‘A Crude Orgy of Drunken Violence’: A Russian Account of the Brisbane ‘Red Flag Riots’ of 1919

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The report translated below, though not preserved in full, is a unique historical document. While the dramatic events surrounding the red flag demonstration in Brisbane in March 1919 are well known, the Russian perspective is not. The most comprehensive study to date is admirably thorough and balanced, and leaves few sources out of account, but can now be enriched by sources not previously available, such as the present one. Raymond Evans, the author of that study, supplied much detail on the prelude to the event, the demonstration itself, and the riotous disturbances which shook the city in the week and more that followed.¹ Police reports, the censor’s notes, and the communications of the military authorities provided a wealth of information, as did the Brisbane newspapers of the day, most of which gave vent to indignation at the actions of the ‘disloyal’ demonstrators, many of them foreigners. Accounts by members of the latter camp, are rare, however, and not to be found in what the radicals termed the ‘mercenary’ or ‘venal’ mainstream press. *Nabat* (The Tocsin), the newspaper which carried the report below, represented a different view, and its author, Herman Bykoff, was one of the despised disloyalists, and a foreigner, a Russian who carried his flag at the head of the marching column, having played a major role in the organisation of the procession. He would shortly be imprisoned for this and six months later deported with several others from the Commonwealth of Australia to Soviet Russia.

The red flag demonstration included a substantial contingent from the Union of Russian Workers (URW) and was perceived to be a largely Russian affair. It is

certainly the case that, had it not been for the Russians, events would have taken a very different course: the Australian marchers would have bowed to police orders and processed without the banned red flags, perhaps thereby pre-empting the ensuing violent clashes. Since the Russians with their symbolic emblem provided the ‘Bolshevik nucleus’, the fury of the returned soldiers and their ‘patriotic’ allies was directed squarely and solely at their community. The soldiers, many of them veterans of the Western front, by now demobilised, were easily provoked to violence against the Russians: in their view the Bolsheviks’ separate peace treaty with Germany was a betrayal of the allied cause, an act which led to higher casualties in the Western armies, including the AIF. Consequently the then Russian quarter of South Brisbane, where the Russian hall was situated, bore the brunt of the violence, in particular the hall itself, which the soldiers did their best to sack in a short-lived ‘siege’. In this they were partially thwarted by a large force of armed police, but, as the article shows, the building was damaged and the event nevertheless proved disastrous for the URW and the wider Russian community, as the organisers and leaders of the march ruefully admitted.

The demonstration of Sunday 23 March 1919, which precipitated the disturbances, brought together a range of bodies on the political Left in protest against the War Precautions Act. Like an earlier march by the same participating organisations on 26 January, it took aim at a number of associated regulations, especially the ban on the display of red flags. Some of the red banners bore slogans such as ‘Down with the War Precautions Act’, ‘We demand civil liberty’ and ‘Hands off Russia’.² The carrying of red flags was deliberately provocative, and as the report shows, the Russians surpassed all other groups in their determination to fly their flag in defiance of the government ban, and were deeply disappointed by their Anglo-

Saxon allies in the Socialist League, the Industrial Council and other bodies. These, they felt, were sadly lacking in the fighting spirit which the occasion required.

The Russian contingent was led by two activists who had come to the forefront of Russian community affairs in the course of the previous two years: Alexander Zuzenko, the secretary of the URW since the previous August and editor of its fortnightly newspaper *Znanie i edinienie* (published in English from December 1918 as *Knowledge and Unity*), and Bykoff, who often used the name ‘A. Rezanoff’.³ The later career of Zuzenko has been recounted more than once, and only the briefest summary is called for here.⁴ Perceived—not incorrectly—to be the driving force behind the ‘Bolshevik trouble’, he was quickly seized, taken by the army to Sydney and deported in mid-April to Odessa, followed shortly afterwards by his young wife Civa, née Rosenberg. In Moscow he forswore his earlier anarchism and work in Australia for the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and was proud to call himself a Bolshevik and a Leninist.⁵ After a period in the service of the Communist International, which brought him back to Australia for a brief visit as its agent in 1922, he became a sea-captain on the Baltic shipping line, until arrested and executed as a ‘British spy’ in 1938.

There is less detail available on Bykoff: like Zuzenko, he was a former Socialist Revolutionary and sailor. Unlike Zuzenko, he had been in Australia for less than three years. (Zuzenko had arrived in 1911.) He was arrested soon after the procession, tried with others for his part in it, and sentenced to six months’ imprisonment. In April, May and June, supporters campaigned vigorously for the early release of the Red Flag prisoners. The American-born pacifist and feminist Jennie Scott Griffiths, who figures in the account below, played a prominent role in the campaign, which ended with their release after less than four months. Bykoff,

however, was soon rearrested and taken to Sydney to join half a dozen other Russians awaiting deportation in Darlinghurst Detention Barracks. He was deported in September 1919 and in the Soviet Union held responsible Party positions.⁶ He is known to have been in Chita (Eastern Siberia) in 1923, and an undated handwritten note in the margin of the typescript copy of *Nabat* No. 2 states that he is ‘currently secretary of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party’s Far-Eastern Bureau’. Information from Zuzenko’s widow indicates that he was spared in the purges, living with his family in Leningrad until the Nazi siege, when contact was lost.⁷

The URW was a fissiparous organisation, and Bykoff had left it in early 1918 to form a separate ‘Group of Russian Workers’, but this itself had split into two factions and Bykoff, ill at ease in the company of what he called ‘nationalist-individualists’ and ‘intellectuals’,⁸ drifted back towards the URW, though often at odds with Zuzenko, whom he regarded as a domineering and dictatorial leader of the community. In the extreme circumstances brought on by the red flag procession, the two set aside at least some of their differences and achieved a working relationship and an appearance of harmony.

