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SIR GEORGE BURY AND THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

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Until comparatively recently, Canada has been effectively insulated against developments in modern Russia. Reasons for this lack of contact are not surprising. Geography has played its part: although both countries have converging polar interests, the Arctic wastelands have not stimulated intercourse, and the troubled waters of the Bering Sea and North Pacific have seemingly provided greater barriers to communication than those of the Atlantic. Again, apart from racial and linguistic differences, there have been diverging political factors: during our colonial period, the formal channel of communications between Ottawa and St. Petersburg (if needed) lay through Whitehall. American purchase of Alaska, in the year of Confederation, further served to accentuate the division. In more recent decades, Canadian participation in the abortive operations of 1918-19 in northern Russia and Siberia, and adherence to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization have restricted closer co-operation with the Soviet state.

Yet if Canada, as a nation, has had little to do with Russia, individual Canadians have made some interesting forays into that country over the past century. Significantly, most of these efforts were related to military matters. How many Canadians remember that the first Victoria Cross won by a Canadian was awarded Toronto-born Lieut. A. R. Dunn for his exploit with the famous Light Brigade at Balaclava? Or that, somewhat later, a Canadian militia officer, Lieut.-Col. George T. Denison, journeyed to St. Petersburg, doing research for a volume that won Czar Alexander II's prize for the best history of cavalry in a competition "thrown open to the officers of all foreign armies"?¹

Another Canadian, who carried out a singularly important mission in Russia during a critical stage of the First World War, has also been neglected by his compatriots. His name will not be found in any official British or Canadian history of that conflict. Nor is he mentioned in the published history of the great commercial enterprise (the Canadian Pacific Railway) to which he devoted so many years of distinguished service.² Nevertheless, early in 1917, George Bury (afterwards knighted

¹ Lieut.-Col. George T. Denison, *A History of Cavalry from the Earliest Times, with Lessons for the Future* (London, 1877), Preface, vii. The book was dedicated "to His Majesty Alexander II, Emperor of Russia, through whose munificent encouragement it has been written."

² John Murray Gibbon, *Steel of Empire: The Romantic History of the Canadian Pacific, the Northwest Passage of Today* (New York, 1935).

for his services) was sent to Russia at the express invitation of the British Government to study and report upon the condition of the Russian railways. His report and impressions of the beginnings of the most significant revolution of the present century form the subject of this paper.

It will be recalled that, at the end of 1916, the Allied politico-strategical situation gave little cause for satisfaction. On the Western Front, the sanguinary struggle on the Somme had ended with combined German and Allied casualties of about a million and a quarter men. A new concept of armoured warfare, enabling the tank to restore mobility to the battlefield, had been blighted by mechanical failures and piecemeal tactics. Joffre might claim that Verdun had been saved — but the “strategy of attrition” (if the plan behind this horrible slaughter can be dignified by the word “strategy”) had achieved little more. On the Eastern Front, Brusilov’s promising beginning, in the summer of 1916, had been halted by the usual fetters on Russian initiative — inadequate administration and logistic support. A stalemate ensued, while the German armies made short work of Rumania in a model campaign lasting just four months. In the Salonika sector, a disappointing Allied counter-offensive followed a Bulgarian attack. The only bright spots on Allied maps were in Egypt and Palestine, where British forces made important gains at the expense of the Turks. The New World was on the point of intervening to redress the balance of the Old; but many months were to pass before American participation in the war became effective.

At the beginning of 1917 one of the unpredictable factors in the Allied equation was the situation within Russia. Germany’s speedy conquest of Rumania had far-reaching effect. Readers of Ludendorff’s *Memoirs* will not need to be reminded of the importance of Rumanian wheat and oil to the German economy.³ By the same token, the Rumanian defeat had serious repercussions on Russia’s military effort. Lloyd George, who had recently displaced Asquith at No. 10 Downing Street, observed: “Her already insufficient transport facilities were still further strained. Her long line of front, which she had not enough trained and equipped men to defend, was stretched by hundreds of kilometres.”⁴ For months before assuming the premiership, he had urged the British Government to organize an Allied Conference at which Russia could be represented. In the emergency of early 1917, such a conference could be held only in Russia. Accordingly, after many delays (partly due to the increasingly disturbed state of Russian domestic politics), an Allied mission sailed from Oban for Petrograd on 21 January. Lord Milner, a member of the War Cabinet, and General Sir Henry Wilson headed the British

³ General Ludendorff, *My War Memories 1914-1918* (London, n.d.), I, 355, 358-60.

