

(February 10th. 1936)

The New Deal in Russia

BY MAURICE HINDUS.

COLONEL A. L. BISHOP, opening the meeting, said:—It is with the greatest regret that we record the passing of one of the original fifty-seven members who founded the Canadian Club in McConkey's restaurant in 1897. Dr. Colquhoun, born in Montreal, had a brilliant career at McGill University, and became immediately identified with the press. His contribution to the cultural life of Canada, his charming personality, and the impetus he gave to the cause of education in Ontario are things that may well be recorded gratefully by all of us. As president in 1912 and 1913, he brought to the Toronto branch real leadership, and I think it is only right that we should all stand and pay silent tribute to his memory.

The members of the club stood with bowed heads and remained silent for two minutes.

Introducing Mr. Hindus, President Bishop said:—In 1906 there arrived from Russia, at the age of fourteen, a young man, who sought a greater opportunity of livelihood and a greater measure of freedom than his own country offered. He passed through Colgate and Harvard Universities, and after attaining high academic honors he took up his real vocation in life as author, historian and world traveller. As a research expert in a matter which affects the whole future of the world he has made some trips since the revolution to Russia, his native country, and he has given the world, by his writings and lectures, a very interesting account of the conditions in that country. Through his writings the name of Maurice Hindus is internationally known, and it gives me great pleasure to welcome him here today.

MR. HINDUS:—I am going to begin by making a few very trite remarks, the meaning of which will be self-explanatory, but the significance of which we sometimes forget.

If it had not been for revolution there would have been no constitutional government in England.

If it had not been for revolution there would have been no French Republic.

If it had not been for revolution there would have been no United States of America.

Revolutions are ghastly things. They mean horror and misery and bloodshed so long as they last.

Look at Oliver Cromwell. You will remember that he visited Charles I. and tried to get him to be reasonable. He learnt to like him because he was a good husband, a good father, and altogether a charming man. But, for all that, he said, "We will cut off his head, even with a crown on it." And they did. That was not all that Oliver Cromwell did. He was deadly serious in his desire to bring constitutional government to England. Ireland was a hotbed of royalist sympathies, so he went across there and simply drowned it in blood.

Then turn to the French revolution, which got a great deal of its inspiration from Oliver Cromwell and contemporary writers. Perhaps you saw the picture, *A Tale of Two Cities*. I do not go to the movies very often but that picture interested me and I shall not soon forget the scene of horror that it portrayed. And I shall never forget the description by Carlyle of the incident of Marie Antionette's execution. Carlyle uses the simplest kind of words to give you a picture of one of the greatest horrors in the history of mankind. He says she was led to the execution in the same manner as an ordinary criminal—bound in a cart. She ascended the scaffold with courage enough and at 12.15 her head fell amidst deafening cries of "*Vive la République!*" And the bleeding head was kicked around like a football by students while the crowds shouted with glee.

Revolution is not a picnic or a banquet or a joy to anyone. Look at the people across the line in the States. To-day you hear people in America deprecating this "Bloody Russian Revolution." And it is bloody—one of the blood-

iest in history. But look back to the early days of the United States, when they tarred and feathered loyalists, who had to flee penniless to another country to escape the bloodthirsty persecution of the mobs who pursued and persecuted them.

Strangely enough people who approve of revolution in the abstract and who are outside the revolutionary area do not like revolutions in the concrete. Look at Edmund Burke, the great Liberal. Have you read his *Reflections on the French Revolution*, in which he so scathingly denounces it? Pitt was the friend of the Colonists, but even this great and energetic liberal denounced it. And the great poet, Wordsworth, did the same. Yet today Dr. Gooch, of Trinity College, Cambridge, describes the French Revolution as the most enlightening movement since the coming of Christianity.

