Chapter 07

Persecution of Anarchists

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Text:

MY FURTHER DISILLUSIONMENT IN RUSSIA

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CHAPTER VII
PERSECUTION OF ANARCHISTS

IN A country State-owned and controlled as completely as Russia it is almost impossible to live without the "grace" of the Government. However, I was determined to make the attempt. I would accept nothing, not even bread rations, from the hands stained with the blood of the brave Kronstadt sailors. Fortunately, I had some clothing left me by an American friend; it could be exchanged for provisions. I had also received some money from my own people in the United States. That would enable me to live for some time.

In Moscow I procured a small room formerly occupied by the daughter of Peter Kropotkin. From that day on I lived like thousands of other Russians, carrying water, chopping wood, washing and cooking, all in my little room. But I felt freer and better for it.

The new economic policy turned Moscow into a vast market place. Trade became
the new religion. Shops and stores sprang up overnight, mysteriously stacked with delicacies Russia had not seen for years. Large quantities of butter, cheese, and meat were displayed for sale; pastry, rare fruit, and sweets of every variety were to be purchased. In the building of the First House of the Soviet one of the biggest pastry shops had been opened. Men, women, and children with pinched faces and hungry eyes stood about gazing into the windows and discussing the great miracle: what was but yesterday considered a heinous offense was now flaunted before them in an open and legal manner. I overheard a Red soldier say: "Is this what we made the Revolution for? For this our comrades had to die?" The slogan, "Rob the robbers," was now turned into "Respect the robbers," and again was proclaimed the sanctity of private property.

Russia was thus gradually resurrecting the social conditions that the great Revolution had come to destroy. But the return to capitalism in no way changed the Bolshevik attitude toward the Left elements. Bourgeois ideas and practices were to be encouraged to develop the industrial life of Russia, but revolutionary tendencies were to be suppressed as before.

In connection with Kronstadt a general raid on Anarchists took place in Petrograd and Moscow. The prisons were filled with these victims. Almost every known Anarchist had been arrested; and the Anarchist book stores and printing offices of "Golos Truda" in both cities were sealed by the Tcheka. The Ukrainian Anarchists who had been arrested on the eve of the Kharkov Conference (though guaranteed immunity by the Bolsheviki under the Makhno agreement) were brought to Moscow and placed in the Butyrki; that Romanov dungeon was again serving its old purpose—even holding some of the revolutionists incarcerated there before. Presently it became known that the politicals in the Butyrki had been brutally assaulted by the Tcheka and secretly deported to unknown parts. Moscow was much agitated by this resurrection of the worst prison methods of Czarism.

Interpellation on the subject was made in the Moscow Soviet, the indignation of the deputies being so great that the Tcheka representative was shouted off the platform. Several Moscow Anarchist groups sent a vigorous protest to the authorities, which document I quote in part:

The undersigned Anarcho-syndicalist organizations after having carefully considered the situation that has developed lately in connection with the
persecution of Anarchists in Moscow, Petrograd, Kharkov, and other cities of Russia and the Ukraine, including the forcible suppression of Anarchist organizations, clubs, publications, etc., hereby express their decisive and energetic protest against this despotic crushing of not only every agitational and propagandistic activity, but even of all purely cultural work by Anarchist organizations.

The systematic man-hunt of Anarchists in general, and of Anarcho-syndicalists in particular, with the result that every prison and jail in Soviet Russia is filled with our comrades, fully coincided in time and spirit with Lenin's speech at the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party. On that occasion Lenin announced that the most merciless war must be declared against what he termed "petty bourgeois Anarchist elements" which, according to him, are developing even within the Communist Party itself owing to the "anarcho-syndicalist tendencies of the Labor Opposition." On that very day that Lenin made the above statements numbers of Anarchists were arrested all over the country, without the least cause or explanation. No charges have been preferred against any one of the imprisoned comrades, though some of them have already been condemned to long terms without hearing or trial, and in their absence. The conditions of their imprisonment are exceptionally vile and brutal. Thus one of the arrested, Comrade Maximov, after numerous vain protests against the incredibly unhygienic conditions in which he was forced to exist, was driven to the only means of protest left him—a hunger strike. Another comrade, Yarchuk, released after an imprisonment of six days, was soon rearrested without any charges being preferred against him on either occasion.

