

1917

a year that changed the world



SOCIALIST  ALTERNATIVE

Russian Revolution Reader

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Explanation of Some Terms

Bolsheviks: Revolutionary wing of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party which, under the leadership of Lenin, led the working class to the taking of power in October 1917. Trotsky and his supporters joined the Bolshevik Party at its conference of July 1917, past differences between them having been resolved through the experience of the revolution. He was elected to the Bolshevik central committee and, with Lenin, led the struggle for power.

Mensheviks ('minority'): The reformist wing of the RSDLP got their name from the split with the Bolsheviks ('majority') over organizational questions at the 1903 Party Congress. In 1917 with their mistaken 'two-stage' theory of the Revolution, Menshevik ministers helped prop up the capitalist Provisional Government, supported by imperialist foreign policy and fought against the proletarian revolution. After October, they became an openly counter-revolutionary party.

Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs): The SRs based themselves on the peasantry. Their program called for "free, popular rule, nationalization of the land and nationalization of all great industries". After the February revolution they became, with the Mensheviks, the mainstay of the bourgeois Provisional Government. By the time of the October Insurrection, the right wing of the SRs sided openly with the counter-revolution. The left wing of the SRs, having split, formed a short-lived agreement with the Bolshevik government.

Kadets: The Constitutional Democratic Party of the liberal-monarchist bourgeoisie in Russia. Failing to save the monarchy in February 1917, they took the advantage of their key position in the Provisional Government to pursue their counter-revolutionary and imperialist policies. After the October revolution they actively supported the invasion of Russia by the armies of the imperialist powers.

Black Hundreds: Popular name for the "Union of the Russian People" – a league of the most reactionary monarchists and nationalists who employed methods of criminal terror against revolutionaries and were the chief instigators of the pogroms (massacres of Jews).

Cossacks: Cavalry soldiers who formed a caste and almost a 'nationality' in Tsarist Russia, since they enjoyed exemption from taxes and privileged land allotments in special territories.

Provisional Government: After the overthrow of the Tsar in February 1917, the Provisional Government held formal power. It was made up of landowners and industrialists, mainly Kadets, together with Kerensky, and was supported by the Mensheviks and SRs. The precise composition of the Provisional Government changed

February and October, but nor its essential character as defender of capitalism and the old state.

Soviets: Councils of workers' and soldiers' deputies – bodies of elected delegates, created by the initiative of the masses. Until August 1917 the Mensheviks and SRs had a majority in the Soviets.

Kerensky: A Socialist Revolutionary, on the right wing of the party, who was Minister of Justice, then Minister of War, before becoming President of the Provisional Government in the period leading up to its overthrow in the October revolution.

Zinoviev and Kamenev: Members of the Bolshevik Central Committee, eventually executed on Stalin's orders in 1936 after the Moscow Trials.

Petrograd: Capital of Tsarist Russia, today called Leningrad.

Winter Palace: The Tsar's official residence in Petrograd.

1905 (First) Revolution: The “dress rehearsal” for the revolution of 1917, when the working class clearly established itself as the leading force in the struggle and gave rise to the first Soviets, before it was crushed.

Bloody Sunday: January 9, 1905, when a peaceful demonstration of workers led by a priest, Gapon tried to present a petition to Tsar Nicholas II and was met with volleys of gunfire. This massacre sparked off the revolution of 1905.

Social Democratic Parties: The term was originally used in the late 19th century to distinguish workers' parties based on Marxism from the parties of capitalist democracy. With the growth of a conservative bureaucratic leadership during the long period of relative stability and economic growth in Western Europe and North America in the last part of the century, however, these parties underwent a profound degeneration. On the outbreak of the 1914 World War the vast majority of their leaders took up a nationalist position in support of their own capitalist classes, thus demonstrating their abandonment of Marxism.

Brief history of the year 1917 by Clare Doyle

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Nearly one hundred years after it happened, on November 7th by the modern calendar, the ‘October revolution’ in Russia in 1917 is still regarded by socialists as the greatest event in human history. Under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party, it brought into existence the first, and so far the only, workers-led government to hold power for any length of time. With its appeal to the workers of the world to follow suit, it set out to sweep feudalism and capitalism from the face of the earth.

This was the most democratic form of government ever embarked on. The Bolsheviks drew on, and developed, the experience of the Paris Commune of 1871 and of the workers’ councils set up during the revolution in Russia in 1905. All major decision-making was to be done through a system of ‘soviets’ – of workers’, soldiers’ and peasants’ delegates – at a local, regional and national level. Any paid representatives were to stand regularly for re-election and receive no more than the average wage of a worker.

By the summer of 1918, Russia was out of the World War. Land had been taken over by the state for the use of the poor peasants. The country’s major banks, and industries had been under workers’ control and were now nationalised. A rudimentary workers’ management of industry and society was operating through the country’s elected soviets at local and national level.

The idea of revolution had spread like wild-fire internationally. By the end of 1918 the workers’ uprising in Germany had forced the Kaiser out of power. The following year in Hungary, an attempt was made, under the leadership of Bela Kun, to emulate the Russian revolution. In Britain strikes had increased six-fold in 1918 with 35 million working days ‘lost’ in 1919. Dock-workers in London refused to load arms for use against the Bolshevik government.

Weakest link

Most Marxists had expected the first successful socialist revolution to take place in a predominantly industrialised country with an experienced working class, such as Germany or even America, and later spread to less developed economies. But capitalism broke at its weakest link because of a very special coming together of factors.

Russia at the time of the February revolution in 1917 was a vast, war-drained, country. Eighty percent of the population were impoverished peasants many working on the estates of aristocratic families and of the 'new rich' of the business world. Only a small percentage of Russia's workforce was engaged in industry. Two million Russian soldiers, most of them from peasant families, had already been slaughtered in the blood-letting of the first world war.

What industry there was in Russia was relatively modern and foreign-owned. Workers drawn from the countryside, were housed in hovels and concentrated together in large factories – mostly in the main cities of Moscow and Petrograd – the country's capital at the time.

The Tsars had operated a suffocating police state in order to try and maintain their vast empire and pampered existence. Before 1905 all opposition forces had been illegalised. Narodniks – Social Revolutionaries based themselves erroneously on the peasantry and on the tactic of assassination – of Tsars and government ministers – to 'detonate' revolution. Many were executed or at best exiled.

Marxist Socialists based themselves on the industrial proletariat as the motor force of revolution. They, too, were persecuted and imprisoned. Their organisations were driven underground and their leaders into exile. Strikes were forbidden.

1905

Generations of revolutionaries in Russia had fought the tsarist regime and developed their ideas through studying books and their own experience of struggle. By the beginning of 1905, strikes and protests were mounting against the background of Russian forces being humiliated in the war with Japan. In Petrograd, on January 9, a peaceful protest of striking workers and their families from across the city, led by a priest made their way to petition the Tsar for decent conditions and political freedoms. Government troops opened fire and hundreds were killed and injured.

Strikes spread across the country. A mutiny on the battleship Potemkin in Russia's Black Sea Fleet sparked more mass protests in Odessa, in which many hundreds of people were killed. A general political strike developed in October during which workers' 'soviets' or councils were thrown up – a new form of representative body. Delegates were elected from the workplaces and came together to discuss the key issues in the struggle and also to execute whatever plans were agreed. They were seen as a major threat to the old order, coordinating every strike and demonstration.

The Tsar reacted to the uprising by promising an elected Duma – a suggestion dismissed by the soviets as an inadequate sop. The strikes and mass demonstrations continued.

Eventually, not having found sufficient support in the countryside and in the army, this revolution was defeated. On December 3, the Petrograd soviet was broken up and its leaders arrested, including Trotsky its president. Ferocious

battles continued in the workers' districts of Moscow with many hundreds killed. In the course of 1905, thousands of lives were lost and many opposition fighters executed.

Reaction and recovery

This 'dress rehearsal' for the events of 1917 wrung certain democratic rights from the regime – such as elections to the Duma, the legalisation of the press and trade unions. But many of the movement's political leaders were either in prison, in internal exile or abroad. The workers and peasants bowed their heads to the yoke once more, harbouring enormous resentment against their oppressors but taking time to recover their fighting capacity. In spite of certain democratic rights having been won, a period of reaction set in and ideas alien to the workers' movement came to the surface.

But the workers' movement revived. By 1912, important strikes were breaking out in factories and mines across the country. On 17 April, a mass demonstration of striking workers at the Lena goldfields in Siberia was brutally attacked by armed soldiers. Hundreds were killed and wounded. This massacre "inflamed the masses with revolutionary fire" commented Lenin, the eventual leader of the workers' government established five years later.

The massacre of oil-workers by government troops in Western Kazakhstan in 2011 could have had the same effect, or the shooting down of platinum miners in Marikana, South Africa two years ago. Similarly, the angry response of workers and their families to the mining disaster at Soma, Turkey – the direct result of cutbacks in safety by cronies of the then president, Erdogan, who bought up the mine cheap when it was privatised.

Such events are etched in the memory of the working class, not yet ready to launch an all-out offensive against their governments but feeding their determination to 'get even'!

1912 in Russia was also the year that the RSDLP finally split into two separate parties – the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. The Bolsheviks, under the leadership of Lenin, were intent on building a revolutionary party with trained cadres and serious, committed members in the factories, the army and the navy. The Mensheviks favoured a looser form of organisation. Both, at this time, shared the view that the first stage would be a democratic revolution against feudalism in the shape of Tsarism and the 'landed gentry'. Then, in theory, after a period of development of capitalism, a move could be made towards socialism.

Although Trotsky was neither a Menshevik nor a Bolshevik until five years later, he was closer to Lenin's party. He began, as early as 1904, to outline his theory of 'permanent revolution' in 'Results and Prospects' which was published in 1906. Before Lenin came to the same conclusion, he was arguing that, in 'backward' Russia, the revolution to overthrow the monarchy and feudalism would need to be combined with the socialist revolution, under the leadership of the working class.

In the interests of maximum unity in struggle, Trotsky had been advocating the re-unification of the RSDLP (for too long, by his own admission). He had formally remained with an organisation called the Mezhrayontsi (Inter-District group), but when he joined the Bolsheviks in July of 1917 he was readily accepted as one of the party's ablest leaders.

February 1917

The February revolution of 1917 came after months of strikes and unrest. On International Women's Day (March 8th but February 27th, according to the pre-revolutionary calendar) women textile-workers in Petrograd began to walk out of their factories. They demanded an end to food shortages and price rises, and also an end to the war.

They were enthusiastically joined by tens of thousands of other workers. The Tsar had dithered and shown his inability to introduce reform. He ordered the troops to fire on the demonstrators. Hundreds were killed and injured. The workers' appealed to the soldiers to refuse any further orders to shoot. Eventually they were convinced and the rule of the Tsars was over.

The atmosphere was one of joyous celebration. Workers had moved onto the scene of history, come onto the streets in a veritable 'festival of the oppressed'. They had removed a hated government and held power in their hands, but did not know what to do with it. In this situation a revolutionary party is needed that is trusted and well known amongst the workers, which has a mass base and a leadership which can indicate the steps that need to be taken to stop reaction regaining the upper hand. The Bolsheviks, who had a leadership with a clear perspective for the development of the revolution, were still a relatively small force. As so often in revolutions, the workers who had made it took the apparently easier way out – handing power to the available, apparently 'progressive' politicians.

The government that came into office was indeed 'provisional' and was from the very beginning rivalled by the Petrograd Soviet of workers' and soldiers' representatives in a situation characterised as 'dual power'. This body commanded more support amongst the population of the city than the government. At this stage, the Menshevik party had the support of a majority of the workers' and soldiers' representatives but were doomed to lose it as the tumultuous year progressed.

The Provisional Government was a government of crisis from the very beginning. It agreed to elections for a constituent assembly, but, by the time such a body could be convoked...after the victorious October revolution...it would no longer reflect the real relationship of forces in society.

Weak government

Lenin returned to Petrograd from exile on 3rd April 1917, urging the Bolsheviks to see that the first revolution had to 'grow over' immediately into the

next one – the socialist one. His ‘April theses’, declaimed from an armoured car at the Finland station and elsewhere in the city, were published in the Bolshevik newspaper Pravda on 7 April. He expressed total opposition to support being given to the provisional government by the Bolsheviks inside the country under the leadership of Lev Kamenev and Josef Stalin, who were putting forward the same arguments as the Mensheviks.

The Mensheviks were supporting the government from outside. In May, they decided to enter into a government coalition with the ‘liberal’ Constitutional Democrats. The Bolsheviks then launched the demand of ‘Down with the ten capitalist ministers!’ to expose the SRs’ and Mensheviks’ failure to push for a government that truly represented the forces that had made the revolution.

Little had changed in society. The war continued to drain all available human and industrial resources. The provisional government had neither removed the capitalists from power in industry nor the feudal landlords from power in the country-side. In many cases they were one and the same.

Revolt

The revolt in the countryside spread like wild fire. Estates were seized and stately homes burned down. In the cities, demonstrations against the war multiplied. The Bolsheviks’ simple slogan of ‘Peace, Bread and Land’ accorded with the deepest desires of the mass of the population. It led workers, soldiers and eventually the peasantry to see for themselves the need to carry the revolution further. Tirelessly the Bolshevik Marxist workers’ party continued its agitation in the factories and at the front.

By the middle of 1917, the Bolsheviks had increased their support in the city’s central soviet of workers’ and soldiers’ deputies. Although many workers were supporting the call ‘All power to the soviets’, the Bolshevik leadership around Lenin advised against a direct challenge for power until all the conditions for a successful revolution had matured. They felt the armed forces were still not ready to risk siding totally with the socialist insurrection and nor were the provinces.

‘July Days’ and after

When a proposal came from below in July for a general strike and mass demonstration against the war and to bring down the government, the Bolshevik leaders felt it was premature and advised against it. But in the City Soviet they could not hold back the tide, and a majority agreed to go ahead. The movement held out for days against the police and the military, but, as Lenin and Trotsky had feared, it failed to draw them over to their side or at least neutralise them – another essential prerequisite for a successful seizure of power.

At this stage the military obeyed the orders of the Kerensky-led government and the July uprising was put down in blood. On July 4th, hundreds of pro-

testers were killed and injured. Bolshevik leaders were arrested or forced to flee the country. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin went into hiding.

During his period 'out of the public eye' (out of the reach of the police) in August and September, Lenin applied himself to writing the vitally important pamphlet – 'State and Revolution'. He outlined the basic principles laid down by the heroic French Communards of 1871 and those adopted by the workers' and soldiers' Soviets in Russia:- Regular election of all officials with the right of recall at any time; no representative to receive more than the average wage of a worker; the rotation of responsibilities (-"Every cook should be eligible to take a turn at being prime minister, and every prime minister should spend some time being a cook!"); no standing (permanent) army but an armed people.

He urged his supporters to spread the basic idea that a party aiming for the socialist transformation of society must understand the need to destroy the old state machine – courts, prisons, parliaments, armies – set up to enable the dominant but minority class in society (the 1%) to maintain its ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange. What had happened in Russia already that year – the failure of the Provisional Government, now under the hapless Kerensky, to solve any one of the problems of the majority in society – had demonstrated conclusively the impossibility of simply filling up the old state machine with a socialist content.

