

Tomas Masaryk and Postrevolutionary Events¹

Victor MASLOV²

For the 150th anniversary of birth of Tomas Masaryk,
the first President of Czechoslovakia

From the author: My grandfather Academician Pyotr Maslov was connected with Tomas Masaryk and the Czech National Committee. His stories about that time shaped my view on the Russian Revolution and the role the Czechoslovak Corps played in it. Since the UNESCO declared the year 2000 the year of Tomas Masaryk, acknowledged as an outstanding historical personality, I have decided it is proper time to share this view with the broad public.

IT IS COMMON KNOWLEDGE that the liberally-minded Russian public welcomed the February Revolution with great enthusiasm. But I feel that the mere stating of the fact is not enough: I am going to recall certain characteristic episodes which occurred prior to the Revolution. When Nicholas the Second entered his box at the Bolshoi, the chorus, which had appealed with some kind of petition to the Tsar, got down on their knees, and the great Russian singer Chaliapine had no choice but to do likewise. After that incident this idol of all Russia was ostracized by society. My mother, who was a schoolgirl at the time, told me how sorry she had been for Chaliapine, with whom people refused to shake hands.

Another episode. In 1878, a young woman Vera Zasulich shot and wounded Moscow's Governor, the aged general Fyodor Trepov, for ordering to have a university student flogged. She was tried by the newly established jury court. This is how the famous lawyer Anatoly Koni described the moment when the verdict was pronounced: "No!" declared the foreman of the jury, "Not gui..." He was not allowed to finish. One had to be present there to imagine the explosion of sounds, which drowned the words of the foreman, and to feel something like an electric discharge which shook the audience. There was an outburst of unrestrained joy, hysterical sobs, shouts of 'Bravo! Good for you! Hurrah! Vera! Vera! Many made the sign of the cross, and in the gallery, where more democratic public was seated, people hugged one another. Even those who sat in the honorary seats behind the jury clapped with great gusto... Somebody was making a great deal of noise right into my ear. I looked and saw the Assistant General-Feldscheikmeister Count A.A. Barantsev, a ruddy-faced gray-haired man clapping his hands off." And further: "...I

¹ The paper was published in the journal "Social Sciences", the Russian Academy of Sciences, n 4. 2000, p/66-77/

² V. Maslov, Academician (Department of Mathematics) who also has been taking part in the work of the RAS Department of Literature and Language, winner of the Lenin and State prizes of the USSR and Russian Federation, Editor-in-Chief of Russian Journal of Mathematical Physics.

was on the point of leaving, but was detained by one of our dignitaries, a tall gaunt old man with the Order of Alexander Star on his chest. 'It's the happiest day of my life!' he cried, slapping the star on his chest. His face suddenly flushed, and an old man's nervous tears glistened in his eyes. 'The happiest day!' he repeated giving me a firm handshake."

Mind you, there were not enough legal foundations for a full acquittal of Vera Zasulich. Next, I am going to quote the end of the speech made by Aladyin, member of the "trudovik" fraction of the First State Duma, at the first session of the 26th sitting of the Duma in 1906. Subsequently, I must add, he was an active participant in the Kornilov mutiny against the Provisional Government. I am quoting from the Duma Minutes, p. 1333: "We representatives have but one road open to us - to give as few of our Cossacks as possible for the dirty and disgraceful service for the present government (thunderous applause)."

Here is the conclusion of the famous speech of Prince Urusov in the same Duma: "...the danger will not disappear as long as the administration is influenced by people who are sergeants by education and pogrom-mongers by conviction (prolonged thunderous applause)" Shouts of "Pogrom-mongers!" (The chairman rings the bell.) Voices from the left: "Pogrom-mongers!" (p. 1132) (At that moment the Ministers were attending the Duma session.)

I have been citing these examples so that the people of today could form an impression of the social climate of that time. I liked what Vladimir Voinovich said to a gushing lady of his acquaintance: "If you lived at that time, you may very well have become a regicide yourself". "What do you mean?" the lady cried indignantly. "I am a monarchist!" To which he replied: "You are a monarchist today, but at that time the sentiments of society were very different." Thirty-nine years passed between the episode of Vera Zasulich and the February Revolution. The speeches of Aladyin and Urusov were separated from this revolution by eleven years. This goes to show that, by 1917, patient Russian society had become red-hot. No wonder it greeted the revolution with great enthusiasm.

