

THE NEW RUSSIA

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649739707

The New Russia by Paul Biriukov

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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THE INDEPENDENT LABOUR PARTY,
8 and 9 Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, London, E.C. 4.

6d.



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266.5
B53-2

FOREWORD.

By
Mrs. PHILIP SNOWDEN.

DURING a recent visit to Geneva I met Mr. Paul Birukoff in his own home. He had just returned from Moscow, whither he had been sent by the Swiss Red Cross in charge of four hundred Russian refugees who were being returned to their own country. His conversation about the present state of Russia was so interesting that it occurred to me that it would be very useful if his experience and knowledge of Russia could be made known in Great Britain. The fact that Mr. Birukoff is not a Bolshevist makes his impressions and statements all the more valuable.

The translation of Mr. Birukoff's manuscript has been made by Mr. Emile Burns, the Secretary of the I.L.P. Information Bureau, to whom I am very much indebted.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

On

PAUL BIRUKOFF.

PAUL BIRUKOFF, an intimate friend and biographer of Leo Tolstoi, was born in 1860 at Kostroma in Russia. He studied first with the Corps of Pages, then at the School of Imperial Marine, and later, after a cruise in the Mediterranean, went to the Marine Academy.

Feeling no vocation for a military career, he transferred his services to the Academy of Sciences, taking a post at the Central Observatory of Petrograd. The social and moral ideas which were then current in high society in Russia attracted him greatly, and he soon abandoned his scientific career and took to popular propaganda for Christian and democratic ideals. He was one of the founders of the publishing house, Posrednich, which soon became the principal medium of propaganda for Tolstoi's ideas. Becoming acquainted with Leo Tolstoi, Paul Birukoff soon became one of his intimate friends, and later an interpreter of his ideals. In 1897 he took an active part in the anti-militarist movement of the Doukhobortsi, as a result of which he was exiled and deported to the Baltic Provinces near Mitau, where he had to spend a year under close police supervision. After that he was allowed to go abroad, and went first to England, then made a journey to Cyprus to establish there a colony of the Doukhobortsi, and finally settled in Switzerland

near Geneva. After the Russian Revolution of 1905 he was able to return to Russia, but as he found his activities hampered by the last reactionary Czarist Government, he left Russia again and returned to Switzerland in 1912, and, believing that he would have to settle there for ever, he was naturalised and became a citizen of Geneva. But at the end of the world war in November, 1918, being anxious to renew his literary relations with Russia, he took an engagement with the Swiss Red Cross, conducted a number of Russian emigrants from Switzerland to Moscow, and after a stay of three months in Moscow, returned to Geneva with the last train load of Swiss subjects in March, 1919. In the brief account which follows he gives an impartial account of his impressions of his former Fatherland. His main literary works are:

- (1) *Tolstoi's Life*. A biography in four volumes (two volumes already published, the third in the press, and the fourth in preparation. This has been translated into all European languages).
- (2) The French edition of Tolstoi's complete works, with preface and notes.
- (3) Edition, with notes, of *Leo Tolstoi's Journal*.
- (4) A large number of articles on the Tolstoian Movement in Russia, published in various papers and reviews.

THE NEW RUSSIA.

In dealing with such a living and thrilling subject I have first of all to tell you within what limits I shall speak. It may be that these limits will disappoint you. You must understand at once that I have nothing sensational to tell you. I have not come here to hurl thunderbolts against the Bolsheviki, who are used nowadays much as bugbears are used to frighten children. And again I am sorry not to be able to please those who came here to hear a Bolsheviki, because I am not one, in spite of the rumours which have been put about.

I am speaking because I wish to let the truth be known, for the truth is dear to me. My noble master and friend, Leo Tolstoi, used to repeat a Russian proverb which ran something like this: "It is as undignified for an old man to lie as for a rich man to steal." Therefore my white hairs will compel me to tell the truth.

The New Russia. Does it exist or does it not? Yes. It does exist. It is shaping itself and rising from the chaos into which it had been plunged by the downfall of Czarism, by the war and the Revolution. But it is such an enormous and complicated subject, one so full of contradictions, that it is impossible to deal with it fully in a speech. It would need years of study and volumes of description to deal with it adequately. I have only been on a journey from Geneva to Moscow and back again during last winter. I stayed about three months in Moscow, and I must ask you to allow me to give you as exactly as possible the impressions I formed during that time. Do not expect me to give you scientific statements and do not be disappointed if my impressions are not the same as yours. I had the good fortune to be a Russian,

that is to say, to be able to understand the psychology of the people, the psychology of the time and the psychology of the movements which are now in progress within the heart of this great nation. And this *a priori* knowledge enabled me to keep my mind clear in spite of the pack of lies that the Press put about as to the condition and fate of present-day Russia. I was able quietly to digest the facts which came to my knowledge and to appreciate the degree of truth in news described as "authentic."

THE CAMPAIGN OF LIES.

I have neither the time nor the wish to analyse and deny all the lies that have been heaped up about the present system in Russia. I shall merely take one or two examples and leave you to draw your own conclusions as to the rest.

Since Lenin appeared on the political stage he has been described as "in German pay." The basis for this was that he preached what is known as "Defeatism." Now there is no doubt that the Germans might have been able to derive advantage from this propaganda, but that was in no way Lenin's fault. His line of argument was perfectly correct, and it was based on the history of Russia. Looking at Russian history during the nineteenth century the student observes that every victorious war was followed by reaction, and every war in which Russia was defeated was followed by progress. The logical conclusion for any person who desired progress for his country was to hope that it would be defeated. This is what Lenin did. And in fact this historical law has once again been proved in the Russian defeat and in the Entente victory. However, the Brest-Litovsk Peace made Lenin be once more described as "in German pay"