

TRAGEDY OR TRIUMPH: RUSSIANS AGONIES OVER HOW TO MARK 1917 REVOLUTION

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ABSTRACT

On the 100th anniversary of Russian Revolution and 150th anniversary of Karl Marx' Das Kapital, it is very important to analyze that whether the term revolution and communism has any relevance with the progress and liberation of Russia especially when Stalin came into power of Soviet Union. This paper intends to discuss the merits and demerits of Russian Revolution. It is true that the debate on the same topic has already taken place without coming to any proper conclusion.

However, it is important to discuss the role of Russian Revolution and Soviet Communist system to pave way for anti-capitalist worker's struggle. Bolsheviks seized power against Mensheviks and then ruled by terror of Soviet system. This system became more intricate because its principles were based on slave labor and political dissident. These ideologies became an unequivocal alternative for this social struggle. Even NEP (New Economic Policy) which was smiting its victims one by one, was promoted by Lenin in 1920s. How was Soviet Communist system forced to lodge capitalism although the latter was deadly? Though people were aware that they were manipulated, they didn't raise voice against collectivization. Due to this, the Kulak class was liquidated. Even the results of so many casualties (owing to famines) could not indicate that the Soviet Communist system is a total failure. The major target of Soviet Communist machinery was to create an industrial class with the most developed weapons and armory on the expense of the poor peasants' precious lives. Though, in World War II against Hitler, they proved their superiority, but a cobweb of ambiguity lied regarding their Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with Hitler on August 23, 1939. Some of the Russians (like Alexander Zinoviev, for example) call the whole unfortunate Soviet Communist episode russkaya tragediya "Russian Tragedy, Roads Long Sunk".

In this paper, efforts have been put in to illumine specific problems that the October Revolution could not assume at all. In this paper, efforts have been put in to illumine specific problems that the October Revolution could not assume at all. Is the twenty first century condition of New Russia – a nation fraught with Post capitalist mechanization is a Commodity Fetish of the 1917 child of the communist idea, will be an attempt to comprehend and analyze through this paper.

Keywords: *Capitalism, Soviet communist, Commodity Fetish, Bolsheviks, New Economic policy*

I. INTRODUCTION

Remember, remember The fifth of November.

The gunpowder treason and plot. (V for Vendetta)

It is not another Guy Fawkes vendetta since 1605 or even a silver jubilee of “November Rain” of Guns N’ Roses that this paper intends to discuss - especially as the tech-milieu inches close to the collective proletarian *vendetta*: October Revolution centenary. Russian Revolution of 1917 is a tale oft told, but a centenary, never been awaited. It was a revolution which dusked the Tsarist autocracy and brought the spectacular dawn of Soviet Union in Russia. Bolsheviki, not only revolted against Czar Nicholas II, but also paved the way for proletarian’s fight for economic equality. The Decembrist revolt in December, 1825, was the precursor of Russian Revolution..

Karl Marx’s influence of the classless Communist plateau inscribed the great vision on Vladimir Lenin, Stalin and Leon Trotsky. But the degree of inspiration differed owing to differing socio- economic situations and so-called rigid principles and applications of theorizing Marx, seventy years later (The Communist Manifesto being a product of 1848). The Publication of Marxist periodical “Iskra”, — “The Spark” became an integral part in promotion of Communist ideas in Russia. Marx believed that the whole world should participate in communist revolution. Lenin followed his principles and theories although he felt contented with communist revolt on a small scale in Russia. Lenin strongly believed that Proletariat should once dictate the society before completing communism. The Communist party was founded and later on led by Vladimir Lenin with the help of the Bolsheviki which was a major bloc of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party in the year of 1898. Lenin was responsible to transform Russia into U.S.S.R. All of them gave more importance to working class therefore their flag also has iconic tools of the proletarian’s workers - hammer and sickle. The revolution took place against the atrocities of Czar Nicholas II. At that time, Proletarians were craving for their prerogatives (upgradation of the proletarians as the ruling class and democratic equality).

In the post-Lenin era, two dominant figures, Leon Trotsky and Stalin emerged with their different opinions. In this era, it was seen, for a major period, decadence in the relationship between Leon Trotsky and Stalin. Leon Trotsky being the leader of Lenin’s Red Army, believed in certain things that ran at times of opposite to the thought process of Stalin. He believed that communist revolution should spread all over the world. Leon Trotsky, on the Bolshevik actions in the Civil War, expressed:

“We Communists recognize only one sacred right – the right of the working man, his wife, and his child to live. We did not hesitate to wrest the land away from the landlords, to transfer the factories, mills, and railroads into the hands of the people...and, by the force of arms, to tear the crown from the stupid Tsar’s head. Why then should we hesitate to take the grain away from the kulaks?” Report read at a public meeting in Sokolniki, Moscow, in June 9, 1918. The topic of the discussion was The Kulaks – Bulwark and Hope of the Counter-revolution.