Zuzenko left numerous references to the event and fragmentary accounts in his own writing, and on occasion repeated versions of them to acquaintances in the Soviet Union, where they emerged, often in somewhat distorted form, in the work of Soviet writers and historians. In the immediate aftermath of the demonstration and riots, while he and Bykoff surveyed the wreckage and strove to maintain their propaganda offensive in the face of imminent arrest, Zuzenko left it to Bykoff to chronicle the débâcle in their new joint publishing venture. For his part, he would direct his

considerable energies to editorialising, seeking to bolster his readers' sagging morale and drawing the lessons from a serious defeat.

Together Zuzenko and Bykoff worked in extremely adverse circumstances to launch an illegal Russian-language newspaper with the title *Nabat*. It was intended to replace *Deviatyi val* (The Ninth Wave), also illegal, which Zuzenko had first issued in December 1918. That paper, according to Bykoff, had proved to be Zuzenko's personal mouthpiece: it ill accorded, he claimed, with 'the ideas of Soviet Russia', and an overwhelming majority in the URW therefore withdrew financial support.⁹ For its Russian readers the new paper would also supplement *Knowledge and Unity*, which since December had appeared in English only and was therefore inaccessible to many who had previously read *Znanie i edinenie* and *Deviatyi val*.

The contents of the first issue of *Nabat* (6 August 1919) have been summarised elsewhere and an attempt made to identify the anonymous authors of the contributions.¹⁰ Like the other Russian newspapers of the period, more particularly the illegal newspapers, it had limited circulation, with the result that copies are now extremely rare. The only available copy of No. 1, incomplete and in imperfect condition, now held in the National Archives of Australia (Brisbane Office), appears to be a proof copy.¹¹ The second issue, in all probability, never reached the production stage, but a complete typescript set of the materials for that issue is held in the Central Museum of Modern Russian History in Moscow.¹² Closely typed on sixteen foolscap pages, it bears no date, but the evidence of the contents confines it to a seven-week period: after 19 September 1919, as it reports the deportation of eight Russians known to have sailed from Sydney on that date, and before 7 November, since one article celebrates the forthcoming second anniversary of the October revolution. A date towards the end of that period appears the more likely.

Besides the anniversary piece and the account of the demonstration and rioting, which occupies three pages, the contents of No. 2 include articles of an editorial nature, a feuilleton, reports on the movements of local personalities reputed to be in the pay of the authorities, and a report on the treatment of the Russian prisoners under military custody in Darlinghurst Detention Barracks. The fate of Zuzenko is the focus of much concern: the article on the Darlinghurst detainees relates how he was taken away by force, and expresses fears that the hired flunkies of 'Australian Tsarism' may already have made an end of him. However, the next item, one of the few which is not anonymous, is a letter of farewell from Zuzenko, posted in Hobart on 20 April 1919, as the SS *Bakara* made its way to the Indian sub-continent and the Middle East. Exhorting those left behind to 'work tirelessly to propagate the ideas of the Russian revolution', he assures them that, 'whatever the situation in prison and exile, in the face of death I will remain the same revolutionary and anarchist, unshakable in my faith, as before.' A subsequent report in the same issue, citing Zuzenko's sister-in-law Fanny Rosenberg as a source, has Zuzenko in prison in Bombay, while Civa his wife has reached Egypt.¹³ A long 'Political Survey' reviews the world situation, in particular reaction to developments in Russia and the founding congress of the Third International, while emphasising strikes and potentially revolutionary stirrings in various countries of the world.

If there was ever a third issue, it is unknown, but the possibility must be considered remote, since the prime movers and main contributors had been deported from Australia.

The editing of the first issue was a collaborative endeavour by Bykoff and Zuzenko. The latter contributed leading articles written, presumably, in the few days before his arrest on 27 March. It was Bykoff who assembled and prepared the

contributions over a longer period. By their hunger strike in Boggo Road he and his Russian and Australian comrades secured the right to be treated as ‘political prisoners’, which meant that he was able to write articles which appeared in both *Nabat* and *Knowledge and Unity*. After his release on 19 July, he was able to prepare the first issue for publication, before he was rearrested and taken to Sydney for deportation with some of the Darlinghurst prisoners.

