

Involuntary Admissions on Russia from Bertrand Russell

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Unpublished, *circa* Summer 2007

I found Bertrand Russell's *The Theory and Practice of Bolshevism* in a local used bookstore. I wondered if it was worth buying, but based on the savant's name alone, I decided to part with my dollar. The book itself is laughable: Russell, though a genius mathematically, was little more than retarded in nearly every other area of life, an opinion that is not my own, but one shared by his long-suffering wife (cf. Paul Johnson's *Intellectuals*). The book reads like a western useful idiot, full of fashionable slogans, but, due to his naive honesty, seems rather perplexed by the fact that these slogans, popular in England, have no bearing on Russian reality. He could not make the conceptual connection between English reality as distinct from the Russian.

The book was published in 1920, and is based on a lengthy visit to Russia. These visits were organized intellectual hypocrisy. Any group of British leftists were shown a Potemkin village of Russia after the "revolution." They knew it was not real, but their desire was such so as to override their reason. In other words, it was a propaganda trip, one engaged in regularly by the fashion-plates at Yale, Harvard and Oxford after the revolution. Who foot the bill for this lengthy and expensive trip is left unexplained. A simple innocent omission, of course. Traditionally, the Old Money foundations such as Rockefeller or Morgan (or Rothschild in England) paid for these propaganda field trips. There is no reason to believe that is not the case here.

Russell, within this candid book, cannot help but completely relate his confusion, conceptual conflict and his sense of muddle as he was guided around Moscow and its environs. He starts out as an apologist of Bolshevism, and ends up rejecting it. He does this without fully realizing it. He was not so much dishonest as inexplicably innocent, accepting some vague form of socialism, a form of socialism seemingly bizarre coming from such a precise mathematical mind such as Russell's.

He dislikes Bolshevism for its authoritarianism, its violence and its extreme police measures. At the same time, he cannot help but attempt to rescue it from these accusations, blaming the war, etc., for Russia's ills. He is aware this is boilerplate rationalization, but he goes through the motions anyway. As a whole, the book comes off as a deeply confused clutter, a muddle that will haunt Russell for the rest of his career.

I have entitled this piece "involuntary admissions" because he is forced, due to his naive honesty in things political, to admit realities that had been argued by monarchists throughout the revolutionary period, and are still relevant today. I don't think he realizes these are royalist arguments, but, to the extent his naivete serves the cause, they are worth reprinting. One almost feels sorry for him, a brilliant mind so easily taken by an absurd ideology in a police regime. His innocence serves him well, since he rejects it with the naivete of a child.

Early on, he writes "If Bolshevism remains the only vigorous and effective competitor of capitalism, I believe that no form of socialism will be realized, but only chaos and destruction." (19) Soon after, he states with a similar sort of simplicity: "Western socialists who have visited Russia have seen fit to suppress the harsher features of the present regime, and have disseminated a belief among their followers that the millennium would be quickly realized there

if there were no war or blockade.” (20)

Two things should be noted here: first, the admission that American and British leftists were deliberately lying about the USSR in order to transform America into a copy of it is remarkable. Today, this is well-known. At the time, careers were made through this sort of deliberate lying. And second, that the American intellectual class between 1920 and 1990 were enamored with Bolshevism, all well-funded by the Rockefeller foundation. To this day, this confuses western writers. As Bolshevism might now seem a dinosaur, at the time, it was the latest elite, cocktail party fad. These facts alone show Marxism as an elite weapon, not the voice of “labor,” a group who suffered under Marx far more than under Smith.

“The exhaustion and misery caused by the unsuccessful war were necessary to the success of the Bolsheviks.” (22) No war, no revolution. This simple equation took this math genius years to finally grasp. A people exhausted by war, manipulated by foreign propaganda, is different from the faculty lounge scribblers’ notion of a people, ideologically motivated, rioting to install the British parliament in St. Petersburg.

“When a Russian communist speaks of dictatorship, he means the word literally, but when he speaks of the proletariat, he means the word in a Pickwickian sense.” (26) Bolshevism or socialism, as conceived by the pseudo-intellectuals in America has nothing to do with labor. It never has been even remotely associated with the working man. Socialism is about the state taking over all aspects of life, a state controlled by elite, big money organizations and a kept bureaucratic, intellectual class of peons, now empowered to make their silly theories a reality.

This is why the Rockefeller foundation controlled the entire career of the so-called Frankfurt school, financing their move to America, creating the New School for Social Research, and financing the “socialist” works of Herbert Marcuse and company. Why do Leftists never seem to be impressed by the fact that in the preface of all of Marcuse’s books, he thanks the Rockefeller foundation for their “generous support?”

“I never came across a Communist by chance: the people whom I met in the streets or in the villages, when I could get into a conversation with them, almost invariably said they were of no party. The only other answer I ever had was from some of the peasants, who openly stated they were Tsarists.” (42). Every book written by the faculty lounge scribblers talks of a population that wanted nothing to do with the tsar, and who wanted “democracy.” Of course, the very naive but honest Russell puts that myth to rest. This simple admission destroys the official narrative of the American historian. Keep in mind that these peasants were picked by the NKVD for their “reliability.” Yet even so, they reject the Bolshevik state when speaking with visitors.

