

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)

Anti-Copyright



The Truth About the Boylsheviki

Emma Goldman

1918

Emma Goldman
The Truth About the Boylsheviki
1918

Retrieved on February 19th, 2021, from

<https://id.lib.harvard.edu/curiosity/>

women-working-1800-1930/45-990050129610203941

Originally published by Mother Earth Publishing Association
sometime in 1918, though the exact date is unknown.

usa.anarchistlibraries.net

Dedicated as my last contribution before going to Jefferson City, Mo., prison for two years, to the Boylsheviki in Russia in appreciation of their glorious work and their inspiration in awakening Boylshevism in America.

The attitude of dense ignorance and stupidity towards the most gigantic event since the French Revolution, the Boylsheviki movement in Russia, is not typically American. All great movements have met with the same fate in every land, since stupidity and ignorance have never been the monopoly of any particular country.

The Boylsheviki, like all revolutionary movements, have faced three characteristic stages. First, calumny, misrepresentation, hatred, opposition, and persecution. After that came ridicule, scoffing, and cheap derision of the movement. Finally, in the third stage, recognition — though stunted and grudging.

It took the great movements of the past more than a century to pass these varying stages, and that at the expense of untold suffering and sacrifice. The Boylsheviki have swept on and all but reached the third stage in just a few months.

It is indeed unfortunate that we in America depend upon the press for information on all urgent questions. Yet everybody knows that there is no other medium so hopelessly inaccurate, so much of a falsified of facts as the press. Not only because it is inspired entirely by material interests, and therefore opposed to every movement which is likely to hurt those interests, but because the profession of journalism is in the hands of the most undeveloped, uninformed, provincial type of men and women. People who know almost nothing of the social currents in their own country cannot be expected to even remotely grasp the character and purpose of a movement which promises the salvation of the world. Therefore the utterly stupid, conscious and unconscious, misrepresentation of the Boylsheviki.

And yet it is of the utmost importance that the people in America should understand the true meaning of the Boylsheviki, their origin, and the historic background which makes their position and their challenge to the world so significant to the masses.

Boylsheviki is the plural term for those revolutionists in Russia who represent the interests of the largest social groups, and who insist upon the maximum social and economic demands for those groups.

At a Social Democratic Congress, held in 1903, the extreme revolutionists, impatient of the ever-growing tendency of compromise and reform in the party, organized the Boylsheviki wing as opposed to those known as the Mensheviki, or the group content to move slowly, gaining reform step by step. Nikolai Lenin, and later Trotsky, were the prime factors in the separation, and have since worked incessantly to build up the Boylsheviki party along straight revolutionary lines, but nevertheless in keeping with Marxian theoretical reasoning.

Then came the miracle of miracles, the Russian Revolution of 1917, which to the politicians in and out of the different Socialist groups meant the overthrow of the Tsar and the establishment of a liberal or quasi-Socialist government. Lenin

and trotsky, with their followers, saw deeper into the nature of the revolution, and, seeing, they had the wisdom to respond — not so much to their own theoretical predilections but to compelling needs of the awakened Russian people themselves.

Thus the Russian Revolution is a miracle in more than one respect. Among other extraordinary paradoxes it presents the phenomenon of the Marxian Social Democrats, Lenin and Trotsky, adopting Anarchist Revolutionary tactics, while the Anarchists Kropotkin, Tcherkessov, Tchaikovsky are denying these tactics and falling into Marxian reasoning, which they had during all their lives repudiated as "German metaphysics."

The Russian Revolution is indeed a miracle. It demonstrates every day how insignificant all theories are in comparison with the actuality of the revolutionary awakening of the people.

The Boylsheviki of 1903, though revolutionists, adhered to the Marxian doctrine concerning the industrialization of Russia and the historic mission of the bourgeoisie as a necessary evolutionary process before the Russian masses could come into their own. The Boylsheviki of 1918 no longer believe in the predestined function of the bourgeoisie. They have been swept forward upon the waves of the Revolution to the point of view held by the Anarchists since Bakunin; namely, that once the masses become conscious of their economic power, they make their own history and need not be bound by the traditions and processes of a dead past, which — like secret treaties — are made at the round table and not dictated by life itself.

In other words, the Boylsheviki now represent not only a limited group of theorists but a Russia reborn and virile. Never would Lenin and Trotsky have attained their present importance had they merely voiced cut-and-dried theoretical formulae. They have their ears close to the heart-beat of the Russian people, who, while yet inarticulate, know how to register their demands much more powerfully through action. That, however, does not lessen the importance of Lenin, Trotsky and the other heroic figures who hold the world in awe by their per-

sonality, their prophetic vision and their intense revolutionary spirit.