Matters are less clear in the case of *Nabat* No. 2. Zuzenko and Bykoff certainly contributed material written weeks or months in advance, but since both men had been deported before some of the other contributions were written it is highly unlikely that they took charge of the editing. The pronounced anarchist tone of the anniversary article, with phrasing which seems to replicate Zuzenko’s rhetoric, suggests that Zuzenko’s close ally and fellow-anarchist Nikolai Lagutin played an authorial and editorial role. While his participation cannot be confirmed, Lagutin had edited *Znanie i edinienie* for a period in 1918, and was known to be eager to keep up production of radical newspapers.¹⁴ A comic play, the work of Bykoff in February 1919, lampoons Zuzenko and Lagutin equally, making ‘Nol’-Kapustin’ [Lagutin] say that he is ‘an anarchist and a communist’.¹⁵ Lagutin narrowly avoided deportation, in spite of a strong recommendation to this effect from the Commandant of the First Military District, who claimed to have evidence that he was planning a ‘huge Red Flag Demonstration’ in Brisbane for the second anniversary of the revolution.¹⁶

While Lagutin’s involvement is unproven, there can be no doubt as to the authorship of the long report, published anonymously, spanning two issues, on the demonstration and its consequences. As has been noted in a different context, everything about it points clearly to Bykoff.¹⁷ There are close similarities of phrasing between this article and others which he is known to have written, and in some cases

signed, while his preferred motifs resonate from one essay or article to another. Russian workers, it is claimed, are a breed apart, their moral superiority to the ‘English’ workers of Brisbane self-evident. The ‘sensitive soul’ of the ‘revolutionary-minded’ Russian worker earnestly seeks self-improvement and education, which is alien to the ‘phlegmatic unfeeling soul’ of the English worker, the author writes. In the unpublished article ‘Russia in Australia’, written by ‘A. Rezanoff’ (Bykoff) in late 1918 for *Znanie i edinienie*,¹⁸ the same sentiments are expressed in very similar terms with regard to the bloodless British soul and the alien social environment (the ‘quiet backwaters of British Puritanism and narrow-minded ordinariness’). The apathy of the workers of Queensland was a source of continuing frustration, indeed exasperation, to the Russians of the URW. Zuzenko and Bykoff shared the frustration and both wrote of it repeatedly and with deep contempt, but the terms used here are distinctively Bykoff’s. The difficulties of rousing the local worker from his ‘nightmarish slumbers’, into which he has been lulled by the treacherous ‘political school of spiritual prostitution’, reappear as the theme of a separate article in *Nabat* No. 2, ‘A Few Words about the English Worker’,¹⁹ which also displays the hallmarks of Bykoff’s prose and phrasal near-coincidences with ‘The Defeat...’. ‘A Few Words...’ blames the indifference of the English worker for his treachery to his class. ‘The Defeat...’ finds treachery among the allies of the URW: since the local workers lacked the courage to go through with the plan and fly their red flags, they must be held responsible for the result, a resounding defeat (*razgrom*) for the URW, and associated *pogroms* aimed at all of Brisbane’s Russian community. (The word *pogrom*, hitherto applied mainly to mob assaults on Jews in the pale of settlement, was now widely used in the community to describe the violent response of the ex-soldiers and ‘patriots’.)

There is also evidence of a more circumstantial nature for Bykoff's authorship: the proof copy of *Nabat* No. 1 is preserved with other papers seized from Bykoff; the author is reporting from the head of the marching column, where Bykoff marched at Zuzenko's side. It is also clear that he was one of the small group of men inside the besieged Russian Hall in Merivale Street in the evening of 23 March and throughout the next day. No other Russian participants are known to have written of this episode. Lagutin was not present. Zuzenko, who was present, and was a principal contributor to *Nabat*, can be ruled out as a possible author of this article; in place of his characteristic turns of expression, it displays locutions and reference points which more closely match those of Bykoff.

The texts translated here are those found in the only known copies of *Nabat* in public collections. As noted above, No. 1 is in poor condition: only four pages are present, and one article on page 4 bears the words 'continued on p. 5'. The report of the demonstration, on page 2, has no such indication, but since there is an obvious interruption in the narrative we may assume either that the editor intended to place the continuation on page 3 but omitted to do so, or that it has been lost with the missing pages. Whichever is the case, the result has been the loss of an essential part of the report, covering the later stages of the march to the Domain, the speeches at the entrance, the opening of the gates and the rally held at its central rostrum, where various speakers addressed the crowd.²⁰ This deficiency apart, the contributions were clearly prepared in some haste and printed in decidedly amateur fashion. In addition to frequent misprints, there is much faulty grammar and spelling, and in places intelligibility is compromised by the loss of words or entire lines. On occasion, unconventional or missing punctuation makes it difficult to determine where sentences begin and end, and to distinguish narrative from direct or indirect speech.

For these reasons it is not always possible to construe the intended meaning with complete confidence. Much of this applies also to the materials of No. 2, which is, however, complete, and in a somewhat better state of preservation, in type, rather than print.

Incomplete and partisan though it is, this report is the only detailed account known to have been written by a Russian participant with a leading role. It thus stands as a useful addendum to the pioneering investigations by Raymond Evans and makes a valuable contribution to the study of the disturbances, and of the place of the Russian community in the history of Queensland.

Nabat No. 1, 6 August 1919, p. 2

The Defeat of the Union of Russian Workers: The Red Demonstration and the Hunt for Bolsheviks

The sad and dreary life of the Russian emigrants in Australia has been going from bad to worse thanks to the recent *pogroms* against them and the disgusting outburst of rampant reaction, at once senseless and indiscriminate in its manifestations and furious in its nature.