⁴ *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George* (London, 1933-36), III, 1382.

party; M. Doumergue and General Castelnau represented France and the noted jurist, Vittorio Scialoja, led the Italian delegation.

From the beginning Allied leaders recognized that logistical factors limited the amount of aid that could be given to Russia. Externally, the shortage of shipping and unrestricted submarine warfare handicapped Allied efforts. Internally, inefficient management and undeveloped facilities crippled attempts to distribute supplies. To help solve these grave problems, the British Government sought the assistance of a Canadian railwayman of long and varied experience, who might be expected to cope with the formidable but not unfamiliar difficulties of severe climate and long distances. On 19 January, Lloyd George telegraphed to Lord Shaughnessy, President of the C.P.R., "we are anxious for best available railway transportation authority to accompany Allied Mission", adding that George Bury, then Vice-President of the C.P.R., had been suggested as the "best man for this purpose". The Prime Minister continued: "Should be immensely grateful if you could arrange with him to come over by the first possible boat and join Mission. I realize that this involves great inconvenience both to you and to him but you would thereby be rendering invaluable assistance to Allied cause as well as great personal service to myself." ⁵

Shaughnessy replied on the following day:

Bury glad to do anything he can to help. Sailing immediately and will call at your office on arrival. Has been associated with me here for thirty-four years, and I know of no man in the world to whom would sooner entrust the particular character of organization that you mention. Given rather a free hand and reasonable co-operation willing to stake my reputation on results.⁶

Thereupon, the Prime Minister sent a secret telegram to Lord Milner advising him that Bury was joining the Petrograd Mission, adding: "We consider it of the utmost importance that every facility should be given to Mr. Bury, and we hope that the fullest possible use will be made by the Imperial Government of his great experience and knowledge, which he places unreservedly at their disposal." ⁷

The subject of these communications was a third generation Canadian of Irish extraction, born at Montreal in the year preceding Confederation. The son of George and Catherine Bury, he was educated at the Collège de Montréal. At an early age he married May Aylen of Aylmer, Quebec. In 1883 young Bury entered the service of the C.P.R. as a junior in the purchasing department at a salary of one dollar per day. No corporation ever made a better investment. From the moment that this

⁵ Tel., Lloyd George to Lord Shaughnessy, 19 Jan. 1917, in "The Bury Collection", The Vancouver Club.

⁶ Tel., Lord Shaughnessy to Lloyd George, 20 Jan. 1917, *ibid.*

⁷ Tel., Prime Minister to Lord Milner, 2 Feb. 1917, *ibid.*

ambitious, dynamic, red-headed youth joined the company, he established a reputation for driving energy and clear thinking that brought quick promotions. His rapid rise was mainly due to the interest of Sir William Van Horne, President of the C.P.R. during the last years of the 19th century. It is said that, at their first encounter, Van Horne asked the young clerk: "And what is your ambition?" Unhesitatingly came the answer: "To become president of the Canadian Pacific Railway."⁸ It is clear, from a review of his subsequent career, that Bury missed his ultimate objective by a narrow margin.

Within a short time of joining the C.P.R., Bury was appointed Assistant Superintendent in charge of the division from Chalk River to Cartier and Sault Ste. Marie; thereafter he was Superintendent at, successively, North Bay, Fort William and Cranbrook, and General Superintendent of the Central Division at Winnipeg. By 1907 his reputation was so well established that he was offered, but refused, the position of General Manager of the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railway, one of the largest American railways. He was instrumental in determining C.P.R. policy on many important issues — such as the building of the Connaught Tunnel (after the disastrous slides of 1912), when he told the Directors they could not avoid the expensive undertaking for fear of losing a trainload of passengers! Appointed General Manager of the C.P.R.'s Western Lines in 1908, Bury became Vice-President, a Director and member of the Executive Committee in 1915. Consequently, at the time of the wartime conference in Petrograd, he was one of the world's leading experts on rail transportation in northern latitudes.