It was into this turbulent whirlpool of events, ideas, searchings, hopes, declarations, brilliant speeches, futurist posters and poems that was plunged Tomas Masaryk, professor of sociology and philosophy and fighter for the liberation of Czechoslovakia from the Austrian yoke. His acquaintances from among liberal professors of St. Petersburg were in full sympathy with him and his cause. Pitirim Sorokin, who was twenty-eight at the time and was university lecturer, left the following prophetic entry in his diary: "Today I was visited by Professor Masaryk from Prague... It was a pleasure to talk to this rational, cultured, serious and broad-minded man... I have no doubt that with such leaders as Masaryk Czechoslovakia will win its independence." This was written in early June of 1917, in the period between the February and

October Revolutions.

"They (the Czechs) had lived, together with us Russians, through a 'honeymoon of freedom' and were considerably influenced by the Russian Revolution," wrote the Socialist-Revolutionary Victor Chernov.

In Russia Masaryk sought and found ideological support for the freedom of his people. Russian society was prepared to share its newly acquired freedom with him. Russian democracy was fully on the side of Masaryk in his fight.

Soon after the October coup a momentous event took place in Russia: the elections to the All-Russia Constituent Assembly. Obviously, society placed great hopes in this Assembly. "Russia's verdict" was eagerly awaited. The Bolsheviks lost in the elections. Out of the 36 million voters only 9 million sided with the Bolsheviks. Victor Chernov was elected Chairman of the Assembly. This happened in early January, 1918.

But, while people in the provinces were eagerly awaiting developments, time in the capital was rushing along, bearing Russia into some fantastic anarchic vistas. The anarchist Zheleznyak, head of the guard, resolved matters by a curt phrase he said to Chernov at the height of the Assembly's session: "The guards are tired." This signified the end of the Constituent Assembly - in the capital.

Was this a coup d'état? Naturally, from the legal point of view, it was. The coup was effected not on November 7, when the Provisional Government was overthrown, but at the moment of dispersal of the Constituent Assembly. Neither the Provisional Government, nor the Petrograd Soviet headed by Leon Trotsky were legitimate bodies of government. They were temporary and only effective in the capital. And the coup was perpetrated not by Bukharin, who had just spoken at the Assembly, and not by Lenin, the Bolsheviks' leader, who had a Browning pistol stolen from his person during the sittings, but by the anarchist Zheleznyak and his likes. Was he a supporter of Bukharin? I am sure that, like Sharikov in Bulgakov's story *A Dog's Heart*, he did not agree with either side. What, then, was the reaction of Lenin and Bukharin? They approved, with some misgiving but also with much joy, Zheleznyak's actions, thinking up the pretext that there was no quorum at the sittings.

To place oneself at the head of a revolutionary people is much like catching a bear in the well-known story: "You've caught a bear? Then bring him here." "But he won't let me." You either go the way the mob is going, or are dragged along or else somebody else will lead it and you will be stamped underfoot. The very astute philosopher B. Porshnev said that if the Bolsheviks failed to place themselves at the head of the mob, some other radical group would have done it.

Here are a few examples in support of this idea. Ensign Krylenko, a Bolshevik and the

future Commander-in-Chief, started out with a squad to arrest the liberal general Dukhonin, the army Chief of Staff. Anarchist sailors met his squad at the railway station and escorted him to Dukhonin. But when they saw that Krylenko was preparing to take Dukhonin away, they would not let him do it. Krylenko, who tried to resist them, was beaten up, and Dukhonin was brutally murdered. When Krylenko, his face bearing traces of the beating, reported to Lenin and demanded that the sailors should be punished, Lenin signed post factum order on the execution of Dukhonin instead.

Or take another commonly known fact. The Bolsheviks were bitterly opposed to the June demonstration in 1917, but when it took place notwithstanding, decided to lead the demonstration.