According to reliable information received by us, some of the arrested Anarchists are being sent to the prisons of Samara, far away from home and friends, and thus deprived of what little comradely assistance they might have been able to receive nearer home. A number of other comrades have been forced by the terrible conditions of their imprisonment to declare a hunger strike. One of them, after hungering twelve days, became dangerously ill.

Even physical violence is practiced upon our comrades in prison. The statement of the Anarchists in the Butyrki prison in Moscow, signed by thirty-eight comrades, and sent to the Executive Committee of the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission on March 16th, contains, among other things, the following statement: "On March
15th Comrade T. Kashirin was brutally attacked and beaten in the prison of the Special Department of the Extraordinary Commission by your agent Mago and assistants, in the presence of the prison warden Dookiss.

Besides the wholesale arrests of and the physical violence toward our comrades, the Government is waging systematic war against our educational work. It has closed a number of our clubs, as well as the Moscow office of the publishing establishment of the Anarcho-syndicalist organization Golos Truda. A similar man-hunt took place in Petrograd on March 15th. Numbers of Anarchists were arrested, without cause, the printing house of Golos Truda was closed, and its workers imprisoned. No charges have been preferred against the arrested comrades, all of whom are still in prison.

These unbearably autocratic tactics of the Government towards the Anarchists are unquestionably the result of the general policy of the Bolshevik State in the exclusive control of the Communist Party in regard to Anarchism, Syndicalism, and their adherents.

This state of affairs is forcing us to raise our voices in loud protest against the panicky and brutal suppression of the Anarchist movement by the Bolshevik Government. Here in Russia our voice is weak. It is stifled. The policy of the ruling Communist Party is designed to destroy absolutely every possibility or effort of Anarchist activity or propaganda. The Anarchists of Russia are thus forced into the condition of a complete moral hunger strike, for the Government is depriving us of the possibility to carry out even those plans and projects which it itself only recently promised to aid.

Realizing more clearly than ever before the truth of our Anarchist ideal and the imperative need of its application to life we are convinced that the revolutionary proletariat of the world is with us.

After the February Revolution Russian Anarchists returned from every land to Russia to devote themselves to revolutionary activity. The Bolsheviki had adopted the Anarchist slogan, "The factories to the workers, the land to the peasants," and thereby won the sympathies of the Anarchists. The latter saw in the Bolsheviki the spokesmen of social and economic emancipation, and joined forces with them.

Through the October period the Anarchists worked hand in hand with the Communists and fought with them side by side in the defense of the Revolution.
Then came the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, which many Anarchists considered a betrayal of the Revolution. It was the first warning for them that all was not well with the Bolsheviks. But Russia was still exposed to foreign intervention, and the Anarchists felt that they must continue together to fight the common enemy.

In April, 1918, came another blow. By order of Trotsky the Anarchist headquarters in Moscow were attacked with artillery, some Anarchists wounded, a large number arrested, and all Anarchist activities "liquidated." This entirely unexpected outrage served to further to alienate the Anarchists from the ruling Party. Still the majority of them remained with the Bolsheviks: they felt that, in spite of internal persecution to turn against the existing regime was to work into the hands of the counter-revolutionary forces. The Anarchists participated in every social, educational, and economic effort; they worked even in the military departments to aid Russia. In the Red Guards, in the volunteer regiments, and later in the Red Army; as organizers and managers of factories and shops; as chiefs of the fuel bureaus; as teachers—everywhere the Anarchists held difficult and responsible positions. Out of their ranks came some of the ablest men who worked in the foreign office with Tchicherin and Kharakan, in the various press bureaus, as Bolshevik diplomatic representatives in Turkestan, Bokhara, and the Far Eastern Republic. Throughout Russia the Anarchists worked with and for the Bolsheviks in the belief that they were advancing the cause of the Revolution. But the devotion and zeal of the Anarchists in no way deterred the Communists from relentlessly persecuting the Anarchist movement.

The peculiar general situation and the confusion of ideas created in all revolutionary circles by the Bolshevik experiment divided the Anarchist forces in Russia into several factions, thereby weakening their effect upon the course of the Revolution. There were a number of groups, each striving separately and striving vainly against the formidable machine which they themselves had helped to create. In the dense political fog many lost their sense of direction: they could not distinguish between the Bolsheviks and the Revolution. In desperation some Anarchists were driven to underground activities, even as they had been during the regime of the Czars. But such work was more difficult and perilous under the new rulers and it also opened the door to the sinister machinations of provocators. The more mature Anarchist organizations, such as the *Nabat*, in the Ukraina, *Golos*...
Truda in Petrograd and Moscow, and the Voylni Trud group—the last two of Anarcho-syndicalist tendency—continued their work openly, as best they could.

