

**RUSSIA, THE REVOLUTION AND  
THE WAR: AN ACCOUNT OF  
A VISIT TO PETROGRAD AND  
HELSINGFORS IN MARCH, 1917**

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Russia, the revolution and the war: an account of a visit to Petrograd and Helsingfors in March, 1917 by Christian Lous Lange

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**CHRISTIAN LOUS LANGE**

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## PREFACE

Dr. Christian L. Lange of Christiana has been since the establishment of the Carnegie Endowment a valuable correspondent of the Division of Intercourse and Education. His experience in the public life of Norway, his service as a member of the Second Hague Conference, and his work as permanent secretary of the Interparliamentary Union have given him not only a wide acquaintance with international politics and with European statesmen, but unique opportunities for observing and for studying them.

In December, 1916, and still more markedly in January, 1917, there were signs that something important and significant was going on behind the scenes in Russia. The apparent paralysis of Russia's military and economic organization and effort required explanation, and the rapidly growing rumors of coming political changes called for more accurate knowledge and fuller interpretation. Under these circumstances Dr. Lange was requested by cable to proceed as promptly as might be to Russia in order to make to the Endowment a full and accurate report upon the political, economic and military situation in that country. It is doubtless fortunate that Dr. Lange was not able to undertake this mission until after a delay of several weeks, for in consequence he reached Russia just as the storm of revolution broke and so was able to see with his own eyes and to hear with his own ears the events which mark one of the greatest and most sudden political changes in all history.

The value of Dr. Lange's report is so great that the Division of Intercourse and Education has given it the widest possible publicity. It will stand as a permanent and authentic record of the happenings of fateful days in March and April, 1917.

Dr. Lange's report was completed and forwarded from Christiana before April 20, 1917. It is a striking tribute to his clear-sightedness and sagacity that the events which immediately followed have confirmed in many respects the analysis and the predictions he then made. It is profoundly to be hoped that his favorable forecasts of the future will be similarly sustained by the happenings of the next few weeks.

NICHOLAS MURRAY BUTLER,  
*Acting Director.*

June 4, 1917.

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## RUSSIA, THE REVOLUTION AND THE WAR

An Account of a Visit to Petrograd and Helsingfors in March, 1917

BY DR. CHRISTIAN L. LANGE

### NEARING HISTORIC EVENTS

It was a most fortunate chance that I had planned my trip to Russia for the middle of March. As it happened, I arrived at Petrograd by the first train to pass the Russian frontier after the revolution, on the evening of Saturday, March 17, two days after the formation of the Government and after the abdication of the Tsar, the day after the abdication of the Grand-Duke Michael, the Tsar's brother, an event which made Russia for the time being a republic.

I left Christiania on March 12, when as yet nothing was known at all about what was going on at Petrograd. At Stockholm, where I stopped for Tuesday and Wednesday to meet the Interparliamentary Group of the Riksdag, I read telegrams about the riots in the Russian capital; I also learned of the adjournment of the Duma. Competent persons, however, advised me to go on, as they firmly believed that the telegrams were fantastic and exaggerated. This also proved true. The papers had spoken of a bridge across the Neva having been blown up, of Petrograd swimming in blood. All this was partly fantastic rumors, partly intentional perversion. It is needless to say that I was anxious to go myself, as I was sure at any rate to meet my political friends in Russia, and it might even be supposed that most interesting events were developing. When in September last Mr. Milyukoff was at Christiania, he told me that a revolution was inevitable. The only questions were: when was it to come? how would it be possible to coordinate a revolution with the exigencies of the war?

My tickets were taken, sleepers and all, and I thought it best at any rate to go to the frontier and take counsel there.

The journey to Russia is now very long, the Baltic being impassable. One has to go north by rail for forty hours. I left Stockholm Wednesday, March 14, in the afternoon, and only Friday morning I reached the frontier at Haparanda. In the train I had already seen the first communication from the Executive Committee of the Duma that they had seized the reins of Government, that the Tsar's ministers were in prison, that the Petrograd garrison had

joined the Duma, and that the town was quiet. The Russian consul at Haparanda advised me to go on, but warned me at the same time that it might be difficult to reach Petrograd according to the time-tables. This, however, was not considered as serious, and I crossed the river in a sledge—there is no railway connection—the temperature being at  $-40^{\circ}$  F. ( $-40^{\circ}$  C.). As there was no wind, the cold was much less biting than later at Petrograd, where the temperature was  $+5^{\circ}$  F.

