

**THE RUSSIAN  
WORKERS'  
REPUBLIC**

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The Russian workers' republic by Henry Noel Brailsford

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BY  
HENRY NOEL BRAILSFORD



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20/7/21

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## PREFACE

THIS book is the fruit of two months spent in the autumn of 1920 in Soviet Russia. A visit to Russia is no longer a difficult adventure. I obtained a British passport to Esthonia and a Russian permit quite easily. Travelling was uneventful, and less uncomfortable than I had found it in Poland, Austria and Germany the year before. I met invariably with kindness and courtesy, and made many acquaintances, who represented every phase of opinion. "White" exiles in London had told me that I should be watched, followed and "personally conducted" wherever I went, and that no opponent of the Communists would dare to talk with me or approach me. None of these predictions came true. I went about *alone* whenever and wherever I wished. I saw the leaders of the opposition *alone* in Moscow. In the provinces the local leaders of the opposition sought me out. Even in trains and libraries, strangers would enter into conversation and express themselves quite freely. Let me say at once that while I heard much criticism in Russia, I never heard there the wild exaggerations in which exiles indulge abroad. So far from receiving too much help from official quarters in my inquiries, I could sometimes have wished for more. There is much kindness but very little method in the dealings of the Bolsheviks with foreign journalists.

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I divided my time between Petrograd, Moscow, Minsk and the Western war-front and the central province of Vladímir. Moscow is still incorrigibly Russian, which means that it is unpunctual and unbusinesslike. The distances are great and the communications primitive. The telephone works badly and is little used. The Press reflects only one point of view. One may spend a week in Moscow and learn less than one could gather in two days in Berlin. Everyone, moreover, is overworked, and officials, after the Congress of the Third International, were rather tired, I suspect, of foreigners. In any event, I was anxious to see something of the provinces and of country life. I chose Vladímir for a short visit, and found it so interesting that I remained for two weeks. I learned in these two weeks more about Russia than in the other six. To investigate the life of a small town is a manageable problem. You can walk all over it without fatigue. Also, I could get conveyances to visit the villages, a thing I only once achieved from Moscow. Above all, everyone was interested in the presence of a stranger. Vladímir had seen no foreigner of any sort for six long years, and it was as eager to question me as I was to study it. This mutual inclination led to a stimulating exchange of thought and information. My reasons for choosing Vladímir were partly that it combined industry with agriculture, and partly that it had escaped the ravages of the civil war. I wanted to see the normal development of Soviet institutions after three years of revolution.

My slight acquaintance with the very difficult Russian language was a handicap which I must confess. I had spent some months before I started in an effort to learn it. I could understand a great