Lenin's view of the events of 1917 kept changing beginning with the April Theses, and yet he barely managed to keep up with the developments. Kamenev and Zinoviev, as is well known, disclosed the date of the uprising planned by the Bolsheviks, for which "treachery" was later imputed to them. But did this "treachery" influence the course of events in any way? Not at all. It had no significance whatever.

The dispersal of the legitimately elected Constituent Assembly is censured by most today. Let us not debate this question, since we have no idea what would have happened if power remained in the hands of the "legitimately elected" Assembly. It is very possible that, if Russia had not been a totalitarian state, it would have failed to win the war. Like other metaphysical discussions, this has no connection with real life.

But what was happening in the provinces? There was no army, no police, no law, no order, no calendar with months and no dates - exactly as in Gogol's Notes of a Madman. And in the midst of this muddle was the well organized, well armed, disciplined and motivated Czechoslovak Corps, which was supposed to have the status of prisoners-of-war. We know how the Czechs felt about the Austrian government. So there was nothing surprising that the Czechoslovak Corps surrendered to the fraternal Russian army during the First World War and was not disarmed.

Masaryk promised the Provisional Government that the Czechoslovak Corps would leave Russia without interfering in its internal affairs and will proceed to the front to fight the Germans and Austrians on the side of France.

But when the All-Russia Constituent Assembly was dispersed, the situation changed radically. While previously Masaryk had hopes of Russia's help in his fight for national independence, it now transpired that the Assembly members deprived of their status and some of them even arrested, pinned their hopes upon Masarik and his corps.

From my grandfather's stories I remember that Masaryk was an internationalist, that he

supported close ties between Slav nations and was himself ready to take part in defending the legitimately elected power in his host country. Besides, the fighters for the freedom of Czechoslovakia - Masaryk, Benes, Stefanik and others - felt let down because the Power of Soviets had discontinued the war against Germany and Austria, thus jeopardizing the chances of their country's liberation from the yoke of the Austrian Imperial House. But even if a person is prepared to risk his own life, it is a very different proposition to risk the lives of thousands of your fellow-citizens, when your own country is not yet free. Had it not been for the attempt by Red Army men, apparently on Trotsky's orders, to disarm the Czechoslovaks, there would probably have been no mutiny of the Czechoslovak "prisoner" corps.

According to my information, an agreement about the Czechs helping to restore the legitimately elected power was reached in the early months of 1918 in Moscow (where both Masaryk and my grandfather had moved from St. Petersburg). My grandfather agreed to take part in elaborating a land reform.

Masaryk's principal task, undoubtedly, was to ensure a safe withdrawal of the Czechoslovak Corps from the territory of Russia. Only if given a guarantee of the Corps' safe passage home with all its weapons did the Czechs promise aid to Russian liberals - in the event of restoration of the legitimate power. So the two sides were to help each other.

I must explain why my grandfather Pyotr Maslov, a prominent scholar, an agrarian economist, the author of a number of fundamental treatises (The Agrarian Question in Russia and others), which were published both in this country and abroad, a man who was subsequently to become an academician and who kept away from politics and political intrigues, agreed to take part in the future government of the Constituent Assembly.

Here I must remind you that besides laws of democratic society according to which the All-Russia Constituent Assembly was to be invested with full state power, there existed, and still exist laws which govern the conduct of party members. The land program of the Social Democratic Party (Bolsheviks and Mensheviks) was adopted at the Stockholm unifying congress in 1906. This Congress was to decide on the problem of land and land reform, which has remained topical to our own day.

Four different programs were submitted to the Congress: Lenin's, program of "nationalization" of land, Schmidt's program, Larin's program and the program of Pyotr Maslov, my grandfather. Lenin's program was put to the vote first, and was voted down Schmidt's program, which was supported by Lenin as the most acceptable to him, was voted down too. So was Larin's program, despite the support of Lenin, who was strongly opposed to Maslov's program. And finally the Congress voted on Maslov's program of "municipalization of land." Lenin criticized it quite harshly, and yet, after some amendments and additions suggested by

Plekhanov were inserted in it, this program was passed by the majority of votes.

