
The Practical Problems of Russia

by Santeri Nuorteva

Secretary of the Bureau of the Representative in the
United States of the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic

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You cannot solve the Russian problem by emotionalism. You cannot explain the situation there by passion. You cannot solve it by denunciation. You cannot understand Russia by telling that this man did so and so, and another did so and so; and if these men had not done so, or had not been there, everything would be different. The Russian problem is not so simple as that. I represent at this particular time the Bolshevik regime in



Russia. I am the secretary of the Russian Soviet Mission in the United States. What I have to say here may be taken as coming from that mission, and from the people over in Russia, because they have instructed me, through my chief [Ludwig Martens], who is the representative of the Russian Soviet Government in America, to present their cause before the American people.

[Land Question is Fundamental.]

I shall confine myself to pointing out just one outstanding fact in the Russian situation — namely, the land question. That has been the fundamental question in Russia for years and years. The peasants have made attempts to confiscate the land in Russia many, many times before the Soviet Revolution. If you have heard anything about revolutionary Russia, you have heard that peasant revolts have been the outstanding feature in Russia for the past 15 years, and long before that. The peasants never had enough land. The Tsar's Government was too reactionary to present a

solution of the land question, even in such forms as have been accepted by so-called liberal capitalism in Western Europe. I refer to such solutions as, for example, were reached in the Irish land question, where the landlords were bought out and the Irish peasants were placed in a position where they could somehow buy on installment payments the little patch of land they got.

The Tsar's Government was too reactionary to offer even such a solution. It stuck stubbornly to the old order for years and years, and when the day struck, when the peasants were in full physical control of the country, it was too late to offer such solutions. The peasants needed too much land and the finances of Russia were too disrupted to allow arrangements which would have been acceptable to capitalistic conceptions of society. If the land they took had been bought it would have required tens of billions of rubles, financing of a kind which Russia was unable to do, even if she had wanted to at that time. When the revolution came the army, which had been the chief weapon of keeping the peasants down, became the chief weapon in the hands of the peasants themselves. And so the peasants just took the land. They just took it — whether you like it or not. Whether you approve it or not, it doesn't matter, because you can't change it any more than you can change the course of the sun or the moon. It was, as diplomats say, a *"fait accompli"* — an accomplished fact, which could not be undone.

[Kerensky Regime Lacked Courage.]

Now, the Kerensky Government fell because it had not courage enough to deal with this fact as an accomplished fact. Nor did it dare to stand for the

consequences of that fact. Yet it just naturally led to many other things. If you annul the property rights on millions of acres of land, you thereby strike a death blow at the very foundations of capitalistic finance. Land is usually mortgaged. The value of papers in banks ultimately rest on land value. If you annul the mortgages, the banks are interrupted. The bankruptcy of the banks will influence the industrial and commercial life as a whole.

The question is, then: "What are you going to do about it?" Well, there were several theoretically possible courses in Russia. One would have been to oppress the peasants. That could not be done because of the fact that the peasants refused to allow themselves to be used to suppress themselves. Another proposition was — one which is being carried out in Russia even now, although with very little success — to get somebody else to suppress the peasants. Kolchak is trying to gather around him various armies of semi-savage tribes in Russia. It may be news to you, but I think it is very necessary that you should understand this news. The armies at the disposal of Kolchak, who are called Russian armies, are not Russian armies. His armies are composed of semi-savage nomadic tribes — Kalmyks, Bashkirs, etc., who have no interest in the land question, with a sprinkling of Old Regime officers. They are, however, not numerous enough to suppress that vast number of peasants. Then the Russian autocracy proposes another solution. They would like to have American boys to go over there and suppress the Russian peasants.

I want to emphasize that, even if there had been no Communist Party in Russia at the time of the March [1917] revolution, one would have been created to cope with the issues presented by the fact of the nationalization of land. The Bolsheviks are in power because they had courage enough to stand by that issue and to pursue a policy which was necessary. The fact that they, as Socialists, because of their social theories and their general program, were particularly interested in following such a program made them particularly fitted to take upon themselves the consequences of the nationalization of land. Those consequences were the nationalization of banks, industry, and so on, as far as it has been necessary and advantageous to them.

[Chaos Exists Worldwide.]

The main question, however, is the situation before us today. What is Russia? Chaos, you say. Oh, yes; chaos, certainly, to a certain extent. But where do you not have chaos in the world today? You have chaos elsewhere than in Russia.

