

The Russian Uprising (January 26, 1905)

The Russian uprising will have a marked tendency toward the solidarity of all the workers of the world.

The uprising in Russia is not unexpected to those who have been watching the trend of events in that tsar-cursed country. The wretched condition of the working class in the industrial centers and among the peasantry has been exploited in the newspapers and magazines of all civilized countries during these many years, and all observant men have long since realized that the limits must finally be reached and that the inevitable crisis must come.

At last the oppressed and half-starved workers have risen in revolt and this revolt now presages revolution which may or may not be temporarily suppressed, but which, before it runs its course, will sweep the Russian monarchy out of existence. Emperor Nicholas might have given his reign a new and indefinite lease of power had he but received the petition from his meek and miserable subjects. But true to his instincts of royalty and of the ruling class of every age, the common people were not only spurned from the presence of the monarch, but were shot dead in their tracks like wild beasts by his army of heartless mercenaries.¹ It was these murderous volleys that transformed the lowly subjects into resolute and defiant men and lit the fires of the Russian revolution that now loom lurid and portentous on the horizon of the whole civilized world.

From the standpoint of organized labor the revolution has special significance. It means that the working class of Russia, so long in the rear ranks of the international labor movement, are arousing from their lethargy and are at last resolved to break the political chains that fetter them and take their place where they properly belong in the bonds of international unionism. The uprising of the Russian toilers under such extraordinary conditions is watched with intense eagerness by the organized workers of all countries, who are profoundly in sympathy with their thrice enslaved Russian comrades and devoutly wish that they may triumph over the heartless² despots that have so long tyrannized over them.

There is no doubt that the Russian toilers have received some of their inspiration from their coworkers in the United States. The literature of

labor is now international and the Russians are well advised of the progress that is being made by the working class of this country in organizing not only to resist injustice, but to emancipate the working class from wage-slavery and make it the ruling class of the world.

It is not probable that Count Tolstoy's³ doctrine of non-resistance will meet with much favor among the outraged workingmen who have become full-fledged revolutionists. The doctrine of Father Gapon⁴ will more likely become the shibboleth of the revolution. The Russian monarchy will rule with blood and iron until it is shot or blown out of existence.

Gorky,⁵ the socialist leader, has the true spirit and his is in the veins of the revolution. He is the idol of the downtrodden millions of Russia and should he be put to death the fate of the Russian Empire will be all the sooner settled.

The noteworthy feature of this revolt is the universal interest with which every move is followed. It is recognized to be a proletarian upheaval and the rulers of other foreign countries comprehend its significance and are gravely concerned about its results. Not only this, but the unanimity with which the Russian workers have stuck and the spontaneity with which the strike has spread from place to place suggests to the capitalist class of all countries, the United States included, that the time may be near when the workers of all lands, conscious of the wrongs they are suffering and the power they have to right them, will inaugurate a universal strike at the ballot box as well as in the factory, mill, and mine, and will not cease striking until the struggle is victorious and labor is free throughout the world.

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¹ The reference is to Bloody Sunday, January 22, 1905 (NS), during which a procession of more than 50,000 people to the Winter Palace to present a supplicating petition to the tsar calling for freedom of speech, free public education, adoption of a progressive income tax in lieu of indirect taxation, abolition of land redemption payments, termination of the Russo-Japanese War, establishment of the 8-hour day and overtime, freedom of workers to unionize, and other reforms. The singing demonstrators were met by mass gunfire from troops defending the palace, with an official death toll — perhaps understated — of 130 killed and

299 seriously wounded. See: Abraham Asher, *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), chapter 3.

² The *New York World* version has “soulless.”

³ Lev Tolstoy (1828-1910) was a Russian novelist and social thinker who espoused a vision of pacifism, non-violence, and quasi-anarchist rural cooperation based on collective ownership of land.

⁴ Georgii Gapon (1870-1906) was a Russian Orthodox priest who became involved in missionary work among the nation's poor. At the behest of the tsarist secret police he was persuaded to act as a moderating force, and channelling discontent away from politics and toward simple economic ends. He established an organization called the Assembly of Russian Workers of St. Petersburg in 1904 as a conduit for this activity. Amidst the popular discontent of that year, the organization developed a volition of its own, pushing Gapon to action. Gapon authored a petition for the tsar calling for a set of ameliorative reforms and led a labor procession to the Winter Palace for its presentation on January 22, 1905, which was shot down, triggering the Revolution of 1905. After the massacre Gapon emigrated to Switzerland, returning after the October Manifesto of the tsar providing minimal democratic reforms. In cooperation with the new administration of Sergei Witte, Gapon advocated support of the regime instead of further pursuit of the revolution to overthrow autocracy. Gapon was hung as a collaborator by a four member hit squad of the Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries (PSR) on March 26, 1906.

⁵ Maxim Gorky (born Alexei Maximovich Peshkov, 1868-1936) was a leading Russian literary figure of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Gorky made use of a social realist style, breaking with convention to highlight the daily struggles of common people in many of his novels and short stories. A socialist activist, Gorky supported the revolutionary movement but came to oppose the brutality and stifling of dissent by the Bolshevik regime during the civil war period. He emigrated to the West in 1921, eventually settling in Italy. The rise of fascism in Italy prompted Gorky to accommodate himself to the Stalin regime. He returned to the Soviet Union in 1931, thereafter dutifully writing in support of the government and serving as president of the Union of Soviet Writers. Gorky died of natural causes in 1936; the top two Soviet leaders, Joseph Stalin and V.M. Molotov, led the procession at his widely publicized funeral as pallbearers.