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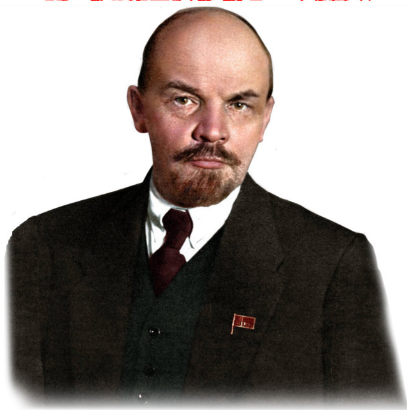
LENINE AND HIS SOVIETS—A FRIENDLY VIEW



"AND when is the American revolution coming?"

This question, in excellent English, is said to be Lenine's first greeting to practically every American who succeeds in getting an audience with him. It is the question with which he greeted Washington D. Vanderlip, head of the financial syndicate whose report of a tremendous concession in Siberia stirred mixed amazement and incredulity in most parts of the civilized world. Mr. Vanderlip, according to his own chatty account of his Russian adventures published in the May issue of *Asia*, "The American Magazine of the Orient," found Lenine a very cheerful companion as well as an extremely astute business man. When Lenine had delivered his question as to the American revolution, "with a cordial smile," the writer smiled with equal cordiality, he says, and replied: "Not in a thousand years. And any Russians you send over there to make a revolution will be hanged to the nearest lamp-posts!" The dictator of the world's greatest empire and autocracy took the reply in good part and turned the conversation to another angle:

"I'm told that every American family has a motor-car. Is that so—every one?" I came back: "Everybody—or else an order for one in his pocket, backed by the country's prosperity." My interlocutor halted. "Tell me," he said slowly and seriously, "does anything in Soviet Russia seem good to you?" "Yes—many things," I replied. "And Americans, let me add, want the best wherever they find it. Whatever is good in Russia, we'll be the first to take. But we've got to be shown. We're from Missouri." At the last word he cocked his head. "Missouri! The Missouri River? What's that got to do with it?" He had pounced on the sole reference he didn't know. I explained the idiom and told him that, if he would understand us, he ought to know our slang at least as well as our geography.

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On his desk lay a copy of the New York *Times*, well thumbed. "Do you really read it?" I asked. "I read the New York *Times*, the Chicago *American*, and the Los Angeles *Times* regularly," he said. "Through the New York *Times* I keep track of the atrocities, the assassinations, and the new revolutions in Russia. Otherwise I shouldn't know where to find them. The Chicago *American* tells me what is going on in the Middle West. And the Los Angeles *Times*—oh, by the way, wasn't the office of that newspaper wrecked by dynamite some years before the European war? By friends of the McNamara brothers, labor agitators?" His pronunciation of the Irish name was correct, and so were his facts. I told him so. "And that paper is owned by one of the members of your syndicate, is it not?" I assented, and Lenine chuckled. "Well, now—that is amusing. I find your Mr. Chandler very refreshing. He writes that I am the bloodiest assassin the world has ever seen! Now I wonder"— his head went on his hand and an impish look appeared in his eyes, as if he saw a joke a long way off—"I wonder if, when this mess is all cleaned up and I visit Los Angeles on a trip I want to take around the world —I wonder if you couldn't arrange luncheon for me with Mr. Chandler? And— I say, would you invite Charlie Chaplin? I've always wanted to meet Charlie Chaplin. Doesn't he, too, live in Los Angeles?"

The attitude of the Russian people, especially of the aristocratic and intellectual classes, toward the Soviet Government is touched upon by the writer in a series of illuminating little incidents. Among the leaders of the Communists, about half of whom, we are told, were nobles under the old régime, there was plenty of disagreement about Russian politics, but none concerning "the fact that profound social changes have come to stay in Russia." Their sentiment toward meddling outsiders he explains by a quotation from "a charming and peppery aristocrat, for the last two years a responsible employee under the Soviets." This man said: "'My country, right or wrong!'—I believe it was an American who said that. Well, it is our motto now." Mr. Vanderlip continues:

A woman who became one of my translators was once the greatest heiress in Moscow. To-day she relies for a living on the workers' rations she gets, eked out by the 9,000 rubles a month that she earns at her post in the Foreign Office. The Soviet allows her and her mother four living-rooms in the packed office-building that was once her father's palace.

As for the community of hardship, the shares in the concern are as nearly equal, I believe, as they ever were in history. The Communists lead the fashion in threadbare wearing-apparel. If shabbiness is a