Look at the American Civil War. Have you seen another motion picture, "So Red the Rose?" See it and you will get its significance in the similarity it shows between the Russian Revolution and the Civil War. It tells the story of a girl of the Bedford family. Her lover is killed. her brother is killed and her father is killed. She is left with other women unprotected on the plantation, while freed slaves rage up and down destroying things. Then these women, who had never been accustomed to doing any work, have to go into the fields with hoes, do their own baking, washing and scrubbing. It is pathetic. When you see this picture; when you see these Southern ladies with their men-folks all killed, working in the fields; when you see the Yankees come and burn their house, you say it is terrible.

And yet would it have been better to have retained these Bedfords and slavery, or to have had a free and enlightened nation? The answer to this question is given by history. The Bedford family had to be destroyed. The same thing is true of Russia. Hundreds of Bedford families had to be destroyed. It is all very dreadful, but I regard the Russian revolution as one of the most momentous things the world has ever known. And it would have been impossible, had it not been for Oliver Cromwell and the French and American revolutions.

This revolution is now about seventeen years old—a little over seventeen—and the period of destruction is long past. There are always two phases to a revolution, the destructive and the constructive. Construction followed the execution of Charles I. It was not the execution of Charles that made Cromwell important. If that was all he had accomplished he would have been forgotten today. But his building up of the English constitution made him a significant figure in history. And it was the same with the French Revolution.

In Russia today there is a constructive program. Intellectually, I am sure it will not appeal to most of your people. If you know the basic ideas, you will say they are no good. But Russia is Russia, and the basic idea behind the whole revolution is that private business must be destroyed. But even before the Revolution Russia was a country without much private business. This was so, even in the matter of farming. The average Russian farmer had not the same feeling for his farm that the Canadian farmer has. A deed to the Russian peasant did not mean anything. He did not like papers. They were affairs of the government, and as such he always shied away from them suspiciously. The only ownership he knew was, to be left on his bit of land and allowed to work it. Papers did not matter, for there was no buying or selling of land among the farmers. Russian peasants, with very few exceptions, never had bank accounts. They did not have many dealings with money. A little trade and barter was all they had. But the average Canadian farmer makes most of his transactions through a bank. He has wide business relationships, and a high sense of private ownership. Lacking these things, the Russian farmer did not develop the same resistance to the theories of the revolution as have the Canadian and American farmer.

For a long time in Russia things just hung in the air. Nobody knew what would happen. I have never met Stalin. The more I think of the man, the more mysterious and fascinating I find him. In 1929 he had to make the most momentous decision of the whole revolution. He had to decide if the time had come for Russia to destroy all private

business, and he thought it had. The intellectuals in the party told him that he was crazy and that the time had not yet come. Trotsky told him that the outcome would be a *débauché*." But he was determined to make the test. He exiled all his best friends—revolutionaries who had fought side by side with him—and made up his mind to break with private business for ever. And not only in the cities but in the villages and in the country. And for five years thereafter the Russian people were staggering under the blow. The standard of living dropped lower and lower, till in 1932 I wondered why they bothered to try to live at all. But yet look at 1934 and 1935. The standard of living has risen rapidly. It still is low compared with Canada, but it is infinitely higher than it was in 1932. It is indeed much higher than even Stalin had expected.

The most important thing about this revolution is its versatility and adaptability. One of the worst things Stalin did was to collectivise the farms. He completely disregarded the psychology of the peasant and overlooked his elementary needs. They were told to get together on large scale collective farms. But the government forgot to take into consideration the importance to the peasant of his cow, pig and chickens. In their burst of enthusiasm for collectivism they did not let the farmer keep his own pig. It was the most dreadful mistake they could have made, but if you had told them so and tried to set them right you would have been denounced as anti-social, as a saboteur and as the meanest human being in the world. And they hung on to collectivism as the basic idea for three years—three years of costly blundering. Then they saw their mistake, and such is the versatility of this revolution, as I told you, they realized that the peasant must have his own cow and chickens. So now if you say that he must not have them and even whisper collectivism in its original sense, you will be denounced roundly, in the same terms as were applied to those who first objected to it.

