

In the Flames of Revolt Twenty Years Ago

(Reminiscences of the Revolutionary Days of 1905, by an old Rebel).

EDITOR'S NOTE:—In connection with the 20th anniversary of the revolution of 1905 we publish this series of word pictures of the revolution as told by a comrade who participated in the events of that time. This is the fourth story.

By M. A. SKROMNY.

IV.

The Demonstration on Skulianskaya Rogatka.

THE attacks by the patriotic hooligans against peaceful workers, students and Jews became bolder and bolder, and finally culminated in the autumn of 1904 in the murder of an old innocent woman. She was the owner of a small tobacco store.

A group of hooligans came into the store and asked for cigarettes. After serving them she requested payment for the cigarettes. Instead of paying her they began to beat her, finally killing her.

About a week before that happened, a worker, a party member, was badly beaten up in the city park. Many similar incidents occurred before. This murder was the last straw that broke our patience. We decided to arrange a political demonstration of protest. A special meeting of the Boyevoy Otriad (military organization) was called and plans made for a demonstration. It was decided to turn the funeral of the victim into a political demonstration.

By order of the united conference of all the revolutionary organizations of the city all party members quit work on that day and came down to the hospital from which the funeral procession was to start. About nine o'clock in the morning the big courtyard of the hospital was crowded to capacity. The courtyard was circled by a tall stone wall and had a big gate thru which two ambulances could pass.

The "B. O." (as the military organization was called) took up positions at the gates, which were at once locked, and in the office of the hospital near the telephones. The administration was informed that the Russian social-democratic labor party was now in charge of the hospital, and that we will not interfere with the regular work of the hospital, but would see to it that no messages shall be sent to the police. Nobody was allowed to leave the place without the permission of the "B. O." and a telephone conversation was listened in to by the members of the "B. O."

About ten o'clock while the autopsy was being made in the hospital, we opened up in the courtyard the first open-air meeting in the city. Speakers representing the Russian social-democratic labor party, the social-revolutionary party (S.R.) and the Jewish social-democratic organization (Bund), made fiery speeches exposing the murderous policy of the bloody czarist government. They pointed out that the real murderers are not in this city but in Petersburg (now Leningrad, then the capital of the czar). They spoke about the bloody persecutions of the workers in the shops and factories, the miserable sufferings of the landless peasants, the lack of all freedom to fight their exploiters which workers abroad have, no unions, no possibility to meet, no possibility to organize legally, etc.

"The only way left to us is the revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of czarism!" said one speaker.

"Let's then fight this bloody monster that is killing us in the shops and factories, by long working hours and unbearable working conditions, let's fight the government that is using the murder of innocent people as the shield for its defence! Freedom for the workers! Land for the peasants! Down with czarism!"

The meeting lasted for over an hour. While the meeting was going on, the "B. O." held a meeting of its own. Every member of the "B. O." who was not stationed at strategic points was called into the park which formed a part of the great courtyard

of the hospital. There all the preliminaries were gone over again and final instructions were given. Cartridges were passed out to those who were short and everybody warned again not to fire until we will be fired on, or attacked.

When the meeting was over and everything ready, the "B. O." began to line up the crowd eight abreast before the gate. The bier was brought up to the front and the gate swung wide open.

The hospital is located near the city limits. The cemetery is a few miles away from the city. It was the general custom to carry the caskets to the cemetery on the shoulders.

The strongest group of the "B. O." was concentrated in front of the procession, the rest were scattered in the center and on the flanks. We expected to be met by police at the cemetery.

About a mile away from the hospital, when we reached the highway Skulianskaya Rogatka, a scarlet banner went up in the center of the procession. It was in the form of a pillow slip and about the same size. The breeze filled it up with air making the white letters on the red background plainly visible. As we read the words: "Down with absolutism! Long live the Revolution!" hearts began to beat faster. Up till now we had been talking of fighting czarism under the red flag of the revolution, but this was the first time we actually marched under the red banner openly defying our enemies. The thrill passed all over the ranks. The members of the "B. O." clasped tighter the guns in the pockets. All eyes were on the red flag.

About a block farther we encountered a mounted policeman. He was standing on a side street watching the procession pass. He saw the red flag but did not stir. As soon as we passed he rode off at full speed in the direction where we came from. We understood that something was up and an attempt was made to get in touch with the leader of the "B. O." but before we had time to do it, a cry went up: "Dragoons!"

We had been attacked from the rear! Our main forces were concentrated in front and in the center around the red flag. As the panic began only a few members of the "B. O." succeeded in making their way to the rear in face of the rushing mob.

In the middle of the street a company of dragoons was galloping at us with drawn sabers, on both sides the gendarmes and police were running with drawn revolvers. As they came nearer they began to fire. The fire was immediately returned by the few members of the "B. O." who had fought their way to the rear in order to hold back the attack as long as possible to give the crowd a chance to disperse.

A captain of the police fell wounded. The police and gendarmes stopped hesitatingly. The dragoons could not stop. By this time they were madly rushing at us. They cut into the crowd trampling it under the hoofs of the horses. The sabers began to fall right and left, sparkling in the sun. The police and gendarmes recovered their wits and began to fire again. As they reached the crowd after it was already disorganized by the attack of the dragoons, they also drew their sabers and began to stab and cut right and left.

The crowd fought back with bare fists, stones picked from the street, boards from the broken fences, etc. The members of the "B. O." used their guns as long as they could, but most of them were wounded at the first onslaught of the dragoons. One comrade who put up a stubborn fight was cut up almost to ribbons. He died on the spot.

The air was filled with shrieks and groans of the wounded, the cries and swearing of the police. One police captain was especially fierce, crying madly: "Shoot them! Stab 'em! Kill 'em!"