It is not so long ago that Trotsky and Lenin were denounced as German agents, working for the Kaiser. Only those who are still influenced by newspaper lies, who know nothing about the two men, believe such accusations. Incidentally it is well to bear in mind that there is nothing quite so contemptible or cheap as to call a man a "German agent" because he refuses to believe in the high-sounding phrase "to make the world safe for Democracy," with Democracy whipped in Tulsa, lynched in Butte, shut up in prison, and otherwise outraged and banished from our shores.

Lenin and Trotsky need no defense. Yet it is well to call the attention of the credulous ones, whose daily papers "cannot tell a lie," that when Trotsky was in America he lived in a cheap apartment house, and was so poor that he had hardly enough to live on. To be sure, he was offered a comfortable position on one of the successful Jewish Socialist dailies, on condition that he learn to compromise and curb his revolutionary zeal. Trotsky preferred poverty and the right to retain his self-respect. When he decided to return to Russia, at the very beginning of the Revolution, a private subscription had to be taken up by his friends to cover his fare — so much did Trotsky earn as a "German agent."

As to Lenin, his whole life has been one long, endless struggle for Russia. In fact, he comes to his revolutionary ideals through heritage. His own brother was executed by order of the Tsar. Thus Lenin has a personal as well as a universal reason to hate autocracy and to dedicate his life to the liberation of Russia. What absurdity it is to accuse a man like that of sympathy with German imperialism! But even the loud-mouthed accusers of Lenin and Trotsky have been shamed into silence by the powerful personalities and the incorruptible integrity of these great figures of the Revolution.

our brothers, paralyzed our minds and chained our limbs, bent our backs and emasculated our wills.

The Boylsheviki have come to challenge the world. It can nevermore rest in its old sordid indolence. It must accept the challenge. It has already accepted it in Germany, in Austria and Romania, in France and Italy, aye, even in America. Like sudden sunlight Boylshevism is spreading over the entire world, illuminating the great Vision and warming it into being — the New Life of human brotherhood and social well-being.

likely that if the Boylsheviki attain to complete economic and social power in Russia, the combined governments might make common cause with German Imperialism in order to crush the Boylsheviki. It can be safely predicted that the imperialistic elements will join the bourgeoisie to defeat the Russian Revolution.

The Boylsheviki are alive to these dangers and are using the most effective measures to combat them. Their influence on the proletariat of Germany and Austria has been immeasurable. Returning German prisoners of war are carrying the message of Boylshevism into trench and barracks, in to the fields and factories, awakening the people to the only power that can crush autocracy. The educational work of the Boylsheviki among the German people is beginning to have its effect. Certainly it has already accomplished a hundred-fold more than all the pratings of the Allies about the necessity of spreading revolt in the Central Empires.

Even though the Boylsheviki should fail in actually carrying out their wonderful dream, their conception and universal peace, their attempt to ally themselves with all the oppressed peoples of the world, their demand that the land be given to the peasants and that the workers who produce the wealth of the world should enjoy the things they produce — the very fact of them being and demanding must exert such influence upon the rest of the world that human beings can never again be quite so commonplace, so contented and ordinary as they were before the boylsheviki made their appearance upon the horizon of human life.

This is the part the Boylsheviki are playing in our lives, in the lives of the German, the French and all the other peoples of the earth. We can never be the same, because at all times, in moments of despair, in moments of pessimism, in moments when we believe everything crushed, we shall turn toward Russia and there behold the Great Hope risen, incarnate, breaking up the blackness that has filled our hearts with the hatred of

In one respect it is not at all surprising that there should be so little understanding in America for the Boylsheviki. The Russian Revolution still remains an enigma to the American mind. Without a trace of feeling for his own revolutionary traditions, and ever prostrate before the majesty of the State, the average American has been trained to believe that Revolution has no justification in his own country and that in "darkest Russia" it was only for the purpose of getting rid of the Tsar, provided it was done in a gentlemanly manner and with respectful apologies to the autocrat. And, further, that the moment a stable government like ours is established, the Russian people ought to "get behind the president."

Imagine, then, the surprise when the Russian people, after driving out the Tsar, destroyed the throne itself, and sent the "liberal" Miliakovs and Lvovs, and even the Socialist Kerensky, in the direction the Tsar had gone. And then, to cap the climax, come the Boylsheviki, who declare against both king and master. That is too much for the democratic mind of the American.

Fortunately for Russia, her people have never enjoyed the blessings of Democracy, with its institutionalized, legalized, classified values of education and culture; all of which are "machine made and ravel out the moment one begins at the first knot."

The Russians are a literal people with an unspoiled, uncorrupted mind. Revolution to them has never meant mere political scene shifting, the overthrow of one autocrat for another. The Russian people have been taught for nearly a hundred years — not in stuffy schools by sterile teachers and stale text books, but by their great revolutionary martyrs, the noblest spirits the world has ever known — that Revolution means a fundamental social and economic change, something which has its roots in the needs and hopes of the people and which must not end until the disinherited of the earth come into their own. In a word, the Russian people saw in the

overthrow of the autocracy the beginning and not the finale of the Revolution.

