

New Documents on the Bolshevik Revolution

THE BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION — 1917-1918, by James Bunyan and H. H. Fisher. Stanford University Press, Stanford University, California—Hoover War Library Publications. 735 page, \$6.00.

THIS is without doubt one of the important books published in the United States on the Russian Revolution. Excepting the authorized and official publication of original documents, especially Lenin's *Works*, by the International Publishers, there has been, up till now, no attempt at a documentary history of the Russian Revolution published in the United States.

Such an attempt is made here. It is a serious, and in some ways, a thorough work. Albert Rhys Williams, one of the active participants in the Russian Revolution, told this writer that in reading Professor Fisher's book he had, at various times, a feeling that he was again in the midst of the events with all the atmosphere of their drama, cross-currents, controversy and struggle.

Unfortunately for the value of their history, however, the authors are clearly not

Marxists. Also, unfortunately, they show a strong bias in favor of bourgeois and more specifically, Kerensky rule.

The book is a collection of official speeches and documents, arranged in chronological order, with narration by the authors in between, so that it presents a running and connected story. The strong bourgeois prejudices of the authors are most evident in their own comment and description of events. But it is also evident in their choice of documents and in their manner of abridging them.

The outstanding illustration is the presentation of the facts surrounding the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly.

Students of the Russian Revolution will remember that from February till November, there were really two ruling bodies in Russia. There was the Provisional Government in control, which had been elected in the typical bourgeois manner, with all sorts of limiting rules and laws as to who had the right to vote, the division of constituencies on the basis of territory and the resultant larger representation to bourgeois

residential districts as against working-class residential districts. Also, there were the Soviets, which were democratically elected bodies without limitation, but based upon places of work so that the weight of strength in the elections rested with the useful members of society, the wage-earners, small farmers, etc.

These two bodies were in constant conflict with one another. The Councils of Soviets gained strength constantly, to the measure that the Duma was at no time able to carry through such acts as would satisfy the needs of the masses of people, particularly the ending of the war, the seizure of the land, and the supplying of food to the masses. The whole course of the history of the Russian Revolution was such that by November, the struggle of those elements who particularly benefited by the continued existence and functioning of the Duma, was in reality a struggle to continue a body in power which showed itself to be both incapable and unwilling to end the war and carry through the other measures so necessary for the interests of the people. And

against this, the struggle to give *all power to the Soviets*, was a struggle to carry through these measures. The seizure of power by the workers and peasants under the leadership of the Bolsheviks, was nothing more nor less than the form in which the masses insured that these desperate needs that they had would be satisfied.

Professors Bunyan and Fisher, however, although supplying much valuable material surrounding this basic struggle, miss its essential character. They argue like bourgeois attorneys against the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly. They say

The opponents of the Bolsheviks, possessing a majority of the elected representatives to the assembly, strove to rally public opinion to uphold the expressed will of the nation, against the Bolshevik dictatorship.

Did the Constituent Assembly represent the "expressed will of the nation" as the enemies of the Bolsheviks claimed?

The total vote cast in the elections to the Constituent Assembly was 36,262,566. This was out of a total of about 170,000,000 people. How undemocratic such an election is, which includes a comparatively few number of voters, can be seen from the fact that in the Soviet elections this year, for example, 90,000,000 people will cast their votes. Thus, the numbers voting in the elections to the Constituent Assembly represented a little better than twenty percent of the population. A majority for the controlling group amounts to about eleven percent.

The numbers voting for the Soviets today represents almost sixty percent. And if at all, because of the issues at stake, and the great conflict in the elections, there would be more reason for a bigger vote in the elections to the Constituent Assembly in 1917 than there would be today, where the will of the people is very clear to the whole world even before the elections.

But to emphasize the fact that this Constituent Assembly did not represent "the expressed will of the nation" we can point to the following facts:

Events and the state of mind of the nation travelled at a tremendously increased pace in those crucial months prior to the November 7th Revolution. The choosing of candidates, and the voting to the Constituent Assembly took place *weeks before* the seizure of power on November 7th by the Bolsheviks and their followers.

In the time elapsing between the elections to the Constituent Assembly and the seizure of power, the state of mind of the entire nation underwent a profound change in their attitude towards various political programs and parties. This is very clearly shown in the fact that where the Bolsheviks were a minority, in the municipal elections in the main cities in September, they won a majority in November. Let us give the figures of elections in Petrograd, contrasting these two months, showing that this is so.

