the Russian Revolution, this work must find its way onto every revolutionary's reading list – particularly those who still believe the myth that things were different before Stalin. Particularly given that Stalin simply applied the tactics used by Lenin against the external opposition (whether anarchist, socialist, worker and peasant) *within* the party itself.

To Remain Silent is Impossible: Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman in Russia

Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman
Andrew Zonneveld (Editor)
On Our Own Authority!
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So the editor and publisher should be congratulated in producing such a useful book full of such key texts. This does not mean the book is perfect. There are a few minor typos and hopefully any second edition will pick those up. Far more importantly, some obvious pieces are missing. There is nothing from Berkman's *The Bolshevik Myth* nor from the two hundred pages (chapters 52 and 53) on Russia from Goldman's autobiography *Living My Life* (and neither are mentioned in the introduction) while just the "Afterward" from her *My Disillusionment in Russia* is included. Perhaps the editor considered these as being easily available and so did not need to be included, but it does feel like a missed opportunity.

Still this does raise the one really glaring omission, namely the final chapter of Berkman's *The Bolshevik Myth*. This included Berkman's lessons from his experiences but was rejected by Berkman's publisher as being an "anti-climax" from a literary standpoint. Berkman self-published it under that title in 1925 and while it was included in the 1989 Pluto press reprint of the book it is a shame it was not included here – particularly given its history. Also missing, although perhaps more understandably, are the prefaces to Goldman's *My Disillusionment* or at least quotes from them in the introduction where she refutes some of the standard claims against her account – such as she expected anarchism to exist in Russia, that she should be siding with the regime because Russia is "on strike", and so forth. Such nonsense is trotted out (pun intended!) regularly and it is a shame not to have used the opportunity to debunk them (again!).

Still, it includes Goldman's ridiculously good "Trotsky Protests Too Much" (sadly not in *Red Emma Speaks*) and the well-argued, if somewhat stating the basics (or so we should hope!), "There is No Communism in Russia". The latter's distinction between nationalisation and socialisation should be read by all on the left for even after the failure of Bolshevism and social-democracy you still see state-capitalism being portrayed as socialism. Sure, it may be better than privatisation but it is hardly the best we can aim for –

rare ones which have never been collected in book form before (or republished at all).

So, for example, it includes the three works "The Russian Tragedy", "The Russian Revolution and the Communist Party" and "The Kronstadt Rebellion" were collected into one volume in the 1976 by Cienfuegos Press and reissued by Phoenix Press ten years later (with a different introduction). Likewise the "Afterward" to Goldman's *My Disillusionment in Russia* was in the excellent anthology *Red Emma Speaks*. In addition, and what should be of interest to even the most well-read anarchist, are the many, much rarer, pieces – the crowning jewel of which is "The Crushing of the Russian Revolution" which was last issued by Freedom Press in the 1920s based on a series of articles which had previously appeared in *Freedom* in 1922. It is these articles which make this an important book.

So an important series of articles written by two seasoned Russian-speaking libertarian revolutionaries who spent two years in Bolshevik Russia and expressing the lessons they had drawn from the experience. What were those lessons? That for a revolution to succeed the masses need to be in control. This means decentralisation of power, federations from the bottom-up, workers' self-management and initiative, in a word, anarchist principles.

Sadly, the dominant political forces within the working classes in 1917 – initially the Mensheviks and then the Bolsheviks – were Marxists who had a statist, centralised outlook. The Bolsheviks had very specific ideas of what constituted "socialism" and, equally important, its preconditions (a fusion of state and capitalism). Ideas have consequences – particularly when they are the ideology of the ruling party in a centralised state. If you favour centralisation, then you will create centralised structures and these produce very specific social relationships – unfree and unequal ones embryonic of future class divisions.

This is what the Bolsheviks did, with the negative consequences which Goldman and Berkman describe well. Thus we find the latter providing an excellent overview of what had happened in Russia after the October Revolution:

> "The elective system was abolished, first in the army and navy, then in the industries. The Soviets of peasants and workers were castrated and turned into obedient Communist Committees, with the dreaded sword of the Cheka [political para-military police] ever hanging over them. The labour unions governmentalised, their proper activities suppressed, they were turned into mere transmitters of the orders of the State. Universal military service, coupled with the death penalty for conscientious objectors; enforced labour, with a vast officialdom for the apprehension and punishment of 'deserters'; agrarian and industrial conscription of the peasantry; military [or War] Communism in the cities and the system of requisitioning in the country [...] the suppression of workers' protests by the military; the crushing of peasant dissatisfaction with an iron hand [...]" ("The Russian Tragedy", 98)

The sad fact is that today most revolutionaries are as ignorant of these developments – particularly the suppression of popular protest – as they were at the time Berkman and Goldman were writing. Worse, these policies are justified – due to the civil war – and completely divorced from Bolshevik ideology.