More than the tyranny of the Tsar, the muzhik hated the tyranny of the tax collector sent by the landed proprietor to rob him of his last cow or horse, and finally of the land itself, or to flog him and drag him off to prison when he could not pay his taxes. What was it to the muzhik that the Tsar had been driven from his throne, if his direct enemy, the Barin (master) still continued possession of the key to life — the land? *Matushka Zemlya* (Mother Earth) is the pet name which the Russian language alone has for the soil. To the Russian the soil is everything, life and joy giver, the nourisher, the beloved *Matushka* (Little Mother).

The Russian Revolution can mean nothing to him unless it sets the land fee and joins to the dethroned Tsar his partner, the dethroned land-owner, the capitalist. That explains the historic background of the *Boylsheviki*, their social and economic justification. They are powerful only because they represent the people. The moment they cease to do that, they will go, as the Provisional Government and Kerensky had to go. For never will the Russian people be content, or *Boylshecism* cease, until the land and the means of life become the heritage of the children of Russia. They have for the first time in centuries determined that they shall be heard, and that their voices shall reach the heart of, not of the governing classes — they know these have no heart — but the hearts of the peoples of the world, including the people of the United States. Therein lies the deep import and significance of the Russian Revolution as symbolized by the *Boylsheviki*.

Starting from the historic premise that all wars are capitalist wars, and that the masses can have no interest whatever in strengthening the imperialistic designs of their exploiters, it is perfectly consistent for the *Boylsheviki* to insist upon peace and to demand that there shall be neither indemnities nor annexations involved in that peace.

money, they would bribe the devil himself to save them from the Revolution, and the people, starved and destitute, might succumb to the cruel bargain.

That is why the *Boylsheviki* took possession of the banks and are urging the peasants to confiscate the land. They have no desire to turn the banks and land, the raw material and the products of Labor's toil over to the state. They want to place all the natural resources and the wealth of the country in the hands of the people for common holding and common use, because the Russian people are by instinct and tradition communists, and have neither need nor desire for the competitive system.

The *Boylsheviki* are translating into reality the very things many people have been dreaming about, hoping for, planning and discussing in private and public. They are building a new social order which is to come out of the chaos and conflicts now confronting them.

Why is it that many Russian revolutionists are opposed to the *Boylsheviki*? Some of the finest types of men and women in Russia, such as our beloved *Babushka Breshkovskaia*, *Peter Kropotkin*, and others, are antagonistic to the *Boylsheviki*. It is because these good people have been lured by the glamor of political liberalism as represented by Republican France, Constitutional England and Democratic America. Alas, they have yet to realize that the line of demarcation between liberalism and autocracy is purely imaginary, the sole difference being that the people under autocracy know that they are enslaved, and love liberty to such an extent that they would fight and die for it, while the people in a democracy imagine that they are free and are content in their bondage.

The Russian revolutionists who are opposed to the *Boylsheviki* will soon come to appreciate that the *Boylsheviki* represent the most fundamental, far-reaching and all-embracing principles of human freedom and of economic well-being.

It might be asked, what would the *Boylsheviki* do if they were opposed by all the other governments? It is not at all un-

peoples of the world to demand and make peace, whether the governing classes want it or not.”

Trotsky, in a letter to the ”Citizen Ambassador” of Persia, said: ”The Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907 was directed against the liberty and independence of the Persian people, and is, therefore, null and void for all time. Moreover, we denounce all agreements preceding and following the said agreement which may restrict the rights of the Persian people to a free and independent existence.”

The Boylsheviki are accused of taking possession of the land. This is a terrible charge if you believe in private property. It is considered the greatest crime of all to offend against private possessions. Human slaughter may be justified, but the sanctity of private possessions is inviolate. Fortunately, the Boylsheviki have learned from the past. They know that past revolutions failed because the masses did not take possession of the means of life.

The Boylsheviki have done another terrible thing — they have taken possession of the banks. The Boylsheviki remembered that during the Paris Commune, when women and children were starving on the streets, the Communards foolishly sent their comrades to protect the Bank of France, and that afterwards the French Government used the bank’s funds to pay Bismark in return for the 500,000 German war prisoners who marched into Paris and drowned the Commune in the blood of 30,000 French workers.

At that time, in 1871, the French bourgeoisie had not the slightest objection to the use of German guns to slaughter the French people. The ”end justifies the means,” which the bourgeoisie would not hesitate — now and then — to use for the maintenance of its own supremacy.

