

# **THE CRISIS IN RUSSIA**

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The crisis in Russia by Arthur Ransome

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**ARTHUR RANSOME**

**THE CRISIS  
IN RUSSIA**



# THE CRISIS IN RUSSIA

BY  
**ARTHUR RANSOME**

Author of "Russia in 1919"



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TO  
WILLIAM PETERS  
OF ABERDEEN

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## INTRODUCTION

THE characteristic of a revolutionary country is that change is a quicker process there than elsewhere. As the revolution recedes into the past the process of change slackens speed. Russia is no longer the dizzying kaleidoscope that it was in 1917. No longer does it change visibly from week to week as it changed in 1918. Already, to get a clear vision of the direction in which it is changing, it is necessary to visit it at intervals of six months, and quite useless to tap the political barometer several times a day as once upon a time one used to do. . . . But it is still changing very fast. My journal of "Russia in 1919," while giving as I believe a fairly accurate picture of the state of affairs in February and March of 1919, pictures a very different stage in the development of the revolution from that which would be found by observers to-day.

The prolonged state of crisis in which the coun-

try has been kept by external war, while strengthening the ruling party by rallying even their enemies to their support, has had the other effects that a national crisis always has on the internal politics of a country. Methods of government which in normal times would no doubt be softened or disguised by ceremonial usage are used nakedly and justified by necessity. We have seen the same thing in belligerent and non-revolutionary countries, and, for the impartial student, it has been interesting to observe that, when this test of crisis is applied, the actual governmental machine in every country looks very much like that in every other. They wave different flags to stimulate enthusiasm and to justify submission. But that is all. Under the stress of war, "constitutional safeguards" go by the board "for the public good," in Moscow as elsewhere. Under that stress it becomes clear that, in spite of its novel constitution, Russia is governed much as other countries are governed, the real directive power lying in the hands of a comparatively small body which is able by hook or crook to infect with its conscious will a population largely indifferent and inert. A visitor to Moscow to-day



would find much of the constitutional machinery that was in full working order in the spring of 1919 now falling into rust and disrepair. He would not be able once a week or so to attend a meeting of the All-Russian Executive and hear discussions in this parliament of the questions of the day. No one tries to shirk the fact that the Executive Committee has fallen into desuetude, from which, when the stress slackens enough to permit ceremonial that has not an immediate agitational value, it may some day be revived. The bulk of its members have been at the front or here and there about the country wrestling with the economic problem, and their work is more useful than their chatter. Thus brutally is the thing stated. The continued stress has made the muscles, the actual works, of the revolution more visible than formerly. The working of the machine is not only seen more clearly, but is also more frankly stated (perhaps simply because they too see it now more clearly), by the leaders themselves.

I want in this book to describe the working of the machine as I now see it. But it is not only the machine which is more nakedly visible than

it was. The stress to which it is being subjected has also not so much changed its character as become easier of analysis. At least, I seem to myself to see it differently. In the earlier days it seemed quite simply the struggle between a revolutionary and non-revolutionary countries. I now think that that struggle is a foolish, unnecessary, lunatic incident which disguised from us the existence of a far more serious struggle, in which the revolutionary and non-revolutionary governments are fighting on the same side. They fight without coöperation, and throw insults and bullets at each other in the middle of the struggle, but they are fighting for the same thing. They are fighting the same enemy. Their quarrel with each other is for both parties merely a harassing accompaniment of the struggle to which all Europe is committed, for the salvage of what is left of European civilization.

The threat of a complete collapse of civilization is more imminent in Russia than elsewhere. But it is clear enough in Poland, it cannot be disregarded in Germany, there is no doubt of its existence in Italy, France is conscious of it; it is only in England and America that this threat

is not among the waking nightmares of everybody. Unless the struggle, which has hitherto been going against us, takes a turn for the better, we shall presently be quite unable to ignore it ourselves.

I have tried to state the position in Russia today: on the one hand to describe the crisis itself, the threat which is forcing these people to an extreme of effort, and on the other hand to describe the organization that is facing that threat; on the one hand to set down what are the main characteristics of the crisis, on the other hand to show how the comparatively small body of persons actually supplying the Russian people with its directives set about the stupendous task of moving that vast inert mass, not along the path of least resistance, but along a path which, while alike unpleasant and extremely difficult, does seem to them to promise some sort of eventual escape.

No book is entirely objective, so I do not in the least mind stating my own reason for writing this one (which has taken time that I should have liked to spend on other and very different things). Knowledge of this reason will permit the reader to