The Glorious Seventh.

A NATION'S CHEERS.

By S. P. BUNTING.

Russia is agog with the Fifth Anniversary of her Revolution and coinciding with it, the opening of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International. For both are national events: not mere affairs of "one section of society," as bourgeois people say, but landmarks in the history of the country's emancipation. And not Russia's alone. One effect of the Revolution has been to give the people a very lively sense of their position in the world. Political meetings, private discussions, newspapers, all deal with the "outside world" as their own world. They have become internationalists, not like the English who assume a God-given command over "other nations," nor yet like bourgeois "good Europeans," but as pioneers of the international revolution for the liberation of mankind. And so even the internal affairs of Russia, like the food tax, the "new economic policy," or the suppression of bribery, become matters of world import, and are discussed in the same spirit and breath and by the same people as, say, the control of the Straits or the British elections; while on the other hand the conditions of foreign States are treated like "home affairs." The Russians to-day are international politicians by second nature. They love Russia, but to raise their enthusiasm an orator must talk to them about the whole world. Indeed, it is said they pay more attention to a foreigner than to their own people.

EAST MEETS WEST.

With a full sense of cosmopolitanism, then, the twin capitals, Petrograd and Moscow, do honour at once to their own people and to the delegates of the world proletarian advance guard. Every day delegates have been pouring in. About 350 are here, from 52 countries; not so many delegates as last year, but as regards place of origin more catholic than ever. There is hardly a country in the atlas but is represented here, directly or indirectly, by a delegate "legally" or "illegally," with a babel of tongues that somehow manages to get interpreted into either French, German, English or Russian, the four languages prevailing in the Commintern. Perhaps the most notable absentee here is our own continent of Africa, except the extreme North and South. Thus, while all the nations of the East, from Turkey through Persia, India, Dutch Indies and China to Japan, are amply and very ably represented here, and have so far, I think, held the most live and serious meetings of any group, also calling forth in the streets and among the students and other Orientals sojourning here the greatest demonstrations of sympathy and support, especially in connection with the struggle for the liberation of Constantinople and the Straits from Western Imperialism—the masses of Africa, on the other hand, are necessarily liable to be ignored, for they have nothing to show for themselves, and are represented only by my one "consultative" vote for the Communist Party of South Africa, as compared with "decisive" votes allotted as follows, for example: Russia 65, Germany and France 50 each, England 30, and so on (for, alas, Ivon Jones is still away, though picking up wonderfully, in the Crimea: and now at the last moment even my co-delegate must perforce, owing to a health breakdown, miss the Congress she came these many thousand miles for, leaving me like Orpheus without Eurydice). The American negroes for their part have two representatives here: one, an unofficial visitor, is Claude Mackay, a negro journalist who has written some fine revolutionary poems, some of which have been published in the "International." He was the first negro to enter Russia since the Revolution. It is good to find his views on "black and white" problems agreeing in the main with ours.

THE CONGRESS OPENS.

The Congress opened first on November 4, 5, and 6, at Petrograd, to and from which the delegates were conveyed by special trains. They were welcomed there with magnificently enthusiastic workers' demonstrations and a review of troops, and were told off to address a hundred workers' meetings held throughout the district in celebration of the double occasion. But Moscow is not to be outdone. The counter-revolutionaries were surely praying for a rainy, muddy or snowy Seventh, but to their chagrin a fine and frosty morning greets the anniversary, an advance on previous anniversary weather which, Trotsky suggested, might be significant of political progress. Streets are swept clean of mud. Banners, with symbolical pictures in that curious art style of which specimens have before now reached South Africa (I last saw them at Marshall Square) bedeck the public buildings, and even the "N.E.P." men (bourgeois products of the "new economic policy"—shopkeepers, etc.) display Marx' picture in their windows, like Johannesburg tradesmen "closing in sympathy with the strikers" or displaying Citizens' Alliance cards, according to which side is uppermost. The newspapers come out with big special editions. At night the town is illuminated. The feast is celebrated like Christmas. But there is more than Christmas cheer going to-day. It is not Christ's but the workers' birthday. Let us see how it is celebrated by the Soviet Government.