This same versatility spread all through the revolutionary policies. Take education for example. In the early days of the revolution any boy or girl, who applied for permission to enter a university, was presented with an appli-

cation blank to fill out. It was in the form of a questionnaire, and one of the questions that had a very important appearance was this: "What is your social origin?" But what did that mean? In other words it meant: "What did your father do?" If before the revolution your father had been a banker or something of that sort, they would not let you even look down the corridor of a university, much less join it. It was the same if your father had been a merchant or a trader. You were *tabu* unless you were willing publicly to renounce your father. And that renunciation meant that you had to insert an advertisement in the newspapers something on these lines:—"I, son of, hereby publicly proclaim that I renounce my father, who was a merchant, and exploiter of the poor, and an enemy of the new society, and henceforth I shall never speak to him again." That resulted in great social tragedy. But only three months ago these pernicious regulations were wiped from the law books of the country; and now even the son of a former land owner is freely admitted to the Universities of Russia.

Take something else. I was very much interested in speaking to Sir Frederick Banting on his impressions of the state of medicine in Russia. Russia was always very backward medically. There were very few doctors. In my village when a woman gave birth to children there were no doctors or nurses, and most of the children were born on a pile of straw on the floor. There was no idea of sanitation or antiseptics, and the only help a mother had was that of some older woman, who had had children herself. It was a country which needed physicians and it still needs them very badly. In the old days there were practically no women doctors. There were a great many who wanted to be, but they were not allowed to enter the universities and study. So some of them had to go to Switzerland and take their degrees and then return to practice. The new government, it is interesting to note, encourages women to be doctors, and at the rate things are going, it will not be long before there are no men left in the profession. Already two-thirds of the medical students in Russia are women.

In the early days of the revolution the rulers were very

suspicious of scientists because they felt that scientists were in some way associated with the old regime. For a long time intellectuals were tossed about from pillar to post, cast into prison, transferred from one prison to another so that their persecution was very conspicuous. Yet, and here again you see the adaptability of this revolution, in the last two years the change in this attitude has been so colossal that the physicians who attended the congress in Moscow last year will tell you that there is no government in the world that is so interested in forwarding the science of medicine as is the Russian government today.

Yes, the most consistent thing about the revolution has been its apparent inconsistency. It is flexible and always has been.

Take another example. For a very long time the revolution said "This is not just a national revolution. It is an international revolution. It must spread over the world, so that the whole world may be liberated." I don't know what Lenin would have done in 1917 if he had known that the Russian revolution would stop at the Russian frontier. I don't know if he would have initiated the revolution or not. But he was confident that it would spread, and for a long time they were all confident that the whole world would follow their example. But it did not. The revolution in Europe died on the Russian border. So then they settled their hopes on spreading the revolution through China, and concentrated on that country. But eventually the Chinese national government chased them out; and they realized that after all this idea of trying to bring about a world revolution was doomed to failure. The quarrel between Stalin and Trotsky arose out of this question of whether or not Russia should continue to try to foment a world revolution or not. Trotsky said, "Yes." Stalin said, "No." Stalin won and Trotsky went into exile. Nothing is now so important to the revolution as the development of Russian industry on national lines. You will hear a lot more talk with the third international in New York than you will in Moscow. Nobody in Russia pays very much attention to it. They are all far too interested in their own affairs to bother with it. The whole question of world revolu-

tion has been thrust into the background and it is very seldom that you hear it mentioned now.

In the French Revolution it was the same thing. When Napoleon conquered Italy, it was on the pretext of bringing democracy to that country. He said he was going to take democracy to England, and in Egypt he said the same thing. He set out to spread the revolution outside France with the sword. But it was outside interference that was responsible. If they had been left alone to stabilize themselves, Napoleon would never have happened. Today Russia needs to be left alone, so that she can concentrate her energies on developing the country.