The minutes of the Congress do not mention that Maslov (who was not, even formally, a member of the party) had the status of "an invited delegate" and used the pseudonym "John". Academician Strumilin would later describe how protective they were of my grandfather when the ship on which the delegates were going to Sweden was hit by a storm. Several safety belts were put on him to ensure that the most important delegate should be rescued in case the ship perished.

But at the Congress "John" was not consistently "pro-Maslovite," for which he was criticized, and was quite flexible as regards amendments and objections. He was not a dogmatist. Therefore, if party ethics was to be observed, even if Lenin was quite rude in his attacks on Maslov in the press (for instance, in the article "P. Maslov in Hysterics"), Maslov's program, once it was adopted by the Congress, had to be implemented.

So, according to the correct procedure, first, the Constituent Assembly was to be convened, and, second, the faction of the Social-Democratic party (Bolsheviks and Mensheviks) was to propose the program of municipalization of land. At least, this was what society expected. Therefore it was natural for my grandfather to agree to take part in the elaboration of the land program of the Constituent Assembly, provided, of course, that its powers were to be restored. Let me remind you how events developed further. The mutinous Czechoslovak Corps was inspired by one common idea - to achieve Czechoslovakia's independence. Otherwise, it was ideologically versatile. The congress of the Corps's soldiers' deputies showed that about 75 per cent of them were socialists. There were also pure nationalists of the right-wing trend, like, for instance, General Gajda. The Commander-in-Chief, Syrový was a liberal, and private Hasek, the future famous writer, sided with the Bolsheviks. After the mutiny, the triumphal march across Russia, and fraternization with workers and peasants of Samara, Ufa and Yekaterinburg, the Czechs were inspired by "a new revolutionary uplift and expectation of an era of brilliant successes" (V.Chernov).

On July 20, 1918 Lenin wrote: "It is necessary to move against the Czechoslovaks a maximum of Petersburg workers... Otherwise we shall be done for-the situation with the Czechoslovaks is the worst imaginable."¹

On the vast territory controlled by Czechoslovaks a Government was set up in Samara, which was called, as planned "Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly" (Komuch). This government was headed by the Socialist-Revolutionary Volsky, and my grandfather was among its members. At a congress of towns and zemstvos, Volsky declared that "the capitalist order cannot be abolished at the present time. Capitalist industry must exist, and the class of capitalists must be provided with the opportunity to direct industry."²

On the other hand, it was provided that the wages should be established by agreement between workers and factory-owners. The new government supported the development of individual farms, relying on the so-called "kulaks" as on their "social mainstay" in the countryside.³

A land reform was developed, which abolished both big land ownership and the so-called "black re-allotment." But the official adoption of this reform was postponed till the full quorum of the Constituent Assembly was restored.

The new government sought to establish law and order. The newspaper *Vestnik Komucha* (Messenger of the Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly) wrote the following about the doings of the Cossacks, who were a law unto themselves. "In the morning the arrested (recruits) were led out into the square, made to undress and lie down on their clothes - and whipped to a man. Two of the victims were taken into the backyards and shot... The Cossacks made three raids in search of Bolsheviks and were unable to find any for the sole reason that the peasants regard those whom the Cossacks are looking for as honest land-tillers. The other day the Cossacks came for the fourth time and arrested several men. Nobody knows what happened to these people," the newspaper concluded with indignation.⁴

But not all members of the government shared these views. Ataman Dutov, the deputy for Orenburg, who used to wear a red bow, and even Chairman Volsky himself secretly connived with lawless acts perpetrated by the Cossacks.

My grandfather was adamantly opposed to such views and practices, which has since been admitted by some newspapers of the Urals and Siberia. For instance, the newspaper *Vozrozhdenie Urala* (Rebirth of the Urals) wrote in its number 3 (16) for 15 February, 1996: "Pyotr Pavlovich was a proponent of justice." Maslov himself wrote in one of his works: "In my approach to the social problem I ignore party considerations, because I believe that they interfere with the correct posing of the question from the point of view of the interests of the national economy, which do not always coincide with the current interests of one or another class, one or another party."

What role, then, did the Czechoslovak National Committee play?