On February 1st 1917, Lloyd George wrote to Bury as follows:

By desire of the War Cabinet I request that you will proceed to Petrograd as a member of Lord Milner's mission at the earliest possible moment. He has been warned by telegraph that you are on your way. If Lord Milner has left Petrograd you will please report to the British Ambassador [Sir George Buchanan, who had been at Petrograd since 1910] and obtain his directions as to joining Lord Milner. Under Lord Milner's instructions you are desired to obtain all the information that you can and render every possible assistance, in regard to the working of the Russian railway system.⁹

Bury worked quickly. Less than three weeks after receiving these instructions, the Canadian had completed his report, running to more than 2,000 words, at Petrograd. The Russian Government made their facilities readily available to him and, possibly somewhat to Lord Milner's surprise, the Czar granted the Canadian a private audience. Bury described the doomed ruler as a "charming, simple and wholly unaffected man."¹⁰ For his part, the Czar was sufficiently impressed to send Bury

⁸ Reported by G.C. Porter, *Tribune* (Winnipeg), 22 Nov. 1941.

⁹ Lloyd George to Bury, 1 Feb. 1917, in "The Bury Collection".

¹⁰ Bury to D'Arcy Marsh, *Province* (Vancouver), 12 July 1958.

daily thereafter a bottle of champagne for lunch. Bury found, as anticipated, that Russia did not possess sufficient railway lines, and those in existence were inadequately equipped with locomotives and waggons. (Throughout his report, Bury used English equivalents of North American terminology.) "An extensive construction programme is for the present impracticable," he wrote, "and the situation will have to be met in part by increasing the movement on the lines in existence and buying all the waggons and locomotives that can be delivered during this year."¹¹ He pointed out that "increased tonnage movement" could be obtained by adding passing tracks, shortening the distances between them, improving terminal and junction yards, spacing signals closer on heavily burdened lines and, above all, "by increasing the goods trains to the haulage capacity of the locomotive." Since Russian and Canadian climates were comparable, Bury knew that, depending upon the severity of winter weather, railroad lines might drop to half their capacity.

To meet the crisis in Russian transportation, he advocated reduction of passenger services to a minimum, prohibition of movement of luxuries and non-essentials and restriction of imports through Vladivostok. More effective use must be made of waterways, and a more efficient system of repairs must be adopted. "Compared with our practice," Bury noted, "the Russian railways should have 1500 locomotives less under and waiting major repairs than they have at present and 15,000 less wagons." Explanations offered for this situation were insufficient shop space together with lack of material and skilled labour; but the Canadian suggested that space be provided at the expense of munitions, that a census be taken of all skilled workers (including prisoners of war) and that both day and night forces be employed at repair shops.

Bury's recommendations covered a wide field of technical considerations. He found that thousands of Russian freight cars were used as storehouses and living quarters; obviously, these must be restored to their proper use. Also heavy penalties should be imposed for delays in loading and unloading operations. Purchases of rolling stock outside Russia should be restricted to wheels, axles and other steel parts, using native woods for superstructure. At the shops he had visited, the Russian engineers (many of whom had been to America and were familiar with American methods) had explained that their regulations limited tire wear to four millimetres. Bury commented: "This limit might safely be made eight millimetres. It is the practice on many roads with heavy and fast traffic. Increasing the limit of tire wear would add to the mileage of locomotives."

In retrospect, it is interesting to observe that, on the eve of the Revolution, two-thirds of the Russian railways were operated by the

¹¹ "Memorandum regarding Transportation, prepared for the British War Cabinet", by George Bury, 20 Feb. 1917, in "The Bury Collection".

state, the remainder being privately owned. We need not be too surprised to find a note of disapproval in the following comment by this representative of Canadian private enterprise: "The State assumes great powers over the privately owned railways and imposes its will upon them to an extent unheard of in other countries." Nevertheless, he suggested that closer co-ordination and greater efficiency could be attained by "some central authority", using daily telegraphic reports in key form to control the allotment of cars and engines to various railways. He also remarked that Russia "should be divided into zones in which peat, wood, coal or oil would furnish heat and power. The fuels decided upon should be heavily stocked during the summer [,] moving it by waterways where available."

