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Open Letter to Romain Rolland

Ida Mett

16 May 1931

Brussels, 23 April 1931

I have just been reading in the latest edition of *La Révolution prolétarienne* [N°116, 5 avril 1931] your response to Gaston Riou. And I cannot help but say a few words to you on the matter.

I belong to a generation of Russians who were barely sixteen at the time of the October Revolution. My name will not mean anything to you as I am only one of the many who, like drops, make up the formidable ocean that the people-in-revolution was, the people that defended it even at the cost of their lives, without, in so doing, leaving behind any traces in the annals of official history. Thousands like me have fought epidemics, famine, have laboured in the most ghastly conditions and taken part in the civil war itself, all because that revolution has turned, as far as they are concerned, into the very essence of life, the aim and the foundation of life itself.

That said, I must tell you that I agree whole-heartedly with your response to Gaston Riou regarding the “Pan-Europe of Count Goudenhoy-Kalergi and Briand” as well as on the value of democratic fictions in imperialist Europe.

Like you, I say to the Asia of Sun Yat Sen and Gandhi: “Count on me, brethren. I stand ready, along with thousands of others, to

do on behalf of your liberation what we have done on behalf of revolutionary Russia, ready to give it our all and our very lives.”

But where we fall out is when you write: “I say to Lenin’s Russia.”

You are mistaken here, Romain Rolland: Lenin’s USSR has been trampled underfoot. It is Stalin’s USSR that is in the saddle. Russia in a state of rampant capitalism, a Russia out to seek historical compensation for long years of enforced feudalism in unbridled capitalism. The Russia where workers toil like slaves to build a capitalism that may well be the mightiest that the world has ever witnessed. The Russia where trade unions taken under the wing of the State by means of oversight from the ruling Party are now non-existent in terms of workers’ defence agencies. The Russia where Stalin and his consorts exploit the myths of the day in order to shut the mouths of those who dare to criticize. For instance: To start with, it was a five-year-plan, now it’s the five-year-plan in four years and even now there is talk of the five-year-plan taking just three years.

Have you grasped the meaning of this?

It means that factories, workshops and railways are under construction on the mere basis of the unlimited possibility of exploiting the worker in conditions where there are absolutely no agencies to defend the proletariat. It also means exporting foodstuffs whilst leaving the very workers carrying out the celebrated five-year-plan without bread.

Lenin’s USSR, you say. This is the Russia of red imperialism, the Russia which, whilst purporting to protect the Chinese revolution, is primarily the champion of its own imperialist claim on the railways in Eastern China. You have seen how easily Blucher’s army crushed the Chinese army that was defending China against the deals made with tsarism.

‘Revolutionary’ Russia, you say. No. This is a Russia where the most consistent militaristic spirit prevails; every cell, every fac-

tory committee, every youth organization has been transformed by “revolutionaries” of the stamp of Stalin into a nest of war-mongers.

Your fears, Romain Rolland, are unfounded. This capitalist, imperialist Russia is not about to be encircled by equally capitalist States. Quite the opposite; it will enter into pacts with them. The Italian-Russian trade treaty is only the beginning of that process.

“I was blind-sided and duped right up until the latter months of 1914”, you state in your reply to Riou. “Between us, comrades,” – you write later – “the only dupe is the willing dupe.”

And yet, despite all the precautions you seem to be taking, you are being duped a second time.

You are mistaking phantoms for facts. You call for defence of Lenin’s USSR (it being, as you would of course have it, revolutionary) and you are actually defending the Russia that has driven out one of the organizers of the victory over the Whites – Trotsky; the Russia that holds in its prisons the likes of Ghezzi, old communists like Rissanov, the Russia that enters into treaties with Mussolini’s Italy and supports fascism economically.

In your blindness, you cannot see that Stalin no longer stands for the Russia of the days of the October Revolution, any more than, say, Tardieu stands for the Paris Commune.

But if, in spite of everything, you cannot bring yourself to correct your lack of judgment, history will do the job for you. Rest assured that this severe judge will tell generations yet to come that the author of *Jean-Christophe* covered for the crimes of Russian Bonapartism with his moral status. Rather than offering moral support to the voices of the workers’ opposition, the voices of the heroic people ground down by counter-revolutionary force. You cry out: “The USSR is the target in the sights.” But what USSR are you talking about? Revolutionary Russia has long been under the jackboot of State capitalism, and when calls for help reach here you do not lift a finger to support them. After that, what possible value could there be in the words: “If she were to disappear, I would have no further interest in Europe’s future”?

You need to have the strength to look the truth in the face.

Revolutionary Russia is gone, so let us do all we can to resurrect it, shall we say.

Accept, Romain Rolland, greetings from a daughter of the Russian revolution who stands with you “against the Master of oil and petroleum and the Western business bloc”, alongside you in supporting the liberation of the peoples of Asia and Africa, but who is simultaneously opposed to Stalin’s Russia, precisely because that Russia no longer embodies but rather murders and discredits “the most heroic experiment of the age”, the October Revolution.

I am certain that I speak for the best of my generation, so many of whom were left behind on the battle-field, fighting for the success of ideas that you diminish by offering your support to Stalin’s Russia.