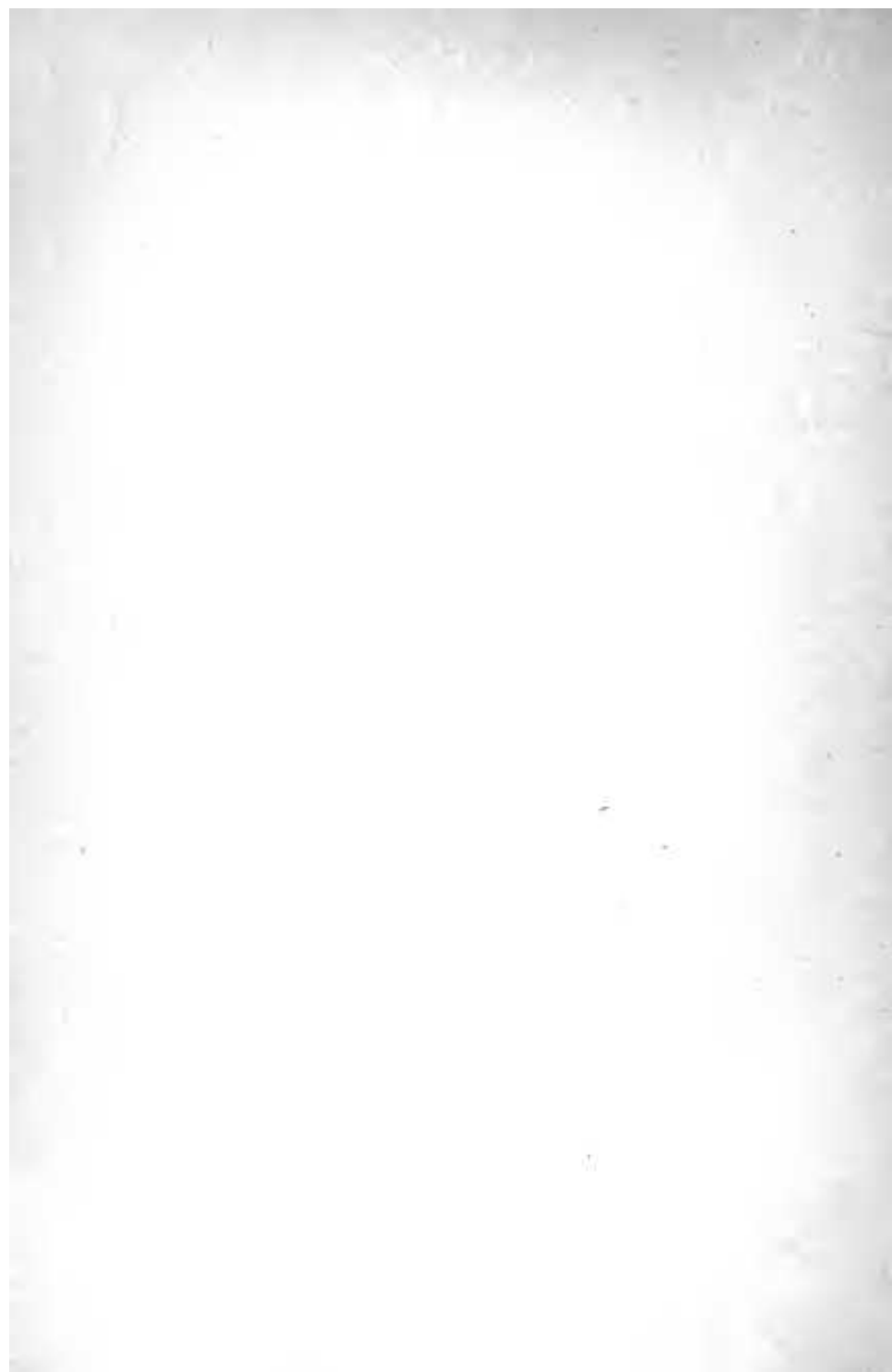
deal that was said, and could latterly follow a speech, if the orator did not speak too fast. But one easily grows tired in these efforts, and I never managed to express my own thoughts, except in the most elementary way. I can read a newspaper, though with much labour. I had at Vladimir as an interpreter a young man, Comrade Rozinsky, of whose character and ability I formed a high opinion, and he had a tact rare in interpreters: he always left me alone when I did not need his services. Even in remote Vladimir I found a good many people who could talk French, German or English. In Petrograd and Moscow, of course, nearly every educated man, and many a workman who has lived abroad, speaks one of these languages, and usually well. Of the three, I found German the most generally useful. Oddly enough, the Russian of the peasants, which is very pure in the Central Provinces, was easier to understand than that of the intellectuals.

To my friend Michael Farbman, who was in Minsk and Moscow during my stay, I owe many helpful suggestions and explanations, and he has done me the service of reading my proofs—not always with assent.

I have never, in what is now a rather long experience, found an inquiry so difficult. I have never felt so little confidence in my own conclusions. Perhaps I may also add that I have never been more anxious to arrive at the objective truth.

H. N. BRAILSFORD.

*Christmas 1920.*



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