By the end of August, Kerensky was under threat from a different direction – an attempted far-right coup by General Kornilov. The Army's Commander in Chief had decided the government was failing to deal harshly enough with the Bolsheviks and the soviets.

It was the mobilisation of workers and soldiers led by the Bolsheviks who then routed Kornilov's forces. Their mass 'sabotage' of the railways, as well as preparedness to defend the government with arms 'provided the gun-rest' for Kerensky to defeat reaction. But it enormously enhanced the power of the revolutionary forces in the soviets and gave the Bolsheviks an overwhelming majority in the soviets of the main cities by the end of September.

The way for a revolutionary overthrow was rapidly being paved. The four conditions for a successful revolution spelled out by Lenin were all maturing rapidly.

Four conditions

The first is a crisis at the top of society. It manifests itself in a split in the ruling layer, uncertain as to how to proceed – whether to make concessions or employ repression to deal with the developing demands for change welling up from below. It can reveal itself in one individual ruler – a vacillating monarch such as Tsar Nicolas II or a government of crisis like that of Kerensky.

The second objective factor in a developing revolutionary situation is a middle class in ferment, not sure which way to turn but beginning to throw in its lot with the organised workers. The middle layers in society – small farmers,

shop-keepers and intelligentsia – are highly volatile and can move in one direction and then another, depending on who of their possible allies appears to be more on the ascendant and more likely to ease their troubles.

In Russia in the Autumn of 1917 the mass of the peasantry was ready for a fight to the finish against the landed aristocracy. Their traditional defenders in the Provisional Government – the Social-Revolutionaries and others – were passive.

The forces of the state – the soldiers, the sailors, the militiamen – had also lost faith in the parties of the Kerensky regime and were ready to take a neutral position and, in many cases, an active part in the revolution.

The working class of Petrograd, Moscow and elsewhere was already on the move and involved in strikes and political action in opposition to the political representatives of the ruling class. They were prepared to take the fight to a conclusion. This third condition for revolution had also reached full term.

The decisive fourth element necessary for a social and political revolution against capitalism to succeed is the existence of a party that has the confidence of a large part of the working class, with a leadership that can see the main line of march of events and can weigh up exactly what to do at each crucial moment in the struggle.

The Bolsheviks

Having had no more than 3% support in the soviets at the beginning of 1917 and just a few thousand actual members, by October the Bolshevik Party had hundreds of thousands of worker-members and a clear majority in the main soviets. They had support in the army and the navy and set up the Petrograd Military Revolutionary Committee that would lead the October insurrection.

The leaders of the Bolshevik Party – both Lenin and Trotsky – had a clear idea of what was needed, but also a keen sense of timing. They were agreed on the necessity of ‘completing’ the revolution by removing the capitalist parties from government and the class they represented from power in society. It had taken the dialectical processes of agitation around slogans and revolutionary propaganda amongst a broad swathe of workers, soldiers and poor peasants, to help them draw conclusions, through their own bitter experience, that an all-out socialist revolution was necessary.

Then the vital role of the leadership is to decide on the moment for decisive action once all the conditions have come together in the most propitious combination. Too early an attempt at insurrection would have led to an abortion; too late would have meant a still birth with reaction triumphant and a long period of recovery necessary before a new opportunity might arise.

If the insurrection had not gone ahead as it did in Petrograd on the 25th October 1917 (7th November, new calendar), but had been delayed even for another day or two to allow for the All-Russian Congress of Soviets to take place, the relationship of forces could have changed dramatically for the worse and the opportunity lost for a generation or a century!

The forces of reaction in the country along with those of the German invader, were threatening to close the opportunity for the Bolsheviks to bring down the Kerensky government; they had to seize the moment for insurrection.

The uprising began on October 24. The Military Revolutionary Committee sent armed groups to seize the main telegraph and post offices and the State Bank, block the main road and rail entrances to the city and lower all the bridges except one across the River Neva. By morning Kerensky had fled and the Red Guards had taken over the Winter Palace. The seizure of power was swift and effective. Even the tougher 'battle for Moscow' was over in a week.

By the morning of the 25 October (7 November) an order was issued for the transfer of power to the Petrograd Soviet, written by Lenin. An Extraordinary Session of the Petrograd Soviet took place in the afternoon and, in the evening, the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets opened in the Assembly Hall at the Smolny Institute, headquarters of the revolutionary forces. An international appeal to workers, soldiers and peasants is made.

A new life

The first decrees of the new soviet government, within hours of victory over the capitalist government of Kerensky, laid the basis for achieving the three basic demands of the revolution – 'Peace, Bread and Land'. The decree on Peace meant the pursuit of a cease-fire and peace terms without annexations.

The Decree on Land meant the immediate expulsion of the feudal lords from their estates and the allocation of land to be used by the poor peasantry. The Bolsheviks aimed to gear up the production in the cities of modern agricultural machinery, that would transform productivity on the farms. The small farmers would be encouraged to see the advantages for themselves, and for the city-dwellers, of the cooperative production of food.

Soviet power was also to mean workers' delegates taking over immediate control of banks and industry in preparation for taking them into public ownership in 1918 and setting out to manage them as part of a totally democratically planned state-owned economy.

After the victory

Attempts to snuff out the workers' revolution failed. Twenty one armies were sent in by imperialist countries to back up the arch reactionary White forces in the Civil War. They were repulsed at great human cost by the heroic forces of the Red Army under the command of Leon Trotsky.

There was also enormous economic cost. Industrial production fell to one seventh of the value of 1913 and that of agriculture nearly halved. Hundreds of thousands of people had been killed and millions died from starvation and disease.

The leaders of the revolution had long recognised that it would be considerably easier to take power than to hold onto it in their circumstances. They

were acutely aware of the vital importance of spreading the revolution to other more industrialised countries, with a stronger working class, in order to develop rapidly the technique and practices necessary to 'revolutionise' industry, the railways, power production and mining, as well as agriculture, to establish a healthy planned economy.

Even as the country struggled with the conditions of civil war, the Bolsheviks were under renewed pressure to establish a new international organisation to replace the discredited Second International whose main parties had supported the imperialist war. In the spring of 1919, representatives flooded to Petrograd from socialist and communist organisations across the globe to the founding conference of the Third (Communist) International. Such was the enthusiasm to join it, that before its second congress, Lenin established a list of 21 conditions for membership in order to prevent clearly non-communist forces jumping on the band-wagon.

The victory of the revolution also inevitably meant the break-up of the Russian Empire – a 'prison house of nations'. Lenin was sensitive to the desire of oppressed nations to exercise their right to self-determination. He nevertheless urged them to be part of a voluntary confederation.

By December 30th 1922, when the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was established, only Finland and Poland went their separate ways. The rest, including the first to declare independence, Ukraine, came together to pursue in tandem the new challenge of organising society on the basis of truly socialist principles. Huge progress was made on social as well as economic fronts.

After Lenin

In spite of the enormous enthusiasm amongst workers and oppressed across the world for the workers-led government in Russia, it was left tragically isolated. Socialist revolutions in Hungary, Germany and elsewhere ended in defeat and after the death of Lenin in 1924, Josef Stalin switched the government's policy to one of seeking 'Socialism in One Country'. As he usurped the revolution, abolished workers' democracy and exterminated all opposition to his rule, the Communist International became an instrument in his hands, not for spreading revolution elsewhere but for preventing it. The development of a healthy workers' state elsewhere would challenge his dictatorship.

His counter-revolution did not take the form of the re-establishment of capitalism. (This came much later towards the end of the 20th century after a period of slowing growth and the threat of stagnation). It was a political counter-revolution in the interests of a parasitic caste who had little connection with the revolutionary events of 1917. It sucked its privileges from the state-owned bureaucratically planned economy.

Huge advances were made in spite of this development. Industry grew rapidly because of the elimination of capitalism and feudalism and the 5 year plans. But all elements of workers' democracy were crushed and its advocates physically annihilated, including Leon Trotsky in exile in Mexico. The Third Inter-

national acted as the policeman of workers' movements around the world and a defence of the privileged position of the bureaucracy, only mouthing allegiance to socialism, communism and international solidarity while trampling on the heritage of the great Marxist teachers and leaders.

Understanding

A clear understanding of the processes of revolution and counter-revolution is vital for winning the new battles ahead. The conditions for a successful revolution cannot be reproduced according to a set model. Revolution is not like a scientific experiment – which uses an established set of equipment and known substances and procedures that guarantee a certain outcome.

The objective conditions for revolution stem from the interaction of living forces – the constant collision of class interests between the minority – “the 1%” – property-owning class and the rest of society – “the 99%” – the predominantly propertyless and the super-exploited with all their intermediary layers. Revolutionaries study different revolutionary experiences as generals do different battles – to learn from mistakes in order to try and avoid repeating them. But no two battles take place against exactly the same background and with exactly the same forces engaged.

Heroic mass movements have developed many times into challenges for power on the part of workers and youth, taking things into their hands and removing apparently all-powerful dictators. Those that come to mind most readily are the revolutions of North Africa. Tunisia and Egypt in 2011 saw events typical of revolution – when things move so fast that every day seems like ten years previously. The masses on the streets, the organised workers playing a decisive role with their strikes in overthrowing Ben Ali and Mubarak – there were elements of February 1917.

But lacking in the situation was widespread socialist ideology and a Bolshevik or revolutionary party with broad support, making conscious the unconscious strivings of those who were making the revolution – a party whose leaders could see the need to take the revolution directly on to the task of finishing with capitalism. Without this, there has been no ‘October’ in these countries and not even any real democracy.

Workers and young people who want to find a way of changing the ugly capitalist world we live in would do well to look at the lessons of the Russian Revolution. The most important conclusion to draw is to get involved in a party dedicated to the cause of workers and poor people and the building of a new mass force for socialism.

The legacy of the Russian revolution by Peter Taaffe

In 1997, on the 80th anniversary of the Russian revolution, Peter Taaffe reviewed Orlando Figes's book, A People's Tragedy, acclaimed as an authoritative history but, in reality, an attempt to obscure the real significance of the momentous events of 1917 (Socialism Today No.23, November 1997).

FROM THE OUTSET of the Russian revolution the representatives of the possessing classes, in Russia and worldwide, predicted the early collapse of what they called the 'Bolshevik dictatorship'.

On 9 November 1917, The Times approvingly quoted Naklukoff, the ambassador to Paris of the recently overthrown Kerensky government: "The situation must be regarded seriously but not tragically. Even if the facts be true there is no occasion for undue alarm... It is better that it should have taken place and be disposed of once and for all. The maximalist (Bolshevik) movement, by its arbitrary action, is already doomed. I have no doubt that the movement will be stopped by the first Cossack regiment that appears on the scene". The leader of the Social Revolutionary party gave the Bolsheviks 'no more than a few days', while the famous writer, Maxim Gorky, expected them to stay in power for two weeks. However, once it became clear that the soviet regime of the Bolsheviks would be more enduring than their earlier prophecies, the capitalists resorted to lies and slander. This was insufficient, so a more powerful 'argument' was used: arms, tanks, aeroplanes and interventionist armies to attack and destroy the revolution.

In the years since, no effort has been spared to distort what happened in 1917 and to falsify the ideas of the great leaders of the revolution, particularly Lenin and Trotsky. If the capitalists' fear of the contagious effects of the Russian revolution was justified in 1917 and subsequently, why today do historians like Orlando Figes still go to such lengths (over 900 pages) to carry out, in essence, the same role as earlier calumniators of the Russian revolution? After all, with the collapse of the Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in 1989-90, the heritage of the Russian revolution, particularly the planned economy, has apparently been eradicated 'forever'. Yet the fact that those, like Figes or the even more reactionary historian, Richard Pipes, have devoted so much attention to the revolution's anniversary, shows its enduring attraction to workers today. This will be even more so in the future given the economic, political, social and ecological disasters which loom for world capitalism. Everything must be done to obscure the lessons of 1917 for today.

Could capitalism have developed Russia?

THE REVOLUTION, AND the introduction of a planned economy, laid the basis for the transformation of Russia from the 'India' of Europe to, at one stage,

the second most powerful economy and country on the globe. In the detail which Figes gives (pp112-113) about the conditions in the Russian cities, he confirms the backwardness of Russia at the time of the revolution: "The death rate in this city of the Tsars (St Petersburg) was the highest of any European capital, including Constantinople, with a cholera epidemic on average once in every three years". The same primitiveness and economic backwardness in the countryside is also elaborated by Figes. However, his mission is to demonstrate that it was 'by no means inevitable' that the revolution should have ended in the Bolshevik 'dictatorship'. He argues that a 'democratic' path for Russia was possible and that the October revolution was a 'coup d'état' organised by the 'cowardly' and 'dictatorial' Lenin and his Bolshevik Party.

Others, particularly bourgeois economists, have complemented Figes to demonstrate that left to itself, without the intervention of the October revolution, Russia would have developed at a much greater economic pace than it did through the planned economy. On the contrary, despite the monstrous, one-party, totalitarian regime which developed under Stalinism, the planned economy which issued from the Russian revolution led to a colossal development of industry and society and also the living standards of the mass of the population, unrivalled by any other comparable country.

'Not so', argue the bourgeois opponents of Marxism, 'what about the phenomenal growth rates of the Southeast Asian Tigers and Japan post 1945?' But these economies developed at a phenomenal rate because of their unique circumstances and the special measures of US imperialism and its puppets in the post-war situation. Faced by the challenge of Stalinism, which rested on the gains of the October revolution including the planned economy, US imperialism in Korea and Japan carried through a major part of the bourgeois democratic revolution, by expropriating the landlords and giving land to the peasants. The same task was undertaken by the Kuomintang who took the land of the native Taiwanese landlords when they were driven from the Chinese mainland. They cleared out of the way the remnants of feudal and semi-feudal land relations, paving the way for the development of capitalism. It was this and access to the US market, together with sweated, slave labour (in Korea and Taiwan) which laid the basis for the development of the 'Tigers'. This was not the pattern for the majority of the countries in the colonial or former colonial world where the bourgeois democratic revolution remained, and remains, uncompleted.

Even the Scientific American, in December 1968, after a study of comparative growth rates of Japan and the USSR between 1928-66, concluded: "Taking into account the fact that the USSR's growth was set back severely by World War II, its average annual rate for the 38-year period since 1928 nevertheless ranges between 5.4-6.7%: the Soviet accomplishment appears to be essentially unprecedented". (p21) The rate of growth of the USSR only slowed down, its potential vitiated by the one-party, totalitarian Stalinist regime, in the 1970s and 1980s. The maintenance of Stalinism actually led to a regression in the economy and society in the immediate period prior to its collapse in 1989-90.

The tasks which confronted Russia in 1917 were those of the bourgeois democratic revolution, which entailed a thoroughgoing land reform, with land to the peasants, the solution of the national question, with the right of self-determination to the oppressed nationalities, democracy and the development of a modern economy. Basing himself upon the 1905 revolution, Lenin argued that the liberal capitalists were incapable of carrying through the capitalist democratic revolution. Trotsky in his famous theory of the Permanent Revolution, and Lenin in his April Theses, showed that the industrialists and bankers were bound with iron hoops to the semi-feudal landlords. The capitalists invested in land and the landlords invested in industry. Four thousand million roubles were owed by the landlords to the bankers and the expropriation of the landlords would endanger the investments of the bankers and the industrialists.