At Torneå, the Finnish railway terminus, we were examined by the Russian *gendarmérie* as usual at European frontiers during the war. I had a *laissez-passer* from the Russian Minister at Christiania, and was not even searched, and I heard from my fellow-travelers that their examination had also been very lenient. The people at the station knew less of what had passed at Petrograd than we did. They had not seen the first *communiqué*, and the Finnish woman, who kept the book-stall at the station, was delighted when I slipped a Swedish paper to her, which gave the text of the document.

The exceptional events and the feverish excitement with which we anticipated the rest of our journey soon dissolved the reserve which more or less estranges fellow-travelers, especially in war-time, when you read everywhere: "Beware of strangers. Enemy ears are listening to every word!" And we soon formed one single discussion club, when we found ourselves in the sleeping car: a couple of Finns, a Russian customs officer from the Chinese frontier, who had been prevented by the submarines from seeing his wife and family at Geneva, and now had to return to Charbin, an American lawyer and his wife going on business to Russia, the American consul and vice-consul from Tiflis on their way to their posts, a French diplomatic courier, some four or five Norwegians and some gentlemen of indeterminate nationality and characteristics. The first great question was: were we to reach Petrograd? The next morning we learned that we had passed the express from Petrograd during the night. This gave hope. But at the same time strange rumors were circulating: that there were new disturbances and strikes at Petrograd, bloodshed at Helsingfors, and a railway-strike in Finland. At last, early in the afternoon, I got an Abo paper containing the full official report from the new Government, its composition and program, and—through a chance word in a reported speech of Milyukoff's—the first intimation of the abdication of the Tsar. During more than an hour I had to sit and translate these historic documents to my foreign friends.

There was great elation but still anxiety, as we steamed southwards. We were never sure, on reaching one station, we would get beyond it. However, we got to Viborg, the last considerable town on the Finnish side. Were we to pass the frontier, too? It was already late at night when we steamed into the station of Bielo-Ostrov, where the customs and passport examination takes place. Some Russians had come on board the train, and they confirmed the reports of mutiny among the marines at Kronstadt and at Helsingfors. Hor-



rible things had been going on. A young naval officer told us his life had been threatened. "But I was popular with my men, so there was no serious danger for me." He carried the red badge of the revolution, but it was evident that in his heart of hearts he did not really like it.

Our excitement reached its pitch when we slowly came up to the platform at Bielo-Ostrov. We were standing ready with our bags, luggage tickets, passports and everything; the platform was empty, not a human being to be seen. Then all of a sudden, the carriage door opens, enters a little dwarf, no taller than my writing-desk, and he cries out as he rolls down along the corridor: "Liberty is supreme. All the gendarmes are sent to prison to Petrograd. No more passports, no customs. Only liberty reigns!"

He was our herald of the revolution! And he proved right. The train left at once, without any examination at all, and within two minutes we all carried, God knows how, red badges in our buttonholes. I got mine from the carriage maid, who tore asunder a piece of red flag cloth and freely distributed the pieces, and she at once became very communicative: there had been a strike for some hours on the railway lines, a strike of pronounced political character. The men had insisted on the removal of some high Russian officials in the railway administration. As soon as they had obtained satisfaction, they returned to work. This accounted for the delays we had had and still had.

#### PETROGRAD AT NIGHT

At half past twelve we were at the end of our journey. I had myself wired to a hotel, and the Russian Minister had wired through his Department, that I should be met at the station and get accommodations at a hotel—they are all more than full—but nobody was there to meet me (I later learned that no wires had arrived) and what was worse, there were no taxis, not even a single horse and sledge. I was most glad to join the Russian customs officer, who also was on the outlook for a room, and he moreover took under his care a young American electrician, on his way home to the States by Vladivostok and San Francisco. We three started together from the Finnish station, which is on the western bank of the Neva (no bridge had been blown up) in the outskirts of the town, close to the industrial quarters, where the revolutionary movement began.

The city was altogether quiet. We met some soldiers patrolling the streets; here and there we saw groups of young students with white bands round the left arm, bearing in red the letters G. M. (Militia Guard) and a gun thrown across the shoulder. Once or twice we met some persons returning from a dinner-party. Otherwise the streets were as if dead, not a horse and carriage, nor a tram. When we had crossed the great bridge, we saw the dreary ruins of the big police court on the *Lieteny Prospect* (one of the main thoroughfares). It had been burnt, but otherwise no traces of destruction were to be seen thus far.