By the force of its influence on the sensitive soul of the Russian worker, in a very short time the revolution in Russia compelled him to live and foster within himself the mentality of a class-conscious, principled individual. This resulted in greatly changed conditions and experiences in his personal way of life, bringing new

meaning, content and tasks to the life of the Union of Russian Workers, which is small but strong in spirit. The inner life of this creation of the Russian emigrants was increasingly enriched and deepened by its organisational life, together with independent revolutionary activity and a passionate desire for self-improvement to such a level as to be able to make sense of the burning questions of the day; and an awareness of class interests and the tasks of the Social Revolution in Russia demanded an outlet into the streets and the arena of the class struggle. The awareness that only a revolutionary-minded worker can render palpable assistance to the revolution compelled the Union to move out from its four walls into the broad mass of Australian workers, and help them by word and deed to wake from the nightmarish slumber cast over them by the political school of spiritual prostitution. And the Union carried out this mission to the end. Now it is in ruins, having fallen prey to a crude orgy of drunken violence, and we are its shattered remnants. It would be a mistake, it would be wrong not [to assume?] moral fortitude.²¹ All readers of our small underground newspaper should form their own independent opinions regarding these events, while we tell our comrades what happened during the Union's procession and demonstration with the Red Flag.

We hope that our comrades already know that we were not alone in preparing that demonstration. There were other bodies, such as the Industrial Council, the Socialist League, and the One Big Union Propaganda League.²² Following our advice and exhortations, they were also supposed to demonstrate alongside us. In order to draw in the masses, primacy went to the Industrial Council. But... We were fully in harmony before the demonstration, but sang out of tune during it. An ugly disharmony resulted. The price of this disharmony was that we, the Russians, had to

withstand the hardest blows of the forces of reaction. But it's hardly worth mentioning that. We're only Russians, after all.²³

The Procession

On 23 March this year a sizable crowd gathered at 2.00 p.m. outside Trades Hall to gaze upon something new in the streets of Australia, a red flag, and moreover in defiance of the War Precautions Act. After 2.00, young Russians in twos, threes and more began converging on Trades Hall from various directions, complying strictly with the police warnings, and soon one could sense the ugly mood in the assembled mass. Indeed, as in earlier street demonstrations, the Russian residents of Brisbane, apart from a few extremist opponents of the Union, gathered for the procession having made preparations for it long before: the men wore red rosettes and sashes, while the women and children had red ribbons over their shoulders, and red veils, and even carried red parasols. The mood was one of excitement, nervous tension and expectation. We all felt we had made a prior decision to raise the red flag and defy destiny. At 2.30 Russians could be seen in large groups clustering round the main entrance, on the footpath and in the street, arguing or laughing loudly, while others hummed revolutionary songs under their breath. Those who had the time might have noticed the astonished looks of Australians contemplating this noisy assembly of Slavs, and seen how odd this free and unfettered expression of free will and the nature of the Russian crowd must have seemed to their phlegmatic unfeeling souls. And necessarily so, as this small group of representatives of our dear and distant Russia had no intention of holding back in voicing its revolutionary mood and its mainly

instinctive faith in the religion of Rebellion against social injustice. At 2.45 rumours spread, to the surprise of all, that the Industrial Council had received a ban from the military authorities: there were to be no red flags in the procession. A murmur of protest arose in the crowd of Russians.

We Russians felt this most of all, but a group immediately met in one of the rooms, to decide calmly what to do: refuse to take part in the procession without the red flag, or proceed, with the flag, at our own risk. It was decided to march with the red flag, come what may. The decision was greeted with friendly applause and cries of 'Long live the Social Revolution!' The president of the Industrial Council,²⁴ plainly alarmed by our readiness to fight, climbed onto a windowsill and announced to the crowd outside that the procession was off. This meek readiness on the part of the Industrial Council, one of the most powerful organisations, to submit to the demands of the military authorities called forth in us a storm of indignation and rage, and we all in a body went outside and formed up in ranks. Comrades Zuzenko and Rezanoff (Bykoff) took up position in the van with flags furled. A member of the Peace League, seeing our determination, quickly mustered the young people and children and formed them up in front of us with little red flags. The OBUPL and the Socialists followed her example and started falling in. When the marchers were ready to start, a police inspector demanded that Comrade Griffiths²⁵ submit to the military authorities' order and discard the red flags, otherwise he would not allow the procession to move off. Comrade Griffiths furled their flags and told the children to step aside, loudly declaring that in protest she was leaving a procession in which the banner of labour was banned! We Russians were left in the front, facing a question of principle and revolutionary honour. How should we react in this situation?

For a minute there was visible confusion in the front ranks, while the question was debated: to be or not to be. The police inspector, two assistants, and a substantial number of policemen stood barring our way,²⁶ and their stern faces expressed their determination to uphold law and order.