This, in broad outline, is the situation which still obtains in much of the former colonial or semi-colonial world, in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In India, for instance, the landlord and the capitalist is often one and the same figure, united through bank capital. A thoroughgoing land reform, giving land to the peasants, would come up against the opposition of not just the landlords and their armed detachments but also the capitalists.

1917 - accident or necessity?

IN RUSSIA, THE landlords and the capitalists were linked to the bureaucracy and the system was crowned by the tsarist regime which was used to alternately stupefy the masses and crush opposition. Figs argues that perhaps timely land reform and democratic concessions from tsarism may have saved the regime. However, in much of the detail he supplies he shows how utopian is this idea. It is true that the capitalists had wanted the monarchy to give limited democratic reforms. But this would not have fundamentally altered the course of the revolution as the experience of the Spanish revolution between 1931-37 showed. King Alfonso replaced the dictator Primo de Rivera only to follow him later into exile.

Milyukov, the leader of the capitalist Cadet party, in urging concessions from the tsar in 1915, declared: "We are treading the volcano... tension has reached its extreme limit... a carelessly dropped match will be enough to start a terrible conflagration". Concession or repression, this was the dilemma for the possessing classes in 1917. Either road risked igniting a revolution.

The fear of Milyukov in 1915 was well founded. Russian peasants were groaning under the burdens placed upon them by the war. Figs and bourgeois historians, even when the material they furnish contradicts their conclusions, have essentially a conspiratorial view of history and particularly of revolution. This is certainly their view in relation to the October revolution. But revolution, as Trotsky points out, "breaks out when all the antagonisms of a society have reached their highest tension".

It is not a product of agitation and propaganda alone but arises when society cannot further progress without a sharp break. In general, four conditions

have to be present before mass opposition to a regime overflows the bounds of normal protests and develops into a revolutionary movement. The ruling class has to be divided, which was quite evident even to Figes prior to February. There was growing opposition both to the war and the regime in the period leading up to February 1917.

Amongst the working class, the idea gradually developed that ‘we cannot live like this any longer’. This is another vital condition for revolution, the preparedness of the working class to go the whole way. This mood developed in the months prior to the February revolution. It is possible that in 1916, if the tsarist regime had made concessions, events could have developed differently in the first period of the revolution. But the process would not have been fundamentally different.

A widespread strike developed in January 1916 in St Petersburg on the anniversary of ‘Bloody Sunday’ when workers were massacred in the 1905 revolution. The number of strikes doubled during the following year, going from economic strikes to political strikes, from partial and sectional struggles to the idea of a general strike. The intermediary layers, particularly in the countryside, were in ferment, a process enormously speeded up by the slaughter of the first world war.

But, according to Figes, these were not the reasons why the Russian workers eagerly embraced the ideas of Marxism. The acceptance of “this dogmatism has much to do with the relative scarcity of alternative political ideas, which might at least have caused the workers to regard the Marxist doctrine with a little more reserve and scepticism. But it also had its roots in the way most of the workers had been educated in philosophy. When people learn as adults what children are normally taught in schools, they often find it difficult to progress beyond the simplest abstract ideas. These tend to lodge deep in their minds, making them resistant to the subsequent absorption of knowledge on a more sophisticated level. They see the world in black-and-white terms because their narrow learning obscures any other coloration”.

So the fact that Russian workers absorbed Marxist ideas was not because these ideas accurately described their condition under the Russian landlord/capitalist regime. If only they had passed through a university, preferably one where Figes was the principal tutor, the consciousness of the Russian working class would have been different. When it comes to the social sciences and, in particular, when dealing with revolution the universities are, in general, institutions for obscurantism and dust-blowing on a gigantic scale. Bourgeois academics are utterly incapable of perceiving and understanding the working class, in particular, its guiding advanced layer, as anything other than putty in the hands of leaders’ and intellectuals.

Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolshevik Party prepared for the Russian revolution by an assiduous study of the French revolution, the Paris Commune and the first 1905 revolution. They saw their task as making conscious the unconscious will of the working class to change society. The agitation and propaganda of the Bolsheviks expressed the clear class interests of the workers and poor peasants in 1917. As Trotsky explained: “Not only in the soldiers’ Soviets but also in the

‘workers’ Soviets, the Bolshevik faction generally constituted one to two per cent, at best five per cent. The leading parties of the petit bourgeois democracy (Mensheviks and so-called Social Revolutionaries) had the following of at least 95% of the workers, soldiers and peasants participating in the struggle” at the beginning of 1917.

The Bolsheviks were denounced as sectarians and then as agents of the German Kaiser. But “all their attention was directed to the masses and, moreover, not to their top layer but to the deepest and most oppressed millions and tens of millions, who parliamentary babblers usually forget”. The whole of the press, including the papers of the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, carried on a vicious campaign against the Bolsheviks. Even in the first months after February, this torrent of abuse, the suggestion that carloads of gold had been delivered to the Bolsheviks from Germany, etc, led the sailors and soldiers to threaten to bayonet Lenin and the other leaders of Bolshevism.

But the experience of the masses led to their disillusionment in the other parties, who betrayed the interests of the workers and peasants, in a bloc with the bourgeois Cadets. It pushed them into adopting a more sympathetic attitude to the speeches of the Bolsheviks. As Trotsky comments: “To the worker in the shop, the soldier in the trench, the starving peasant, it became clear that the capitalists and their lackeys were slandering the Bolsheviks precisely because the Bolsheviks were firmly devoted to the interests of the oppressed. Yesterday’s indignation of the soldier and sailor against the Bolsheviks became remoulded into passionate devotion to them, an unselfish readiness to follow them to the very end. And, on the other hand, the hatred of the masses for the Cadet Party was inevitably transferred to their allies, the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries”.

These words, directed to an audience of workers in the 1930s, are far too ‘simplistic’ for our lofty historians. Yet they are more accurate than the heavy tomes of Figs and his like in explaining the triumph of the Bolshevik Party, the soviets and the October revolution of 1917.

Coup d’état or mass uprising?

FOLLOWING THE FEBRUARY revolution, the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries handed power to the capitalists. Even the Bolshevik leaders in Petrograd, led by Stalin and Kamenev, gave ‘critical support’ to the capitalist coalition. Only Lenin in Switzerland and Trotsky in New York understood the significance of the February events as the beginning not only of the Russian revolution but of the international revolution.

Lenin demanded that the workers place no trust in the Provisional Government. However, the Bolsheviks were only 8,000 strong after the February revolution. Lenin explained that it was necessary for the Bolsheviks to base themselves on the consciousness of the masses. In the first stage, inevitably, the masses take the line of least resistance. In Russia they gave massive support to the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries as explained above. Only big

events would teach them the correctness of the perspectives, strategy and tactics of the Bolsheviks.

The working class learns rapidly in a revolution. The Bolsheviks grew quickly. They numbered 2,000 members in Petrograd in February 1917 (Figes puts the figure at 3,000), 16,000 by April (with 79,000 nationally). By July, says Figes, the membership of the Bolshevik Party stood at 200,000. This had risen, according to him, to 350,000 on the eve of the October revolution, "the vast majority of these blue-collar workers". (Most accounts give the membership of the Bolsheviks as 240,000 in October).

But the revolution did not develop in a straight line. Between February and October there were many sharp turns in the situation. In April, with the continuation of the war, the workers of Petrograd were already becoming disillusioned with the Provisional Government. The masses, particularly the ten million soldiers exhausted by the war, yearned for an end to the slaughter. But even the workers' and peasants' councils, the soviets, which the masses themselves had improvised based on the experience of the 1905 revolution, supported the continuation of the war.

The national soviet congress in April, dominated by the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, refused to ratify the eight-hour day. The disappointment and anger of the masses were reflected in the 'July days', which both Pipes and Figes are incapable of understanding. Against all the evidence of the participants at the time, from Trotsky to the leaders of the Petrograd Bolsheviks, Pipes argues that the Bolshevik leaders attempted a 'power seizure'. Only when it failed did the Bolsheviks then argue, according to this 'historian', that it was a spontaneous demonstration which they sought to direct into peaceful channels. Figes adopts a more vacillating view. On the one side, he quotes Sukhanov in support of Pipes but then implies that the Bolsheviks were of 'two minds' as to whether to use the July demonstrations to seek power or not. Moreover, Lenin is described as a hopeless vacillator unable to make up his mind.

On the contrary, the massive 400,000-strong demonstration of workers and soldiers in July was a stage which has been seen in all revolutions. Bitterly disappointed at the results of the revolution so far they called for the eviction of the ten capitalist ministers from the coalition government: 'Down with the offensive and all power to the soviets'. As with the 'June days' of 1848, the 'Spartacist uprising' in January 1919 and the 'May days' in Barcelona in 1937, the July days represented the consciousness of the masses that the gains of their revolution were being snatched out of their hands. The mass manifestation in Petrograd was an attempt to prevent the derailment of the revolution.

The Bolshevik leadership, contrary to Figes's account, opposed the July demonstration but were compelled to go along with it. Already the workers of Petrograd were ready to overthrow the government but the Bolshevik leadership opposed this. Lenin and Trotsky warned that the rest of the country, and particularly the peasants and soldiers at the front, needed time to see through the coalition of Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. The masses could only learn this through bitter experience.

Figes's description of Lenin as a 'coward', both before and during the July days, is itself sufficient to discredit the whole book as a serious scientific and objective appraisal of 1917 (p385). In July, he has Lenin running away from St Petersburg to Finland to save his own skin! He writes: "Lenin was always prone to overestimate the physical danger to himself; in this respect he was something of a coward. It cannot be said that his life was ever at direct risk during his summer on the run". Yet, barely a paragraph later, he writes of "the frenzied anti-Bolshevik atmosphere... a time of lynch law with the tabloid press full of cartoons showing Lenin on the scaffold".

Lenin's refusal to appear before a court, which would have been composed of the bitterest class enemies of the Bolsheviks, was entirely correct. As Trotsky comments: "It is sufficient to remember the fate of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg". Lenin went into hiding not out of concern for himself as an individual but for what was at stake for the revolution. With Trotsky, Lenin was the 'brain' of the Bolshevik Party and, therefore, of the revolution. It was the interests of the revolution that were paramount in Lenin's attitude during the July days. If neither Lenin nor Trotsky had survived, then the Russian revolution itself would have been shipwrecked. The murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht was a major factor in the derailment of the German revolution.

The July days led to reaction, with repression against the Bolsheviks and the imprisonment of Trotsky, while Lenin was driven underground. The counter-revolution, in the figure of General Kornilov, attempted a coup in August, which was defeated by the working class with the Bolsheviks playing the most prominent role. The troops of Kornilov refused to take action once the real situation was explained to them by delegates and agitators from the Soviets. The railway workers completely disintegrated the army of Kornilov by stranding them in railway sidings, etc.

Revolution sometimes needs the whip of the counter-revolution. The August events gave an enormous access of support to the Bolsheviks. In the two months that followed, the majority of the workers' and soldiers' soviets were won over to the Bolsheviks. Using the Military Revolutionary Committee, set up by the soviets in Petrograd under the leadership of Trotsky, the working class took power on 25 October.

Figes's verdict on the October revolution, which Marxists consider as the single greatest event in human history, is that it was "in reality such a small-scale event, being in effect no more than a military coup, that it passed unnoticed by the vast majority of the inhabitants of Petrograd". Incredibly, he then goes on to comment: "The whole insurrection, as Trotsky himself acknowledged, was carried out as a coup d'état". In support of this claim he quotes Trotsky's comment that the insurrection was, "a series of small operations, calculated and prepared in advance".

These claims are made by Figes despite the fact that Trotsky, in a brilliant chapter in his *History of the Russian Revolution*, *The Art of Insurrection*, goes to considerable lengths to show that the October revolution and insurrection was entirely different to the classical idea of a 'coup d'état'. The latter, pursued by conspirators from a group or section of the ruling class or army, usually re-

sults in the replacement of one clique of the same ruling class by another. But, says Trotsky, “only mass insurrection has ever brought the victory of one social regime over another”.

The importance of the Bolshevik Party

THERE WAS A fundamental difference between the February and October revolutions. The February revolution was a mass insurrection which overthrew the old power but did not result in the working class and peasantry taking power into their own hands. The objective prerequisites have to be there before a successful socialist revolution and insurrection is possible. But something more than this is needed for the working class to take power. In October, as opposed to February, there was the presence of the ‘subjective factor’, a mass revolutionary party with a far-sighted leadership, capable of leading the masses to power.

A revolutionary situation is not long lived: the fate of a revolution can be determined in a two- or three-day struggle. In Russia, the conditions probably existed for a successful revolution between September and November, a three-month period. Failure to take power then would have led Russia back into the noose of a capitalist dictator like Kornilov.

The active support for the revolution is reflected in the victory of the Bolsheviks in the soviets and the dramatic swing towards the left in the peasants’ soviets prior to October. Figs has the revolution being carried through by a minority. It is true that the technical military aspect of the seizure of power in October was carried out by a minority. This is the case in all revolutions; a minority acts but with the support of the mass. To be successful in October, as opposed to July, meant that the actions of the Bolsheviks under the banner of the soviets needed the mass support of the proletariat and the peasantry. The relatively ‘bloodless’ character of the October overturn, recognised by Figs, would not have been possible without the mass of the Petrograd proletariat supporting the insurrection. Conversely, the virtually nonexistent forces at the disposal of Kerensky’s Provisional Government reflected the demoralisation of those opposed to the revolution. The “series of small operations, calculated and prepared in advance”, mentioned by Trotsky, merely dealt with the technical military aspects of the October revolution and not with its mass support. It is, moreover, an incontestable historical fact that only in Russia, following the overturn in October, did the workers take power and establish real workers’ democracy.

In the years since there have been many opportunities for the working class to follow in the path of the Russian workers of 1917. In its sweep, scope and potential for victory of the working class, the Chinese revolution of 1925-27 was equal to, if not greater, than even that of Russia. The working class in Spain attempted not once but on ten occasions between 1931-37 to carry through a revolution. In 1968 in France, the working class organised a general strike of ten million; the capitalist bonaparte, De Gaulle, fled to Germany believing that ‘the game was up’, and yet the French workers were not able to emulate their

Russian counterparts of 50 years before. The same process developed in the Portuguese revolution in 1974 when the capitalist state disintegrated. Unlike in the Russian revolution, the great majority of the Portuguese officer caste were radicalised and were searching in the direction of 'socialism' but, unfortunately, the capitalist state machine was reassembled and was able to liquidate the gains of the Portuguese revolution. It was the false policies of the leadership of the workers' organisations – the social democracy and the mass Communist Party – which prevented the revolution from being completed.