The popular exasperation had turned against the police and its headquarters. Unfortunately some very important documents were destroyed at the same time: not only the *états civils*, the registers of the population, their age, status and so on, but also the archives of the secret police have been destroyed in part, so it is now one of the difficult tasks of the new administration to trace the *agents provocateurs*, who were everywhere. I heard later from Mr. Keryenski, the Minister of Justice, that not only was one of the editors of the *Pravda (Truth)* the organ of the extreme socialists, in the pay of the *Okhrana*, the secret police, but that the police had also one of their representatives on the Central Committee of the Cadets, Milyukoff's party. A sharp pruning knife will be necessary to remove this excrescence with all its ramifications from Russian life.

We called at every hotel, at any boarding house which was indicated to us; impossible to find a room, or even an easy-chair. The explanation of this fact is that so many refugees from Poland, lately also from Roumania, have filled the hotels; some of the bigger ones have also been turned into hospitals. After two hours of weary wanderings, a militia-man took pity on us and led us to a room in a highly "modest" hotel which served as a sort of resting-place for the patrols. There I passed the rest of the night in a corner of a sofa, while the two others with a courage I could not muster lay down on a most suspicious looking bed.

When we turned out early in the morning, in bitter cold, it proved impossible to find breakfast. No coffee-houses were open, no bakers' shops, no restaurants; even the lunch counters in the railway station were closed, so we had to walk on without any tea or coffee. As we walked back towards the station to find our luggage, we saw men, women and children lining up before the bakers' shops or the victuallers'. On that day the victualling was very difficult. I got lunch at noon, but not a crust of bread before. The next morning, after having found a hotel at 6 p.m. on Sunday, after much searching and many a weary walk, I got for my breakfast a pot of coffee with sugar, but no milk, and one single piece of black bread, and that piece not a large one, fifty or sixty grammes.

But it should be said at once that matters improved very quickly. Partly because the scarcity of food was artificially created by the late Government, partly because the new administration made an extraordinary effort to feed Petrograd, matters soon returned to their normal level. I was told in Finland that there were four meatless days a week in Russia. As a matter of fact, I had meat every day during my fortnight's stay, and both at lunch and dinner, and there was no difficulty after a few days in having bacon with the breakfast eggs, if I preferred. In the hotels I saw only black bread, but in private houses I had white bread. The prohibitive regulations were still in force, in the hotels no wines, and still less spirits, were to be had. I know that there were great difficulties in finding wine in bottles for private persons.

But prices were very high, more than double those prevailing at my former visits to Petrograd (in 1910 and in February, 1914). To a certain extent this rise is balanced to foreigners by the serious depreciation of Russian money. Here in Norway the exchange on Petrograd is somewhere between 55 and 60 per cent of the normal exchange. Paper money is flooding the country, and during my whole stay I had not one single Russian coin in my hand, not even a copper. I once saw some copper and even one silver coin in the purse of an *istvostsjik*. I have in my possession as souvenirs paper notes of one, two, three and five copecks. They are 5 x 8 cm., but for ten, fifteen and twenty copecks stamps without gum were used instead of coins. It is evident that the peasants are hoarding the coins; they think them more valuable than the paper, of which from bitter experience they are distrustful. In Finland smaller coins were used, while, from one mark upwards, paper notes were most to be seen. (Finland has its own currency system [a mark = one franc]). It is said that several foreigners are buying up Russian notes, speculating in the rise of the currency when the crops which are now being hoarded for want of export facilities, will be thrown on the foreign market.

During Sunday I succeeded, as already said, in finding provisional hotel accommodation, but rather out of the way, and I was promised a room on Tuesday at one of the better hotels in the central part of the town. As I walked along the Nevsky during the afternoon, I met a procession of workmen, soldiers and women, singing the revolutionary hymn—an old song I was told—sung to a tune evidently borrowed from the *Marseillaise*, but in rather a depraved setting. The text may be rendered as follows:

Let us give up the ancient world.  
Let us shake its dust from our feet.  
We want no idol in gold.  
We hate the palace of the Tsars.  
We will go to our suffering brethren,  
We will go to those who are starving.  
With them we execrate the felon,  
And we will challenge him to fight.  
March, march, workmen, forward!

The procession carried red banners on which was written: "Land and Liberty," "Down with Autocracy," etc. It was a revolutionary sight, but at the head of the procession in the very middle of the street I saw a strange sight: high up on a car drawn by a horse a man was standing, turning, turning incessantly his cinematograph preparing his "films of the Russian revolution." Then I understood that I was really a witness of historic events, but also that all danger was passed. Petrograd had settled down to civilized life.