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pose maintained for political effect, it serves its purpose well; so far as I could judge, the Communists are men genuinely unconcerned with externals. They find something grimly humorous in their insufficient food and insufficient clothing It was only by strategy that I succeeded in bestowing a gift on Santeri Nuorteva. He had come from the Soviet Bureau in New York to his post in the Moscow Foreign Office with a trunk well filled with clothes, which he had promptly given away. We were traveling to Petrograd together and I noted the contrast between my boots and his, mine a $20 pair not long out of an American store conducted on sound capitalist principles (as I slyly reminded him), and his an ancient makeshift with heels gone and soles gaping. He had just finished proving rather brilliantly the certainty of the recovery of Russian industry after the resumption of Allied trade. Suddenly he leaned forward and stroked my boots. "Shall we ever again be able to buy things like those in Russia, I wonder?" he said, with the speculative leap that Russians are likely to take without warning, to any point of view on any subject. I began to unlace my boots. He looked alarmed. "Try them on and wear them if they fit," I said. "I have another pair and I'm leaving Russia, besides." He protested that his own were as good as he needed and better than his neighbors'. I walked to the car-window and dangled the American boots outside. "Either the next peasant who walks along the right of way gets them or you," I said. At that he wilted; his worn boots were really uncomfortable. "Wait," he said shyly. "I'll take them back to the Foreign Office and everybody there will match sore feet." Then he hesitated and added: "But there's one thing I bet I should appreciate more than any man in Russia. I've a tender skin and I've been spoiled by a year of ease in your damned capitalist civilization. Have you half a dozen safety-razor blades? I've used the same one for three months. It's agony." His eyes gleamed as I filled his hands with all the safety blades I had.

The young Communist in charge of the foreign guest house obeyed Soviet regulations more strictly, says the writer:

He was a Polish noble, with the sensitive face characteristic of the Pole, and he had taken to Communism like a religion. He loved its emphasis on an abstract idea, its ritual of phrases, its demand for asceticism. Guided by standards curiously and contradictorily derived from inherited instinct and acquired ideas and brute circumstance, the young fellow walked about in clothes that were—well, lamentable. A servant confided to me the state of his socks. I arrived at his room next morning with six new pairs from America. We had the usual embarrassing scene when one tries to do a favor to a Communist, but he finally accepted one pair. The others, he said, would go to the regional storehouse to be rationed out to other workers. He himself took them there.

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The peasant woman who had reported the condition of the commissar's feet arrived at the storehouse shortly afterward for her sock ration. The little woman had friends at home and evidently friends among the rationing clerks at the storehouse, too. For, one after another, five pairs of American socks appeared, I was glad to observe, on feet in our household.

H. G. Wells, the British novelist, was in Moscow during Mr. Vanderlip's stay there, using the visit as a basis for the extended articles upon "Russia in the Shadow," which were shortly afterward syndicated in this country and in England. We are given this rather amusing glimpse of the British writer and of his Russian researches:

H. G. Wells, like most of those who have talked with Lenine, was much imprest by his personality. Wells spent only thirty-six hours in Moscow, most of them in pacing his room in the Guest-House, awaiting the hoped-for interview with Lenine. Wells seemed to me that pathetic object—an Englishman out of reach of English comfort for several weeks. Moreover, he was disturbed by "rumors." "Get out of this country as speedily as you can," he said to me in private. "This town will be drenched in blood within a fortnight. I have inside information."

After Wells left, I forgot the warning. But three weeks later, when I asked the British Consul in Reval for a *visé* to England, that official was amazed that I had lived to quit Moscow. "What about the new revolution?" he cried. "Do you mean the revolution of October 18?" I had remembered the date of Wells's revolution, which proved to be the Consul's also. Thereupon, I got out my diary and read aloud the entry I had made for that day.

Here it is: "Walked from the Foreign Office to my home at 4 A.M., distance one and one-half miles. Met only two people. One was friendly guard on bridge below the Kremlin walls, drest entirely in American clothes. Asked, 'Where did you get them?' 'From our commissary across the Polish lines last summer.' What?' "Oh, when we needed things badly, our commander told us to go across the lines and take them. If the Poles wouldn't give them up, we just took them anyway. All the things I brought back were American.' I gave him some American cigarets. 'I'm all American now,' he said. Was very proud of his fine clothes and his brand-new repeater from America, this lad."

Afterward, this same youngster that was guarding the bridge on the night Moscow was to be drenched in blood invited me to wait to see the sunrise, "because it is so beautiful across the golden domes of the Kremlin." The Russian capital was, in point of fact, as peaceful as Sunday afternoon on the banks of the Wabash.

Mr. Vanderlip compliments the Russian negotiators on the "cleanness" of the whole negotiation, that is to say, on the absence of graft. He writes:

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None of the several score of men with whom I dealt had been privately and financially "encouraged" to yield to my demands; I had seen not one indication that any of them could be. I had done business very differently in the old Russia.

"Have you uprooted graft in Russia?" I asked.

The answer was a sketch of Soviet history confirmed by everything I saw or heard across the frontier. "As you know, the old régime was worm-eaten with graft," said the spokesman. "Up to a year ago we put men to death for stealing, and we imprisoned them for attempting to steal. Among responsible Communists, there has been for a year no instance of graft. Communists are still liable to the death sentence, under the rules of their party organization, not of the Soviet state. When non-Communist officials are convicted of theft in any form, to-day, they are imprisoned. But the habit of stealing is dying out; Russia has changed. We note by the American newspapers that you arrange things differently at home, as the recent airplane and Shipping-Board scandals bear witness. You judged your grafters not guilty. We shot ours."

It was an arrogant reply, but it had its point. And to drive the point home, the Russians were ready with a marked file of the American newspapers.

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