THE RED SQUARE.

We go to the Red Square, where the delegates and Commintern officials from a platform witness a review of some 30,000 troops of all arms. The soldiers, who marched barefoot in 1920, to-day look remarkably well clad and cared for; nor is there a trace of caste in the "commissioned" ranks, you can hardly tell which are the officers. After speeches by Trotsky and a couple of foreign delegates, Trotsky comes down from the "Tribune" and, standing at the "saluting post," shouts with his powerful voice (Kameneff and Lunacharsky also taking their turn as relefs) fraternal revolutionary greetings and slogans to each unit by name as it swings past, always ending up with a "Hurrah" to which the ranks respond with a hearty cheer. Contrast this comradely atmosphere with the stiff pomp and silence of a capitalist review, with hard-faced feathered field-marshals condescendingly looking down from horseback on their militarised mechanical slaves who "about to die, salute them." Somehow in this military display at Moscow there seems no militarism, because there is no ruling class for which these soldiers are to fight, they are only out to fight against all ruling classes.

Why do they cheer? They cheer Trotsky only because he stands for them, not they for him. They cheer as conscious fighters for the workers, and the international workers at that. They cheer because they feel they are helping to push things forward politically for their class in all lands. They cheer spontaneously, without admiring crowds to stimulate them, for the Square is clear, the "civilians'" turn comes later.

Where else in the world is there a national festival in honour of the workers and in perpetuation of the day they kicked their masters out? What other government treats their cause as officially and exclusively its own?

WORKERS' BATTALIONS.

"Oh, but," the critics will say, "it is easy enough for a government to order out the troops, tell them to cheer, and then call that a great demonstration in favour of the Government." Wait a bit.

The army review began at 10.30 a.m., but the march past was not over until 7 p.m. The military display was completely eclipsed by a civilian procession. Where else in the world is an army review followed up by a march of workers, as much as to say, "we are with them and they with us"? But that is what happened here. The public holiday was taken advantage of by the masses of Moscow, not to go to the Zoo or to the pubs, but to march past in their turn, organised in factory group after factory group, branch after branch, union after union, each with its banner and streamers, and always with bands playing, and including many women and some children, all in step. Half a million must have filed by; thousands were still outside the Square waiting their turn when darkness fell, and beguiled the delay with songs.

The whole "public" of Moscow seemed to turn out, not as spectators but as actors in the great show, though even then the pavements en route were crowded with onlookers. Big demonstrations are no doubt Russia's forte; but you can't manipulate the entire public like this: them at any rate you can't make cheer against their will. There is nothing of the compulsory branch or shop committee meeting about this gathering. The impression of mass support of the Government which we got from the "Youth" demonstration in September was multiplied tenfold this time. On days like this N.E.P.-men lie low, and even labour "oppositionists"—unfriendly grousers at N.E.P., etc.—are snowed under and shown up as, after all, only a minor quantity. The "Times" will ridicule the whole affair: well, I have already written what credence the "Times" deserves. Trotsky and his associates stood their ground hour after hour to the end, greeting all the proletarian as they had done the military units, and with the same response. It was a sight and a sound to take one's breath away.

WHY DO THEY CHEER?

Again we ask, why do these people come out in their hundreds of thousands to "salute the happy morn," and wait all the cold day for a chance to do it? There is no king or queen in a golden crown to trudge miles for a sight or a smell of. These people are living in crowded quarters, on poor rations, at wages still below pre-war, with the rouble down again and prices consequently rising (though wage adjustments do follow here); their living standard is still miserable; and it is the workers who more than anyone else feel the injustice of N.E.P.-men coining money while they themselves still go short. Why, then, do they cheer? I can hear them still cheering as they go home at half-past one at night. It is not hero-worship for Trotsky, for as often as not they turned their eyes away from him and up to the tribune where some of the strangers stood, delegates from "furrin parts." No, it is the Soviet Government that is popular, even impregnable, but why? We must answer in this way. In the Russian workers' history and blood there is a "real" idealism that we miss in Anglo-Saxon peoples. They are thinking not just of their immediate fleshpots, though they hope and expect improvement will come there too, but of the political, social and economic emancipation they have already won and held these five years against all attack.