Two aspects of the Russian railway system required particular attention. We know, from Buchanan's *Memoirs*, that as early as May 1916 the British Ambassador had been calling the Czar's attention to "the congestion existing on the Siberian railway and to the necessity of completing the Murman railway with the least possible delay."¹² (Murman, now known as Murmansk, was the only northern port remaining ice-free throughout the year. Earlier construction work on the line to this port had been performed by prisoners of war under the supervision of Canadian engineers.)¹³ On the other hand, Vladivostok was thousands of miles from the Eastern Front and, after the failure of the Gallipoli expedition, inefficient operation of the Trans-Siberian Railway resulted in the accumulation of vast quantities of *matériel* at Vladivostok. This included many supplies, especially ammunition, urgently needed by the Russian Armies on the western frontiers of the homeland.¹⁴ Bury's realism was evident in his assessment of these problems. "It is clear," he wrote, "owing to the distance, that without much more rolling stock than is in sight that the traffic movement via Vladivostok must be very small and that for at least a year Russia must depend upon her Northern ports. From now till navigation opens at Archangel Port Murman will be practically the only avenue for imports from abroad except waggons and locomotives which should come via Vladivostok. . . . On the opening of navigation imports may come freely through Archangel, Kem [on the south-western coast of the White Sea], and perhaps a small quantity via the Finnish ports."¹⁵ However Bury added, somewhat sombrely, that Allied estimates should be based on "four-fifths of the Russian expecta-

¹² Sir George Buchanan, *My Mission to Russia and Other Diplomatic Memories* (London, 1923), II, 8.

¹³ Public Archives Records Centre, G.A.Q. file 10-28, "The Syren Party", by Capt. J. K. Nesbitt.

¹⁴ John Albert White, *The Siberian Intervention* (Princeton, 1950), 137-38. The stocks of war material at Vladivostok continued to accumulate; by the latter part of 1918 their total value was estimated at between \$750,000,000 and \$1,000,000,000. (*Ibid.*, 138).

¹⁵ The Russian authorities promised to move 127,000 tons via Port Murman in the period ending on 1 May 1917.

tions." He emphasized that the line from Port Murman would become "the main artery for traffic to Russia"; the work of improving service on this line was, in his words, "of such magnitude and so essential to the Russian Empire that it must be laid out and prosecuted on a very large scale indeed."

The report contained some interesting reflections on the broader aspects of Russian railway problems.

The Russian railway officers vary in ability and knowledge as elsewhere. Many of them have travelled extensively and the railway practice in various parts of the world has been studied and as a rule they know what should be done. Without meaning any reflection upon them [I] believe they have not the organizing genius to be found in some other countries, and certainly not that push and energy that stops at no obstacle.

No matter how well a State may strive its very nature inclines it towards red tapism and in Russia perhaps it is to be found more than elsewhere.

To attempt to change the ways of a nation quickly would be abortive. To attempt to place British or French officers in charge of the more important positions on the Russian railways, even with the full power of the Government behind them would not bring about the desired results any more than if Russians were to be placed in charge of the British or French railways.

He therefore suggested that the only practicable course was to provide Russia with all the freight cars and locomotives that could be obtained ("even by paying premiums for prompt delivery") and to station capable officers, as observers, at key points such as Port Murman, Kem and Archangel. He also urged the British Government to support the Minister of Ways and Communications (Nikolai Nekrasov), a man of practical experience who, in Bury's opinion, was "undoubtedly the best administrator that has filled that position."

The report concluded :

There is the possibility of forming committees from the Duma or the business men of Moscow who would push forward the matter of transportation improvement continually [,] but here again only the intimate knowledge of Russian politics possessed by our ambassador could enable a decision upon the advisability of that course.

Our hope of improved conditions lies in having the present minister retain his portfolio during the continuance of the war at least and in enlisting his full sympathy in the remedies suggested and to induce him to carry them out vigorously and whole-heartedly.

Even within the comparatively narrow limits of its investigation, Bury's report serves to illustrate the grave nature of economic problems in Russia on the eve of the Revolution. In fact, the document acquires greater significance when we consider it in the light of contemporary political developments.

