From Communism to Anti-Communism
Photographs from the Boris Souvarine Collection at the Graduate Institute, Geneva

Graduate Institute Publications

Procession, Field of Mars, Comintern Congress, Petrograd, 19 July 1920

Lars Lih

DOI: 10.4000/books.iheid.6595
Publisher: Graduate Institute Publications
Place of publication: Geneva
Year of publication: 2016
Published on OpenEdition Books: 7 December 2016
Série: eLivres de l'Institut
Electronic ISBN: 9782940503971

http://books.openedition.org

Printed version
ISBN: 9782940503957

Electronic reference

This text was automatically generated on 7 May 2019.
After the adjournment of the short opening session at the Tauride Palace (as the official record tells us), “the delegates set out for the Field of Mars, accompanied by a huge crowd of workers, soldiers, and sailors in an endless procession. At the grave of fighters for the revolution, they lay a wreath bearing the inscription ‘The Second Congress of the
Communist International of proletarians of all countries – to brothers fallen in the struggle for communism'.

2 An overview of the procession can be seen here with delegates pulling a giant wreath. The delegate in the front of the procession in the center of the picture is the romantic American radical John Reed whose Ten Days That Shook the World is a classic account of the Russian Revolution. Reed is the only American to be buried in the walls of the Kremlin.

3 The Field of Mars is a large park in the center of Petrograd that became a memorial location for victims of the revolution immediately after the February Revolution in 1917 (that is, when the Bolsheviks were still a small minority). The procession there in March 1917 honoring those who fell in the February Revolution had been, no doubt, the largest mass procession seen in Russia up to that time. The solemn re-enactment of that procession among the ceremonies held at the beginning of the Second Congress of the Comintern was designed both to memorialize and reiterate that earlier episode. It was now carefully choreographed with its impressive framing of the marching delegates by an honor guard, apparently of sailors, in gleaming white shirts, including a second line of white-shirted guards, further separating the marchers from the spectators. In this event too the Bolsheviks were drawing on the choreography worked out at earlier socialist meetings. Their control of public space allowed for some genuinely impressive spectacles such as this solemn procession but the genuine drama of actual contestation with independent forces was absent.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