The latter is important, as Berkman and Goldman make clear. For the Bolsheviks, once in power, naturally sought to implement their vision of socialism and, unsurprisingly, it reflected their assumptions, prejudices and dogmas. This lead to the ironic situation of leading Bolsheviks bemoaning the gigantic inefficient, corrupt bureaucratic machine which somehow had sprung up around them

possible. They choose the latter. By the beginning of 1919, Bolshevik ideology now proclaimed the inevitability of party dictatorship during any "successful" revolution – needed, you understand, to withstand the vacillating and wavering of the masses themselves. Trotsky was repeating this "lesson" (as openly proclaimed to the world by Zinoviev at the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920) until his death.

In short, as Goldman and Berkman argue, the failure of Bolshevism was not due to external factors but the inevitable outcome of their ideology, its prejudices and the structures it favoured. For those interested, section H.6 of my *An Anarchist FAQ* (volume 2) summarises the current research on this subject.

Rather than being their undoing, the civil war helped the Bolsheviks secure their rule because they could justify their actions in terms of defending the revolution (and, since then, for their followers to dismiss critiques by anarchists!). Indeed, repression against the non-Bolshevik left was inversely related to success of the Whites. When the Whites were winning, the left (Menshevik Internationalists, Left Social Revolutionaries, Anarchists, etc.) was allowed more freedom as they sought to help defend the revolution. When the Whites were retreating, the left was crushed. Unsurprisingly, the winning of the Civil War saw the ending of all opposition – including within the party itself by the banning of factions.

Was this repression, this police state, needed? The book includes an article by Goldman comparing the political liberties in the Spanish revolution to the political repression under the Bolshevik, so no. Ah, some may say, Franco won but the Whites were defeated – but the Bolsheviks also defeated the revolution, which was surely the whole point rather than simply ensuring Lenin stayed in power? Likewise, the anarchist-influenced Makhnovists in the Ukraine show that theory played its role in the outcome of the revolution – for while fighting the same civil war as the Bolsheviks, the Makhnovists organised soviet conferences while the Bolsheviks banned them.

ularity. For anarchists, the former is as unsurprising as the latter for the state has evolved a structure to *exclude* the masses from the decision making (how else can a minority rule?) and Bolshevik centralisation did precisely that – the masses were alienated and disempowered as anarchists had long predicted. The new ruling few could not solve the many problems a social revolution threw up and so the masses turned away from them.

This process of alienation, bureaucratisation and Bolshevik loss of popular support – and resulting state repression – started very early, in fact by early 1918. As Goldman and Berkman arrived in Russian in January 1920, the focus of their writings are well after such key events as the Bolshevik disbanding of soviets elected with non-Bolshevik majorities, the packing of soviets of "delegates" from Bolshevik controlled bodies (so swamping those elected directly from the workplace), the breaking of workers' protests and strikes as well as the gerrymandering of the Fifth All-Russian Soviet Congress which denied the Left-Social Revolutionaries their rightful majority (which lead to the assassination of the German Ambassador and their crushing).

All bar the last occurred *before* the outbreak of civil war at the end of May1918 as had the centralisation of power into a few hands – politically in the Bolshevik dominated executive committees of soviets (at all levels but flowing downwards from the national Bolshevik government) and economically in the nationalised, state-run, committees. Both spawned an ever-growing bureaucracy and were backed up by the Bolshevik's political police and armed forces whose democratic structures had been abolished by Trotsky's decree in April 1918.

So by the start of the civil war the Bolshevik's had created a state pretty-much like any other state (marked by a few rulers and armed forces separate from and used against the masses) and an economy which had replaced the bosses by the state bureaucracy. The Bolsheviks soon faced a choice – remain true to their stated principles of soviet democracy or hold onto power by any means

while seeking solutions by increasing the very thing – centralism – which had produced it in the first place.