The battle did not last very long. The forces of the government won a big victory. There were about two

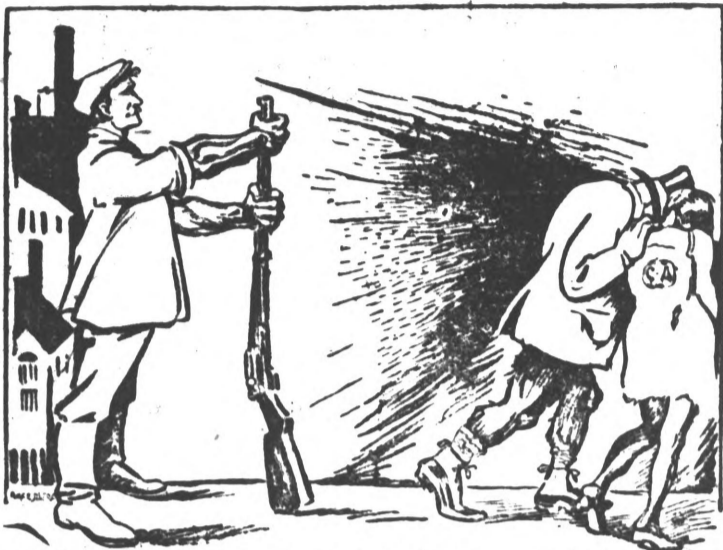
hundred revolutionists wounded, lying in the street and only a few policemen injured. A couple of hundreds were rounded up. The street was littered with battered hats, broken boards, walking sticks, etc., when the friendly nurses who were warned by the comrades arrived from the hospital with firstaid supplies. By that time some of the patriotic hooligans arrived and began to beat up the arrested and wounded. The nurses and doctors who came up began to protest to the head of the government forces and it was stopped.

Gendarmes were stationed at the hospital to round up everybody who will apply for aid for gunshot wounds

or saber cuts. But they did not catch many in this way, because the friendly nurses would lead the wounded out thru a side door. One leading comrade for whom the police was looking and who was slightly wounded, was lead out of the hospital dressed in womens' clothes and wrapped up in a big shawl.

Thus ended our first open fight against the czarist government under the red flag of the revolution.

A few months after this affair the fierce police captain was shot and killed in the center of the city. He had a mounted policeman as a body guard, but the latter ran away as soon as the firing began.



"BANISHED FROM PARADISE"—Our Own Version of a Bible from "Gudok," published in Moscow.)

Research Department Book Reviews

THE NEW NEGRO: A NOTICE OF ALAIN LOCKE'S BOOK.

By EARL R. BROWDER.

"The New Negro, An Interpretation," Edited by Alain Locke, New York, Albert and Charles Boni, 1925. Price \$5.00.

"THIS volume," begins the editor in his foreword, "aims to document the New Negro culturally and socially—to register the transformation of the inner and outer life of the Negro in America that have so significantly taken place in the last few years." And no matter how many reservations may be made, as to the adequacy of a book which almost completely ignores the economic basis of its subject, the book stands out as a ringing challenge to American society. The Negro has become conscious of himself. He feels the powers of all humanity within his own spirit. He brings these powers to expression and finds them equal to the best of the "superior races." A revolution takes place in the minds of the Negro masses!

A review of this important book, which summarizes the cultural processes that have been going on among the Negroes for some years, particularly since the war, can be written only after a careful study of it. The book is just off the press. Its table of contents immediately marks it as a noteworthy work, which must be brought to the attention of everyone who realizes that the awakening of the Negroes to consciousness is one of the most important and interesting facts of American life. This notice, preliminary to a later review, is intended to serve only to arouse interest in an important book, not to pass judgment upon it except as to its importance.

The book opens with essays: "The New Negro" by Alain Locke, "Negro Art and America" by Albert C. Barnes, "The Negro in American Literature" by William Stanley Braithwaite, and "Negro Youth Speaks" by Alain Locke. Then there follows the work of Negro artists, in fiction (selections from six Negro writers); poetry (from nine poets, including Claude McKay, James Weldon Johnson, and Georgia Douglas Johnson,

who are familiar to readers of the Liberator and the Workers Monthly); drama (from three Negro writers, including a play by Willis Richardson); music (four contributors). Five essays on "The Negro Digs Up His Past" complete Part I of the book which bears the general title of "The Negro Renaissance."

Part II is entitled "The New Negro in a New World." It lacks the color, the energy, the self-confidence of the first part, and shows the "New Negro" groping thru the devious paths of bourgeois culture and bourgeois institutions, quite evidently not himself, not at home, but as yet unable to sound a clear note of protest against the distortions of established middle class social forms. As one of the contributors says: "When I visit the Business Men's Association, the difference between this gathering and that of any Rotary Club is imperceptible." And Part II of "The New Negro" reeks thruout of the atmosphere of the Rotary Club.

This is, of course, inevitable. Only thru bitter disillusionment will the New Negro find his way out of the marshes of the middle-class "culture" of America and shake the last fetters from his mind. Only when the Negro finds his intellectual home with the revolutionary working class, abandons his dreams of a bourgeois paradise, will he reach his full stature. As yet we find but faint echoes of such development in books such as "The New Negro." To hear the real note of the future on the problems of "The New Negro in a New World" one must turn toward the American Negro Labor Congress.

The book closes its 445 pages with a rich bibliography which is of great value. And the book itself, as a product of the printer's and binder's art, is a thing of beauty of which the publishers may be proud; not the least pleasing feature being the splendid portraits and decorations by Winold Reiss. A serious review of the book must be undertaken after more prolonged study than has yet been possible—and perhaps by more competent hands.