“It is a singular fact that Tsarist rubles are worth ten times as much as Soviet rubles, and are much commoner in the country.” (ibid.) Why would this be the case? Russell does not offer an answer. This is far more convincing of the population’s support of Tsarism after the War than anything else I’ve seen. The monarchy had full control over the currency. The 19th century monetary reforms created a gold ruble that never shifted in value, even during the war. Western aid was the only thing keeping the USSR alive in the early years. It was capable of producing nothing but corpses.

“Under Kerensky there was a tendency for universal holiday, under the impression that freedom had removed the necessity for work.” (46) Interesting. This proves something I’ve always believed, that the revolutionaries simply lied to the population, promising them things they had no intention of keeping. They apparently were telling labor that they would not have to work in a socialist society. Their very slogan “Peace – Land – Bread” was a mockery. Soviets required constant violence to justify their police measures. They nationalized all land. This land

barely produced a tiny fraction of what it yielded under the Tsars.

Industrial conscription is, of course, rigidly enforced. . . . By proclaiming itself the friend of the proletariat, the government has been able to establish an iron discipline, beyond the wildest dreams of the most autocratic American magnate. . . . The Tolstoyans, of whom I saw the leaders, are obliged by their creed to resist every form of conscription, though some have found ways of compromising. (57)

In other words, in Bolshevik life, factory labor was forced to work by the state. I don't recall this as a part of Marx's plan – though he just may not have been telling the public everything. The “working class” was a myth in the worst sense: an abstraction without meaning, used to justify the destruction and humiliation of that very class. For 70 years, the American academic establishment bought it without much complaint.

“I became persuaded that Russia is not ready for any form of democracy and needs a strong government.” (65) Why was it that then the Tsars said this, they were called reactionaries? When Pobedonostsev said this, his words were called “chilling?”

“The Asiatic policy of the Russian government was adopted as a move against the British Empire and as a method of inducing the British government to make peace.” (68) Again, a very important admission about which Russell does not know the full import. Russian expansionism in the far East had nothing to do with “imperialism,” but rather was a way to check the predatory British empire.

The fact is that Russian expansionism, whether in Central Asia, the Caucasus, or anywhere else, was always contiguous to Russian borders. The empire was created, not for financial gain, as were the other European empires, but for self defense: against fanatical Islamism, British imperialism, or tribal violence on their borders. In other words, Russian “imperialism” was qualitatively different from the rest of Europe and was far more justified morally.

In time, it may become possible, by physiological means, to alter the whole emotional nature of a population. . . . It is also possible, having acquired power, to use it for one's own ends instead of for the people. That is what I believe to be likely to happen in Russia: the establishment of a bureaucratic aristocracy, concentrating authority in its own hands and creating a regime just as oppressive and cruel as that of capitalism.” (85-87).

This is why ideology fails to deal with a people's problems. Ideology is not a set of ideals, but a way to mask one's demand for power and control over people. Ideology is psychological rather than political or philosophical. In the Soviet case, it was a cynical cover for the new, mostly Jewish, ruling class to bleed the workers dry.

“It may be that Russia needs sternness and discipline more than anything else; it may be that a revival of Peter the Great's methods is essential to progress.” (112). Again—when I say things like this, I am called a “nut.” However, there is an ominous tint to these words. It almost sounds like this anti-authoritarian is arguing, in certain cases, violent force must be used to make a population “ready” for democracy. Regardless of the conceptual problems with this argument, it is an accurate portrayal of Peter. Needless to say, this is only to be used when a society is

Christian and conservative. Russell is also assuming the classical liberal, British, view of “progress” as if it has long been settled.

“But there are two different things that may be meant by democracy: we may mean the system of parliamentary government, or we may mean the participation of the people in affairs.” (121) The fact is that Russell is admitting that parliamentarianism has nothing to do with popular government. Western democracies believe democracy should be in place where the average family can have no actual control over affairs of state. But where people can have direct control over affairs, such as in industry or over local government, suddenly, it is “unworkable.”

Under the Tsars, Russians had full democratic control over local affairs through the commune and the volost, or zemstvo system. In fact, the Russian peasant had far more actual power over local legislation than anywhere else in the world. He had full representation on the zemstvo and the commune, and was judged by his peers; i.e. other peasants, in all court cases.

This is where democracy can actually work: over local affairs and local concerns. How funny that the liberals in Russia in the late 19th century wanted a parliament in Petersburg, but wanted the commune abolished? Who would be empowered then? This clearly cynical approach to power has yet to penetrate the tenured neurotics at the Ivy league, but the truth is usually too inconvenient for simple understanding.

Bertrand Russell unwittingly made a royalist, anti-communist and anti-liberal argument in his lengthy visit to Russia. He says far too much for his own good. While his ideological shifts are the stuff of legend, his loathing for the Bolsheviks remained fairly firm.