



**Emma Goldman, *My Disillusionment In Russia*
(London: C. W. Daniel Company, 1925)**

PREFACE

To First Volume of American Edition



THE decision to record my experiences, observations, and reactions during my stay in Russia I had made long before I thought of leaving that country. In fact, that was my main reason for departing from that tragically heroic land.

The strongest of us are loath to give up a long-cherished dream. I had come to Russia possessed by the hope that I should find a new-born country, with its people wholly consecrated to the great, though very difficult, task of revolutionary reconstruction. And I had fervently hoped that I might become an active part of the inspiring work.

I found reality in Russia grotesque, totally unlike the great ideal that had borne me upon the crest of high hope to the land of promise. It required fifteen long months before I could get my bearings. Each day, each week, each month added new links to the fatal chain that pulled down my cherished edifice. I fought desperately against the disillusionment. For a long time I strove against the still voice within me which urged me to face the overpowering facts. I would not and could not give up.

Then came Kronstadt. It was the final wrench. It completed the terrible realization that the Russian Revolution was no more.

I saw before me the Bolshevik State, formidable, crushing every constructive revolutionary effort, suppressing, debasing, and disintegrating everything. Unable and unwilling to become a cog in that sinister machine, and aware that I could be of no practical use to Russia and her people, I decided to leave the country. Once out of it, I would relate honestly, frankly, and as objectively as humanly possible to me the story of my two years' stay in Russia.

I left in December, 1921. I could have written then, fresh under the influence of the ghastly experience. But I waited four months before I could bring myself to write a series of articles. I delayed another four months before beginning the present volume.

I do not pretend to write a history. Removed by fifty or a hundred years from the events he is describing, the historian may seem to be objective. But real history is not a compilation of mere data. It is valueless without the human element which the historian necessarily gets from the writings of the contemporaries of the events in question. It is the personal reactions of the participants and observers which lend vitality to all history and make it vivid and alive. Thus, numerous histories have been written of the French Revolution; yet there are only a very few that stand out true and convincing, illuminative in the degree in which the historian has *felt* his subject through the medium of human documents left by the contemporaries of the period.

I myself--and I believe, most students of history--have felt and visualized the Great French Revolution much more vitally from the letters and diaries of contemporaries, such as Mme. Roland, Mirabeau, and other eye witnesses, than from the so-called objective historians. By a strange coincidence a volume of letters written during the French Revolution and compiled by the able German anarchist publicist, Gustav Landauer, came into my hands during the most critical period of my Russian experience. I was actually reading them while hearing the Bolshevik artillery begin the bombardment of the Kronstadt rebels. Those letters gave me a most vivid insight into the events of the French Revolution. As never before they brought home to me the realization that the Bolshevik régime in Russia was, on the whole, a significant replica of what had happened in France more than a century before.

Great interpreters of the French Revolution, like Thomas Carlyle and Peter Kropotkin, drew their understanding and inspiration from the human records of the period. Similarly will the future historians of the Great Russian Revolution--if they are to write real history and not a mere compilation of facts--draw from the impressions and reactions of those who have lived through the Russian Revolution, who have shared the misery and travail of the people, and who actually participated in or witnessed the tragic panorama in its daily unfoldment.

While in Russia I had no clear idea how much had already been written on the subject of the Russian Revolution. But the few books which reached me occasionally impressed me as most inadequate. They were written by people with no first-hand knowledge of the situation and were sadly superficial. Some of the writers had spent from two weeks to two months in Russia, did not know the language of the country, and in most instances were chaperoned by official guides and interpreters. I do not refer here to the writers who, in and out of Russia, play the role of Bolshevik court functionaries. They are a class apart. With them I deal in the chapter on the "Travelling Salesmen of the Revolution." Here I have in mind the sincere friends of the Russian Revolution. The work of most of them has resulted in incalculable confusion and mischief. They have helped to perpetuate the myth that the Bolshevik and the Revolution are synonymous. Yet nothing is further from the truth.

The actual Russian Revolution took place in the summer months of 1917. During that period the peasants possessed themselves of the land, the workers of the factories, thus demonstrating that they knew well the meaning of social revolution. The October change was the finishing touch to the work begun six months previously. In the great uprising the Bolshevik assumed the voice of the people. They clothed themselves with the agrarian programme of the Social Revolutionists and the industrial tactics of the Anarchists. But after the high tide of revolutionary enthusiasm had carried them into power, the Bolshevik discarded their false plumes. It was then that began the spiritual separation between the Bolshevik and the Russian Revolution. With each succeeding day the gap grew wider, their interests more conflicting. To-day it is no exaggeration to state that the Bolshevik stand as the arch enemies of the Russian Revolution.