As he dictated these observations and recommendations at Petrograd, the middle-aged railway executive could not know that he would shortly witness the beginnings of the most significant revolution in modern history. Yet, little more than a fortnight after signing his report, he was a keen observer of the disturbances at Petrograd known as the "February Revolution" (occurring in March in the western calendar), leading to the overthrow of the Romanov dynasty. Moreover he had the foresight — and for this historians can be particularly grateful — to record his impressions in a separate report to the British War Cabinet.¹⁶

This paper cannot attempt to review the immediate background of the Revolution. However, we may recall that when the First World War began, Lenin (then in exile in Switzerland) hastened to reiterate the position adopted, seven years earlier, at the Second International — namely, to "utilize the economic and political crisis caused by the war in order to . . . hasten the destruction of the class domination of the capitalist class."¹⁷ Within Russia prominent Bolsheviks (including Stalin) were soon arrested and deported to Siberia. But by early 1917 chaotic conditions favoured a resumption of revolutionary activity. Although, in January, Lenin told a Swiss audience that he doubted whether his generation would "live to see the decisive battles of the coming revolution", the latter were only weeks away. Thus, Lenin was soon passing through central Europe in the famous sealed train, headed for Petrograd, where Stalin, Molotov and other Bolshevik leaders were gathering.

The "February Revolution" (beginning on 8 March) has been described as "the spontaneous outbreak of a multitude exasperated by the privations of the war and by manifest inequality in the distribution of burdens."¹⁸ Bury's report to the British Government stated :

There was general dissatisfaction of the Russian people with the Government and a great hatred of the Russian Police, whose drastic methods are well known. The Revolution was due to a shortage of food. Prior to the Revolution, for some time, the people had to wait in long lines for bread and then were only able to secure but a small dole. The price of food had been growing at a tremendous rate and it is not an exaggeration to say that many of the work-people were on the verge of starvation. The food shortage was brought about from the inadequate transportation system of Russia, hampered by a very severe winter, to the fixing of maximum prices and partly to people endeavouring to make undue profits.

The Canadian noted that the revolution had been confined mainly to Petrograd and the Navy, adding : "It was freely stated and is generally believed throughout Russia, that the Government desired to provoke the

¹⁶ "Report regarding the Russian Revolution prepared at the request of the British War Cabinet", by George Bury, 5 April 1917, in "The Bury Collection". [Unless otherwise indicated, subsequent quotations are from this document.]

¹⁷ Quoted by Edward Hallett Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923* (London, 1950), I, 66.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

people, expecting to chastise them and then have an excuse for a separate Peace. Whether this is true or not, it is accepted generally by all classes of the people." Lack of raw materials closed many factories in the vicinity of Petrograd and the unemployed "marched into the city, crying for bread but without making any great demonstration." Bury observed that the Russian police had placed many machine-guns on the roofs of buildings. An ironical comment on the diversion of Allied assistance was the report that 2,000 out of 3,000 machine-guns received from America had been turned over to the police.

Serious fighting developed on Saturday, 10 March. At an early stage there were signs that Cossacks, called in to bolster the police, were sympathetic to the workers. In Bury's words: "Bombs were thrown and weapons used freely. The police acted with disgusting savagery and towards the evening a row developed between the Cossacks and the police, which resulted in the Cossacks turning their arms against the police, who fled and were killed freely." Thereafter, the struggle continued between the police and the military, the latter largely composed of recruits. Bury was convinced that the co-operation of workers and soldiers was "a pure accident" and that "it had not been pre-arranged." As we know, subsequent research has established that the revolutionary parties were not directly responsible for the Revolution. "They did not expect it, and were at first somewhat nonplussed by it."¹⁹

Bury describes how the soldiers were soon disarming and killing some of their officers, and compelling others to wear red ribbons. New orders followed: saluting was changed, officers were to be chosen by their men and separate messes abolished. Mechanized vehicles "were running all over the city loaded with soldiers, hooligans and workmen and shooting was going on very generally. Field guns were laid across some of the streets. Every police station was ransacked and all the records burned." Political prisoners and criminals were released, and shops looted. Fortunately, little liquor was obtainable, or the casualties (including estimated deaths of at least 5,600) might have been greater. The Canadian report continued: "The rivers and canals in the vicinity of Petrograd are covered with ice. At many intervals there are water holes cut for the use of laundresses and many of the killed — principally the policemen — were just pushed under the ice and allowed to float out." It will be remembered that, only a few months before, Rasputin's murderers had attempted, unsuccessfully, to use the same *oubliette*.