Unfortunately, as was unavoidable under the circumstances, some evil spirits had found entry into the Anarchist ranks—debris washed ashore by the Revolutionary tide. They were types to whom the Revolution meant only destruction, occasionally even for personal advantage. They engaged in shady pursuits and, when arrested and their lives threatened, they often turned traitors and joined the Tcheka. Particularly in Kharkov and Odessa thrived this poisonous weed. The Anarchists at large were the first to take a stand against this element. The Bolsheviks, always anxious to secure the services of the Anarchist derelicts, systematically perverted the facts. They maligned, persecuted, and hounded the Anarchist movement as such. It was this Communist treachery and despotism which resulted in a bomb's being thrown during the session of the Moscow Section of the Communist Party in September, 1919. It was an act of protest, members of the various political tendencies cooperating in it. The Anarchist organizations Golos Truda and Voylni Trud in Moscow publicly expressed their condemnation of such methods, but the Government replied with reprisals against all Anarchists. Yet, in spite of their bitter experiences and martyrdom under the Bolshevik regime, most of the Anarchists clung tenaciously to the hand that smote them. It needed the outrage upon Kronstadt to rouse them from the hypnotic spell of the Bolshevik superstition.

Power is corrupting, and Anarchists are no exception. It must in truth be admitted that a certain Anarchist element became demoralized by it; by far the largest majority retained their integrity. Neither Bolshevik persecution nor oft-attempted bribery of good position with all its special privileges succeeded in alienating the great bulk of Anarchists from their ideals. As a result they were constantly harassed and incarcerated. Their existence in the prisons was a continuous torture: in most of them still obtained the old regime and only the collective struggle of the politicals occasionally succeeded in compelling reforms and improvements. Thus it required repeated "obstructions" and hunger strikes in the Butyrki before the authorities were forced to make concessions. The politicals succeeded in establishing a sort of university, organized lectures, and received visits and food parcels. But the Tcheka frowned upon such "liberties." Suddenly, without warning, an end was put to decent treatment; the Butyrki was raided and the prisoners,
numbering more than 400, and belonging to various revolutionary wings, were forcibly taken from their cells and transferred to other penal institutions. A message received at the time from one of the victims, dated April 27th, reads:

Concentration Camp, Ryazan.

On the night of April 25th we were attacked by Red soldiers and armed Tchekists and ordered to dress and get ready to leave the Butyrki. Some of the politicals, fearing that they were to be taken to execution, refused to go and were terribly beaten. The women especially were maltreated, some of them being dragged down the stairs by their hair. Many have suffered serious injury. I myself was so badly beaten that my whole body feels like one big sore. We were taken out by force in our night-clothes and thrown into wagons. The comrades in our group knew nothing of the whereabouts of the rest of the politicals, including Mensheviks, Social Revolutionists, Anarchists, and Anarcho-syndicalists.

Ten of us, among them Fanya Baron, have been brought here. Conditions in this prison are unbearable. No exercise, no fresh air; food is scarce and filthy; everywhere awful dirt, bedbugs, and lice. We mean to declare a hunger strike for better treatment. We have just been told to get ready with our things. They are going to send us away again. We do not know where to.

[Signed] T.

Upon the circumstances of the Butyrki raid becoming known the students of the Moscow University held a protest meeting and passed resolutions condemnatory of the outrage. Thereupon the student leaders were arrested and the University closed. The nonresident students were ordered to leave Moscow within three days on the pretext of lack of rations. The students volunteered to give up their payok, but the Government insisted on their quitting the capital. Later, when the University was re-opened, Preobrazhensky, the Dean, admonished the students to refrain from any political expressions on pain of being expelled from the University. Some of the arrested students were exiled, among them several girl students, for the sole crime of being members of a circle whose aim was to study the works of Kropotkin and other Anarchist authors. The methods of the Czar were resurrected by his heirs to the throne in Bolshevik Russia.
After the death of Peter Kropotkin his friends and comrades decided to found a Kropotkin Museum in commemoration of the great Anarchist teacher and in furtherance of his ideas and ideals. I removed to Moscow to aid in the organization of the proposed memorial, but before long the Museum Committee concluded that for the time being the project could not be realized. Everything being under State monopoly nothing could be done without application to the authorities. To accept Government aid would have been a deliberate betrayal of the spirit of Kropotkin who throughout his life consistently refused State assistance. Once when Kropotkin was ill and in need, the Bolshevik Government offered him a large sum for the right to publish his works. Kropotkin refused. He was compelled to accept rations and medical assistance when sick, but he would neither consent to his works being published by the State nor accept any other aid from it. The Kropotkin Museum Committee took the same attitude. It accepted from the Moscow Soviet the house Kropotkin had been born in, and which was to be turned into a Kropotkin Museum; but it would ask the Government for nothing more. The house at the time was occupied by a military organization; it would require months to get it vacated and then no means would be at hand to have it renovated. Some of the Committee members felt that a Kropotkin Museum was out of place in Bolshevik Russia as long as despotism was rampant and the prisons filled with political dissenters.