Superstitions die hard. In the case of this modern superstition the process is doubly hard because various factors have combined to administer artificial respiration. International intervention, the blockade, and the very efficient world propaganda of the Communist Party have kept the Bolshevik myth alive. Even the terrible famine is being exploited to that end.

How powerful a hold that superstition wields I realize from my own experience. I had always known that the Bolshevik are Marxists. For thirty years I fought the Marxian theory as a cold, mechanistic, enslaving formula. In pamphlets, lectures and debates I argued against it. I was therefore not unaware of what might be expected from the Bolshevik. But the Allied attack upon them made them the symbol of the Russian Revolution, and brought me to their defense.

From November, 1917, until February, 1918, while out on bail for my attitude against the war, I toured America in defense of the Bolshevik. I published a pamphlet in elucidation of the Russian Revolution and in justification of the Bolshevik. I defended them as embodying *in practice* the spirit of the revolution, in spite of their theoretic Marxism. My attitude toward them at that time is characterized in the following passages from my pamphlet, "The Truth About the Bolshevik:"*

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, Tschaikovsky are denying these tactics and falling into Marxian reasoning, which they had all their lives repudiated as "German metaphysics."

The Bolshevik 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 Bolshevik of 1917 no longer believe in the predestined function of the bourgeoisie. They have been swept forward on the waves of Bakunin; namely, that once the masses become conscious of their economic power, they make their own history and need not be bound by traditions and processes of a dead past which, like secret treaties, are made at a round table and are not dictated by life itself.

*Mother Earth Publishing Association, New York, February, 1917.

In 1918, Madame Breshkovsky visited the United States and began her campaign against the Bolshevik. I was then in the Missouri Penitentiary. Grieved and shocked by the work of the "Little Grandmother of the Russian Revolution," I wrote imploring her to bethink herself and not betray the cause she had given her life to. On that occasion I emphasized the fact that while neither of us agreed with the Bolshevik in theory, we should yet be one with them in defending the Revolution.

When the Courts of the State of New York upheld the fraudulent methods by which I was disfranchised and my American citizenship of thirty-two years denied me, I waived my right of appeal in order that I might return to Russia and help in the great work. I believed fervently that the Bolshevik were furthering the Revolution and exerting themselves in behalf of the people. I clung to my faith and belief for more than a year after my coming to Russia.

Observation and study, extensive travel through various parts of the country, meeting with every shade of political opinion and every variety of friend and enemy of the Bolshevik--all convinced me of the ghastly delusion which had been foisted upon the world.

I refer to these circumstances to indicate that my change of mind and heart was a painful and difficult process, and that my final decision to speak out is for the sole reason that the people everywhere may learn to differentiate between the Bolshevik and the Russian Revolution.

The conventional conception of gratitude is that one must not be critical of those who have shown him kindness. Thanks to this notion parents enslave their children more effectively than by brutal treatment; and by it friends tyrannize over one another. In fact, all human relationships are to-day vitiated by this noxious idea.

Some people have upbraided me for my critical attitude toward the Bolshevik. "How ungrateful to attack the Communist Government after the hospitality and kindness she enjoyed in Russia!" they indignantly exclaim. I do not mean to gainsay that I have received advantages while I was in Russia. I could have received many more had I been willing to serve the powers that be. It is that very circumstance which has made it bitterly hard for me to speak out against the evils as I saw them day by day. But finally I realized that silence is indeed a sign of consent. Not to cry out against the betrayal of the Russian Revolution would have made me a party to that betrayal. The Revolution and the welfare of the masses in and out of Russia are by far too important to me to allow any personal consideration for the Communists I have met and learned to respect to obscure my sense of justice and to cause me to refrain from giving to the world my two years' experience in Russia.

In certain quarters objections will no doubt be raised because I have given no names of the persons I am quoting. Some may even exploit the fact to discredit my veracity. But I prefer to face that rather than to turn anyone over to the tender mercies of the Tcheka, which would inevitably result were I to divulge the names of the Communists or non-Communists who felt free to speak to me. Those familiar with the real situation in Russia and who are not under the mesmeric influence of the Bolshevik superstition or in the employ of the Communists will bear me out that I have given a true picture. The rest of the world will learn in due time.

Friends whose opinion I value have been good enough to suggest that my quarrel with the Bolshevik is due to my social philosophy rather than to the failure of the Bolshevik régime. As an Anarchist, they claim, I would naturally insist on the importance of the individual and of personal liberty, but in the revolutionary period both must be subordinated to the good of the whole. Other friends point out that destruction, violence, and terrorism are inevitable factors in a revolution. As a revolutionist, they say, I cannot consistently object to the violence practised by the Bolshevik.