Stalin, in the meanwhile, became very influential as general secretary, took advantage of Lenin’s absence by snatching support of the Politburo and the party’s Central Committee. Most of the time, reality was concealed from Lenin due to his ailing health. Pravda carried on the partisan propaganda while Meyerhold through his theatre art professes partism to appease Lenin (quite something like “India Shining” in the contemporary scenario). Immediately after the death of Lenin, Krupskaya, (Lenin’s wife), passed Lenin’s testament onto the party secretariat in order to be distributed in 13th Party Conference in the middle of that year. Stalin had received a very negative assessment:

“Stalin is too rude and this defect, although quite tolerable in our midst and in dealing among us Communists, becomes intolerable in a Secretary-General. That is why I suggest that the comrades think about a way of removing Stalin from that post and appointing another man in his stead who in all other respects differs from Comrade Stalin in having only one advantage, namely, that of being more tolerant, more loyal, more polite and more considerate to the comrades. This circumstance may appear to be a negligible detail ... but it is a detail which can assume decisive importance.” (594-596).

As a result those documents were not disclosed among the masses. Till 1926-27, those papers were concealed and were finally disclosed after too much editing. In this way it marked a beginning of the bloodied history of Russia. Stalin shaped a troika to have an effective control over The Bolshevik Party– a three-way alliance with Kamenev and Zinoviev. The rise of Stalin steered in the worst period in Russia’s history, with war, industrialization, collectivization of farms, famine and class war leading to the deaths of as many as 20 million people. No doubt, one is reminded of Napoleon of George Orwell’s Animal Farm. (17th August 1945)

Stalin believed in partial communist revolt where he emphasized that Communism could be successful in a single nation and could coexist with other forms of government. By 1927, Stalin assumed total dominance in the Communist party through his deeds of terror and brutality. Stalin’s KGB was moreover like his personal defenders who could easily eradicate or suppress the opposition. Louis Althusser hints at the ‘bureaucratic class’ which distances the bourgeois –proletarian polarity, in his essay ‘Ideological Apparatuses’? He in 1939 gave approval to the alliance with Adolf Hitler after the Civil War. In 1921 sailors, at Kronstadt military base, rebelled against Communist rule but became unsuccessful. Kronstadt sailors revolted in the year 1921 and sailors stated that “By carrying out the October Revolution the working class had hoped to achieve its emancipation. But the result has been an even greater enslavement of human beings. The power of the monarchy, with its police and gendarmerie, has passed into the hands of the Communist usurpers, who have given the people not freedom but the constant fear of torture by the Cheka, the horrors of which far exceed the rule of the gendarmerie under tsarism.” (241- 243)

He played each and every game of his life in a synchronized manner. For example USSR’s involvement in World War II, in the battle of Stalingrad in 1943 where Hitler was defeated by Stalin’s Forces , or in Tehran Conference where Stalin , Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt sat to discuss the peaceful conditions after the war. His duplicitous nature and faltering behavior cheated everyone.

Bolsheviks could not do anything to overrule the power of Stalin in fear of being killed by his KGB. They knew that Trotsky was fighting for their amelioration but could not support Trotsky because of Stalin’s terror. George Orwell once quoted while he was in Trotskyite band of soldiers “Many of our friends were shot, and others spent a long time in prison or simply disappeared.” Appendix second (Preface to translation of ‘Animal Farm: A Fairy Story’ on Ukrainian language).

II. POLITICAL TURMOIL

It is truly said that, all that glitters is not gold. Russian Revolution marked the beginning of more fatal governance than ever. It was more oppressive, totalitarian and deadly than previous one. Initially, everything appeared as a heaven for Bolsheviks but later on they faced innumerable hurdles. All of them shared equal share of the country. People demanded for total independence. People started finding new avenues in search of safety

and security. Political opponents were often assassinated. Instances of persecution of religious leaders were clearly demonstrated. Communist party almost dictated the lives of Soviet Union. Some harsh rules and laws were levied upon poor citizens of Russia. — Wilhelm Reich has rightly opined while addressing the Bourgeois that “YOUR SLAVE DRIVER IS YOU YOURSELF. No one is to blame for your slavery but you yourself. No one else, I say!”(7) Clifford Odets in his play ‘Till the day I die’ (1935), resonates such occurrences even in his own country – America therefore, Stalinist rule was a global phenomenon.