I, for one, believe that Russia, if she is left to herself, will soon be stabilized. Not only that, I believe she might easily become an extremely conservative country. Remember that there are many people in the United States today, who are extraordinarily proud that their ancestors were revolutionaries, but who would hate to think that they might be revolutionary ancestors themselves. The revolutionaries of yesterday become the conservatives of today. They will stabilize as the standard of living grows higher. They will do the same as other peoples have done—become primarily interested in themselves.

But there is a danger that the Revolution will be attacked. And if it is, Europe will be sucked into one of the most horrible wars in the history of the world. In this respect the greatest danger lies with Germany. Hitler has said that Germany must expand to the east. That she must get the Ukraine. The Ukraine is a beautiful country, ideal for grain growing, containing gold and iron and supporting forty million people. It would be a grand prize for Germany. Two years ago I was at the Economic conference and Hugenberg read a paper in which he said the same thing; and later at Geneva, the dictator made the same statement that Germany must have the Ukraine. What do you suppose Stalin has to say about it? Only this: He says, "Come along and try to get it!", and the result of it all is that now Russia has a huge military machine and is ready for anything, either in the East or West.

In the far East there is another and very difficult situa-

tion. In spite of all the treaties and agreements, Japan is gradually encroaching on the rights of the Soviet. They are gradually pushing closer and closer to outer Mongolia, and the moment they step on Russian territory, there will be war. Russia is prepared this time, and when the war starts it will be a bloody war. If they fight alone the war may be localized, but that is the only way it can be. If Hitler should seize the opportunity to make a simultaneous attack on Russia, there will be a war in Europe. And in that war no nation will be able to stay out. Much as they may dislike it, Canada and the United States will be drawn in too.

It is all right to pass neutrality laws, but if there is a European war, America will stay out only as long as England stays out. If England is involved, the United States can pass all the neutrality laws it likes, but it will be drawn in. I am no alarmist, but I am trying to face the facts. Hitler has tried to get England to let him take Russia without interference, but he has not been very successful. He tries to get Laval to do it, but Laval is out and the situation is entirely changed. But even if he succeeded in getting England and France not to interfere while he attacked Russia, the situation could not remain like that for very long. He cannot get at Russia except through Lithuania and Poland, and once let him lay hand on either country, and the whole country becomes involved. Be sure of this. If Russia has to fight both Japan and Germany the whole world will be embroiled in war, and then I shudder to think of what may happen.

It is impossible to refrain from drawing parallels with what has happened before in history. If Foreign nations had not attacked France at the revolution in that country there would have been no Napoleon, and Europe would not have had to suffer under so many years of bloodshed. There is nothing to be feared from world revolution, if Russia is left to herself, but if she is attacked, nobody can foretell what the outcome may be, or where the revolution may end.

If Russia is not attacked, I am confident that the revolution will stabilize itself, and that she will work out her

destiny in her own way. She may have some things we may want to copy, but there is no danger that the revolution will spread or that Russia will attempt to spread it.

Another thing about Russia is the new system of farming. Russia is like Canada in a good many ways, but the farming methods have always been very different in technique. Now there is a new system in vogue, and, having seen the collective farming in operation I am convinced that Russia's new methods of large scale mechanized agriculture, as soon as she develops her machinery, will make her much more important in the world's grain and produce markets than she has ever been before. But this is not likely to mean competition for a long time to come, because they will need all their production for themselves. White bread has always been a luxury in Russia, and it still is. When I was a boy white bread was so much a luxury, that a loaf of it served as a wedding cake. The possibilities of wheat consumption in Russia are tremendous. The same is true of livestock, and many other of their agricultural products—unless they become involved in war. If they do, they will have to tighten their belts and put everything they can upon the open market, so that they may have the necessary balances abroad to pay for munitions. So even in terms of economics, Russia would be an infinitely greater danger to Canada in war than in peace. Let us therefore hope that no war will come, so that these problems can work themselves out peacefully within the borders of Russian territory.

COLONEL BISHOP, thanking the speaker, said:—Mr. Hindus, your concluding words find an echo in the hearts of us all. We are very grateful to you for coming here today, and it gives me great pleasure to offer to you a hearty vote of thanks.