

Days of Revolution

THE Sunday morning documentary from YAs and 4YZ at 9.30 a.m. on October 27 is "1917: Revolution Remembered," an account of the Russian revolutions of February and October 40 years ago. In this article, NZBS Talks Officer WILLIAM R. ROFF (who is also narrator in the programme) tells how he compiled it from contemporary sources and the reminiscences of Russians now living in New Zealand.

REVOLUTION REMEMBERED is an attempt to recreate the course of events and the atmosphere of the months between mid-February, 1917, and the end of October, in the words of people who were there. It would be too large a claim to say that it is a reconstruction of this very complex period in Russian history—rather it is an attempt to select some of the important and significant happenings, give the factual background to them, and set alongside them some of the minor details (which, in one way or another, give life to history). The two main high points are, of course, the few days leading up to and encompassing the revolutions of February 27 and October 25. In the first, the popular and bourgeois revolution, the Tsarist regime was replaced by that of the Provisional Government. In the second, the Bolshevik revolution, the Provisional Government gave place to the first Workers' and Peasants' Government of Soviets. Between these two great crises was unfolded the unhappy story of the Provisional Government, identified with Alexander Kerensky.

I should say at the start that throughout the programme I have used the old

calendar, which was 13 days behind our present one. I have done so because I felt that it is more familiar, and because the two revolutions are commonly known as the "February" and the "October."

My sources have been of two kinds. In the first place, I was able to persuade a number of men and women now living in New Zealand to talk about their personal experiences during the revolutions. These people were not in important positions, but what they saw and heard and did was common to many thousands of others. They came, mostly, from middle-class backgrounds, and their viewpoint and experience is coloured by this fact. All condemn the Bolshevik Revolution out of hand; most have some sympathies towards the February Revolution. I, of course, have tried to remain impartial throughout.

Though the background of these speakers is thus broadly similar, they did have widely different experiences. Many were living at the time in Petrograd, and I have concentrated much of the programme on the happenings in this city which played, after all, much the same role as Paris did during the French Revolution. In addition, there will be heard the voices of one or two army men from the front; that of a young girl who lived with her mother in Nijni Novgorod, and that of a young man who was studying engineering in Moscow. In Petrograd, one of the speakers—then a girl of 17—had just left school, and worked for a time in one of the Provisional Government Ministries. Frequently she had occasion to pass the palace from whose balcony Lenin, during the intervening months, addressed the crowds. Another speaker in the programme, a man from Petrograd this time, remembers the scenes in the streets when the Febru-

LEFT: The last of the Tsars—Nicholas II; and (below, left and right) the Bolshevik leaders Lenin and Trotsky



DEMONSTRATORS with banners parading in the streets of Petrograd on July 1, 1917

ary Revolution occurred, and the part that he himself played. Through the stories of all these people, we get some glimpses into what was felt and thought and talked about during this critical period.

The second kind of source material that has been used are the diaries and written reminiscences of better-known participants. There have, of course, been many personal accounts of the Revolutions, but most of these are regarded as of doubtful historical value. Among those I found useful and vivid are *Ten Days That Shook the World*, by John Reed, an American journalist with Communist sympathies; the magnificent detailed account of the external of the revolution by the Menshevik writer Nikolai Sukhanov; *The Two Revolutions*, by R. H. Bruce Lockhart; and Trotsky's own account of the

events of 1917. I have drawn on these and similar sources to provide additional material, to come a little closer to what lay behind the events than was possible for my casual observers, and to redress the balance in another way by giving the point of view of the revolutionaries.

This material, then, is knitted together by a chronological narrative, to form a many-sided radio documentary. In this documentary I was concerned more to describe what actually happened, than to reflect on or interpret the events. The whys and wherefores are there, though, in the points of view of the many people who, in person or by proxy, take part. But it would, of course, require very much more than an hour-long radio documentary to give a proper account of the complex events during those days of revolution.

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