All this stands in stark contrast to what happened in Russia in 1917. It was the policy and the tactics of the Bolshevik Party, under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, which led the Russian workers to victory. This initiated the 'ten days that shook the world'. Unbelievably, Figes deals with the creation of the Communist International in passing and with only slight reference to the international ramifications of the Russian revolution. The October revolution led, as Lenin and Trotsky had anticipated, to enormous revolutionary ferment throughout Europe, America and the world. At one stage the revolution, because of the intervention of the 21 armies of imperialism, was reduced to the two major cities of Moscow and Petrograd, the old province of Muscovy. Most of Russia was in the hands of the counter-revolutionary White forces backed up by imperialist bayonets. And yet, impoverished, reduced to cannibalism in certain parts of Russia, the revolution triumphed not because of superiority of arms but through appeals to the working class in the armies of imperialism and throughout the world.

From Bolshevism to Stalinism?

LIKE MANY BEFORE, Figes finds the seeds of Stalinism in the policies and methods of Lenin and of the Bolshevik Party. He argues that the Bolsheviks sought to "centralise all power in the hands of the party and, by the use of terror, to wipe out all political opposition". Nothing of the kind occurred in the early part of the revolution. Indeed, the only parties and newspapers which were suppressed were the bourgeois opposition of the Cadets and the semi-fascist Black Hundreds. Only when the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries went over to military counter-revolutionary resistance were measures taken against their press. This is no different to what occurred in other civil wars, including in capitalist civil wars such as that of the USA. Did Abraham Lincoln and the north permit the functioning of newspapers and grant democratic rights to the southern slaveholders and their supporters in the north? Did Oliver Cromwell, in the English bourgeois revolution of the 17th century, allow the royalists to operate freely in areas controlled by the parliamentary forces? On the contrary, they resorted to military repression, which was the logic of civil war. The same was true of the Bolsheviks who took repressive measures only when it was absolutely necessary and who argued, at the time, that with the spread of the revolution to western Europe even these military measures and repression would be unnecessary.

Figs, perhaps without intending to, shows the popularity of the Bolshevik regime and the weakness of the counter-revolution in the first period when he writes about the convening of the Constituent Assembly. He gives many useful facts to show the overwhelming swing of the peasantry towards the Left Social Revolutionaries, who were then in collaboration with the Bolsheviks. He even comments about the mood in the cities: "There was no mass reaction to the closure of the Constituent Assembly". This does not, however, prevent him from arguing: "The political civilisation of the provincial towns is not much more advanced than in backward peasant Russia and outside the capital city there was no real urban middle class to sustain the democratic revolution. That was the tragedy of 1917".

But that begs the question as to why there was not a stable 'urban middle class' and, if it had existed, whether it would have prevented the Russian revolution. Firstly, the weakness of the middle class was itself a reflection of the incapacity of the Russian bourgeoisie to carry through the bourgeois democratic revolution. This meant that these tasks fell on the shoulders of the working class who, having come to power, completed the bourgeois democratic revolution, in alliance with the peasantry, and then went over to the socialist tasks. Moreover, in Germany the presence of an 'urban middle class' did not prevent the revolution of 1918-19 which was only not carried through to a conclusion because, unlike in Russia, the 'subjective factor' did not exist.

The Bolshevik Party of Lenin and Trotsky in the Russian revolution was separated by a river of blood from Stalinism. It was the most democratic party in history and, at the same time, the most determined in the pursuit of mobilising the working class for power. The revolution was conceived as the beginning of the European and world revolution. Without the victory of the revolution in the west, the Russian revolution would inevitably be defeated or degenerate. Lenin and Trotsky argued this many times in advance of the revolution.

Stalinism did not arise from Bolshevism but was rooted in the isolation of the Russian revolution and the backward cultural conditions of Russia. This, along with the slaughter of the flower of the Russian proletariat in the civil war and the disappointment of the masses in the failure of the European revolution to come to their assistance, led to the gradual crystallisation of a privileged stratum. Stalin personified this layer which gradually usurped power from the proletariat. Rather than issuing from Leninism, Stalinism rose in mortal combat with Bolshevism. A precondition for the consolidation of the power and privileges of the rising bureaucracy was the destruction of all remnants of Bolshevism. The annihilation of the Left Opposition and all those connected with the heroic period of Bolshevism culminated in the purges, described by Trotsky as a 'one-sided civil war'.

Does the degeneration of the Russian revolution and the rise of Stalinism, which ultimately led to the liquidation of the planned economy, invalidate the relevance of the Russian revolution? On the contrary, an assiduous study of the revolution, and of events since, shows that it is impossible to understand the 20th century, including the present situation, without understanding the Russian revolution and its subsequent degeneration. The achievements of the

planned economy, despite Stalinism, give an example of what was possible, particularly if it had been organised on the basis of workers' control and management.

A study of the revolution today provides the advanced layers of workers with the possibility of understanding the laws of revolution. Of course, events will not develop in exactly the same fashion, nor with the same speed, as did the Russian revolution. Nevertheless, the struggles of the working class, despite the inane claims of bourgeois ideologists that we are at the 'end of history', that ideology has disappeared, etc, are similar in all capitalist countries.

The class struggle will break out with redoubled force in the period we are going into. The best representatives of the workers and youth will look for the ideological and theoretical weapons that can offer them an explanation of how to act in mobilising the working class against capitalism. They will find what they need, not in Figes's book, but in the works of Marx, Engels and, particularly for today, of Lenin and Trotsky, and in the immortal work in the Russian revolution of the Bolsheviks in 1917.

January 1917 – On the eve of revolution by Niall Mulholland

1917revolution.org, January 20, 2017

The month of January 1917 began with more setbacks for the Russian army, as the great imperialist slaughter of World War One drew closer to an end. On the Romanian front troops retreated. Morale in the Russian army was extremely low. One and a half million soldiers deserted in 1916. Over half of the country's peasant farmers were fighting in the war and their families left at home faced starvation.

At the same time, the Bolsheviks – the revolutionary party spearheaded by Lenin, which was to lead the socialist October revolution – saw their membership and influence rise steadily. They helped organise demonstrations to commemorate the failed 1905 revolution's 'Bloody Sunday' when hundreds were gunned down by the Czarist state. On 9 January, 30,000 Moscow workers went on strike, with 145,000 taking action in Petrograd. A one-day strike also took place in Baku, Nizhi Novgorod, Novochoerkassk, Voronezh, Kharkov, Rostov-on-Don, the Donbass and other cities.

By 31 January, Petrograd was starving and the city stockpile of food would only last another 10 days. Huge food lines appeared in sub-zero conditions. Crowds of women broke into stores.

For the masses, the things could not continue. They were about to storm onto the stage of history. How did the Czarist regime find itself on the verge of extinction?

Disastrous war campaign exposes rotten regime

In late 1914, a series of strikes broke out, but by August social peace seemed to have been restored. War was declared, leading to a surge of Russian chauvinism and popular support for the Czar. Workers' organisations faced severe repression. Bolsheviks in the Duma (parliament) were arrested and deported. The party paper, Pravda, was shut down.

Initially the Russian army inflicted some defeats on the German forces. But by 30 August, the Russian army had lost 300,000 soldiers at Tanneberg, in the eastern front. Badly equipped and short of ammunition and rifles, the Russian army would face defeat after defeat on the battlefield. At the same time, Russian officers treated the rank and file soldiers with contempt.

The war demonstrated the incompetence and rottenness of the Czarist regime. The Czar appointed and removed a succession of ministers. In August 1915, he took direct control of the war effort, disastrously meddling in his generals' plans. Much of the running of country was left to his wife, the Czarina, and her coterie, including the "debauched Monk", Rasputin, a mystic figure with great political influence over the Czarina and her husband. The top of the tottering regime was steeped in obscurantism and superstition. Popular unrest grew. In October 1916 a Petrograd police report stated that the city is "on the eve of great events with which those of 1905 were mere child's play".

In December 1916, Rasputin was assassinated by leading figures from Petrograd society. They hoped to rid the regime of a symbol of decadence in order to try to save it. In January 1917, the Czar appointed his last prime minister, Prince Golitsyn, despite the hapless aristocrat's plea that he was "dumb-founded" and had no interest in politics.

At the start of 1917, over 15 million Russians were under arms and war time industrial mobilisation had thrown the economy out of kilter. Peasants were unable to export their produce and refused to sell food on the open market (the rouble was near worthless). The railway system had all but collapsed and few supplies could get to the front or to the main towns and cities. Famine stalked not just the countryside but the main industrial cities.

Political crisis at the top as working class begins to stir

With the regime completely discredited, even the craven, pro-war 'liberal' and 'reform' parties went into opposition to the Czar when it became clear he would not make any concessions to popular demands. They called for the sacking of the most incompetent and reactionary ministers.

Plots were hatched by top military figures to get rid of the Czar in order to save the system overall. But the conspirators vacillated, fearing any such action could unleash revolution from below.

Meanwhile, working class organisations are recovering from the setbacks at the outbreak of war. Strikes rose sharply to 55,000 in 1915 and almost double that figure again in 1916. As prices rose faster than wages, the summer of 1916 witnessed militant strikes in Moscow, Kostroma and Ivano-Vosnessensk. Petrograd was rocked by a general strike of factories. When troops sent to put down the strikes instead fraternise with workers, Cossacks are needed to quell the workers' protests.

As working class unrest grew, so did Bolshevik membership. The party's structures redeveloped, including the Petrograd city committee. With many veteran leaders exiled or imprisoned, a younger generation of party cadres took control of local leadership. By 1 January, the Bolsheviks, though a relatively small party, grew in membership to around 23,000, and were largely concentrated in industrial pockets.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks gain authority

The Mensheviks –the party with whom the Bolsheviks had split some years before – were in political disarray. A minority opposed the war while others gave barely-disguised support. During the summer of 1916, militant strikes and a growing mood of war ‘defeatism’ saw a shift of working class support away from the Mensheviks’ equivocal position on war and peace.

As the revolutionary pitch rose in Russia in early 1917, Bolshevik leader, Vladimir Lenin, was exiled in Switzerland. Since 1914 Lenin was forced to swim against the tide due to the war hysteria and the betrayal of the parties of the 2nd (socialist) International who supported the war aims of their own ruling classes.

But Lenin’s stature and authority grew from 1914 to 1917. After the collapse of the 2nd International, he became a focus for anti-imperialism and genuine socialist internationalism. As the war dragged on and popular opposition to it grew, Lenin advised Bolsheviks to “organise cells in the army”, to “support all revolutionary actions of the masses of the proletariat” and to encourage “fraternisation between soldiers of belligerent nations, even in the trenches...”

The winter of 1916/1917 was exceptionally cold in Moscow and Petrograd, plummeting to minus 40 degrees centigrade. Women stood in the open air queuing for scarce food and coal. The price of food suddenly shot up by 40% to 60%. At the same time, the rich continued to live in isolated splendour.

By the end of January, class tensions reached breaking point and Russia stood on the edge of the first revolution of 1917.

The February Revolution 1917 by Peter Taaffe

socialistparty.org.uk, March 15, 2007, “The February Revolution 1917 – What lessons for Today?”

23 FEBRUARY 1917 (8 March in the new style Gregorian calendar) marked the beginning of the socialist revolution in Russia that sparked a revolutionary wave that would travel around the world.

In an article published during the 90th anniversary of the Russian Revolution, Peter Taaffe analyses the lessons of February for the working class today and

how the leadership of the Bolshevik party, particularly Lenin and Trotsky, was decisive in ensuring the victory of the revolution in October.

Ninety years ago, the working class of Russia, led by the immortal workers of what is now St Petersburg, rose in a revolution that overthrew the 1,000-year dictatorial rule of the Tsar. This began a process of revolution and counter-revolution over the next nine months which in October 1917 resulted in the first democratic working-class, socialist revolution in history.

The February revolution stands between the first Russian revolution of 1905-1907 and the third and conclusive revolution of October 1917. The representatives of big business today and their hirelings in the universities, the superficial professors of 'history', either ignore this great event or seek to prove that February was the 'real' Russian revolution which 'went off the rails' and ended in the 'putsch' of October 1917.

Of course, Britain today is not Russia of 1917, an economically and culturally deprived society, with the working class a minority in a sea of peasants. Yet, under the whip of a serious economic crisis, a social rupture can develop in the most 'advanced' as well as the most backward societies. The recent upheaval on world stock exchanges is a harbinger of a more disturbed economic and social situation for world capitalism, which could produce in a different form the conditions of Russia 90 years ago.

Bolsheviks

One of the most vital lessons of the February revolution and its aftermath is that had the leaders of the most conscious workers' party at that stage, the Bolsheviks (the majority), pursued the policies of the workers' leaders today, no Russian revolution would have taken place. In 1917, Russia was passing through the greatest social crisis in its history. If there had been no Bolshevik party, led by Lenin and Trotsky, the colossal revolutionary energy of the workers and the peasants would have been fruitlessly spent in sporadic explosions. The class struggle is the prime mover in history but it needs a correct programme, a firm party and a trustworthy and courageous leadership ready to go to the end in the struggle against capitalism and landlordism, as happened in Russia.

The honour of beginning the revolution fell to the working-class women of St Petersburg. On 22 February (according to the old style Julian calendar, which is 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar used in the West), the major plant of the city, the Putilov factory, announced a great strike. In the city at this stage there were roughly 390,000 factory workers, employed in huge industrial units such as the Putilov factory. Approximately one-third of these workers were women and the working class had been hit hardest by the massive inflation at the time.

On 23 February, the women textile workers, without prior agreement from any party, went on strike in several factories, which led to mass demonstra-

tions in the city. This opened the floodgates of revolution, which unfolded over the next five days.

Role of the working class

One of the unmistakable features of a revolution is the direct intervention of the mass of the working class and the poor – usually discontented but forced into submission by capitalism in ‘normal’ periods – in determining their own fate. This has been seen in all revolutions, for instance in France in 1968, when ten million workers came out in the greatest general strike against the wishes of their ‘leaders’; and occupied the factories. The same happened in the marvellous Portuguese revolution, which began in 1974.

In the testing of wills between the working class and tsarism on the streets of Petrograd (St Petersburg), the repressive state apparatus of landlordism and capitalism dissolved in the heat of the revolution. This was marked by the coming over to the side of the workers, or a certain ‘neutrality’ of the formerly most brutal tsarist forces such as the Cossacks.

The First World War, with five million Russian victims killed or injured, undoubtedly played a decisive role in speeding up enormously the subsequent phases of the revolution until October 1917. Later revolutions, such as Spain 1931-37, evolved over a more protracted period. The February revolution was achieved, largely from below, by workers and soldiers – many of them peasants under arms – which struck a mortal blow at tsarism.

But they themselves were not conscious of their own power. Many times in history, the working masses have overthrown a regime but have not enjoyed the fruits of their victory because they have not recognised their role. Therefore, in Russia power fell into the hands of a coalition of capitalist liberals, Mensheviks (the original minority in the Russian workers’ movement) and the Social Revolutionaries, a party of the middle class of the towns and the rural areas.

The February revolution was, in effect, the beginning of the socialist revolution in Russia and worldwide. But only Lenin, the leader of the Bolsheviks, in exile in Switzerland, and Trotsky in New York recognised this. Even the Bolshevik leadership in Petrograd, while they did not enter the government (which would have been unacceptable to the ranks of the Bolshevik party and the working class of the city), nevertheless gave support to the coalition government from the outside. This government was similar to what became known later as the ‘popular front’, which derailed the Spanish revolution of 1931-37 and was employed by the Stalinists in France and elsewhere.