At 13th party Congress, Trotsky gave a conciliatory speech (82) “My country, right or wrong”, whether it is in the right or in the wrong, it is my country.....And if the party adopts a decision which one or other of us thinks unjust, he will say, just or unjust, it is my party, I shall support the consequences of the decision to the end. (83)”. On the question of world revolution, Trotsky and Karl Radek saw a period of stability in Europe while Stalin and Zenoviev forecasted the spread of revolution in Western Europe in 1924. These ideological divisions draw a huge gap between Trotsky, left opposition and Stalin along with his allies.

It was the beginning of Intra party struggle. Communist claimed Trotsky for his disagreements with Lenin and Bolsheviks before 1917. He was blamed for his maltreatment of his subordinates and several errors made during the Russian Civil War. Soviet policy towards Chinese Revolution became the most important issue on which Stalin and United Opposition stood opposite to each other. China divided into nationalist people’s army and national people’s party- Kuomintang. Stalin supported KMT and believed that KMT bourgeoisie, together with all patriotic national Liberation forces in the country, would defeat the western imperialism in China whereas Trotsky believed that communist party must complete its proletarian revolution and oppose the KMT. So many influential opposition leaders were expelled in early 1928 from the Soviet Union. Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev also included in this list.

Trotsky is perhaps one of the most intriguing characters in Russian Revolution. He wanted everyone to be equal and work as a unit. Although Stalin appeared to be a good leader initially, he eventually succumbed to his power of hunger and ambition. During the reign of Stalin, poor peasants suffered the welfare motive of Russia turned to personal benefit of Stalin. Instead of communism, people faced repercussions of dictatorship. Some people think dictatorship is a good opportunity to enjoy power, wealth and luxurious living standards. Russia was at political turmoil at that time even with Hitler over the fate of Ukraine.

III. UNREST, PROMISE AND BETRAYAL

With the passage of time, Bourgeois assumed the all-round development of the country. In 1921, New Economic Policy was approved and implied by Soviet Union Government focusing on agriculture and farming. Everyone worked with selfless motive for the betterment but every hope and aspiration turned into ashes. It was an extreme failure when five million people died because of starvation. Vladimir Lenin on the NEP said these words that “The national economy must be put back on its feet at all costs. The first thing to do is to restore, consolidate, and improve peasant farming... Let the people have their slice of capitalism.”
1917russianrevolution.weebly.com/october-revolution.html

As a repercussion, NEP was exchanged to “Five Year Plan” with the objective of achieving communist utopia. One after another several five year plans were made, but still no industrial growth, foreign investments and agricultural escalation could be observed throughout this period.

A dream of utopian world was shattered when millions of people again died due to the privation of resource. Masses were illiterate and ignorant, thus could be easily manipulated with the common idealistic words of struggle and struggle. They were often misinformed and misled by sharing half truths.

Second five year plan was implemented with the motive of steel production. More focus on railways and communication was led. Coal and oil mines were initiated. All these planning collapsed again.

War broke out in 1941 with Germany, where all the resources were diverted towards tanks construction and weapons building. It was a fatal blow to the entire economy where hospitals, farm lands and railway station were ruined. Around 25 million people became homeless and 20 million lost their lives. Despite these failures Stalin, Soviet Union leader consoled the mob showing them dreams of becoming leading industrial power in next 15 years.

Emphasis on education became the first criteria of development in The Soviet Union. They not only made various advance nuclear weapons but also ballistic missiles.

The first satellite named as Sputnik I was launched in 1957. It symbolized a new dawn of scientific and technological development. A big leap could be easily visible in 1960's and 1970's, due to its hike in national income. Some business entrepreneurs flourished as a result of Economic reform policies in opposition to the existing Government.

Several dint of failure could be easily visible due to the declining birth rate and increasing death rate in 1970's. Lack of labor force was the major problem at that time. Only natural gas industry could bloom due to constant exceeding targets set in five year plans. Soviet system was leading their lives in disillusioned world of fiction. They concentrated more on military buildup rather industrial development.

When Walter Benjamin propounded the idea of "Commodity Fetish", He had perhaps been unwillingly to mention whose commodity, he was actually pointing at. If the products were mao's China, North Korea, Venezuela, Brazil and some parts of Africa, then the 'idea' was 'the great Soviet Model'.

