

HOW THE NEW BECOMES OLD

Soviet Russia—A Living Record and a History. By WILLIAM HENRY CHAMBERLAIN. Little Brown: Boston, 1930, 525 pp. \$5.00.

Reviewed by I. AMTER.

In writing his book "*Soviet Russia—a Living Record and a History*" in September, 1929, William H. Chamberlain, not being a Communist, not being able to analyze capitalism in a Marxian, Leninist manner, not seeing the factors that already were making for a crisis in his home country, the United States, the stronghold of capitalism, the land of Hoover's "prosperity" and of a "high standard of living," could not properly estimate the achievements of the Soviet Union and what these achievements and the crisis mean to the Proletarian Revolution all over the world. In what he calls his "honest effort at understanding" the Russian Revolution—and Chamberlain has made an honest effort, from the viewpoint of a liberal—he made many serious mistakes: (1) He underestimated the strength of the workers and peasants of the Soviet Union; (2) He overestimated the strength of capitalism; (3) He did not see the revolutionary forces in the colonies; (4) He fails to understand the Proletarian Dictatorship and how it becomes ever more necessary for the Revolution at a time of world capitalist crisis, when imperialism seeks its way out of the crisis thru war—and inevitably one against the Soviet Union.

Chamberlain is in error when he asserts that "Western educated Communists are most apt to become implicated in Trotskyist and similar heresies and to kick over the traces of Party discipline." The Proletarian Revolutionary movements are not as Chamberlain says, "dependent on Russia for everything . . . (even) to the ideological excuse for their existence." The Revolution in Germany, Poland and America arises out of world conditions accentuated by economic and political conditions in each particular country. With a Bolshevik Party in Germany in 1918, in Italy in 1920, in Hungary in 1919, there would have been Proletarian Revolutions and Soviet Governments today—just as in China the Soviet Government with its Red Armies is now sweeping forward. True, the Russian Revolution exercises a tremendous political and economic influence on the world policies and is one of the most powerful

ideological factors in winning workers for the Revolution. But Chamberlain's statement is an accusation of *deliberate national chauvinism* on the part of the Russia Communists, whereas in his book he emphasizes that Lenin and the Communists manifest no national chauvinism.

Chamberlain makes such statements because he cannot understand the nature of world imperialism, of the World Proletarian Revolution ("For the program of the International, adopted by its Sixth Congress, is nothing but a universalization of the Russian Revolution, an attempt to apply all over the world, with minor variations for individual national peculiarities, the methods and tactics of the Russian Bolshevik Revolution.") *The methods and tactics of the Russian Bolshevik Revolution were laid down in theory and experience by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels and by the Paris Commune.* They were hammered into a form theoretically and practically adapted to the period of imperialism, of the world war and the immediate situation in Russia by Lenin and the Communist Party. With its tremendous experience and revolutionary leadership, the Russian Communist Party is in a position to aid and to guide the other Parties—and the history of the Communist International has proven that this guidance has been correct.

This criticism of Chamberlain is justified by his own statement that altho Lenin was not nationalistic—still "Lenin's prescience had its limits and, broadly speaking, they were nationalist limits. . . . He proclaimed again and again that the war must produce as its immediate aftermath other successful socialist revolutions." There was *no* nationalism in Lenin, but he foresaw as Marx foresaw, that the Proletarian Revolution would break out where capitalism in a crisis was weakest. This was Russia; nevertheless the *objective* conditions in other countries were ripe for the Revolution and if the *subjective* factor had been present in well disciplined Communist Parties, actively functioning, organizing and mobilizing, more Soviet Governments would be in existence today. But in the period of Revolution, thirteen years are a very short time and Germany, Poland, China, India today demonstrate that Lenin's prescience was *international* in scope. The deep crisis in the United States gives the lie to Chamberlain's statement that "There is no country where communism seems less likely to play a significant role in the *predictable future* in America." (Emphasis ours—I. A.)

In this struggle does the Communist Party speak for the workers and poor peasants; and does Stalin, not as Chamberlain says, "cloak himself with the formidable authority of the Party," but, *really* speak for the Party and the interests of the working class, as Lenin spoke before him? Chamberlain says there are no lengthy biographies of Communist leaders and the tendency is to identify them with the masses—dress, manners, habits, limitations of income, privileges, etc. The Communist leader does not speak for himself—he speaks for the Party; therefore when Stalin speaks, he speaks for the Party and the working class.

Chamberlain must be applauded for the amount of study he has devoted to the subject and the wealth of varied material he has put into his book. He states that, contrary to assertions by others, he was free to gather information wherever he pleased; that he was favored by all government institutions, etc. He writes: "As a matter of fact, the popular attitude toward the foreigner is probably friendlier in Russia than in any other country in the world." He accounts for it in part by the "almost complete absence of the unpleasant form of nationalism that finds expression in hatred for people of other countries."

It is unfortunate that Chamberlain concluded his book before the figures of the first year's results of the Five Year Plan were compiled. This would have answered many questions and settled many doubts, but, following the logic of Chamberlain's book, might have resulted in a book different in many respects. When industry—especially heavy industry—is developing so rapidly; when agriculture is not socialized to the extent of 6-7 per cent, but 40 per cent (Spring 1930) and peasants are joining collectives so rapidly in some sections that they can hardly be taken care of properly; and when 1,000,000 acre state farms are being established, and grain for exportation will come chiefly from state and collectivized farms and not the individual peasants, it changes the whole face of basic questions. No longer can one say "half socialist, half capitalist"—*the Soviet Union is a Socialist State, with the Socialist elements predominating and growing very rapidly*. The State Planning Commission "has shown the tendency to *undershoot* rather than to *overshoot* the mark," says Chamberlain. The possibility of maintaining Socialism does not depend on loans, credits and procurement of machinery from capitalist countries—altho it is very advantageous—but upon the continuance of peace which will allow the Soviet Union to continue her work unhampered.

Chamberlain's book is valuable, but with the kaleidoscopic changes taking place and the tremendous growths reported from week to week, it is impossible to quote figures and statistics as currently authentic. Chamberlain's figures are obsolete and alter the story that he might have told had he waited a few months longer—or perhaps till the Sixteenth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in June.

Despite his shrinking from the methods of Revolution and being unsympathetic to the stern measures of the Proletarian Dictatorship, Chamberlain's book is a friendly, sympathetic story. It contains some errors, such as the alleged eight hours work day for young workers between 16 and 18 (it is six hours); he speaks of the workers, according to the new working week, having one day's rest in six whereas it is one in five; he declares Communists consider the terms Socialism and Communism interchangeable, which is incorrect.

We will conclude with what Chamberlain considers undefeatable achievements of the Revolution: (1) annihilation of large-scale landlordism in agriculture (which is now being supplanted by large-scale state and collective farming—I. A.); (2) substitution of state for private control and operation in industry and transport, banking and trade; (3) cultural autonomy to the non-Russian nationalities; (4) the emergence of a new spirit which Chamberlain calls "plebian democracy."

These achievements are not compatible with capitalism and can only be part of a Proletarian State. Chamberlain says the workers of the Soviet Union are filled with class hatred ("class chauvinism," he calls it.) This is the class hatred that made the Revolution possible; it is the hatred that is liquidating the kulaks and putting an end to religion and the church. It is the spirit that, as Chamberlain says, is giving the "common man (!) a sense of *release of social liberty, that comes with the disappearance of classes* which are visibly above him in wealth and opportunity, culture and social status." It is the consciousness of a proletariat that has destroyed capitalism in one country, that knows its strength and is prepared for the day when the call will come to overthrow capitalism the world over.