Thus, a "bureaucratic machine is created that is appalling in its parasitism, inefficiency and corruption. In Moscow alone this new class of *sovburs* (Soviet bureaucrats) exceeds, in 1920, the total of office holders throughout the whole of Russia under the Tsar in 1914 [...] The Bolshevik economic policies, effectively aided by this bureaucracy, completely disorganise the already crippled industrial life of the country." (96) Bolshevik ideology simply handed the whole of industry to the state bureaucracy – while, in the workplace, usually placed the old boss back into position (unsurprisingly, the bosses preferred nationalisation to workers' control just as much as the Bolsheviks did).

There was nothing accidental about this – it was the aim of Marxism from the start. The Bolsheviks inherited a faith in centralisation from Marx and Engels (along with much else from the *Communist Manifesto*, such as "industrial armies" which provided ideological credence for their attempts to militarise labour in 1920). That this did not work as predicted would not have surprised Bakunin.

The Marxist dogma of centralisation went against their claims of empowering the working class – simply because that was what it was designed to do. Every ruling (minority) class has created a state – as Kropotkin continually stressed – marked by centralisation, hierarchy and a pyramidal structure. It was naïve, in fact unscientific, to expect reproducing those structures not to also reproduce minority rule and so create "the dictatorship *over* the proletariat, as it is popularly characterised in Russia". (95)

Needless to say, the pro-Bolshevik will proclaim that Goldman and Berkman "ignore" the civil war and foreign intervention which, we are equally assured, forced the Bolsheviks to be authoritarian and "betray" their ideas. This ignores many things, not least that Goldman and Berkman did *not* ignore the counter-revolution, but, more importantly, the Bolshevik vision of "socialism" was always impoverished compared to the anarchist one and they built a sys-

tem in-line with it, not against it. So, to give what should be a well-known example, the notion that Lenin supported workers management of production rather than some vague "supervision" has long been debunked (the introduction rightly references Maurice Brinton's still essential *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control*) and his infatuation with centralisation was inspired by Marx.

Not that anarchists have ever denied the need for defence of a revolution (regardless of Lenin's assertions in *State and Revolution*), we just do not confuse a freed people fighting to maintain its freedom with an institution which has evolved to crush that freedom in the interests of a few. Ultimately, the pro-Bolshevik will proclaim the anarchist naïve because we do not recognise that counter-revolution and civil war are "inevitable" so necessitating the so-called workers' state yet, in the same breath, blame both for the failure of Bolshevism. If Bolshevism cannot handle the inevitable without degenerating into tyranny then it is to be avoided, surely?

Needless to say, this work is based on eye-witness accounts and so, for some, may be lacking in sources. Sadly the editors did not seek to add appropriate follow-up references for interested reader nor explain certain expressions and words used (for example, the reader may work out that the *Okhrana* was the Tsar's secret police from the context of its use by Berkman and Goldman but a footnote or glossary would not go amiss). Perhaps such a task is asking too much in terms of research but, for example, referencing Silvana Malle's *The Economic Organization of War Communism 1918–1921* (Cambridge University Press, 1985) supports Goldman's comments on the inefficiency of centralisation as well as the influence of Marxist ideology in Bolshevik ideological support for it:

> "Only free initiative and popular participation in the affairs of the revolution can prevent the terrible blunders committed in Russia. For instance, with fuel only a hundred *versts* [about sixty-six miles] from Petrograd there would have been no necessity for that city to suffer from cold had the workers' economic organizations of Petrograd been free to exercise their initiative for the common good. The peasants of the Ukraina would not have been hampered in the cultivation of their land had they had access to the farm implements stacked up in the warehouses of Kharkov and other industrial centres awaiting orders from Moscow for their distribution. These are characteristic examples of Bolshevik governmentalism and centralization, which should serve as a warning to the workers of Europe and America of the destructive effects of Statism" ("Afterward to *My Disillusionment in Russia"*, 191)

Suffice to say, the notion that a central body could make efficient and well-informed decisions over allocating products or ordering their creation ignores completely the informational burden in collecting, processing and evaluating the information – as well as the power which accrues to the officialdom needed to do – even badly – such a huge task. Combine this with the disruption caused by the destruction of the civil war, it comes as no surprise the economy collapsed as it did.

In terms of lessons, these are as valid today as when Goldman and Berkman initially wrote. They rightly stress the need for mass participation and the free initiative of popular working class organisations – such as soviets, labour unions and co-operatives. The key point they stress is that for a revolution to succeed the masses must be in control, that they must see that they in charge of their own destinies everywhere – the workplace, the community, their unions, the defence of the revolution, co-operatives. This means full freedom for the masses – of assembly, speech, organisation, etc.

Ironically, Marxist talk of the so-called workers' state and love of centralisation undermined all this – along with their own pop-