A FREE PEOPLE.

"They have been converted from mere objects of government," said Zinovieff at Petrograd, "into active creators of the State." One thinks of our South African natives, whom an appeal to unite just for more scoff or "better conditions" will often leave cold, they are not so interested in their wage slavery as such. But take away their boss (yes, and their "missus" too), take away the white caste domination which holds them subjected, take away the perpetual discriminating social and political degradation and inferiority they groan under, and see how they will cheer! So in Moscow—which our credulous native leaders are taught or corrupted to look upon as a home of the devil. The workers of Moscow cheer because they have no more masters. They are equal among firsts, to reverse the old phrase. Their exploiting class, except for those unavoidably readmitted under the new economic policy which all hope will be shortlived, is banished or declassed for ever. They know that, whatever their hardships still, it is a choice between Back to Capitalism and Forward to Communism, and they choose to go forward, with a great inspiration and faith that they are ever moving towards better things, a belief in their mission as a class, as pioneers, and not for Russia only but for the whole world—and so their bugbears, their "Guy Fawkes" effigies in the procession, are not local enemies as they might be in England or South Africa (e.g., Smuts), but the international enemies of the working class, typified by Poincare, Lloyd-George, and—the Second International, a top-hatted figure riding astride a capsized boat! The message their cheers conveyed to us was this: "We are not all Communists, though most of us have some connection with the Communist Party. But we all remember what millions of our people have died for, and we are determined not to let go of any of the gains they won, but to 'stand fast,' as our banners say, 'by our Soviets, the organs of proletarian dictatorship.' We defy the world robbers to rob us of them. We have led the way; now we cheer on the workers of other lands, represented by you delegates on that tribune, to follow up our first success in the Great War." That is everywhere the cry in Russia: "When are you workers in other countries going to do your bit?"

THE GLOVES OFF.

In the evening the huge Opera House was packed at a meeting held by the Moscow Soviet to welcome the delegates. Everyone expected Lenin to appear, but he is evidently holding himself in reserve. Russian speakers included President Kalinin, Kameneff (not hoarse yet), Zinovieff and Radek (who looks like Methodist old Daniel Quorm); from other countries, Clara Zetkin, Bordiga, Murphy of the English Party, and many others. One could not help feeling that, although speakers fresh from the latest and hottest fronts ought to be the best, yet the Russian revolutionary veterans, though no longer directly in the fray, have not got soft but still present the best combination of proletarian fire and sound commonsense, and that the further away you get from them the more you are liable to be put off with either mere hot air or, worse still, an imitation of the "weighty and statesmanlike utterances" of heavy capitalist rhetoric. No doubt the working class has men in plenty who would have been Lloyd-Georges or Smutses if they had been brought up or bought up, like those "great men," to serve Mammon: but as it is there is no need to ape their style. The proletarian revolution is a rough and tumble affair, not a job for "gentlemen," still less for namby-pamby pacifists or Nonconformist conscience men afraid to hurt Fat's tender skin, least of all for a class of workers who, as in English-speaking countries (and hardly anywhere else), for snobbery's or respectability's sake deliberately vote for an avowed enemy of their class, a Tory or a boss or a landlord, and when he shoots them down, go and do it again. Maxim Gorky, sulking again at something, has started abusing his own people as cruel. Well, they are not kid-gloved, that is why they could carry through their revolution; and the experience has hardened their hearts a bit more. They have been through so much that life and death are no longer so great matters of life and death to them. A sleepless enemy has made and is making them undergo untold hardships and sacrifices. They have borne these for the cause: but by God, they are not going to spare the enemy in his turn merely for fear of inflicting hardship and sacrifice on him!

Moscow, November 7th, 1922.