

Russian anarchists' manifesto: For a free Russia!

Gregory Petrovich Maximoff

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Economic wretchedness and the absence of political rights in tsarist Russia had obliged lots of workers and peasants to quit their country and seek material well-being beyond her borders. The revolution in the month of March 1917 resulted in the abolition of monarchist rule and laid the foundations for broader political freedoms, thereby making Russia one of the world's freest countries.

But that revolution was political in nature and had no impact on the capitalist foundations which – by their very nature – are a source of poverty and exploitation as far as the broad labouring masses are concerned. Not only were those foundations left untouched, but they were strictly shielded. So those broad political freedoms were in stark contradiction to the economic dependency of the populace, a dependency that left the toiling people subject to the whims of a narrow group of property-owners, landowners, owners of the means of production and of all the wealth in the country. That dependency – it is the same at all times and everywhere – “effectively” placed the very existence of freedom in jeopardy.

Despite those contradictions, the revolution proceeded on its victorious way. In November 1917, its evolution peaked, sweeping those contradictions aside by expropriating the exploiters and doing away with capitalism in Russia. With the abolition of capitalism went (or, at any rate, so it might have seemed) the root cause of economic impoverishment and the threat of loss of liberty.

The peasants seized control of the land; the workers seized the factories and, freely, they set about building up the creative forces in the life of the country for themselves. Russia was covered by a dense network of free urban townships and villages and, in political terms, turned into a federation made up of soviets by the tens of thousands. The State was beginning to fade out, replaced by the great principle of the Paris Commune, to wit, a Federation of free, independent townships and villages. Having shared out the land, the peasants were starting to work it as a collective asset by means of Agricultural Committees.

The workers organized the administration of labour in the factories by means of a freely chosen body, susceptible to recall, and were busy trying to turn the factory into a “producer commune”, carrying on with production in the interests of the entire population of the country. City dwellers seized the housing and made it their business to run housing by means of free com-

mittees; these committees gradually evolved into the essential organs of a “consumer commune”, whilst at the same time they became agencies concerned with order and security and self-defence bodies. The army, long a threat to all freedom, was done away with and replaced by a widespread arming of the people.

In short, in Russia, for the very first time anywhere in the world, conditions were created that favoured the proliferation of genuine economic equality and genuine brotherhood, which is to say, the conditions yearned for by advanced “cultural” humanity as a whole.

The émigré workers and peasants yearned with all their hearts to go back to the old Russia which was at last working wonders in terms of overhauling society. But the war and the ensuing blockade erected insurmountable obstacles between them and the land of their birth. Eventually the war and the blockade ended: there was no civil war in Russia as yet and many of those enthusiastic emigrants flowed back to their homeland as if to a promised land.

And what did they find there?

There they found a horrible reaction posing as “revolution”. They found a ferocious crackdown on all of the most basic human rights and all freedoms.

They found despotism ensconced there in the shape of the “dictatorship of the proletariat”; more specifically, they found dictatorship in a brand-new guise, the dictatorship of the “bureaucracy” over the proletariat and the entire population.

They found “state-controlled” economic enslavement, compared to which the wage-slavery in the capitalist countries was mere child’s play.

There they met up again with their old acquaintances: famine, deaths by the thousands, shootings, overcrowded prisons, concentration camps and the same old locations to which they had been banished under tsarism.

They ran up against the Asiatic tyranny of a powerful military and police state.

Finally, all of our people’s revolutionary gains and all the outcomes of the progressive efforts by generations prior to the revolution were not found to be alive and well but kept under glass in the Museum of the Revolution. And freedom and the Revolution itself were also under glass!

Such an arrangement is liveable only if we forget about human dignity completely in order to become a beast of burden. Our emigrants were forced to leave the country again, but this time cruelly wounded at heart.

Whereas freedom in a democratic republican society along capitalist lines and which rules out any economic equality is an illusion, socialism without freedom is slavery and brutishness (Bakunin made that sociological truth plain back in the 19th century).

We delo-trudovik¹ anarchists want neither of those forms of oppression, not in Russia nor anywhere else. We find ourselves abroad again and for the very same reasons as in tsarist times. We hold it our sacred duty to our people and the whole of toiling humanity, to fight for a free Russia, for the welfare of all her population, for the economic equality without which any freedom is impossible; consequently, we declare ourselves irreconcilable enemies of the current Russian regime and we proclaim it and will proclaim to the workers of every land; we shall fight that regime until ultimate victory is achieved.

Russia’s experience has shown us that it is not enough (as all the statist socialists claim) to destroy economic ownership. Our country’s experience is proof that in order to achieve that we must also tear down the State which, even in its most liberal format, is inevitably destructive of

¹ i.e. members of the Delo Truda group and the community around the (by then) Chicago-based newspaper.

all freedom, institutes privileges, generates a brand-new ruling class – the bureaucracy – and conjures up a statist brand of slavery, the most horrific of all forms of slavery in that it is all-encompassing.

Restoration and a deepening and broadening of the gains of November 1917. That is our goal.

We delo-trudovik anarchists want to see Russia become a free Federation of free communes, a free economic Federation of Factories, and “producer communes” harnessing the entirety of the people’s economy to the interests and for the welfare of all.

We want to see free, socially useful labour, equally incumbent upon all and morally mandatory for all as the basis for a brand-new free order.

We urge you to organize that order in our homeland; we call upon all our comrades, scattered abroad, to commit to this struggle.

We stand for equality, liberty and fraternity!

Join us!

G. MAXIMOFF (*Delo Truda*, December 1934)

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