

LI DAZHAO: THE VICTORY OF BOLSHEVISM

Li Dazhao (1888–1927) was a Beijing University professor and librarian who joined in the intellectual ferment that found expression in Chen Duxiu's *New Youth* magazine. He exerted an especially profound influence on his student and library assistant, the youthful Mao Zedong. Marxism had attracted comparatively little attention among Chinese, until the success of the October revolution inspired Li to hail it enthusiastically in this article for the November 15 issue of *New Youth* in 1918. Thereafter he launched a Marxist study club, from which recruits were drawn for the founding of the Communist Party in 1921. One of the cofounders of the party, along with Chen Duxiu, Li later was captured in a raid on the Soviet Embassy compound in Beijing and executed. Since Chen, the original chairman of the party, was subsequently expelled and disowned by it, Li came to be honored in his place and to be revered posthumously as the party's founding father.

Although not yet a convinced Marxist at this time, in this article Li bespeaks a widespread feeling of hope and expectation aroused by the Bolshevik revolution among Chinese bitterly disappointed with the outcome of the revolution of 1911. Note how he specifically acclaims it as a potent new religion offering messianic hope for the future.

"Victory! Victory! The Allies have been victorious! Surrender! Surrender! Germany has surrendered!" These words are on the national flags bedecking every doorway, they can be seen in color and can be distinctly heard in the intonation of every voice. . . .

But let us think carefully as small citizens of the world, to whom exactly does the present victory belong? Who has really surrendered? Whose is the achievement this time? And for whom do we celebrate? . . .

For the real cause of the ending of the war was not the vanquishing of the German military power by the Allied military power but the vanquishing of German militarism by German socialism. . . . The victory over German mili-

tarism does not belong to the Allied nations; even less does it belong to our factious military men who used participation in the war only as an excuse [for engaging in civil war], or to our opportunistic, cunningly manipulative politicians. It is the victory of humanitarianism, of pacifism; it is the victory of justice and liberty; it is the victory of democracy; it is the victory of socialism; it is the victory of Bolshevism [Chinese text inserts “Hohenzollern” by error]; it is the victory of the red flag; it is the victory of the labor class of the world; and it is the victory of the twentieth century’s new tide. Rather than give Wilson and others the credit for this achievement, we should give the credit to Lenin [these names appear in romanization], Trotsky, Collontay [Alexandra Kollontai], to Liebknecht, Scheidemann, and to Marx. . . .

Bolshevism is the ideology of the Russian Bolsheviks. What kind of ideology is it? It is very difficult to explain it clearly in one sentence. If we look for the origin of the word, we see that it means “majority.” An English reporter once asked Collontay, a heroine in that [Bolshevik] party, what the meaning of “Bolshevik” was. The heroine answered . . . “Its meaning will be clear only if one looks at what they are doing.” According to the explanation given by this heroine, then, “Bolshevik means only what they are doing.” But from the fact that this heroine had called herself a Revolutionary Socialist in western Europe, and a Bolshevik in eastern Europe, and from the things they have done, it is clear that their ideology is revolutionary socialism; their party is a revolutionary socialist party; and they follow the German socialist economist Marx as the founder of their doctrine. Their aim is to destroy the national boundaries that are obstacles to socialism at present and to destroy the system of production in which profit is monopolized by the capitalist. Indeed, the real cause of this war was also the destruction of national boundaries. Since the present national boundaries cannot contain the expansion of the system of production brought about by capitalism, and since the resources within each nation are inadequate for the expansion of its productive power, the capitalist nations all began depending on war to break down these boundaries, hoping to make of all parts of the globe one single, coordinated economic organ.

So far as the breaking down of national boundaries is concerned, the socialists are of the same opinion with them. But the purpose of the capitalist governments in this matter is to enable the middle class in their countries to gain benefits; they rely on world economic development by one class in the victor nations and not on mutual cooperation among humanitarian, reasonable organizations of the producers of the world. This war will cause such a victor nation to advance from the position of a great power to that of a world empire. The Bolsheviks saw through this point; therefore they vigorously protested and proclaimed that the present war is a war of the tsar, of the kaiser, of kings and emperors, that it is a war of capitalist governments, but it is not their war. Theirs is the war of classes, a war of all the world’s proletariat and common people against the capitalists of the world. While they are opposed to war itself, they

are at the same time not afraid of it. They hold that all men and women should work. All those who work should join a union, and there should be a central administrative soviet in each union. Such soviets then should organize all the governments of the world. There will be no congress, no parliament, no president, no prime minister, no cabinet, no legislature, and no rule. There will be only the joint soviets of labor, which will decide all matters. All enterprises will belong to those who work therein, and aside from this no other possessions will be allowed. They will unite the proletariat of the world, and create global freedom with their greatest, strongest power of resistance: first they will create a federation of European democracies, to serve as the foundation of a world federation. This is the ideology of the Bolsheviki. This is the new doctrine of the twentieth-century revolution.

In a report by Harold Williams in the *London Times*, Bolshevism is considered a mass movement. He compares it with early Christianity and finds two points of similarity: one is enthusiastic partisanship, the other is a tendency to revelation. He says, "Bolshevism is really a kind of mass movement, with characteristics of religion." . . . Not only the Russia of today but the whole world of the twentieth century probably cannot avoid being controlled by such religious power and swayed by such a mass movement. . . .

Whenever a disturbance in this worldwide social force occurs among the people, it will produce repercussions all over the earth, like storm clouds gathering before the wind and valleys echoing the mountains. In the course of such a world mass movement, all those dregs of history that can impede the progress of the new movement — such as emperors, nobles, warlords, bureaucrats, militarism, capitalism — will certainly be destroyed as though struck by a thunderbolt. Encountering this irresistible tide, these things will be swept away one by one. . . . Henceforth, all that one sees around him will be the triumphant banner of Bolshevism, and all that one hears around him will be Bolshevism's song of victory. The bell is rung for humanitarianism! The dawn of freedom has arrived! See the world of tomorrow; it assuredly will belong to the red flag! . . . The revolution in Russia is but the first fallen leaf warning the world of the approach of autumn. Although the word *Bolshevism* was created by the Russians, the spirit it embodies can be regarded as that of a common awakening in the heart of each individual among mankind of the twentieth century.

[Teng and Fairbank, *China's Response to the West*, pp. 246–249]