The Boylsheviki are ardent students of history. They know that the ruling classes would prefer even the Tsar or the Kaiser to the Revolution. They know that if the bourgeoisie could retain the wealth stolen from the people in the form of land and

To begin with, Russia has been bled in a war ordered by the bloody Tsar. Why should they continue to sacrifice their strong manhood, which could be employed to better purpose for the reconstruction of Russia? To make the world safe for democracy? What a farce! Did not the so-called Democracies forfeit the sympathies of the Russian people when they tied their Goddess to the knout of the Russian autocracy? How dare they complain of Russia that she is longing for peace now that she has successfully thrown off her back the weight of centuries of oppression!

Are the allies really sincere in their boast of Democracy? Why, then,

Are the allies really sincere in their boast of Democracy? Why, then, did they fail to recognize the Russian Revolution even before the ”terrible Boylsheviki” had taken charge of its direction? England, the the famous liberator of small nations, with India and Ireland in her clutches, would have none of the Revolution. France, the would-be cradle of liberty, repudiated the Russian Delegate to her Conference. To be sure, America recognized Revolutionary Russia, but only because she fondly hoped that Miliukov or Kerensky would remain in power. Under such circumstances why would Russia help continue the war?

Yet it is not for this reason that the Boylsheviki insist upon peace. It is because nothing vital or constructive can be built up during war, and the Russian people are eager to build up, to create, to found a new, a free, a rich Russia. For that they need peace; and, above all other considerations, the Boylsheviki want to help the other peoples of the earth toward peace — the peoples who, like themselves, never wanted war.

Already the Boylsheviki have taught the world the lesson that peace negotiations must be initiated by the peoples themselves. Peace cannot be declared in the name of those who make wars and gain by them. That is one of the most: significant contributions to world progress that the Boylsheviki

have made. Furthermore, they maintain that negotiations for peace must be made openly, frankly and with the full consent of the peoples represented. They will have none of the secret diplomatic intrigue that betrays the peoples, leading them to irretrievable disaster.

On this basis the Boylsheviki invited the other powers to participate in the General Peace Conference held at Brest-Litovsk. Their suggestion was met with scorn. The democratic boast of the Allies, when put to the test, was found sadly wanting. The treachery of the Allies in forsaking the Russian people itself warrants the Boylsheviki in making a separate peace. They stand guiltless when they declare for a separate peace after their repudiation by the Allies.

Abandoned, the Boylsheviki are no less strong. It was Trotsky who expressed the moral influence of the Boylsheviki in the seeming paradox, "Our weakness will be our strength." Weak in the instruments of an autocracy, the Boylsheviki are strengthened by a common Revolutionary purpose. The moral opinion of the world will be more deeply influenced by a simple-hearted Russian's desire to act honestly at the peace table, than by all the connivance, evasion and hypocrisy of highly cultured diplomats.

The Boylsheviki demand that the obligations and indemnities incurred by the other governing classes should be repudiated. Why should they live up to the obligations of the Tsar? The people have not incurred those obligations; they have not pledged themselves to the other warring countries; they were no more consulted whether they should be slaughtered than the people of America were consulted. Why should they bear the brunt of punishment for an autocrat's crimes? Why should they saddle their children and their children's children with war loans and indemnities? They say that arrangements or contracts made by the enemies of the people must be lived up to by the enemies of the people, but not by the people themselves. If the Tsar pledged himself to other countries, the other coun-

tries should import him and make him responsible for what he pledged. But the people who were not consulted in the first place, who fought and bled and sacrificed their lives for three and a half years, — they say that they will only pay the debts incurred by themselves, with their knowledge, with their understanding, and for a purpose of which they have approved. These are the only war debts, war loans and war indemnities they intend to pay.

The Boylsheviki have no imperialistic designs. They have libertarian plans, and those that understand the principles of liberty do not want to annex other peoples and other countries. Indeed, the true libertarian does not want even to annex other individuals, for he knows that so long as a single nation, people or individual is enslaved, he too is in danger.

That is why the Boylsheviki demand a peace without annexations and without indemnities. They do not feel ethically called upon to live up to the obligations incurred by the Tsar, the Kaiser or other imperialistic gentlemen.

The Boylsheviki are accused of betraying the Allies. Were the Russian people asked whether they wanted to join the Allies? The Boylsheviki, as Communists, as men who adhere with all the passion and intensity of their beings to the principle of Internationalism, declare: "Our allies are not the governments of England, France, Italy or America; our allies are the English, French, Italian, American and German peoples. They are our only allies, and these allies we will never betray; these allies we will never deceive. We want to serve our allies, but our allies are the peoples of the world, not the governing classes, not the diplomats, not the prime ministers, not the gentlemen who make war." That is the position of the Boylsheviki to this present moment. They have demonstrated this within the last few weeks, when they saw that the German peace terms implied the enslavement and dependency of other peoples. They said, "We want peace, but in asking for peace for ourselves we do so because we feel certain that our peace will induce other