Their eyes said, 'In the name of the law we forbid you to move,' but Comrade Zuzenko unwrapped his flag and Comrade Rezanoff after him, and when the flags were raised aloft, joyful cries of welcome greeted them from among the Russians, and with determined calls of 'Comrades, forward!' they rallied round the flags and the whole procession moved briskly off in lively motion. The front ranks stepped forward in an untidy body to the ragged strains of the [Russian] song 'Hostile whirlwinds swirl above us...'²⁷ Eight guardians of the law tried hard to hold back the crowd but soon had to give way, and it seemed that they were about to give up, since they had neither batons nor revolvers. The inspector ordered another assault. This time the aim was to wrest the flags out of the hands of Comrades Zuzenko and Rezanoff. Two policemen promptly seized hold of Comrade Zuzenko's flag and tried to tear it from his grasp, which led to fisticuffs on both sides, and in this manner the march proceeded from Trades Hall to the corner of Turbot Street and Edward Street. Here the police were again forced to retreat. Led by the inspector they ran towards Adelaide Street with the aim of calling in reinforcements and mounting a new assault. The success of the procession had become a matter of pride, and in the front ranks a determination to hold out to the end against the police assaults was evident. They sang 'The Red Flag'. At the corner of Edward and Adelaide Streets the first group of police were joined by three foot police and mounted police, and the inspector ordered them into a new attack. The mounted police advanced first and plunged into the crowd, but amidst the din and shouting the horses starting rearing and backing away. The procession moved

forward again. Brandishing sticks, parasols, hats and flags the marchers succeeded in scaring the horses. The poor animals backed away in fright, allowing the people to keep going forward. Thus they proceeded as far as Queen Street.

Nabat No. 2, no date, p. 2.

The Defeat of the Union of Russian Workers: The Red Demonstration and the Hunt for Bolsheviks (*continued*)

When we reached North Quay it was already late.²⁸ We saw a large mass of people endlessly shouting and milling about. It was difficult to separate friend from foe. One thing was clear: the Union was in danger. The group which had come from the Union dispersed unnoticed in the crowd of people, and it was hard to see any of the Russians, while the soldiers, under the command of an officer with the national flag in his hands,²⁹ were already forming up by the bridge with cries of, 'Let's go and smash the Union! Death to the Bolsheviks!' and so on. There was no time to lose, so about ten men broke away from the crowd and started running across the bridge, and the soldiers, who obviously enjoyed the sight of the Bolsheviks running, rushed after them, with a medley of shouts. Several men ran into the yard of the Union building and hurriedly barricaded themselves in. After several tense minutes of waiting, a crowd of drunken hooligans appeared round the corner and halted a hundred yards from the Union to look around. After considering for a minute, the crowd again surged towards the Union, but the front ranks were met with a hail of stones from the

defenders and the crowd fell back. But not for long. This time, having armed themselves with stones, they tried to go round and approach from both sides. For the besieged defenders a critical situation developed. Two shots rang out from somewhere, and not a soul was left in front of the Union; the mob had evidently decided that the shots came from the Union.³⁰ One of the defenders said, with relief, 'That's been the saving of us.' Five silhouettes loomed out of the darkness, moving towards the Union, calling out as they came, 'We're the police.' They came up to the gates. We told them clearly they were not to try and enter the yard, as they would meet with resistance. After some brief negotiations, the police were obliged to play the part of mediators between the Union and the hooligans. The police evidently gave them an exaggerated picture of the strength of the defenders, as the mob stood silent and did not attempt any fresh assaults. Perhaps the shots had dampened their heroism.

Fortunately drizzle began to fall and the crowd gradually started to disperse, and by 11.00 p.m. there was nobody to be seen. Having secured a guarantee that the defenders would disperse within five minutes, the police themselves departed. This time the Union had been successfully defended. Some women arrived, learned that there had been no disaster, and everybody began to discuss the day's events and trying to foretell, all in their own way, what the next day would bring. But all replied with one voice: 'There'll be a *pogrom* against the Union and all the Russians.'

The next morning it was dreadful for us Russians to walk past the advertising posters of the mercenary newspapers. There in large print was written, 'Revolution in Queensland', 'City Seized by Bolsheviks and Other Foreigners', 'Rebellion of Russian Bolsheviks'. These papers were full of fantastic accounts of the demonstration, of the defence of the Union and the aims of the Russian Bolsheviks. They said, for example, that the Union was defended by sixty well-armed men,

whereas there were only ten men, unarmed. They wrote of plans, caches of arms, bombs and ammunition found there. It was all a vile, provocative untruth, which the forces of reaction and the mercenary press exploited for their own dirty purposes, while the authorities, who were conducting searches but failed to find anything, kept quiet with the obvious intention of letting the drunken debauch do its work. And the press most furiously of all tried to blacken Bolshevism and the aims of the revolution in Russia, blaming revolutionaries in Europe for the drunken debauch and the local hoodlums' *pogroms*. Take note, comrades that the local bourgeoisie and the militarists, exploiting thuggery and *pogroms* in their own interests, have declared for all of Australia to hear: 'Behold, citizens and true sons of Australia, what Bolshevism can do in Australia if it is not rooted out in time!' And the dazed citizenry, the hoodlums, the representatives of the city, the officers and soldiers who had themselves created the wild outbursts, yelled in reply: 'Yes, the Bolsheviks in Russia are creating exactly the mischief we've seen here.' So you can see they're right!³¹

On entering the city it was immediately noticeable that disorder was being prepared for the evening³² on an even grander scale than on Sunday. Meetings of citizens, sons of Australia, and all manner of politicking rabble began in the morning and ended in the evening to allow the *pogroms* to commence. Resolutions of the most varied kind were passed: 'Sack all Russians from their jobs, evict them from their lodgings, and drive them out of town! Killing them's too easy; better to destroy them. And better still put them all on one ship, sail it out to sea, and sink it.' As resolutions go, the soldiers set a new record; they adopted a strange symbolic one: 'Put the fear of God into the heart of every Bolshevik and send them all to the Devil in Hell!'