Both these criticisms would be justified had I come to Russia expecting to find Anarchism realized, or if I were to maintain that revolutions can be made peacefully. Anarchism to me never was a mechanistic arrangement of social relationships to be imposed upon man by political scene-shifting or by a transfer of power from one social class to another. Anarchism to me was and is the child, not of destruction, but of construction--the result of growth and development of the conscious creative social efforts of a regenerated people. I do not therefore expect Anarchism to follow in the immediate footsteps of centuries of despotism and submission. And I certainly did not expect to see it ushered in by the Marxian theory.

I did, however, hope to find in Russia at least the beginnings of the social changes for which the Revolution had been fought. Not the fate of the individual was my main concern as a revolutionist. I should have been content if the Russian workers and peasants as a whole had derived essential social betterment as a result of the Bolshevik régime.

Two years of earnest study, investigation, and research convinced me that the great benefits brought to the Russian people by Bolshevism exist only on paper, painted in glowing colours to the masses of Europe

and America by efficient Bolshevik propaganda. As advertising wizards the Bolshevik excel anything the world had ever known before. But in reality the Russian people have gained nothing from the Bolshevik experiment. To be sure, the peasants have the land; not by the grace of the Bolshevik, but through their own direct efforts, set in motion long before the October change. That the peasants were able to retain the land is due mostly to the static Slav tenacity; owing to the circumstance that they form by far the largest part of the population and are deeply rooted in the soil, they could not as easily be torn away from it as the workers from their means of production.

The Russian workers, like the peasants, also employed direct action. They possessed themselves of the factories, organized their own shop committees, and were virtually in control of the economic life of Russia. But soon they were stripped of their power and placed under the industrial yoke of the Bolshevik State. Chattel slavery became the lot of the Russian proletariat. It was suppressed and exploited in the name of something which was later to bring it comfort, light, and warmth. Try as I might I could find nowhere any evidence of benefits received either by the workers or the peasants from the Bolshevik régime.

On the other hand, I did find the revolutionary faith of the people broken, the spirit of solidarity crushed, the meaning of comradeship and mutual helpfulness distorted. One must have lived in Russia, close to the everyday affairs of the people; one must have seen and felt their utter disillusionment and despair to appreciate fully the disintegrating effect of the Bolshevik principle and methods--disintegrating all that was once the pride and the glory of revolutionary Russia.

The argument that destruction and terror are part of revolution I do not dispute. I know that in the past every great political and social change necessitated violence. America might still be under the British yoke but for the heroic colonists who dared to oppose British tyranny by force of arms. Black slavery might still be a legalized institution in the United States but for the militant spirit of the John Browns. I have never denied that violence is inevitable, nor do I gainsay it now. Yet it is one thing to employ violence in combat, as a means of defense. It is quite another thing to make a principle of terrorism, to institutionalize it, to assign it the most vital place in the social struggle. Such terrorism begets counter-revolution and in turn itself becomes counter-revolutionary.

Rarely has a revolution been fought with as little violence as the Russian Revolution. Nor would have Red Terror followed had the people and the cultural forces remained in control of the Revolution. This was demonstrated by the spirit of fellowship and solidarity which prevailed throughout Russia during the first months after the October revolution. But an insignificant minority bent on creating an absolute State is necessarily driven to oppression and terrorism.

There is another objection to my criticism on the part of the Communists. Russia is on strike, they say, and it is unethical for a revolutionist to side against the workers when they are striking against their masters. That is pure demagoguery practised by the Bolshevik to silence criticism.

It is not true that the Russian people are on strike. On the contrary, the truth of the matter is that the Russian people have been *locked out* and that the Bolshevik State--even as the bourgeois industrial master--uses the sword and the gun to keep the people out. In the case of the Bolshevik this tyranny is masked by a world-stirring slogan: thus they have succeeded in blinding the masses. Just because I am a revolutionist I refuse to side with the master class, which in Russia is called the Communist Party.

Till the end of my days my place shall be with the disinherited and oppressed. It is immaterial to me whether Tyranny rules in the Kremlin or in any other seat of the mighty. I could do nothing for suffering Russia while in that country. Perhaps I can do something now by pointing out the lessons of the Russian

experience. Not my concern for the Russian people only has prompted the writing of this volume: it is my interest in the masses everywhere.

EMMA GOLDMAN.
Berlin, July, 1922.