Is there more chaos in Soviet Russia than in the rest of the world? I shall, however, call your attention to the testimony of an American who cannot be accused of bias toward Bolshevism — William Allen White, who was selected by the President of the United States as one of the representatives at the Princes Island [Prinkipo] conference, which never took place. He wrote in the *New York World* that the Soviet government of Russia is the only stable government on the European continent east of the Rhine. Fred Hunt, quite a conservative correspondent of the *Chicago Tribune*, who is now in Soviet Russia, wires to his paper that there is more order in Soviet Russia than he has seen for a long time anywhere in Europe. You see, the public has certain notions about the Bolsheviks. The average American public always mix anarchy and Bolshevism. Now, the fact is that the Communist Party, which is popularly called the Bolshevik Party, is absolutely anti-anarchistic.

Terror in Russia, you say. Why, yes, Colonel [Raymond] Robins gave you an explanation of that. I wouldn't like myself to see a single life taken if it could be avoided. But I ask you in all fairness, if you speak of the "Red Terror," which, according to official figures, has taken by executions, or, if you please, murder, about 3,000 lives during the past year, why don't you speak about the other terror that exists in other places? In little Finland alone, where I come from, the anti-Socialist forces, the so-called White Guard, together with the Germans, after the civil war was over, deliberately executed 10,000 men and women, and deliberately starved 10,000 more to death within a period of a few months, and they admit it themselves. In the daily press you read the boasting reports of the Kolchak regime. Yet Kolchak himself boasts of the fact that whenever he is able to get hold of a village or town where the Bolsheviks have been in power, he executes "as bandits" everyone who belongs to the Soviet government. They execute as "murderers and looters" all the prisoners they take. I ask whether one life is not as good as

another. If you countenance the terror, tenfold more cruel and extensive, which is being perpetrated by the opponents of the Bolsheviki, is it not sheer hypocrisy to speak about the terror that is perpetrated by the Bolsheviki?

Speaking of the terror, I want to say in addition this, based on official statistics: Out of the 3,000 persons executive in Soviet Russia during the past year, more than 50 percent were executed for looting and for street robbery, for thievery, for dishonesty. The rest of them were executed because they were found red-handed with arms in their hands trying to overthrow the existing government in Russia and to murder their officials.

I shall not presume to suggest to you policies in this country, but I want to ask you: If your country were attacked from all sides by forces invading your country for the purpose of overthrowing the government, and if at the same time there were considerable numbers of people within this country doing all they could to help those invaders, don't you think there would be some kind of a stern rule here?

[Censorship Prevents Sound Judgment.]

The Russian Soviet Government is absolutely incapable of constructive action, we have been told. I venture to say that the American public is not in a position to pass judgment on this question, because they have been systematically prevented from getting news about the constructive work which is being done in Russia. A correspondent of a very important news association, who by no means is a Socialist, admitted to me himself that he left Russia not because the Bolsheviki kicked him out, but because it was impossible for him to send dispatches, as some outside forces prevented him from sending them. He said that 95 percent of all his telegrams were held up, and especially were such telegrams held up which said a single word about the constructive work which is being done in Russia.

You get all kinds of news purely of a negative character. Now, again, I want to appeal to your own experience. If you were cut away from the rest of the world, you Americans here, and somebody outside of America would take upon himself to distribute through the cables any silly, foolish things which might have

been done by some individual, or might not, and news of everything else was prevented from coming out of America, what do you think the people outside of America would think of you? Now, the people of Russia are very much in that same position. I shall not burden you with statistics. But I am ready at any time to present official statistics of the industrial departments of the Russian Soviet Government, which will prove that in spite of the tremendous obstacles — isolation and everything — the Russian industries are running and that their output has been steadily increasing since April of last year [1918]. I shall be able to prove that the educational system in Russia has been reorganized on an extensive basis, unheard of in Russia before, that tens of thousands of new schools have been established, and that treasures of art and music which never reached the people before are now at the asking of anybody in Russia.

There is one thing which I would like to avoid more than anything else. I would like to avoid exaggeration. I don't want to tell you that in Russia there are idealistic conditions. How could there be? But again, I will ask you one thing — if any country in the world, excepting, perhaps, the United States, which is economically self-sustaining, if any country in the world would be economically cut off from the rest of the world for 17 months, as Russia has been, what do you think would happen there economically? Russia always depended for imports from abroad. How do you expect that Russia now, after 5 years of war and revolution, could have ideal economic conditions with the world deliberately keeping away from Russia every screw, every nail, every little cog wheel of a machine in every little thing which every civilized country may need?

[Counterrevolutionary Victory Means Bloodbath.]

