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

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DOI: 10.4000/books.iheid.6597
Published on OpenEdition Books: 7 December 2016
Serie: 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.
The procession of delegates to the Second Congress of the Comintern appears to have now reached the Field of Mars, 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 was, no doubt the largest mass procession seen in Russia up to that time. The present procession sought to reenact and memorialize that earlier event.

This photo focuses on the banners containing slogans such as “Proletarians of all countries, unite!” Words such as “communist,” “international,” and “world” (adjective) can be made out. Banners had long been an essential part of socialist demonstrations that asserted the new worldview in a pithy and proud way. A member of the brass band is seen at the bottom of the photo, and to his left is Nikolai Bukharin.

Like prewar socialist celebrations this procession was a commemoration of martyrs and a visit to a sacred place of revolutionary history, although on a scale unimaginable earlier. As in previous celebrations, this procession included current leaders as well as local workers who demonstrated together. It was a truly impressive spectacle made possible by the fact that the state had eliminated all competition and mobilized resources by fiat. The state discovered that in this way it could put on campaigns of remembrance or of solidarity on an inconceivably greater scale than had previously been possible.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