The Canadian's observations were not gained without a considerable element of personal risk. In general, the revolutionaries were on friendly terms with Allied representatives, who, therefore, were not molested; but, in company with the remainder of the population, Bury and his colleagues

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

ran continual risk of death or injury from the indiscriminate firing that accompanied demonstrations. Complete confusion existed everywhere — for, as yet, the councils of workingmen's and soldiers' deputies were still being organized. By dint of persistent shoving and tactful requests ("May I pass, allies?" or "Let me through, little brothers"), Bury reached the interior of the Duma. The vast Catherine Hall echoed to endless speakers on endless topics. But within the Chamber itself, the silence was broken only by the words of a few off-duty sentries lounging about the official stenographers' table, which was littered with bread and fish offal.

Bury described his interview with Prince Lvoff after the latter took over the provisional government on March 14th. In the Prime Minister's mixed metaphor, "the Government was like 'straws on a turbulent stream'"; but "they had strong hopes of becoming 'firmly fixed in the saddle'". Lvoff, who would soon pass from the scene to exile in Paris, claimed that "the troubles were mainly confined now to Petrograd, that the Revolutionaries, Socialists and other extremists were continually sending out manifestos of all kinds but that their efforts were abortive outside of Petrograd." There was an element of truth in this appreciation because, as we know, the suddenness of the revolution left the Bolsheviki in an embarrassing position, and the whole revolutionary movement was in a state of flux. Yet it was only a question of time before the main stream of Russian discontent bore away the "straws" of Lvoff's administration, preparing the way for Kerensky's provisional government and the Bolshevik triumph in the "November Revolution".

Bury's second report to the British Government concluded with this sombre appreciation :

I would advise that we figure the future on the assumption that Russia will be but little help. The most we can expect is that they will hold their present lines, backing up every time a serious offensive is tried. I believe Germany will make every effort to conquer Russia and that she will take Petrograd. I do not think she can conquer Russia but I regard as certain the fall of the Capital in the next year, mainly through the inefficiency of the Russian Fleet. But the fall of Petrograd will not prevent the Russians finally driving the Germans out of all Russia with the exception of Poland, and possibly the Baltic Provinces.

I know nothing about Military matters, but, in civil life, in large corporations, once discipline has been impaired it takes a long time to restore it and it is certain that the lack of discipline has seriously impaired the effectiveness of the Army and particularly of the Navy.

As events soon proved, Bury had exaggerated the Russian capacity to resist. The Czar was forced to abdicate on 15 March. Taking over the provisional government from Prince Lvoff, Kerensky mounted his ill-fated offensive in the summer; the Germans replied with a crushing counter-offensive, occupying Riga at the beginning of September and threatening Petrograd. Before the end of 1917 tortuous negotiations had

begun at Brest-Litovsk, leading to the cessation of hostilities on the Eastern Front.

In his *Memoirs*, Lloyd George observed that the outbreak of the Russian revolution, immediately following the Allied Conference at Petrograd, "destroyed the value of all the work it had accomplished."²⁰ Lord Milner, General Castelnau and other Allied delegates returned from Petrograd with pessimistic feelings. Western difficulty with the Russian paradox was apparent in the following note, written after Sir Robert Borden heard Milner's report to the British War Cabinet on 6 March: "Greatly impressed by characteristics of Russian people. Says they are oriental in type. Very little effective organization in national affairs."²¹

The revolutionary tidal wave obliterated all positive results from Bury's recommendations. Although the subsequent decline of Russian railroads lies outside the limits of this paper, some salient features may be mentioned briefly in support of the Canadian estimate. For example, it is known that between the beginning of 1917 and the end of 1919, the number of Russian freight cars in operation fell from well over half a million to only 244,000.²² The engineer, Lomonosov, told the Congress of Supreme Economic Councils: "It is useless to shut our eyes to reality. However badly the Tsarist Ministers may have managed, however destructive the imperialist war may have been, in the last account it was the Revolution and the civil war that destroyed our railroads."²³ However, we may safely assume that communications were also adversely affected by the immense, internal struggle between the powerful railwaymen's union and the central Bolshevik authority.²⁴ The resulting disorganization persisted until a decree of 26 March 1918 gave to the People's Commissar for Communications dictatorial powers over all matters connected with railway transportation.²⁵

But these developments lay far in the future when Bury returned to London in the spring of 1917. The British Government's keen appreciation of his services was expressed in the Prime Minister's letter of 6 April.