You can see, comrades, that the bourgeoisie, while offering the drunken and maddened crowd white roses and the cheap kisses of its drawing-room harlots,

demanded in exchange the false innocence of its victims, death and blood in the name of capitalist justice, duty and honour!

To break up a meeting, on Sunday evening the mob beat up several people and almost threw one comrade off the bridge into the river, but luckily the police protected him.³³

The whole of Monday was a day of worry for us Russians. From an early hour warnings and even anonymous letters began to reach us. We had to do something to avoid being taken unawares. We had to safeguard our library, the most important thing in the building, and we set about moving it out. We carried the books in sacks, but could not conceal this from outsiders because the yard was open, and on one side was a machine works and across the street another workshop, from which two workers kept watch all day over what was happening in the yard. At 4.00 p.m. we read in the newspapers that large stocks of weapons—rifles, revolvers, sabres, ammunition etc.—were being taken somewhere from the Union building. By this provocative report the mercenary press was urging the crowd to make an armed assault on the Union. But the worst thing for us was having to watch the preparations being so obviously made to thrash anybody who was in the building that evening. In the adjoining yards, a group of people were putting up posts against the fences but two feet taller, and attaching barbed wire to them—you can guess why.

It was decided to inform the police about the danger to the Union and the house next door. No answer came. Most of the members decided they would not defend the Union, since rumours had begun to spread that the military authorities had armed the soldiers specially to sack the hated Union, but a small group nevertheless insisted on defending it. At 6.30 in the evening a fifty-strong detachment of police arrived, split into two groups, and occupied both exits into the street. Their rifles and

bayonets lent them a stern appearance, and the spectators who had gathered wondered anxiously what was going to happen. A group of Russians came up closer and tried to get to the Union through the neighbouring yards, but the police ordered them to halt, and announced that they would open fire on both groups if the new group tried to approach the Union. No lights were on. The anxious inhabitants of the street were sitting in darkness on their verandas, and on hearing Russian being spoken drove us away with curses from the fences, explaining that they might be taken for bloody Russians and have their properties ransacked too. The dreadful situation and extreme malice were a great torment to us, but there was nothing we could do.

Soon after seven in the evening we could tell from afar that the soldiers and solid citizens who had declared war on the Russian Bolsheviks were approaching because of their furious shouts and patriotic songs as they walked behind an officer with the national flag in his hands. Some heroes! There were many of them, several thousand, but they were outnumbered by onlookers and seekers of sensation. The sight of armed policemen roused them to fever pitch. The police had not been ordered to use their weapons, and the mob, realising this, angrily beset the police and demanded that they turn their firearms on the Union. When this was refused, the mob started pelting us with bottles, stones and bits of fencing timber, firing revolvers, and for greater effect letting off fireworks. The revolver shots, the thunder of stones on the roof, the sound of breaking window panes, the shouts and the clatter of hooves were terrifying to the weaker spirits. To them it all seemed like hell on earth. The women patriots exclaimed fearfully, 'Our poor boys suffered so much at the front, and here at home these blasted Bolsheviks can kill them!' And when they heard the crash of breaking glass they promptly added, 'Yes! That's the way! Kill the lot of them!' And after another crash, somebody said, 'Serves 'em right!'

For want of space in this issue we will conclude this account of the *pogrom* briefly.

The police successfully defended the Union, that is, they prevented the mob from entering the building. Nine policemen were slightly injured, and five seriously. In the crowd, five were injured. One of the horses sustained six gunshot wounds.³⁴ The following morning the Union presented a fairly battered appearance. All the windows were broken, and books, papers and newspapers strewn over the floor testified to the frenzied feast of the drunken mob, and since then the guardians of law and order have not left the premises, and we are denied the right to gather there.

There is no question that the present situation of the Russian workers in Brisbane is a very sorry one. All feel forlorn and crushed in spirit, and offended by this wild outbreak of reaction, which has hit the Russian workers so hard. Many have been dismissed from their jobs to appease the unprincipled crowd, the creatures drunk on patriotism, those dregs of society who have been used to crush revolutionary ferment in advance, used by the representatives of the state and all those who abhor social thought and humanitarian efforts. The material situation of some is very difficult. And be it noted, comrades, that when we as a deputation from the Russians approached Mr Theodore, the leader of the official Labor Party,³⁵ that democratic gentleman refused to receive us, knowing that not only had Russians been sacked from their jobs, but that they were also being evicted from their lodgings into the street, where they were hounded like cattle for slaughter. The Industrial Council also sent a deputation to him, and when they asked, ‘What does the Premier intend to do to ease the lot of the Russians?’, he replied, ‘All unnaturalised foreigners will be dismissed and their places taken by soldiers. The naturalised foreigners will be spared. Unnaturalised tradesmen will be replaced when tradesmen are found among the

soldiers.’ As for their lodgings, he said that anybody who was turned out onto the street would receive a ‘quarantine’ tent, or a new one if his government decided to release sufficient funds!³⁶

Of course we called a meeting and decided not to accept the tents and not to vacate our lodgings until we were granted the right to leave the country, or until our landlords evicted us according to the law. We should not count on the high-mindedness of the Labor Party. It is quite understandable that the faint-hearted lost courage, and here and there one sees signs of regret. But that regret is less objectionable than the mouthings of those who prefer to flail their fists when the fight is over, and the lovers of phrase-mongering in the guise of rational criticism. These are the ones who say, ‘What did we tell you? That your venture would lead nowhere! And that’s what happened! And now you’ve only yourselves to blame!’