The newspaper *Vlast naroda* (Power of the People) (of September 15, 1918) quoted from the talk Pyotr Maslov had had with the representative of the Czechoslovak National Committee, in which Maslov outlined what he considered the most important tasks facing the governments of The Volga region, the Urals and Siberia.

It was decided to set up a stronger power government body, to which the Komuch would be subordinate. September 23, 1918, saw the establishment of Ufa Directoria, which subsequently moved to Omsk. My grandfather agreed to head the Agrarian Department of the

Directoria.

Under the wing of the Czechoslovaks and the Directory there were congregated a great number of officers, who craved revenge on the Bolsheviks. In October 1918 the government moved to Omsk, and in November a military coup was engineered in Omsk. The war Minister Kolchak seized power and adopted the title of All-Russia Supreme Ruler. This is how Chernov explained this development: "After the first brilliant victories scored by the People's Army, this motley crowd decided that Bolshevism was half dead and it would not take much to finish it off... and it focussed its hatred on its supposed successors and heirs."⁵ In other words, they began wrangling over the spoils that were yet to be seized.

Grandfather told me that a considerable factor in Kolchak's coup was the Tsar's huge treasury (43 thousand poods - one pood being equal to about 16 kg -of gold, 30 thousand poods of silver, much platinum and precious stones), which had been seized in Kazan by the Czechoslovak Corps and the troops of the Komuch. As for the Russian and Czech true social democrats, they were guided by perfectly disinterested motivations. Which cannot, unfortunately, be said about the military, who went on wild sprees in Omsk. Many of them dreamed of laying their hands of the Tsar's gold.

The National Committee of the Czechoslovak Corps, with which Maslov was connected, refused to recognize the coup, but the Czech general Gajda, who subsequently headed the fascist movement in Czechoslovakia, announced his neutrality and even agreed to take a post in Kolchak's government. Bloody reprisals were meted out to members of the Constituent Assembly and other representatives of progressive Russian intelligentsia. One of these victims was member of the Constituent Assembly Surguchov, who was chopped to death with sabres. Another prominent worker of the Omsk democratic regime Yevgeny Mayevsky, a well-known revolutionary (first a Bolshevik, then a right-wing Menshevik), who had close ties with the Czechoslovaks, continued to publish his newspaper under Kolchak's regime as well. When the newspaper was prohibited, Mayevsky (incidentally, his real name was Vincenty Anicetovich Gutovsky, and he was a descendant of a Polish rebel exiled to Siberia) continued to publish it, changing its name after every new order of prohibition. In the end, he was court-martialed and sentenced to twenty years of prison. But the Cossacks who were to escort him to prison shot him on the way.⁶

Talleyrand's famous words about the Bourbons, who "forgot nothing and learnt nothing," could well be applied to the new power in Siberia. The Kolchakovites distrusted all local nationalities. They tried to arrest the government of the Bashkirs, which recognized the Komuch. The Bashkirs applied to the Bolsheviks with a proposal of peace. Yet 81 deputies (out of 715) had been elected to the Constituent Assembly from the national groups, which was a larger

proportion than all the right-wing deputies taken together (16 Constitutional Democrats, 2 People's Socialists, 4 non-party members). Of these only the latter four deputies could be considered to be in agreement with the new power. This meant that the new regime was denied the population's support and could not be expected to last. Even the SRs (Socialrevolutionaries) elected a resistance committee with unrestricted authorization and tried to organize a workers' rebellion against Kolchak in Yekaterinburg.

When the Reds arrested Kolchak, he declared at one of the interrogations: "The Bolsheviks have inflicted much harm to Russia, but they have done it one important service - they kicked out the Constituent Assembly."

Let us ask ourselves a metaphysical question: what would have happened if the legitimately elected government was established in Russia in 1918? First and foremost, it was plainly impossible: Russia was not ready for it. It never occurred to Kolchak that the declaration he made before his execution places him, from the point of view of the future mentality of civilized society, on the same level with the anarchist Zheleznyak.