Is there no solution of this situation? A solution has been offered. There was a distinguished gentleman, representing the old order in Russia, who said that we should support the monarchists; you should have sentiment for Russia; we should support Kolchak. Well, it is all good and well. I understand his recommendation very well, but there is one thing I can't understand. I can't understand how anyone may

present a solution of this kind and in that same speech speak with horror about the “terror” of the Bolsheviki. Don’t you understand that if the Kolchaks ever come into power in Russia, they will come into power over the bodies, not of 3 or 4 or 5 thousand, but over the bodies of 5, 6, or 700 thousand men? You will have an orgy of bloodshed which you never have had in the world before. Don’t you understand that it will mean fighting in each and every village in Russia, that it will mean fighting in each and every house in Russia? Don’t you understand that if the Kolchaks are to put down that organization of the workingmen which has been established, they will have bloodshed for years and years to come, and when that bloodshed is ended they will have, at all events, a Soviet Republic?

It has been said repeatedly that America does not want to mix into the internal affairs of Russia. It has been said officially by American representatives that you will not undertake to dictate to the Russian people what kind of a government they shall have. You have said over and over gains that you want to help the Russian people. Now, there is a way to help. I shall accept Colonel Robins’ and Major Thatcher’s challenge.

I shall admit, and by admitting it I am expressing thoughts of my chiefs over in Moscow, that we know very well that the Russian government can succeed only in as far as it is economically sound. We know that we can maintain our power and the structure of society which is in Russia today only in as far as we are able to deal with the realities of life. We are ready to take upon ourselves the responsibility of responsible relations with other countries. Does American have the courage to let us try to bear those responsibilities?

[Trade Relations Desired.]

I spoke not very long ago to a prominent man representing American industrial life. I told him that it is a race between your order of production and our order of production in Russia, and we will not succeed unless we can prove that the system we represent in Russia under given conditions is economically efficient.

A gentleman has spoken in somewhat disparaging tone about our attempts to “bribe the American

businessmen” by promising them \$200 million. He said that we are playing on the avidity of the American businessman, and he was very sorry to admit that some of the American businessmen have fallen for our charms. Now, although I am a Bolshevik, I shall not be as discourteous toward the American businessman as he was. I shall not accuse him of individual avidity. Yet I want you to know that, in spite of the vilification directed against us, and in spite of all warnings issued, there are more than 1550 responsible manufacturers in the United States today who have in black and white expressed their desire to enter into trade relations with Soviet Russia at once, without hesitation. I do not ascribe this to their avidity. I ascribe it to their common sense.

You cannot isolate Russia in the way it has been isolated up to now. You may do so, perhaps, for a year or two, but isolation of this kind is a boomerang in the final account. It will hurt you as well as it hurts us. There is just one thing we are asking for — trade relations and cessation of intervention.

It has been said that if the Allied troops are withdrawn from Russia there will be a general massacre of all those in favor of intervention. This story has been printed over and over hundreds of times, but none of the big American newspapers has ever printed the fact that the Russian government has repeatedly offered that which Colonel Robins said that which you should demand, namely, to give absolute amnesty to everyone who has participated in any struggle against Russia. So you don’t have to worry about those who have been helping the interventionists. The Russians are not out for scalps for the sake of scalps.

[A Plea for Common Sense.]

I don’t ask you to love us. I don’t ask the American public to do away with their prejudices against the theories Russia represents. Why should I? I will not attempt to tell you that we are in accord with American ideals. I would be a hypocrite if I did so. We represent there a different social order. But it is our business, not yours. Every time a newspaper reporter comes to my office, he asks me, “Now, Mr. Nuorteva, are you not here to overthrow this our government?” I answer him usually, “Sir, I do not want to insult you, but you are doing so yourself. Do you really believe

that one or two individuals coming to America from Russia have such supernatural powers that you would be ready to change your government just because we asked you? And we have not asked. Why, it would be an insult to you to suppose something of that kind.”

In every country the social institutions are such as the historic and economic development of that country has created. In every country the future evolution will be such as the economic conditions will determine. We grant that.

But I want to say this: Unwarranted accusations of attempts to overthrow the American government come with pretty bad grace when American newspapers are full of attempts to overthrow the Russian government, and when the whole world policy is directed into an attempt to overthrow the Russian government.

There is too much insincerity in world diplomacy today. Lloyd George said in his speech before the Commons that he never heard about the peace proposition that Lenin had sent with William Bullitt from Moscow to Paris, yet a New York magazine says that Lloyd George had lunch with Bullitt the very next day after Bullitt returned from Moscow. Now, Lloyd George was formally right. He never received an official presentation of that document. No one came to him, clad in the official garb of a diplomatic servant, with the usual formula, “I hereby have the honor to present to your excellency this and that.” Yet he knew all about it.

Now, is it not time already to do away with that insincere, hypocritical structure of diplomatic formalities that have been built up during hundreds of years? They may be in themselves a funny thing, if you have enough sense of humor to see it; but it becomes a criminal tragedy when such formalities stand in the way of sensible people getting together and talking common sense, in order to stop murder and starvation.

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