Provisional government

Initially, the Petrograd workers and the rank-and-file Bolsheviks were hostile to the coalition, which had gathered power into its hands. But from the middle of March, under the influence of Kamenev, a leader of the Bolsheviks, and

Stalin, who had arrived from exile, the Bolshevik party swung decisively to the right.

Stalin wrote and said: "The Provisional Government must be supported because..." This is very similar to the position of Bertinotti and other leaders of Rifondazione Comunista (RC) in Italy in relation to the first 'Olive Tree' coalition which existed between 1996-1998, which they initially 'supported' from the outside.

The consequence was that the RC leaders were covered with the odium arising from the attacks on the working class made by this coalition, which pursued neo-liberal policies and paved the way for the Berlusconi government.

In opposition to such an approach, Lenin telegraphed from Switzerland to the Bolshevik leaders in Petrograd: "Our tactic; absolute lack of confidence; no support to the new government; suspect Kerensky especially; arming of the working class the sole guarantee; immediate elections to the Petrograd Duma; no rapprochement with other parties." Then he pointedly declared: "The least support for the Provisional Government is a betrayal."

Capitalist coalitions

What would he have said of his alleged 'heirs' in the RC and elsewhere today who now support capitalist coalitions 'from the inside', serving as ministers and embracing the neo-liberal programme as, unfortunately, the RC in Italy has done in propping up the Prodi government? Bertinotti has shamefully taken the position of president of the Chamber of Deputies, equivalent to the Speaker of the House of Commons in Britain. He did this while commenting that this was a position that he could "no longer refuse".

Why could he not refuse? When Lenin arrived at the Finland station in Petrograd in April 1917, a young naval commander, speaking in the name of the service, "expressed the hope that Lenin might become a member of the Provisional Government". This was treated with scorn by Lenin who turned his back on the coalition dignitaries and addressed the workers who had come to greet him, with the words: "The Russian Revolution achieved by you has opened a new epoch. Long live the world socialist revolution!"

Romano Prodi, the Italian prime minister, himself declared from the outset his intention to carry through drastic attacks on the living standards of the Italian workers, all in the cause of 'reforming' the Italian state and renovating Italian capitalism.

Yet Bertinotti in April 2006, just after the elections, stated: "We will support a government with Romano Prodi as prime minister and our party will take part in it. A very important step has been made; we defeated Berlusconi. Now we intend to rule Italy towards a change and to help the rise of a new political subject of the alternative left in Italy, which is now stronger after this election outcome and commits us to building an Italian European left section."

Independent policy

Events in Italy in the last period are a direct refutation of this and other arguments of the RC leaders justifying entry into a capitalist coalition government. They have tried to bolster this with the argument that they would be a “check on the right” and act in the interests of the Italian working class. There is absolutely nothing new in these arguments; Stalin and Kamenev supported the post-February coalition government ‘critically’ with very similar arguments.

This was directly contrary to the position adopted by Lenin and Trotsky in 1917. Lenin’s policy led, nine months later, to the October revolution and the ‘ten days that shook the world’, the reverberations of October amongst the working class internationally.

Bertinotti’s policy – of acceding to Prodi’s attacks on the working class – has already led to the disenchantment of broad sections of the workers and young people. It is certain to lead to disaster, the return of Berlusconi or something worse, unless checked by a revolt of the RC members, combined with mass action by the Italian working class.

Unlike the workers’ leaders today who are seduced and corrupted by the lure of easy popularity and ministerial careers, Lenin was not afraid of being in a minority. The Bolsheviks had 1% or 2% share of the vote in the soviets in February, and only 4% by the time he arrived in April. Yet at one stage prior to the First World War, the Bolsheviks had had the support of four-fifths of the organised working class.

But a revolution like February is usually made by a courageous and conscious minority with the broad support of the mass of workers. Once it is triumphant this broad mass enters the political arena and, as in February 1917, following the example of the 1905-07 revolution they created their own independent class organisation in the form of soviets – workers, soldiers and peasants’ councils.

In fact, a ‘double sovereignty’ was created in Russia in February 1917 that lasted right up to the October revolution. This ‘dual power’ or elements of it is visible in all revolutionary upheavals. On the one side, the ‘government’ still retains state forces but it is challenged by the independent power and organisation of the working class.

The struggle between these forces constitutes the essence of the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary processes between February and October 1917. Lenin and the Bolsheviks under his leadership strove to maintain loyalty to the revolutionary programme, irreconcilable hostility to the capitalists and a decisive rupture with those who were not prepared to struggle to the end against capitalism and landlordism.

Revolutionary programme

But this earned the Bolsheviks the undying hatred of the capitalists and all those parties who wanted to remain within the framework of the system. The

entire press, including the papers of the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries, carried on a vicious campaign against the Bolsheviks, just as the British media and press did against the miners in 1984-85, or against the Liverpool Militants in their heroic struggle of 1983-87.

Thousands of tons of newsprint were filled with reports that the Bolsheviks were linked to the tsarist police, that they received carloads of gold from Germany, that Lenin was a German spy, etc. In the first months after the February revolution, this abuse even affected the masses, with sailors and soldiers threatening to bayonet Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders.

However, the Bolsheviks, under the direction of Lenin, ignored the 'parliamentary babblers' and directed all their attention to the mass of the working class and, in particular, to the most oppressed tens of millions who were moving to the left in disillusionment with the 'official' coalition soviet parties.

It was this, the constant stressing of the independent approach of the working class and its organisations; clear delineation of the revolutionary party and masses from the reformist and semi-reformist opportunist parties, which led to the growth of the Bolsheviks. The contrast between Lenin and the Bolsheviks, and the leaders and ex-leaders of the workers' organisations today could not be clearer.

Of course, this was in a period of revolution, which is not the case in most countries of the world today. However, the preparation for such a situation is carried out in the period before such sharp and abrupt changes actually take place. This is the role of a far-sighted Marxist leadership and organisation.

Throughout the world today, the working class is being led into a trap by the philosophy of coalitionism or the 'lesser evil'. This is merely a variation of the ideas seen in February 1917. It means that the workers must always play second fiddle to capitalist parties. They must tail-end the alternative bosses' party in the US, the Democrats. They are urged to give support by the likes of the RC to Prodi in the mistaken belief that future 'concessions' can be extracted. This is, of course, only if they swallow the toxic medicine today in the form of cuts and privatisation.

Venezuela

The February revolution is also important in relation to the momentous events that are unfolding in Latin America today. In Venezuela, following the victory of Hugo Chávez in the presidential elections with more than two-thirds of the vote, the workers' movement has undoubtedly swung towards the left.

Hugo Chávez has praised Trotsky, claims to stand on Trotsky's ideas of the 'permanent revolution' – which in Russia led directly from the February overturn to the victory in October 1917 – and has proposed the nationalisation or partial nationalisation of the energy and other industries.

We and the left internationally support these steps of the Venezuelan government and people. However, Chávez says that his government will proceed by what can only be perceived as 'instalments' towards a break with capitalism at

some unspecified future date. George Galloway, commenting on this, mistakenly claimed in an article in the guardian that this represents a greater advance – is more ‘red’ – than even the Allende government in Chile in the 1970s.

However, in Chile, 40% of industry had been taken over and the masses had created basic rank-and-file organisations (cordones – committees). Serious land reform had been undertaken and the masses were clamouring for arms and a section even had them. Yet because power and ownership of industry had not been taken out of the hands of the capitalists, Pinochet and the army generals were able to crush not just Allende but the Chilean working class and usher in the dark night of his dictatorship. This is a warning to Hugo Chávez and the Venezuelan workers and peasants.

Decisive measures

The Russian workers succeeded not by ‘piecemeal’ policies between February and October. In fact, the gains of the February revolution were systematically undermined because the government coalition refused to break with landlordism and capitalism. It took the experience of the next nine months, together with the agitation and work of the Bolsheviks, to convince the Russian workers of the need for an abrupt overturn – a social revolution – which then took place in October 1917.

Although Chavez has the support of the mass of the people today, Venezuelan landlordism and capitalism has not been broken. In fact, the private sector, fuelled by the sixfold increase in oil prices since Chavez came to power, is doing very well. However, rampant inflation could in time alienate the middle class, as well as sections of the poor, and undermine the enthusiasm of even the poor masses for the revolution, driving them into the arms of reaction.

Ultimately, the only way to defeat the threat of counter-revolution is to follow the policy of Lenin after February – intransigent opposition to capitalism and landlordism and decisive measures to break the power of big business.

The great events of February 1917 are not dead history. We pay tribute to the courageous working class of Petrograd in this great social overturn by learning the real lessons of these events for today.

On Lenin’s April Theses, 1917

The below article by Lynn Walsh, editor of Socialism Today (monthly journal of the Socialist Party – CWI England & Wales), was originally printed in 1987 in the South African publication Inqaba ya Basebenzi, during the inspiring up-

rising of the South African working class which led to the overthrow of the South African apartheid regime.

Introduction to Lenin's 'April Theses', by Lynn Walsh

Inqaba ya Basebenzi, October 1987

The Bolsheviks Adopt a Programme for Power

Lenin's April Theses form one of the most decisive manifestos in the history of the revolution. They consist of just a few short notes, the bare skeleton of Lenin's speeches when he arrived back in Petrograd in April 1917.

But the ideas outlined within them brought about a decisive reorientation of the Bolshevik leadership. Lynn Walsh re-examines the April Theses and their lessons for today.

Lenin's return from exile crystallized a crisis in the Bolshevik party. The leadership in Russia around Kamenev and Stalin, who had assumed responsibility on their return from Siberia in March, endorsed the Soviet's position of conditional support for the Provisional government of Prince Lvov – even though the Soviet held the real power on the streets and in the factories.

Lenin had already rejected this stance, as his Letters from Afar in February demonstrated. The Provisional government, in his view, was so bound up with the landlords, the industrialists and the bankers that it was incapable of fulfilling its promises.

To believe that the government would end the war, distribute the big estates, solve the economic crisis and meet workers' demands was a dangerous illusion.

There was no question, as far as Lenin was concerned, of supporting the Provisional government while it carried out reforms in the expectation that, at a later stage, more favourable conditions would emerge for the struggle for socialism.

The liberal bourgeois government, pushed reluctantly into power by the February revolution, had already gone as far as it was capable of going.

Unless the Soviets smashed the remnants of the old state and placed power decisively in the hands of the workers, the Provisional government would succumb to counter-revolution. The next phase would be a new regime of totalitarian reaction.

Socialist Programme

In the April Theses, therefore, Lenin called for a struggle for a socialist programme based on the independent action of the working class. Its main elements were:

- No Support for the Provisional government.
- Fight for the Soviets to take power.
- End the war.
- Confiscate the big estates.
- Nationalise the banks.
- Establish workers' control of industry.
- Replace the police and army with a workers' militia.
- Replace the old state bureaucracy with workers' administration.
- Proclaim a Communist Party; establish a new international.

A programme on these lines, with the strategy and tactics also spelt out, was an essential pre-requisite for the success of the October revolution.

In April it was opposed by the leaders castigated by Lenin as 'Old Bolsheviks'. However, by appealing to the leading Bolsheviks at rank and file level, Lenin won a majority for his ideas.

The new upsurge of workers and peasants, which provoked a new crisis for the Provisional government, confirmed Lenin's position in a few stormy months. Without the April Theses, 1917 would have ended quite differently.

Underlying Lenin's strategy and tactics was a clear perspective. This provided a clear guide to action during the ebbs and flows of the revolution.

On the other hand, it was precisely because the 'Old Bolsheviks' were working on the basis of a confused perspective, derived from a misinterpretation of Lenin's previous position, that they adopted a policy which prefigured the disastrous Popular Frontism of the Stalinist leaders in the 1930s and since.

Permanent Revolution

The perspective which Lenin arrived at in 1917 coincided with Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution, worked out following the experience of the 1905 revolution.

This resolved the long debate within the Russian labour movement which revolved around three different conceptions of the coming revolution.

All the Russian Marxists were agreed that the tasks of social transformation facing them were those of the bourgeois-democratic revolution.

These were: The breaking up of the big estates and the distribution of the land to the peasants. The abolition of the Tsarist monarchy and the establishment of a democratic republic.

The separation of the church and state. The introduction of social reforms, urgently demanded by the workers and the peasants, but also necessary to clear the way for the development of capitalism.

Given this, which political forces would provide the leadership?

Would it be (a) the liberal capitalist representatives? If so, would the workers' parties, including the Bolsheviks, limit themselves to conditional support for the liberals, accepting that the struggle for socialism would come later, under more favourable conditions which would develop under a capitalist regime?

Would it be (b) the working class, in alliance with the representatives of the peasantry, who would take the power – limiting themselves, however, at this stage to bourgeois-democratic tasks?

Or would it be (c) the working class leading the exploited peasantry behind them, who would take power, carry through the bourgeois-democratic tasks – but at the same time implementing radical changes in their own interests which would begin the transition to socialism?

Position (a) was adopted by the Mensheviks, who formed the right wing of the Social-Democratic party.

From Marx, they drew highly schematic conclusions: that feudalism, capitalism and socialism followed in succession and one historical stage had to be complete before another could commence.

There was no question, according to this view, of the working class initiating a socialist revolution until the bourgeois revolution was complete.

This schema, alien to Marx's dialectical method, took no account of the relationship of forces resulting from Russia's uneven development.

Elements of modern industry can be injected, through foreign capital, into a society dominated by landlords and ruled by an absolute monarchy.

The capitalists had arrived too late on the scene, and were too cowardly to fight for progressive changes.

Long before 1917 they had held the real economic power. But they relied on the Tsar for protection, and feared the consequences of any big movements among the masses.

Above all, they feared the working class – relatively small, but compact, highly conscious and combative.

The Liberal Capitalists, in Lenin's view, had long ago proved their inability to carry through their historical tasks.

The workers should place no reliance on the liberals whatsoever. Lenin always argued for an independent policy and organisation for the working class.

In the years before the revolution Lenin had accepted position (b). Given the bankruptcy of the liberal bourgeoisie, the revolution would be carried through by an alliance of the workers, the most dynamic force, and the peasantry, the predominant exploited class.

This perspective was summed up in Lenin's formula "the revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry."

'Dictatorship' did not mean totalitarian rule (this was before the monstrosity of Stalinism!) but class domination, which would be based on democratic soviets-type organizations. 'Democratic' expressed recognition of the bourgeois character of the tasks to be carried out.

However, Lenin was far from putting a Chinese wall between the bourgeois-democratic and the socialist revolutions.

He was convinced that, because of capitalism's international character, the Russian revolution would be one link in a chain of worldwide revolutions.

A revolutionary government in Russia would, through collaboration with the revolutionary workers' governments in the advanced capitalist countries, move towards a second, socialist revolution in Russia.

How quickly this would happen would depend not on any predetermined historical timetable, but on the relationship of forces.

Above all, it would be determined by the strength of the proletariat involved in the struggle. As far back as 1906 Lenin had written: "We stand for uninterrupted revolution. We shall not stop halfway."