We would remind these comrades that the history of the Russian revolutionary movement is full of such ventures, and anybody who takes the trouble to read a little of it and draw an unbiased conclusion will see that it is only thanks to such ventures that the Russian proletariat now has a glorious social revolution, which is having an irresistible influence on all the rest of the world. Such a comrade will also understand that the splendid bouquet of red flowers in the hands of the revolutionary proletariat of Russia was planted and nurtured not amidst the brutish boot-licking of the pseudo-philosophical bourgeoisie, which covers itself with the innocent blooms of white roses, but in the real soil of Russian revolutionary life, generously fertilised by the bodies of comrades who have fallen in the name of the idea,³⁷ in prison and exile and on the gallows, soil watered with their blood and tears of love and hatred. We say, comrades, the more such ventures and failures, the better, for ‘only through the struggle will you secure your rights’.³⁸ Life is no holiday and no picnic for the true

revolutionary as long as coercion exists; it is arduous and at the same time altruistic toil for the good of mankind. Only philistines and pygmies submit to fate without a murmur and without spiritual pain.

Our watchword is ‘The Struggle for Life!’, because outside the struggle there is nothing but unprofitable idleness. He who does not struggle mentally and spiritually does not live in this world.

Comrades, if you believe in revolutionary work (which is essential), lend us moral and material support, redouble your efforts and work for the speediest possible realisation of the world revolution. With just one or two more such ventures we shall conquer. To work, comrades!

¹ Raymond Evans, *The Red Flag Riots: A Study of Intolerance*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1988. See also Evans’s ‘Agitation, Ceaseless Agitation: Russian Radicals in Australia and the Red Flag Riots’, in *Russia and the Fifth Continent: Aspects of Russian Australian Relations*, eds. John McNair and Thomas Poole, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1992, pp. 125-71; pp. 125-71; idem, ‘“Some Furious Outbursts of Riot”’: Returned soldiers and Queensland’s “Red Flag” disturbances, 1918-1919’, *War and Society*, vol. 3, no. 2 (1985), pp. 75-98; idem, *Loyalty and Disloyalty: Social Conflict on the Queensland Homefront, 1914-1918*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1987; idem, *A History of Queensland*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007; and Raymond Evans and Carole Ferrier, *Radical Brisbane*, The Vulgar Press, Carlton North, 2004.

² ‘Bolshevik Outburst in Brisbane’, *The Proletariat*, 29 March, 1919, p. 1.

³ The spellings Herman Bykoff and Rezanoff are those used by Bykoff himself while in Australia. As he sometimes abbreviated his pseudonym to ‘A. R-off’, he appears in some Australian government correspondence as ‘Aroff’ or ‘Arov’.

⁴ See e.g. Kevin Windle, 'Standard-Bearer of the Australian Revolution: The Interrogation of Aleksandr Zuzenko by Special Branch. An annotated transcript', *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, vol. 39 (2005), pp. 175-215; idem, 'Zhurnal'ist i revoliutsioner na trekh kontinentakh: A. M. Zuzenko', *Tynianovskii sbornik*, No. 12 (2006), pp. 452-468.

⁵ See in particular A. Matulichenko [Zuzenko], 'Kak ia, anarkhist, stal lenintsem', *Novoe russkoe slovo*, 16 February, 1921, p. 2. (Continued 17, 18 February.)

⁶ See Kevin Windle, "'Unmajestic Bombast": The Brisbane Union of Russian Workers as Shown in a 1919 Play', *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies*, vol. 19, nos. 1-2 (2005), pp. 29-51.

⁷ Civa Zuzenko, interview with Eric Fried, 1990. I am grateful to Eric Fried for making the video-recording available.

⁸ A. Rezanoff [Bykoff], 'Rus' avstraliiskaia', p. 8, NAA: BP4/1 Box 4 66/4/2165.

⁹ 'Rus' avstraliiskaia', p. 12, NAA: BP4/1 Box 4 66/4/2165.

¹⁰ See Kevin Windle, 'Nabat and its Editors: the 1919 Swansong of the Brisbane Russian Socialist Press'. *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies*, vol. 21, nos. 1-2 (2007), pp. 143-63. Reissued on-line in *Themes and Variations in Slavic Languages and Cultures: Australian Contributions to the XIV International Congress of Slavists, Ohrid 2008*, ed. by David Wells, Perth, 2008, pp. 23-48.
<http://www.cerc.unimelb.edu.au/anzsa/MSK%20volume.pdf>

¹¹ National Archives of Australia: BP4/1 66/4/2165. A photocopy of the NAA copy is held in the Poole-Fried Collection, Fryer Library, University of Queensland, UQFL 336, Box 21, Folder 2.

¹² 'Biulleten' Soiuza russkikh rabochikh v Avstralii', No. 1913/BIu-12A, Central Museum of Modern Russian History. I am grateful to the management and staff of the Museum, in particular to Ol'ga Ivanovna Litvinova, for assistance in locating this material.