Lyotard in the post modern era repents and celebrates on the death of 'The meta narratives', while feasting on the fragmentation in the proximity of micro- narratives. If we go by his dictums, just like the 'American dreams', the fall of the USSR directly points to the death of that grand structure which was a defining factor to the lives and fates of today's east European countries. Ideologically, the status of China, North Korea and other countries under communist regime, have feeble attachments to Lenin's wave, but their proximity is alive in the iconic model set by Stalin, Khrushchev and Gorbachev. This surge of open market economy, to these micro narratives, whom we can call for the sake of an argument- Communist nations, is what has actually kept them financially alive in the post capitalist era.

No wonder why the people of the Meta narratives Russia are feeling themselves distanced from the 'base' and 'Superstructure' of their predecessors. The Putin's model is giving them an opportunity to live in the 'micro narratives' communist nations in the post modern era.

Drastic fall in oil prices and lack of foreign exchange reserves mingled together to become the reason of the culmination of Soviet Union in 1991. It was an official ending of communist dictatorship, cold war with United States and steering into the new era of political freedom i.e. democracy and capitalism. Soviet domain finally dissolved in to 15 republics and the targets one was Russian Federation.

The first ever elected president was Boris Yeltsin in 1991. Though initially it was hard to grab the changes easily, but gradually everyone felt satisfied. Many factories were transformed from designing military weapons to household goods. Around 20% unemployed people got jobs.

Conditions deteriorate with the passage of time. No one was trained to take risk till now. Despite high level of education and knowledge, Russian citizens lacked business skills.

Russia was hardly hit in Asian financial crisis in 1990. During this period, so many problems confronted Russia such as: less revenue through natural gas and oils, bidding of Russian equity in assets, declining life expectancy, and alarming hike in poverty rate (49% in 1993). On August 17, 1998 Russia devalued the ruble and generated worldwide financial crisis. Even America had to bear the loss because of its investment in Russia.

Hike in oil prices gave a little support to fight against the financial crisis in 1999 -2000. When Vladimir Putin came into power and headed the nation, he brought a remarkable change in the financial condition of the country for example: 70% growth in GDP, average salary increment of workers, increased international export of oil, gas, minerals. It has the second largest coal reserves, the eighth largest oil reserves and is the largest producer in the world in total production. Russia is the fourth largest steel producer and the world's largest steel exporter. In addition, Russia is the world's largest nickel producer.

Russia is paving way for all astronauts and space researchers. Information technology sector is also booming in Russia. Government is investing lot of time and money on I.T related technology parks while promoting R&D centres in Russia. So many well known companies like Intel, Motorola, Boeing are following the R&D activity in Russia.

Through Stalinism is a global phenomenon, one would be wrong to equate it with the Korean, African and the Latin American (Cuba remains as Castro resembles Stalin) condition.

IV. VIEWS OF THE MASSES

Opinion is divided on the revolution among Russians. Recently a survey was done by Ekho Moskvyy radio to know whether people were in favor of February revolution or not. The result said 47% were in favor whereas 53% people rejected it. This data clearly indicates public's opinion about worse repercussions of Bolshevik dictatorship. "This is pretty interesting because in 1917 absolutely nobody supported Nicholas," said Mikhail Zygar. Since 2000 when Vladimir Putin brought out the political stability, people showed their disgruntlement caused due to revolution and support the existing Soviet state. According to a recent survey done by the independent Levada Centre of pollster, 53% of Russians were in favor of Lenin's role, whereas 27% with a negative view, 20 % people don't know. The CPSU empowered with democracy in executing policies and rules which was highly acclaimed by the masses.

On the completion of hundred years of Russian Revolution, People relived those moments once again through a rally, imitating the historical characters. In the event, hundreds of modern Moscow's creative artist dressed themselves as Tsarist aristocrats, ate black caviar and celebrated with champagne. People believed that this event was necessary to develop national consciousness among the masses dealing with the history of Russia.— Amadeo Bordiga has rightly quoted that "The degeneration of the revolution in Russia does not pass from the revolution for communism to the revolution for a developed kind of capitalism, but to a pure capitalist

revo-lution.” Murdering the Dead: Amadeo Bordiga on Capitalism and Other Disasters
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/bordiga/works/1951/murder.htm>

This event is highly resonant of Charles Baudrillard's 'simulation' of the century –old 'idea' – the idea which struck the bell of Orwellian “All animals are born equal” (24). Not only did it take a Stalin, but also a Krushchev down to 'Glasnost' (openness related to Soviet Policy of open discussion on Social and political issues) in order to change the economy of Russia. This statistical judgement therefore can only be a sarcasm or at times a satire- but never a passing judgement.

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