Dear Mr. Bury,

Before you return to Canada, I wish to take the opportunity of expressing to you personally and on behalf of the Government our sincere and grateful appreciation of the most valuable services you have rendered to the allied cause during your recent visit to Russia. If the recommendations contained in your reports are carried out by the Russian Government, I feel sure that we may look forward to a great improvement in their transport services.

²⁰ *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George*, III, 1585.

²¹ *Robert Laird Borden: His Memoirs* (Toronto, 1938), II, 683.

²² W. H. Chamberlin, *The Russian Revolution* (New York, 1957), II, 108.

²³ Quoted, *ibid.*

²⁴ Carr, *op. cit.*, II, 394-97 ("Note D: Workers' Control on the Railways").

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 396.

I need hardly say that I fully appreciate the serious personal risks you have encountered, and I heartily congratulate you on your safe return.

May I also thank you for the report you have sent to the War Cabinet dealing with recent events in Petrograd. The information you give is most valuable and will assist us in arriving at a true appreciation of the real state of affairs in Russia.

Believe me,
Yours sincerely,
"D. Lloyd George"²⁶

It would be interesting, but perhaps unrewarding, to speculate upon the influence exerted by the Bury reports on later Allied policy in relation to Russia.

Another aspect of Bury's mission provides an intriguing commentary on the constitutional practice of the Empire in 1917. A search of the Borden and Perley Papers in the Public Archives of Canada fails to disclose any evidence that the British authorities consulted the Dominion Government or its representative in London about the selection of Bury. However, he was not unknown in Britain (which he had visited shortly before his Russian mission) and apparently the initiative was taken by Lloyd George in his original telegram to Lord Shaughnessy. With characteristic energy, if not subtlety, the British Prime Minister simply bypassed Ottawa. From the Canadian point of view there was what may have been an embarrassing sequel. For in September 1918 the Governor General (the Duke of Devonshire) wrote to Walter Long (the Colonial Secretary): "My Ministers desire to be furnished for Confidential information of Canadian Government with copy of memorandum on Russian Railways and also report on Russian Revolution prepared by Sir George Bury for His Majesty's Government."²⁷ What use, if any, was made of the reports remains unknown. Doubtless, however, official Canadian interest was related to plans then being made for Canadian participation in the expeditions to Archangel and Siberia.²⁸

Bury was knighted for his services to the British Government and in 1919, at the comparatively early age of 53, he retired from the C.P.R. His later years were spent in Vancouver, where he died in 1958. A man of strong character, keen insight and unflinching principles, he had acquired a wide circle of devoted friends, including both leading figures of his time and humble employees of the company he had served.

For a few days of his life, Bury was privileged to be a witness of one of the most significant developments in modern history. It was

²⁶ Lloyd George to Bury, 6 April 1917, in "The Bury Collection".

²⁷ Public Archives of Canada, "Borden Papers", Devonshire to Long, 11 Sep. 1918.

²⁸ Colonel G. W. L. Nicholson, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War: Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1919* (Ottawa, 1962), 512-13, 519-20; James Eayrs, *In Defence of Canada from the Great War to the Great Depression* (Toronto, n.d.), 27-8.

like being in Paris at the fall of the Bastille. Furthermore, the nature of his mission, combined with his practical experience, gave him a unique opportunity to observe one of the primary causes of the Revolution. We may question whether the causes of the revolt were purely economic in nature; but the importance of inadequate transportation in a country, like ours, of such vast area, is obvious.

For his penetrating analysis of a vital aspect of Russia's acute problems in 1917, and for the light he cast on the early stages of the Revolution, historians remain indebted to the shrewd and experienced judgment of one of Canada's most distinguished railway executives.