Lenin's formula, as he explained in April 1917, was 'algebraic'. It expressed the class relationships but left open the specific weight of political forces involved, and did not attempt to quantify the concrete tasks to be carried out.

Trotsky, whose perspective was bolder and more concrete, warned in 1906 that any tendency on the part of the proletariat to accept bourgeois-democratic limits would become anti-revolutionary, and could be potentially fatal to the revolution.

A failure on the part of the revolutionary dictatorship to implement socialist measures would in practice undermine the forces of the proletariat.

The leadership would in reality be conceded, under these circumstances, to the liberal bourgeoisie – opening the door to the danger of counter-revolution.

Old Bolsheviks

By developing the revolutionary essence of his formula in relation to the concrete events of 1917 Lenin avoided this danger.

With regard to the 'Old Bolsheviks', Trotsky's warning proved far-sighted and all too true. The Old Bolsheviks clung to Lenin's 'antiquated' and now 'meaningless' (as Lenin made clear in the April Theses) formula of the democratic dictatorship.

Kamenev and Stalin claimed to be standing on Lenin's previous perspective (b). In reality, the logic of this position – conditional support for the Provisional government and the postponement of the struggle on the workers' own demands – led them back to the Menshevik's position (a) of an alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie, with the workers playing second fiddle.

Was it an accident that, prior to Lenin's return, Stalin and Kamenev supported discussions with the Mensheviks on re-unification?

The remaining position (c), the only one which proved genuinely revolutionary in 1917, was that of the Permanent Revolution. This was the position adopted by Lenin in February 1917, outlined in his Letters From Afar and spelt out in the April Theses:

“The specific feature of the present situation in Russia is that the country is passing from the first stage of the revolution ... to its second stage, which must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants ...

“The Soviets of Workers’ Deputies are the only possible form of revolutionary government...”

The position of Lenin and Trotsky coincided in 1917. Lenin saw that in the epoch of imperialism which dominated class relations internationally, the bourgeoisie of semi-developed countries like Russia had exhausted their historical mission.

They could no longer complete the tasks undertaken by their predecessors in the classical revolutions of the past.

These tasks now fell on the shoulders of the working class. Lenin now accepted Trotsky’s bold conclusion that the working class had to take power notwithstanding its numerical weakness.

But in taking on these tasks, left over from a previous era, the proletariat could not avoid linking them with the socialist measures essential to meet the workers’ immediate needs.

Given the economic backwardness and barbarous culture of a country like Russia, however, it was clearly imperative for the proletariat to adopt an internationalist outlook, striving to link up with the proletariat of more advanced countries possessing the material conditions for socialist development.

For fundamental material reasons, it is only on the basis of the international extension of the revolution that the workers of a backward country could proceed to the construction of socialism.

Referring to the Permanent Revolution, Lenin told his comrade Adolf Joffe: “Trotsky was right.” After 1917 the polemics of the past no longer seemed so important.

Lenin’s contempt for those who clung to the old formula was made clear in the brutal language of the April Theses.

However, there are many later comments which remove all doubt about Lenin’s view. On the fourth anniversary of the revolution, for instance, Lenin said: “In order to consolidate the achievements of the bourgeois-democratic revolution ... we are obliged to go farther; and we did go farther.

“We solved the problems of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in passing as a ‘by-product’ of our main and genuinely proletarian-revolutionary, socialist activities.” (Fourth Anniversary of the October Revolution, 14 October, 1921)

The April Theses Today

Had the Russian revolution been successfully extended internationally, with the development of a socialist federation embracing economically advanced countries, the discussion of pre-1917 perspectives would now be of only historical interest to Marxists.

Unfortunately, with the defeat of the revolution in Europe, Soviet Russia was isolated. The revolution suffered an inevitable degeneration.

The democratic control of the workers was usurped by a bureaucratic elite, which found a bonapartist representative in the person of Stalin.

As the bureaucracy became more remote from the working class within Russia, so it increasingly gave up confidence in the proletarian revolution abroad.

The Communist International was transformed into an agency of the bureaucracy's foreign policy. Searching for national security, the bureaucracy began to play a counter-revolutionary role on the world arena. The perspective for an independent struggle for socialism was abandoned.

In an effort to provide theoretical, 'Leninist' justification for this counter-revolutionary transformation, Stalin exhumed Lenin's old formula of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.

In other words, they returned to the policy they had supported at the beginning of 1917 – before they had been defeated by Lenin in the struggle within the party.

The revival of this discredited policy was applied with disastrous results to the Chinese revolution of 1925-26.

Against the wishes of the leadership of the Chinese Communists, the Stalinist bureaucracy imposed a policy of subordination to the Chinese bourgeoisie led by Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang.

This led to the defeat of China's dynamic working class, with the massacre of thousands of Communists and militants. Since then, the same policy has been applied with the same disastrous results.

In the post-Second World War period the ex-colonial lands have experienced a series of revolutionary upheavals.

The communist party leaders, still dominated by Stalinist ideology, have invariably subordinated the workers' organizations to the interests of national-capitalist leaders.

In many cases this has meant support for Bonapartist dictators, including military bonapartist leaders.

Sukharno in Indonesia, Kassim in Iraq, Gonçalves in Portugal – the list could be extended around the world many times.

In Chile between 1970-73, the Communist Party leaders supported the popular government of Salvador Allende.

This was on the basis of the so-called anti-imperialist, anti-monopoly programme – to make 'inroads' into the power of capital.

In other words, their perspective was that of completing a bourgeois-democratic stage of revolution, with the struggle for workers' power and socialism postponed beyond the horizon.

Following this line, the Communist Party leaders helped to restrain the magnificent movement of the Chilean workers – who are still living with the horrendous results.

Similarly, in South Africa the Stalinists within the leadership of the ANC base themselves on the theory of stages.

In spite of the magnificent movement of the black workers and youth, they believe that the programme of the revolution must be limited, at this stage, to national democratic tasks.

They fail to see that capitalism has completely exhausted the progressive role it once played.

Crisis of Stalinism

The crisis in Stalinism and the reformist degeneration of the various communist parties has severed many of the links with Moscow.

But the CP leaders nevertheless perpetuate the false ideas of Stalin in 1917 – ideas which had to be swept aside by Lenin in order to ensure the success of the revolution.

If in 1917 the idea that the bourgeois-democratic revolution had to be exhausted before the workers could move towards socialism was incorrect, today it is totally absurd.

On the one side, the capitalist class of the underdeveloped countries is even more subservient to the big monopolies and banks of the advanced capitalist countries than in the past.

It is unable to play an independent, progressive role. Even where the national bourgeoisie has taken over, they have failed to complete their traditional tasks.

On the contrary, given the world-wide capitalist crisis, they have accumulated even more problems and fostered grotesque social contradictions.

On the other side, the national bourgeoisie of the ex-colonial lands is almost everywhere confronted by a powerful working class.

Especially in the semi-developed countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, the capitalists are paralyzed by fear of the proletariat – much stronger now than the workers of Russia in 1917.

Many strikes, general strikes, and insurrectionary movements have proved the preparedness of the workers to struggle.

The weakness of the proletariat in the ex-colonial lands cannot be attributed to the incompleteness of the national bourgeois-democratic revolution.

The failure of the workers in these regions to assume the leadership of the exploited peasantry and the impoverished petty-bourgeoisie and to lead society out of its present blind alley is due to its political weakness.

This reflects the absence of revolutionary Marxist policy based on the ideas of Lenin and Trotsky and put to the test in 1917.

That is why the controversy of 1917 is still a live issue. The lessons of the April Theses have to be learned, re-learned and carried to class conscious workers throughout the world.

The April Theses by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin

Pravda, No. 26, April 7, 1917

I did not arrive in Petrograd until the night of April 3, and therefore at the meeting on April 4, I could, of course, deliver the report on the tasks of the revolutionary proletariat only on my own behalf, and with reservations as to insufficient preparation.

The only thing I could do to make things easier for myself – and for *honest* opponents – was to prepare the theses *in writing*.

I read them out, and gave the text to Comrade Tsereteli. I read them twice very slowly: first at a meeting of Bolsheviks and then at a meeting of both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.

I publish these personal theses of mine with only the briefest explanatory notes, which were developed in far greater detail in the report.

THESES

1) In our attitude towards the war, which under the new [provisional] government of Lvov and Co. unquestionably remains on Russia's part a predatory imperialist war owing to the capitalist nature of that government, not the slightest concession to "revolutionary defencism" is permissible.

The class-conscious proletariat can give its consent to a revolutionary war, which would really justify revolutionary defencism, only on condition: (a) that the power pass to the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants aligned with the proletariat; (b) that all annexations be renounced in deed and not in word; (c) that a complete break be effected in actual fact with all capitalist interests.

In view of the undoubted honesty of those broad sections of the mass believers in revolutionary defencism who accept the war only as a necessity, and not as a means of conquest, in view of the fact that they are being deceived by the bourgeoisie, it is necessary with particular thoroughness, persistence and patience to explain their error to them, to explain the inseparable connection existing between capital and the imperialist war, and to prove that without over-

throwing capital *it is impossible* to end the war by a truly democratic peace, a peace not imposed by violence.

The most widespread campaign for this view must be organised in the army at the front.

Fraternisation.

2) The specific feature of the present situation in Russia is that the country is *passing* from the first stage of the revolution – which, owing to the insufficient class-consciousness and organisation of the proletariat, placed power in the hands of the bourgeoisie – to its *second stage*, which must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants.

This transition is characterised, on the one hand, by a maximum of legally recognised rights (Russia is *now* the freest of all the belligerent countries in the world); on the other, by the absence of violence towards the masses, and, finally, by their unreasoning trust in the government of capitalists, those worst enemies of peace and socialism.

This peculiar situation demands of us an ability to adapt ourselves to the *special* conditions of Party work among unprecedentedly large masses of proletarians who have just awakened to political life.

3) No support for the Provisional Government; the utter falsity of all its promises should be made clear, particularly of those relating to the renunciation of annexations.

Exposure in place of the impermissible, illusion-breeding “demand” that this government, a government of capitalists, should *cease* to be an imperialist government.

4) Recognition of the fact that in most of the Soviets of Workers’ Deputies our Party is in a minority, so far a small minority, as against a *bloc of all* the petty-bourgeois opportunist elements, from the Popular Socialists and the Socialist-Revolutionaries down to the Organising Committee (Chkheidze, Tsereteli, etc.), Steklov, etc., etc., who have yielded to the influence of the bourgeoisie and spread that influence among the proletariat.

The masses must be made to see that the Soviets of Workers’ Deputies are the *only possible* form of revolutionary government, and that therefore our task is, as long as this government yields to the influence of the bourgeoisie, to present a patient, systematic, and persistent explanation of the errors of their tactics, an explanation especially adapted to the practical needs of the masses.

As long as we are in the minority we carry on the work of criticising and exposing errors and at the same time we preach the necessity of transferring the entire state power to the Soviets of Workers’ Deputies, so that the people may overcome their mistakes by experience.

5) Not a parliamentary republic – to return to a parliamentary republic from the Soviets of Workers’ Deputies would be a retrograde step – but a republic of Soviets of Workers’, Agricultural Labourers’ and Peasants’ Deputies throughout the country, from top to bottom.

Abolition of the police, the army and the bureaucracy.[1]

The salaries of all officials, all of whom are elective and displaceable at any time, not to exceed the average wage of a competent worker.

6) The weight of emphasis in the agrarian programme to be shifted to the Soviets of Agricultural Labourers' Deputies.

Confiscation of all landed estates.

Nationalisation of *all* lands in the country, the land to be disposed of by the local Soviets of Agricultural Labourers' and Peasants' Deputies.

The organisation of separate Soviets of Deputies of Poor Peasants. The setting up of a model farm on each of the large estates (ranging in size from 100 to 300 dessiatines, according to local and other conditions, and to the decisions of the local bodies) under the control of the Soviets of Agricultural Labourers' Deputies and for the public account.

7) The immediate union of all banks in the country into a single national bank, and the institution of control over it by the Soviet of Workers' Deputies.

8) It is not our *immediate* task to "introduce" socialism, but only to bring social production and the distribution of products at once under the *control* of the Soviets of Workers' Deputies.

9) Party tasks:

(a) Immediate convocation of a Party congress;

(b) Alteration of the Party Programme, mainly:

(1) On the question of imperialism and the imperialist war,

(2) On our attitude towards the state and *our* demand for a "commune state"[2];

(3) Amendment of our out-of-date minimum programme;

(c) Change of the Party's name.[3]

10. A new International.

We must take the initiative in creating a revolutionary International, an International against the social-chauvinists and against the "Centre".[4]

In order that the reader may understand why I had especially to emphasise as a rare exception the "case" of honest opponents, I invite him to compare the above theses with the following objection by Mr.

Goldenberg: Lenin, he said, "has planted the banner of civil war in the midst of revolutionary democracy" (quoted in No. 5 of Mr. Plekhanov's *Yedinstvo*).

Isn't it a gem?

*I write, announce and elaborately explain: "In view of the undoubted honesty of those **broad** sections of the **mass** believers in revolutionary defencism ... in view of the fact that they are being deceived by the bourgeoisie, it is necessary with **particular** thoroughness, persistence and **patience** to explain their error to them...."*

Yet the bourgeois gentlemen who call themselves Social-Democrats, who *do not* belong either to the *broad* sections or to the mass believers in defencism, with serene brow present my views thus: "The banner[!] of civil war" (of which

there is not a word in the theses and not a word in my speech!) has been planted(!) “in the midst [!!] of revolutionary democracy...”.

What does this mean? In what way does this differ from riot-inciting agitation, from Russkaya Volya?

*I write, announce and elaborately explain: “The Soviets of Workers’ Deputies are the **only possible** form of revolutionary government, and therefore our task is to present a patient, systematic, and persistent **explanation** of the errors of their tactics, an explanation especially adapted to the practical needs of the masses.”*

Yet opponents of a certain brand present my views as a call to “civil war in the midst of revolutionary democracy”!

I attacked the Provisional Government for *not* having appointed an early date or any date at all, for the convocation of the Constituent Assembly, and for confining itself to promises.

I argued that *without* the Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies the convocation of the Constituent Assembly is not guaranteed and its success is impossible.

And the view is attributed to me that I am opposed to the speedy convocation of the Constituent Assembly!

I would call this “raving”, had not decades of political struggle taught me to regard honesty in opponents as a rare exception.

Mr. Plekhanov in his paper called my speech “raving”. Very good, Mr. Plekhanov! But look how awkward, uncouth and slow-witted you are in your polemics.

If I delivered a raving speech for two hours, how is it that an audience of hundreds tolerated this “raving”? Further, why does your paper devote a whole column to an account of the “raving”? Inconsistent, highly inconsistent!

It is, of course, much easier to shout, abuse, and howl than to attempt to relate, to explain, to recall *what* Marx and Engels said in 1871, 1872 and 1875 about the experience of the Paris Commune and about the *kind* of state the proletariat needs. [See: *The Civil War in France and Critique of the Gotha Programmeme*]

Ex-Marxist Mr. Plekhanov evidently does not care to recall Marxism.

