

An Ominous Anniversary

(Editor's Note: Dr. Hujer is Professor of Astronomy and Physics at the University of Chattanooga.)

By KAREL HUJER

In Leningrad's historical center we could not miss the Place of the Synod near the Nova river. It is connected by an archway over Krasnaya Street with the Senate, seat of the highest law courts under the tsars. Half a century ago a story circulated in Bohemia about a significant session held in this same Palace early in 1917, in Russia's fourth year of war. At their gathering in the then imperial city of Petrograd, the Supreme Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church leisurely deliberated over what ornates were to be worn during the forthcoming sumptuous Easter rituals. The Bolshevik revolution was soon to follow, unleashing its unspeakable fury and converting the city into a lawless bedlam, with the weakling tsar Nicholas abdicating on the very Ides of March. Many wondered how the church prelates, in their very aloofness from the masses, could be so blinded to the sizzling explosiveness of the streets of the capital of All-Russia. That same year the church fathers themselves were destined to be swept aside.

Meanwhile, in Switzerland a relatively little-known group of Russian exiles and revolutionary utopists intently watched events in their homeland. One, a poverty oppressed small, stocky man with a reddish goatee, impatiently paced the floor of his single small room in Zurich which he and his wife, Krupskaya, had rented from a shoemaker, Kammerer. This man was obsessed with one thought — how to return to Russia as quickly as possible. Again, strange rumors reached Bohemia in April of the same historic year. The German High Command had sent a certain Lenin, in a sealed train car, through Germany via Sweden to Russia. The bargain was Lenin's promise to foment a revolution in Russia so Germany could place all its military weight on the stagnant Western front before an American military build-up. Where the scheming generals in the German High Command then aware that thus they shaped the destiny not only of a divided Germany in the middle of the twentieth century, but of the entire course of world history?

* * *

Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, who chose the name Lenin, reached the Finland Station in Petrograd on April 17, 1917. By Lenin's setting foot on his native soil, the Russian festering masses and crumbling armies obtained an injection from an unpredictable, ruthless, non-human fanatic, a scientific Marxist genius. For better or worse, Russia with its one-sixth world land area and ultimately the entire world was to be ushered into

a new fateful phase of history. No political doctrine, no religious creed, no conqueror, has so affected the destiny of the world in the short span of the subsequent half century as the few incidents after Lenin's arrival in Petrograd on that fateful day in April, 1917. Within 48 hours following that tedious journey through Germany, Lenin appeared on a balcony on Gorki Street near the same Finland Station and delivered the first of his countless dogmatic and demagogic samples of his hypnotizing oratory to the roaring mob. This villa of a former bourgeois has become a shrine, as indicated by a plaque.

* * *

Lenin's return to Petrograd after years of wandering precipitated a swift course of events. He found the capital steaming with power of the provisional government of Kerensky. From the first, Lenin opposed it most fanatically as a tsarist regime in disguise, another capitalist conspiracy to betray the Russian proletariat. He had his own plan — the supreme and exclusive rule of the Bolsheviks. He pressed impatiently his own revolution against the provisional government. "Destroy everything" was his repetitious gospel and "only on the ruins can we build our temple." Through the summer of 1917 he once again escaped to Finland, yet in early autumn, though warned against it by the Communist Central Committee, he returned to Petrograd to unleash his own revolution and bring the climax of pandemonium. The Communist Military Revolution Committee seized the immense Smolny Convent, a former educational institute for aristocratic girls, which became the first headquarters of communist rule in Russia before it moved to Moscow's historical Kremlin. Only after the November seizure of complete power did Lenin remove his wig and give up his disguise of travelling salesman.

The last menace to communist complete power still remained — the Constituent Assembly. For almost a century Russians had dreamed of the day when this body of people's delegates would become the ruling power. With a ruse in his sheltered Smolny Convent, Lenin feigned full protection for the Constituent Assembly. Yet from the very day of the November putsch, the Assembly became a nightmare for the Bolsheviks. No means were too base to destroy this true embryonic Russian democracy. First, Bolsheviks desperately tried to prevent deputies from reaching Petrograd as they drifted into the capital from all parts of Russia, endangering their own lives by coming. Following the November violence, communists finally had to yield and the Constituent Assembly set its first session for January 18, 1918 at Tauride Pal-

ace, seat of the Assembly, which became an armed camp. It was located precariously close to Smolny Convent. Under pretense of protection, deputies approached Tauride Palace but were harassed by Red Guards, frantic Lettish sharpshooters who took orders only from Lenin. They even crowded the galleries of the hall during the session. In this tense atmosphere, Shvetsov showed unprecedented courage declaring the Constituent Assembly opened, with rifles of Red Guards aimed at him. It was the first and last session of the Assembly. Democracy was killed that day in Russia.

* * *

The brute force of the Chuvash Tartar heritage in Lenin's blood indicated that not modern progressive ideas of a council of goodwill but another Genghis Khan and Tamerlane had crushed the gathering, with tyranny and the guillotine triumphant. Trotsky, closest companion of Lenin, had organized the clever military maneuvers in the streets of Petrograd and had shouted to the assembled deputies "You belong to the dustbin of history." He, too, was unaware of symptoms of events to come. Not only was every deputy who dared attend this only session of the democratic assembly eventually liquidated by the dreaded Cheka, but the revolution continued to devour its own children. Stalin, a logical and inevitable product of Lenin, apprehended not only Trotsky, heir apparent of Lenin, but liquidated every member of the original Lenin entourage in the relentless and merciless struggle for power, so characteristic of centuries of Kremlin history.

* * *

What is the lesson of history in this vast issue? It is true the Supreme Synod of Church Fathers was a petrified and formalized institution that lacked the vision of the swift current of the day. But the Easter Resurrection it planned to celebrate recalls another Revolutionary who had allowed himself to be helplessly crucified between two thieves. There was no triumph here as crucifixion was a customary Roman punishment introduced from Carthage. On the other hand, many victorious revolutions and empires have come and gone since the frustration at Golgotha and, given time, the scarlet porphyry mausoleum on Red Square which conceals countless tortured and agonizing victims of this dehumanized system will likewise be relegated to the "dustbin of history." Yet, the revolution of the Least Revolutionary who said: "Resist ye not evil but overcome evil with good," who died on Calvary, will never be erased from man's history. The magnitude of this "revolution of souls, not of fists" will remain man's dream for eternity. This ominous fiftieth anniversary reaffirms that no ultimate good is achieved by the use of force.

CHATTANOOGA TIMES - MONDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 1967