¹³ The date of writing is later than 26 August. Fanny Rosenberg and her mother Dora had written letters to William Watt, the Acting Prime Minister, and received a reply with that date, assuring them that Civa was in good health and in Egypt. Prime Minister's Department: Russians leaving Australia – individual cases: NAA: A2 (A2/1), 1920/1025. Fanny refers to a letter from Civa herself, which she also mentioned in a letter to the *International Socialist*, 13 September, 1919. Watt's reply appears to have reached her before Civa's letter.

¹⁴ See N. Lagutin, late secretary, Russian Club, Brisbane, NAA: BP4/1 66/4/3557, and 'Summary of Communism', NAA A6122/40, Item 111, esp. p. 65. Windle, 'Nabat and its Editors', p. 161.

¹⁵ ‘O tom, kak my uchimsia samoupravleniiu i kontroliu’, NAA: BP4/1, 66/4/2165. For a study of this play, identifying the individuals half-concealed by the charactonyms, see Windle, ‘Unmajestic Bombast’.

¹⁶ Lagutin, NAA: BP4/1 66/4/3557. His deportation had been recommended on at least two previous occasions, once by Major H. E. Jones on 21 December, 1918. ‘Conditions in Queensland’, NAA: A456 (A456/4), W26/241. See also Bolshevism in Queensland, Defence Dept. 5/4/1919 to Acting PM. NAA: A3934 (A3934/1), SC5/1. It should be noted that this Nikolai Lagutin is not the same as the Corporal Nikolai Lagutin treated by Elena Govor in her *Russian Anzacs in Australian History*, University of NSW Press, Sydney, 2005, p. 138.

¹⁷ See Windle, ‘*Nabat* and its Editors’, pp. 156-57.

¹⁸ ‘Rus’ avstraliiskaia’, NAA: BP4/1 66/4/2165. See Windle, ‘*Nabat* and its editors’, pp. 156-57.

¹⁹ ‘Neskol’ko slov ob angliiskom rabochem’, *Nabat*, No. 2.

²⁰ See e.g. ‘The Red Flag Carried through the Streets’, *The Daily Standard*, 24 March, 1919, p. 5. Evans, *Red Flag Riots*, p. 113ff. For intelligence reports, see NAA: A456, W26/241, in particular G. F. Ainsworth, 26 March, 1919. The most relevant passage is cited in John Ainsworth, ‘Captain George Ainsworth, Queensland’s Special Intelligence Bureau Chief, 1917-1919’, *Royal Historical Society of Queensland Journal*, vol. 17, no. 5, February 2000, p. 203.

²¹ Inattention in the construction or printing of a sentence has led to some opacity here: ... *i my ego razbitye ostatki, ne beret [sic] na sebia npravstvennoi smelosti ne pravi’lno, oshibochno [sic]*.

²² One Big Union Propaganda League (OBUPL): the body which had taken the place of the banned Industrial Workers of the World. See Evans, ‘Agitation’, p. 149.

²³ Omitted: *Bei be rabei!* [sic; Beat them for all you’re worth!], seemingly meaning that the Russian community were seen even by their allies as legitimate targets for violence.

²⁴ President of the Industrial Council: William Wright.

²⁵ Comrade Griffiths: Jennie Scott Griffiths, known as a determined opponent of conscription and the War Precautions Act. She is almost certainly the ‘member of the Peace League’ referred to in the previous sentence. On her role in lobbying for the release of the red flag prisoners see the Papers of Jennie Scott Griffiths, National Library of Australia, MS Acc08/58.

²⁶ ‘Substantial number’: according to other sources, only eight, and eight is the number subsequently given by the author. See Evans, *Red Flag Riots*, pp. 111-113.

²⁷ The song is the famous *Varshavianka*, clearly a favourite of Zuzenko, who quotes it in his editorial in the same issue, and finds inspiration in its lines.

²⁸ North Quay was the venue for weekly gatherings of the OBUPL.

²⁹ ‘National flag’ (here and below): the original appears to signify the Australian flag, rather than the Union Jack. Other contemporary sources confirm that this flag is meant (e.g. Evans, ‘Agitation’, p. 151).

³⁰ Australian government documents indicate that pistol shots were fired at this point by Zuzenko. Intelligence report 23 March, 1919, NAA: A456/4, W26/241. See Evans, ‘Agitation’, p. 150.

³¹ *Vidite, oni zhe i pravy!* Pronoun use and punctuation give rise to some obscurity here. ‘They’ may refer to ‘the local bourgeoisie and the militarists’.

³² i.e. on Monday 24 March.

³³ The man who was almost thrown into the Brisbane River was Bykoff himself.

³⁴ The author appears to have relied on the Brisbane press, notably the *Courier*, for these figures. According to Evans (‘Agitation’, pp. 152-53), the press and police reports greatly understated the injuries to policemen and returned soldiers alike.

³⁵ Edward Theodore succeeded T. J. Ryan as Premier of Queensland in 1919.

³⁶ ‘Quarantine’ tent: a reference to measures being taken at the period to combat the world-wide epidemic of influenza.

³⁷ ‘Fallen in the name of the idea’: this phrase is a further echo of a line of the *Varshavianka* (see n. 27 above).

³⁸ *Tol’ko v bor’be obretesh’ ty pravo svoe!* Originally a slogan of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, of which Bykoff had once been a member in Russia. The slogan appears elsewhere in his writing.