I quoted the words of Rosa Luxemburg, who on August 4, 1914, called German Social-Democracy a “stinking corpse”.

And the Plekhanovs, Goldenbergs and Co. feel “offended”. On whose behalf? On behalf of the *German* chauvinists, because they were called chauvinists!

They have got themselves in a mess, these poor Russian social-chauvinists – socialists in word and chauvinists in deed.

Notes

[1] ie the standing army to be replaced by the arming of the whole people. – Lenin

[2] ie, a state of which the Paris Commune was the prototype. -Lenin

[3] Instead of “Social-Democracy”, whose official leaders *throughout* the world have betrayed socialism and deserted to the bourgeoisie (the “defencists” and the vacillating “Kautskyites”), we must call ourselves the *Communist Party*. -Lenin

[4] The “Centre” in the international Social-Democratic movement is the trend which vacillates between the chauvinists (=“defencists”) and internationalists, i.e., Kautsky and Co. in Germany, Longuet and Co. in France, Chkheidze and Co. in Russia, Turati and Co. in Italy, MacDonald and Co. in Britain, etc. -Lenin

This text of the April Theses was sourced from Lenin’s Collected Works, Progress Publishers, 1964, Moscow, Volume 24. Translated by Isaacs Bernard.

The 1917 'July days' – rich in lessons for today

Peter Taaffe, July 2007.

Revolution never develops in a straight line.

Between February and October 1917 there were many sharp turns in the situation in Russia. In April, the government coalition of 'socialists' – the Social Revolutionaries (SRs) and Mensheviks (minority) – with the capitalist ministers, continued the bloody first world war.

However, the mass of workers, together with the peasants, particularly the ten million soldiers, were absolutely exhausted by the war and yearned for the end of the slaughter. But even the worker and peasant councils, the soviets, which were dominated by the SRs and Mensheviks, actually supported continuation of the war.

These parties were also hostile to the demands of the workers, for instance, for an eight-hour day. Initially the capitalists retreated in the face of this long-standing demand of the workers. Many times in history, faced with a mass onslaught, the possessing classes have bent with the wind, only later to try to undermine whatever 'reforms' are temporarily conceded. We see in France today, with the coming to power of the right-wing Sarkozy government, how the 35-hour week, conceded by the earlier Socialist government of Jospin, is set to be destroyed if the government gets its way.

Yet, a shorter working day is vital for participation of the masses in making decisions and putting them into practise, particularly in a period of revolution. If the working class is chained to the factory and office, as is the case today, there is little or no time left to be involved in 'civic life', in the trade unions or political parties. Britain has the longest working week in western Europe. Many workers are compelled to take two or even three jobs to keep their heads above water. And, on the basis of capitalism, it could get a lot worse: "We are in the early stages of a trend towards longer hours that could last for the next 30 years or more" (Hamish McRae, *The Independent*).

A principled position

The first all-Russian congress of soviets on 3 June 1917, dominated by the SRs and Mensheviks, refused to ratify the eight-hour day. This and other issues infuriated the masses, particularly in Petrograd, and led to growth of support for the Bolsheviks. At the beginning of the revolution, as Trotsky explained: "Not only in the soldiers' soviets but also in the workers' soviets, the Bolshevik faction generally constituted 1-2%, at best 5%. The leading bodies of the petty-bourgeois democracy [Mensheviks and so-called Social Revolutionaries] had

the following of at least 95% of the workers, soldiers and peasants participating in the struggle”.

From the beginning, the Bolsheviks were systematically attacked because they expressed the real interests of the masses for bread, peace, land and freedom. On a smaller scale, there is an element of this present today, particularly in the unions in Britain. Socialist Party members as well as other militants are singled out for attack both by the employers and the conservative trade union officialdom.

For instance, in the National Union of Teachers former 'lefts' have tended to coalesce with the leadership. Socialist Party members in that union have stood out against their prevarications over the issue of an early ballot for strike action for an improved pay rise. This has earned them the charge of 'sectarianism' from this 'coalition' which includes practically every other political trend in the union.

This ironically includes the Socialist Workers Party, which is a byword for real sectarianism as well as a denunciatory approach towards others. But Marxists have always been accused of being 'sectarians' whenever they dare to speak the truth to the working class. This is invariably accompanied by attempts to persecute Marxists in the unions, as is now the case in UNISON.

To the working class

The Bolsheviks ignored the parliamentary babblers and the top layer of the workers' movement but concentrated their attention on the masses and particularly the most oppressed millions and tens of millions. The whole press, including the papers of the Mensheviks and SRs carried out a vicious campaign against the Bolsheviks.

Even in the first months after February, there was a torrent of abuse, suggesting that carloads of gold had been delivered to the Bolsheviks from Germany and that Lenin was hiding in a German aeroplane. This even led soldiers and sailors to threaten to bayonet Lenin and other leaders of Bolshevism!

But the brutal experience of the masses in the trenches and factories led to disillusionment with the other parties. Yesterday's indignation of the soldier and sailor against the Bolsheviks became remoulded into passionate devotion to them and unselfish readiness to follow them to the very end. And, on the other hand, the hatred of the masses for the capitalist Cadet party was inevitably transferred to their allies, the Mensheviks and SRs.

In the poll tax struggle in Britain in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and in the epic 1983-1987 Liverpool struggle, Militant, now the Socialist Party, experienced something similar. From a small force, we became the dominant political trend in the Liverpool struggle.

This was achieved not through manoeuvres, as our right-wing and left reformist opponents argued at that time and since, but by winning through argument and action mass working-class support through correct perspectives, programme, strategy and tactics, and a preparedness 'to go to the end' in the

struggle against Thatcher. The same applied in the poll tax struggle where it was Militant, not the small, left, phrase mongering organisations existing then and today, and certainly not the 'babblers' of the Parliamentary Labour Party, which led a movement of 18 million non-payers – an unprecedented mass movement. This not only defeated the poll tax but reduced Thatcher and her government to rubble.

Changes in consciousness

In 1917, the working masses, who learn quickly in a revolution, transferred their hopes to the Bolsheviks, who grew rapidly. From 2,000 members in Petrograd in February 1917 – some historians put the figure at 3,000 – they grew to 16,000 by April (with 79,000 nationally). By the July Days, Bolshevik party membership stood at 200,000.

The indignation of the masses against the government was reflected in June; on the 18th of that month a massive demonstration of between 500,000 and 800,000 workers marched through Petrograd. The Menshevik and SR majority had themselves been compelled to call the demonstration, as a means of heading off one proposed by the masses of Petrograd under the influence of the Bolshevik rank and file. But they completely miscalculated.

As the “delegates to the congress assembled on Mars Field, [they] read and counted the placards” (Trotsky). During the demonstration, the first Bolshevik slogans were met half-laughingly by the soviet dignitaries but “the same slogans were repeated again and again. 'Down with the ten minister-capitalists', 'down with the offensive' and, most importantly, 'All power to the Soviets.'” (Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution, p462).

Reactionary pro-capitalist historians suggest revolution arises either from 'conspiracy' or the result of a revolutionary party's 'agitation'. However, revolutions take place according to clear laws. The mass of the population may be unaware of these laws but the changes in mass consciousness result primarily from objective developments. This is capable of being anticipated and explained in advance by Marxist theory.

The 1917 June days led directly to the July 'half-insurrection'. This was similar to what has happened in previous revolutions: the 'June days' in the 1848 revolution, the 'Spartacist uprising' of January 1919, and the 'May Days' in Barcelona in 1937.

The working masses are conscious of having made a revolution, overthrowing an old regime, but the gains are being snatched out of their hands. They therefore come out onto the streets to prevent this. This is what took place at the beginning of July 1917, particularly in Petrograd.

Rather than this being an indication that the Bolsheviks were, at that stage, set on a 'seizure of power', as right-wing historian Richard Pipes argued, the Bolsheviks and Lenin in particular did everything at that stage in their power to apply the brakes.

There was massive impatience in the ranks of the working class, with even Bolshevik influenced workers demanding: “Why don’t they get busy up there?”, having in mind not only the Mensheviks and SRs, but also the governing bodies of the Bolsheviks. But an attempt to overthrow the Provisional government at that stage was premature.

The 1905 revolution, a dress rehearsal for 1917, had failed partly because the peasants were not ready to fully support the workers. In July 1917 Petrograd was ahead of the rest of the country. On 21 June, Lenin appealed in the newspaper Pravda to the Petrograd workers and soldiers to wait until events “should bring over the heavy reserves to the side of Petrograd”.

At the same time the government was trying to move revolutionary detachments from Petrograd to the war front. The mood of the working class rose to fever pitch, with demands for action by armed soldiers: “Come on, let’s get moving!”. When the Bolsheviks tried to restrain the workers, there were cries of “Down with it! Again you want to postpone things. We can’t live that way any longer”.

The Bolsheviks then switched tack. They recognised that the impatient workers of Petrograd, who gave two-thirds of their votes in the soviets to the Bolsheviks at the beginning of July, were determined to come out onto the streets to confront the government. Because of this, they concluded that they had to put themselves at the head of the demonstration.

Lenin is condemned by the historian Pipes as a “hopeless vacillator”, unable to make up his mind in June and July. On the contrary, Lenin opposed a demonstration to begin with but then, recognising the mood of the masses, urged the Bolsheviks to lead the demonstration in order to mitigate too much damage.

When the mass demonstration on 4 July took place it was accompanied by a furious capitalist propaganda offensive denouncing the Bolsheviks’ “attempt to seize power”. Lenin and the Bolsheviks were in receipt of ‘German funds’ and the street demonstrations in July had been ‘directed by the Germans’.

The demonstrators were fired on and a wave of repression – including the death of one young Bolshevik – was unleashed. This was with the full support of the “entire socialist press” – that is the papers of the Mensheviks and SRs. One newspaper editor wrote confidently at the time: “The Bolsheviks are compromised, discredited, and crushed. More than that, they have been expelled from Russian life, their teachings have turned out to be an irreversible failure” (The Bolsheviks Come to Power, by Alexander Rabinovich, p51).

Repression and the ‘month of the Great Slander’ were unleashed against the workers and the Bolsheviks. Some of them, like Lenin, were compelled to go underground and others were jailed. Another historian, Orlando Figes, accuses: “Lenin was always prone to overestimate the physical danger to himself; in this respect he was something of a coward. It cannot be said that his life was ever at direct risk during his summer on the run”.

The same ‘objective’ historian writes a paragraph later: “However, given the frenzied anti-Bolshevik atmosphere, it is not hard to see why Lenin should be

so concerned for his personal safety. This was a time of lynch law and the tabloid press was full of cartoons showing Lenin on the scaffold”.

Lenin’s refusal to appear before the courts at that stage, which would have been comprised of the bitterest class enemies of the workers, peasants and Bolsheviks, was entirely correct. As Trotsky commented: “It is sufficient to remember the fate of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg”. These two great leaders of the German revolution were murdered by reactionary Junkers, which effectively politically beheaded the German revolution. Lenin went into hiding not out of concern for himself but because of what was at stake for the revolution. For him, the interests of the revolution were paramount. If neither Lenin nor Trotsky had survived, the Russian revolution would have been shipwrecked.

Whip of counter-revolution

The period after July was a ‘festival of reaction’. But the forces of counter-revolution were not sufficiently strong to completely crush the Bolsheviks and the workers’ organisations.

The slanderous campaign against the Bolsheviks has some echoes – but not of course on the same scale – in all the past big social and class movements in Britain. Look at the vilification by *The Sun*, television and radio of Arthur Scargill and the miners during the heroic 1984-85 strike. Tony Benn was depicted as ‘Hitler’ in *The Sun* when he stood for the deputy leadership of the Labour Party in the early 1980s.

Similarly, every capitalist newspaper nationally and locally vilified the Liverpool Militants during their epic struggle, reaching a peak after Kinnock attacked Militant in 1985. This did not stop the Liverpool Marxists from winning every election under the banner of Labour – which was a workers’ party at the bottom at that stage – when they were in power during the 1980s.

Similarly, the repression and slander did not break the Bolsheviks or the Russian working class. Sometimes, as Karl Marx pointed out, revolution needs the whip of counter-revolution. The counter-revolution post-July 1917 culminated in the attempt of the right-wing General Kornilov – “the heart of a lion and the brain of a sheep” – to seize power from the government in August 1917.

But Kornilov’s coup was defeated by the working class with the Bolsheviks playing the most prominent role. There was a similar development in the Portuguese revolution when the right-wing General Spínola attempted to seize power from the Socialist-Communist coalition in March 1975. He was defeated by the desertion of his own troops, which in turn pushed the revolution to the left. Like the Kornilov troops in 1917, they refused to take action in support of Spínola once the real situation was explained to them.

The August 1917 events led to preparation for the October revolution, which will be the subject of a future article. However, like all phases of the Russian revolution, the July Days are rich in lessons for future struggles. Of course, Russia in 1917 was far removed from the advanced industrial countries of Eu-

rope, Japan and the USA today – it was a backward country dominated by peasants.

But the laws of revolution and counter-revolution under capitalism have a relevance in all countries and eras. In the last 90 years, there have been many opportunities for the working class to follow in the path of the Russian workers of 1917. But, unlike 1917, because of faulty leadership the opportunity to effect change was not seized. Even some capitalist commentators today have a dim awareness that beneath the gloss and economic fireworks their system is shaky.

Jeremy Warner, in the business section of *The Independent* of 23 June, explains “Why I’ve dusted off my ‘Das Kapital’”. He states: “The world as it was then [the 19th century industrial revolution] is not without its parallels in today’s supercharged global economy, and, after decades in the wilderness, it is possible that some of Karl Marx’s central ideas might enjoy something of a revival”. He hastens to add: “I’m not talking here about revolutionary communism”. God forbid!

But capitalism is preparing the ground for ‘social ruptures’, that is, mass movements with the threat of revolution, throughout the globe. Warner himself writes about “new and quite unexpected forms of class conflict and envy”.

Ruptures, social revolution, are not just possible but likely in the future. It will differ in many respects from 1917. But the processes will be similar to the great events of 90 years ago.

The new generation of young people and workers in particular must prepare for these events by studying the real history of the Russian revolution.

The Month of the Great Slander

After the defeat of the July Days, the Bolsheviki had their backs to the wall. Their press had been smashed and many of their leaders were also being hounded. The reaction was further boosted by the 'revelation' that Lenin was really in the pay of the German government (with which Russia was still at war). This lie peddled by a couple of drunken adventurers, implausible though it was, was suddenly being seized upon by the press with all the power of the establishment behind it.

The ruling class had felt the full weight of the revolutionary threat to their rule, in the July demonstrations and in the growing sympathy amongst the masses for Bolshevism. So all the forces of capitalist opinion turned their fire on those who dared to challenge the accepted order, the Bolshevik leaders. As Trotsky explains, all the parties virtually ceased attacking each other, to concentrate on "their common baiting of the Bolsheviki".

For workers and youth today slanders and gross personal abuse by the capitalist press and politicians are all too familiar.

The Bolsheviki survived this month of lies and slurs. Their members were tempered and hardened by the experience. By August a new chapter in the Russian Revolution was already opening, in which the Bolsheviki were able to take a leading part, throwing off any mud that might have stuck, and building the support in the ranks of the working class that allowed them to be the decisive force in the dramatic events of October.