Parties	Sept. 2	Nov. 25
Social-Revolutionaries	205,665	149,644
Bolsheviks	183,694	415,587
Constitutional Democrats..	114,485	245,628
All Others.....	45,534	117,495

Clearly the desires of the masses in December, when the Constituent Assembly was to meet, were not the same as in September and October, when they were elected.

Therefore, when Professors Bunyan and Fisher try to present the facts to give the impression that the Bolsheviks had immorally violated the will of the nation, they do so either out of a desire to have continued Kerensky's bourgeois distatorship under a pseudo-democratic mask, or because they do not understand the essential class nature of government.

The pro-Kerensky bias of the authors shows itself in many other instances. For example, when they reported the assassination of General Dukhonin, Commander-in-Chief of the Army (who refused to carry out the instructions to begin negotiations for the end of the war) by his own soldiers, the book says that "he was murdered" and goes to considerable pains to prove Bolshevik complicity.

But the attacks on the Bolsheviks are reported in quite a different tone. For example: "Colonel Drozdovsky . . . arrived in time to take part in the expulsion of Red Forces." How this expulsion was carried through, one can see by reading the diary of Colonel Drozdovsky . . . who says "The mounted platoon entered the village, met the Bolshevik Committee, and put the members to death."

In reporting the introduction of Lenin's famous Thesis of April 4, 1917, where he proposed certain measures to give the Soviet government a breathing spell to consolidate its strength before moving forward further, Professor Fisher explains the reason for this breathing spell as follows:

The extension and stabilization of Soviet power did not contribute much to bringing order out of the chaos induced in economic life by the revolutionary upheaval; it did not produce jobs for the hungry unemployed workers, whose numbers rapidly grew.

Mr. Fisher left out (was it by accident?) that the Soviet government was being attacked by the very allies with whom the Czar had made alliances, and was not allowed an opportunity to establish its economic organism on a functioning basis. But what kind of an historian is Professor Fisher when he says that the "chaos" that existed was induced (not by the Czar's policies, not by the imperialist war, not by the decay and degeneration of the capitalist system but) by "the revolutionary upheaval." This is distortion for purposes of capitalist propaganda, not objective history.

Despite all the short comings of the book, however, students of the Russian Revolution and of all revolutions, will read it with great interest. Many speeches and documents, hitherto unpublished in the United States, are contained. The speeches of Lenin, including some of the greatest of his revolutionary career, are included here. Their simplicity and profound understanding, and their devastating effect upon bourgeois logic, impresses itself forever upon the readers. In his speech on the world-famous April Thesis, for example, he discusses bourgeois and proletarian competition.

Among the absurdities which the bourgeoisie is eagerly spreading about Socialism is the statement that the socialists deny the importance of competition. In reality, however, socialism alone, in so far as it annihilates classes and consequently the enslavement of the masses, is able, for the first time, to pave the way to competition on a mass scale. . . .

Such simple and clear statements of some of the profoundest issues which have been the subject of polemics throughout the world, are numerous in the documents and speeches here re-printed. For this, students of history owe a debt of gratitude to the authors. We would urge that everyone who wishes to more thoroughly understand the Russian Revolution, should, while keeping in mind the limitations of the book imposed by the bourgeois bias of the authors, obtain and read it immediately.

SAM DARCY

The Unheard Voice

MODERN PROSE STYLE, by Bonamy Dobree. Oxford University Press. \$2.75.

MR. DOBREE does not answer the question of what is modern prose style, but his book is well worth reading for some other questions it raises and for some ideas that he presents, in somewhat unfinished form, so that they invite thinking about and discussion.

His definition of style is, to me, unsatisfactory, as is his estimate of its importance. Style to him is the "voice" of the writer, and the details of the definition are adjusted to this metaphor. He does not, however, follow the implications of the metaphor in assigning style

its place in literature, for, whereas an unpleasing voice may be a negligible disadvantage in a man, an unpleasing style, according to Mr. Dobree, is disastrous in a writer. Mr. Dobree in fact, assumes that all good writers have good styles, which would be like saying, in his own terms, that all good men have good voices.

Not only individual writers have their own voices, but each literary period has its own voice. The further we are from the voice of our own time, the less intelligible is the voice we hear. For Chaucer we need an apparatus of glossaries and notes which make reading burdensome, but we deceive ourselves