In the meantime, the Czechs led by Masaryk obtained their goal: in the end of 1918 a new state-Czechoslovakia - was established. In it worked together, without any longer trying to destroy one another, the Communist Hasek, who had by then wrote his famous book about the "brave soldier Schwejk," and the talented general Gajda, who had refused to obey "the national committee"(he was only dismissed from the army in 1920). An economic miracle was worked in this new country, which benefited by the lesson of the Russian epic.

Masaryk became the first President of Czechoslovakia and held this post for 17 years. He invited my grandfather, as a specialist on agrarian problems, to come to Czechoslovakia, but my grandfather chose to remain in Russia. He lectured at Siberian universities and was a consultant of the government of the Far Eastern Republic. When Lenin decided to introduce his New Economic Policy, he invited Maslov, his long-standing opponent, to Moscow, since he had criticized the policy of "war communism." Grandfather was allotted an eight-room house in Moscow and was put at the head of a chair in Moscow University. His books were continually printed and re-printed. He was a leading economist of the country. In 1929, he was elected to the USSR Academy of Sciences as its full member. But in 1930 he was arrested. He only remained in prison for 8 months, however, and was released on the intercession of the French writer Romain Rolland.

I well remember sitting on a stool beside my grandfather's bed in his house in a little backside yard an old Arbat. Grandfather asked me to read aloud to him his memoirs written in lilac ink in a sprawling handwriting. To me, at sixteen, his memoirs seemed dry and completely

devoid of emotion. But when I read the word "Masaryk" and raised my eyes to Grandfather, I was amazed to see a tear rolling down his temple.

I knew that Masaryk had invited him to Czechoslovakia, and that another friend, Noah Jordania, who headed the Government of Georgia in 1918, wanted him to come to Tbilisi. Today I understand what it was that moved my grandfather to tears. According to my notions, he lived a wonderful, luxurious life. As an Academician, he had a big car at his disposal, after Grandmother's death, at the age of 75, he married a wise and kind woman, a real beauty, who took the tender care of him. A scion of Old Believers who prospected for gold in Siberia, he was a hardy and reserved man.

I now understand, that even though he was an Academician, he occupied no post after the NEP was abrogated in 1929, and none of his works were printed. And this, for a scientist, is paramount to death. Masaryk had obviously wanted to consult him on the economic problems of Czechoslovakia. This would have been a wonderful opportunity for Grandfather to try out his concepts in practice. In Russia his efforts had been thwarted.

In conclusion, I want to point out that Czechoslovakia was most responsive of all European countries to the sufferings of Russian emigrants of the first wave. This applied particularly to representatives of Social Democrats and liberal circles, to say nothing of the surviving members of the Constituent Assembly. Russian intellectuals owe great thanks to President Masaryk and Czechoslovak Government for Marina Tsvetayeva, for one, for whom Czechia became, as she wrote, her second home country.

This miracle country - democratic Czechoslovakia, which was an embodiment of the dreams and ideas of Russian democracy, of the dream of my grandfather, was crushed by the Nazis in 1939. Fortunately, Masarik did not live to see it. But my grandfather was sure that nothing could break the spirit of the Czechs. Marina Tsvetayeva wrote prophetically about this people:

Do not die, nation
 God will set things right.
 Your heart is a garnet
 And your chest, granite.
 Your will live, nation,
 Stronger than Scriptures,
 Fiercer than granite
 And as pure as crystal.

NOTES

1 V.I. Lenin. Collected works, Vol. 27, p. 503

2 Quoted from The History of the Civil War in the USSR, Vol. 3, Moscow, 1958, p. 333 (in Russian).

3 Ibidem.

4 Ibid., p. 336

5 V.M. Chernov. Before the Storm. Recollections. Moscow, 1993, p. 377 (in Russian).

6 I am writing about it also to remedy the injustice done Gutovsky by Alexander Solzhenitsyn in one of his books. I think that I must be the only person aware that Solzhenitsyn's "Anicetovich" is that very member of the Menshevik Central Committee Yevgeny Mayevsky, a well-known journalist in his time, whose everyday name was Victor (not Vincenty), and after whom my parents named the author of this article.

7 V. Chernov. Before the Storm. Recollections. Moscow, 1993, p. 386 (in Russian).

Translated by Raissa Bobrova