While I was in Petrograd on a short visit, the Moscow apartment in which I had a room was raided by the Tcheka. I learned that the customary trap had been set and everyone arrested who called at the place during the zassada. I visited Ravitch to protest against such proceedings, telling her that if the object was to take me into custody I was prepared for it. Ravitch had heard nothing of the matter, but promised to get in touch with Moscow. A few days later I was informed that the Tchekists had been withdrawn from the apartment and that the arrested friends were about to be released. When I returned to my room some time later most of them had been freed. At the same time a number of Anarchists were arrested in various parts of the capital and no news of their fate or of the cause of their arrest could be learned. Several weeks later, on August 30th, the Moscow Izvestia published the official report of the Veh-Tcheka concerning "Anarchist banditism," announcing that ten Anarchists had been shot as "bandits" without hearing or trial. It had become the established policy of the Bolshevik Government to mask its
barbaric procedure against Anarchists with the uniform charge of banditism. This accusation was made practically against all arrested Anarchists and frequently even against sympathizers with the movement. A very convenient method of getting rid of an undesirable person: by it any one could be secretly executed and buried.

Among the ten victims were two of the best known Russian Anarchists, whose idealism and life-long devotion to the cause of humanity had stood the test of Czarist dungeons and exile, and persecution and suffering in other countries. They were Fanya Baron, who several months before had escaped from the Ryazan prison, and Lev Tcherny who had spent many years of his life in katorga and exile, under the old regime. The Bolsheviki did not have the courage to say that they had shot Lev Tcherny; in the list of the executed he appeared as "Turchaninoff," which-though his real name-was unfamiliar to some even of his closest friends.

Tcherny was known throughout Russia as a gifted poet and writer. In 1907 he had published an original work on "Associational Anarchism," and since his return from Siberia in 1917 he had enjoyed wide popularity among the workers of Moscow as a lecturer and founder of the "Federation of Brain Workers." He was a man of great gifts, tender and sympathetic in all his relationships. No person could be further from banditism.

The mother of Tcherny had repeatedly called at the Ossoby Otdel (Special Department of the Tcheka) to learn the fate of her son. Every time she was told to come next day; she would then be permitted to see him. As established later, Tcherny had already been shot when these promises were being made. After his death the authorities refused to turn his body over to his relatives or friends for burial. There were persistent rumors that the Tcheka had not intended to execute Tcherny, but that he died under torture.

Fanya Baron was of the type of Russian woman completely consecrated to the cause of humanity. While in America she gave all her spare time and a goodly part of her meager earnings in a factory to further Anarchist propaganda. Years afterwards, when I met her in Kharkov, her zeal and devotion had become intensified by the persecution she and her comrades had endured since their return to Russia. She possessed unbounded courage and a generous spirit. She could perform the most difficult task and deprive herself of the last piece of bread with
grace and utter selflessness. Under harrowing conditions of travel, Fanya went up and down the Ukraina to spread the Nabat, organize the workers and peasants, or bring help and succor to her imprisoned comrades. She was one of the victims of the Butyrki raid, when she had been dragged by her hair and badly beaten. After her escape from the Ryazan prison she tramped on foot to Moscow, where she arrived in tatters and penniless. It was her desperate condition which drove her to seek shelter with her husband's brother, at whose house she was discovered by the Tcheka. This big-hearted woman, who had served the Social Revolution all her life, was done to death by the people who pretended to be the advance guard of revolution. Not content with the crime of killing Fanya Baron, the Soviet Government put the stigma of banditism on the memory of their dead victim.

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