Here we reprint extracts from Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution, on the 'month of the great slander':

On a scale hitherto unheard of, the slander was sown in the thick of the popular masses, a vast majority of whom had heard of the Bolshevik leaders for the first time only after the February revolution. Mudslinging here became a political factor of primary importance...

But how did it happen that the materials of a preliminary investigation appeared in print, and moreover just at the moment when the shattered offensive of Kerensky (in the war with Germany) was becoming a catastrophe, and the July demonstration in Petrograd was revealing the irresistible growth of the Bolsheviki? On of the initiators of this business, the attorney general, Basarabov, later frankly described in the press how, when it became clear that the Provisional Government in Petrograd was wholly without reliable armed forces, it was decided in the district headquarters to try to create a psychological change in the regiments by means of some strong medicine...

Zinoviev appeared at a sitting of the bureau to the Executive Committee (of the Soviet), and in the name of the Central Committee of the Bolsheviki demanded that immediate measures be taken to exonerate Lenin and to prevent possible consequences of the slander. The bureau could not refuse to appoint a commission of inquiry.

But the July Days had produced a serious shift of power to the right, and moreover the Soviet commission was in no hurry to fulfill a task obviously in conflict with the political interests of those who had entrusted it. The more serious of the Compromise leaders – that is, properly speaking, only the Mensheviks – were concerned to establish a formal disconnection with the slander, but nothing more. In all cases where it was impossible to avoid making some direct answer, they would in a few words clear themselves of guilt. But they did not extend a finger to ward off the poisoned sword poised over the head of the Bolsheviks. A popular image of their policy was once provided by the Roman pro-consul, Pilate...

Dirty Accusations

Speaking on the 17th at a joint session of the two Executive Committees, Trotsky said: “An intolerable atmosphere has been created, in which you as well as we are choking. They are throwing dirty accusations at Lenin and Zinoviev. (Voice: ‘That is true.’ Uproar. Trotsky continues.) There are in this hall, it appears, people who sympathize with these accusations. There are people here who have only sneaked into the revolution. (Uproar. The president’s bell long tries to restore order) ... Lenin has fought thirty years for the revolution. I have fought twenty years against the oppression of the people. And we cannot but cherish a hatred for German militarism ... A suspicion against us in that direction could be expressed only by those who do not know what a revolutionist is. I have been sentenced by a German court to eight months imprisonment for my struggle against German militarism ... This everybody knows. Let nobody in this hall say that we are hirelings of Germany, for that is not the voice of convinced revolutionists but the voice of scoundrels.” (Applause)...

On July 5 Lenin, in a conversation with Trotsky, raised the question: “Aren’t they getting ready to shoot us all?” Only such an intention could explain the official stamp placed upon that monstrous slander. Lenin considered the enemy capable of carrying through to the end the scheme they had thought up, and decided not to fall into their hands...

The disinclination of the Soviet Commission to begin the promised investigation finally convinces Lenin that the Compromisers were washing their hands of the case, and leaving it to the mercies of the Whit Guards.

The officers and the Junkers, who had by that time broken up the party printing plant, were now beating up and arresting in the streets everyone who protested against the charge of espionage against the Bolsheviks. Lenin therefore decided to go into hiding – not from the investigation, but from possible attempts on his life.

While agitators of the hostile camp were telling a thousand stories – Lenin is on a destroyer, Lenin has fled to Germany in a submarine, etc. – the majority of the Executive Committee hastily condemned Lenin for avoiding investigation. Ignoring the political essence of the pogrom situation in which, and for

the sake of which, it was launched, the Compromisers came out as the champions of pure justice.

In company with Zinoviev, Lenin passed a number of weeks in the environs of Petrograd in a forest near Sestroretsk. They had to spend the nights and find shelter from rain in a haystack. Disguised as a fireman Lenin then crossed the Finland border on a locomotive, and concealed himself in the apartment of a Helsingfors police chief, a former Petrograd worker. Afterward he moved nearer the Russian border, to Vyborg. From the end of September he lived secretly in Petrograd. And on the day of the insurrection he appeared, after an almost four months' absence, in the open arena.

The German government could obviously have helped the Bolsheviks, not with ideas, but with money. But money was just what the Bolsheviks did not have. The center of the party abroad during the war was struggling with cruel need; a hundred francs was a big sum; the central organ was appearing once a month, or once in two months, and Lenin was carefully counting the lines in order not to exceed his budget. The expenses of the Petrograd organization during the war years amounted to a few thousand rubles, which went mostly to the printing of illegal leaflets. In two and a half years only 300,000 copies of these leaflets were distributed in Petrograd.

However, in spite of the swift growth of the party and of money receipts, Pravda was, in physical proportions, the smallest of all the party papers...

In order to send papers to the front, it became necessary again and again to take up special collections among the workers. And even so, the Bolshevik papers arrived in the trenches in incomparably fewer number than the papers of the Compromisers and Liberals. Complaints about this were continual. "We are living only on the rumor of your papers," wrote the soldiers...

The character of the accusations, and of the accusers, inevitably gave rise to the question, how could people of normal mould believe, or even pretend to believe, in this notorious lie which was inept from beginning to end? The success of the Intelligence Service would in truth have been unthinkable, except for the general atmosphere created by war, defeat, ruin, revolution, and the embitterment of the social struggle. Since the Autumn of 1914 nothing had gone well with the ruling classes of Russia. The ground was crumbling under their feet. Everything was falling from their hands. Misfortunes were coming down on them from all directions. How could they help seeking a scapegoat?...

The July slander against the Bolsheviks least of all fell down out of a clear sky. It was the natural fruit of panic and hate, the last link in a shameful chain, the transfer of a stereotyped slanderous formula to its new and final object, permitting a reconciliation of the accusers and the accused of yesterday. All the insults of the ruling group, all their fears, all their bitterness, were now directed against that party which stood at the extreme left and incarnated most completely the unconquerable force of the revolution. Was it in actual fact possible for the possessing classes to surrender their place to the Bolsheviks without having made a last desperate effort to trample them in the blood and

filth? That tangle of slander, well snarled up from long usage, was inevitably fated to come down on the heads of the Bolsheviks...

During the July events the Bolsheviks themselves sought for an alien and criminal hand in certain unexpected excesses that were obviously provoked with afterthought, Trotsky wrote in those days: "What role has been played in this by counter-revolutionary provocation and German agents? It is difficult at present to pronounce definitely upon this question ... We must await the results of an authentic investigation ... But now it is possible to say with certainty that the results of such an investigation will throw a clear light upon the work of Black Hundred gangs, and upon the underground role played by gold, German, English or 100 percent Russian, or indeed all three of them. But no judicial investigation will change the political meaning of the events. The worker and soldier masses of Petrograd were not, and could not have been, bought. They were not in the service of Wilhelm, or Buchanan, or Miliukov. The movement was prepared by the war, by oncoming hunger, by the reaction lifting its head, by the headlessness of the government, by the adventurist offensive, by the political distrust and revolutionary alarm of the workers and soldiers."

The history of all revolutions and civil wars invariably testifies that a threatened or overthrown ruling class is disposed to find the cause of its misfortunes, not in itself, but in foreign agents and emissaries...

Under these theories about the revolutionary role of foreign agents, as under all typical mass misunderstandings, there lies an indirect historical foundation. Consciously or unconsciously, every nation at the critical period of its existence makes especially broad and bold borrowings from the treasury of other peoples. Not frequently, moreover, a leading role in the progressive movement is played by people living on the border or emigrants returning to the homeland. The village against the city, the backwoods against the capital, the petty bourgeois against the worker – they all defend themselves under the guise of a national force resisting foreign influence. Miliukov portrayed the Bolshevik movement as 'German' for the same reason in the last analysis that the Russian peasant has for a hundred years regarded as a German any man dressed up in city clothes. The difference is that the peasant was making an honest mistake ... When it comes to a threat against their material interest, the educated classes set in motion all the prejudices and confusion which humanity is dragging in its wagon-train behind it...

The struggle of the other parties among themselves was almost like a family spat in comparison with their common baiting of the Bolsheviks. In conflict with one another they were, so to speak, only getting in training for a further conflict, a decisive one. Even in employing against each other the sharpened accusation of German connections, they never carried the thing through to the limit. July presents a different picture. In the assault upon the Bolsheviks all the ruling forces, the government, the courts, the Intelligence Services, the staffs, the officialdom, the municipalities, the parties of the soviet majority, their press, their orators, constituted one colossal unit. The very disagreement among them, like the different tone qualities of the instruments in an orches-

tra, only strengthened the general effect. An inept invention of two contemptible creatures was elevated to the height of a factor in history. The slanders poured down like Niagara. If you take into consideration the setting – the war and the revolution – and the character of the accused – revolutionary leaders of millions who were conducting their party to the sovereign power – you can say without exaggeration that July 1917 was the month of the most gigantic slander in world history.

August 1917: Kornilov's Coup Fails by Rob Sewell

Russia in 1917 saw the forcible entry of the masses onto the stage of history. The sharp pace of change reflected the swift changes in consciousness amongst the mass of the people.

But no revolution ever proceeds in a straight line. This struggle of living forces unfolds through dialectical contradictions; revolutions, the ebb of revolution, periods of reaction, followed by a further impulse towards revolution on a higher level.

The July period was in many ways the watershed between the February revolution and October. In all great revolutions, there are times when the masses, in a period of retreat, feel the gains of the revolution slipping from their grasp and move spontaneously to recapture lost ground.

This happened in June/July in Russia. A similar pattern can be seen in Spain in 1937 and Portugal in 1975. The main difference lay in the existence of the Bolshevik Party in Russia which put itself at the head of the struggle in order to keep the forces of revolution intact for more decisive struggles.

The inevitable result of the Bolsheviks' restraining of the masses' revolutionary impatience was to open up an attack by the forces of the Right. July was the "month of the great slander" where an intense hate campaign was instigated against the Bolsheviks.

However the July reaction was neither deep nor long lasting. The hostility whipped up by the right evaporated within weeks and by August support for the Bolsheviks was visibly recovering. Layers of workers, drawing the lessons of their own experience turned again to the ideas of revolution.

The Bolsheviks made electoral gains as people registered discontent with the moderate socialists who controlled the Central Soviet. Lenin's Party did not gain a majority in the Petrograd Soviet until early September but the tide was beginning to turn.

Worsening economic conditions and unpopular government policies such as the restoration of capital punishment boosted the Bolshevik cause. Pro-Bolshevik resolutions were now passed condemning the government persecutions of those involved in the July events. As one contemporary noted: "The repression of the extreme left served only to increase its popularity among the masses."

Towards the end of July the Kerensky government faced a deepening social, political and economic crisis. Food shortages, economic dislocation, inflation, civil disorder and peasant unrest all served to fuel the growth of revolutionary ideas, which caused acute alarm amongst the ruling circles.

The government was paralyzed. The Russian bourgeois, anxious to destroy the revolution searched desperately for a way out. John Reed, in his famous book,

Ten Days That Shook the World relates that a large proportion of the ruling class would have preferred a German victory in the war to a complete victory of the Soviets. In the ruling circles, there was great disdain for Kerensky's weak-kneed government.

The idea of the "salvation of the motherland" by a strong dictatorship which could end revolutionary anarchy seized their minds more and more. This view was shared by the main capitalist party, the Kadets, the All Russian Union of Trade and Industry and the Union of Landowners.

General Know of the English Military Mission put into blunt words the attitude of the privileged: "*What is wanted is a strong dictatorship; what is wanted is the Cossacks. This people needs the whip! A dictatorship – that is just what it needs.*"

In these circumstances the emergence of an officers' plot was inevitable. Even premier Kerensky had fed this conspiracy by discussions he had with the military command. His ambition was to establish a strong personal dictatorship to do away with Bolshevism – led by himself. Trotsky pointed out "Kerensky wanted to use the revolt of the generals to reinforce his own dictatorship."

But the Military High Command had other ideas. For them the obvious candidate for such a bonapartist role was the newly appointed Commander in Chief, General Lavr Kornilov.

As a military man, and an admirer of the Black Hundreds, Kornilov made little distinction between the Moderate Socialists and the Bolsheviks – they were all revolutionary scum. After all, wasn't it the Soviets which had created all this mess in the first place; they were the "enemies within."

General Kornilov became the symbol and focal point of the counter-revolution and a national hero for every reactionary section in Russia. On August 11 he pronounced it "high time to hang the German agents and spies headed by Lenin."

If the Provisional government was too weak and impotent to act then he would do so independently. On August 24 under the pretext of a "Bolshevik rising", Kornilov told his general staff to redirect the army to march on Petrograd.

Parallels can be drawn with Franco's rebellion in 1936 and Pinochet in 1973. When the ruling class sees no alternative it will drop all its democratic talk and turn to military dictatorship to crush the masses by force. The Bolsheviks gave leadership to the struggle in Russia, defeating Kornilov and building the forces which carried out the successful revolution in October. The lack of such a party in Chile and Spain had terrible consequences.

The counter-revolution in Russia began in earnest from that time on. Kornilov's plans were simple. "The coup will be in place in the suburbs of Petrograd by the evening of August 28. I request that Petrograd be proclaimed under martial law on August 29."

Kerensky had opened up secret negotiations with the conspirators, aiming to incorporate Kornilov into a new 'national government'. The General replied that such a government could only be under himself and that Kerensky had better leave Petrograd at once.

As Trotsky commented, “At the same time that Kerensky and Savinkov were intending to clean up the Bolsheviks and in part the soviets, Kornilov was intending also to clean up the Provisional Government. It was just this that Kerensky did not want.”

Faced with this predicament, Kerensky turned tail and ran to the cabinet with the news of the attempted coup. True to form the Kadet ministers resigned on August 26 wanting no responsibility for putting down a “patriotic” revolt!

As in Spain in July 1936, the majority of the High Command went over to the counter-revolution and high government officials were almost all sympathetic to Kornilov. Divisions were dispatched from the front to crush the revolutionary capital. On the 28th of August prices in the Petrograd stock exchange rocketed; the counter-revolutionaries had high hopes of victory.

But the reaction had misread the political situation, especially the mood of the masses. The coup’s social basis was still very shaky. The essence of counter-revolution as of revolution is timing.

The Bolshevik Party was still operating in semi-illegal conditions after the July events. The Party leadership was scattered: Trotsky was in prison and both Lenin and Zinoviev were in hiding. Nevertheless the Bolsheviks swiftly went into action as soon as the news broke.

From Finland, Lenin warned the Bolsheviks that in the fight against Kornilov, they should give no credence or support to the moderates, the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. There could be no mixing of their political banners.

“In these circumstances” wrote Lenin, “A Bolshevik would say our soldiers will fight against the counter-revolutionary troops. They will not do so to protect the government ... but independently to protect the revolution as they pursue their own aims.”

United Front

This was the policy of the United Front. In the face of a common enemy the United Front serves to unify different workers’ parties in action to achieve a particular object. It does not mean abandoning different political programs or criticisms under the guise of ‘unity’.

There is no merging of political differences but a unity in action. “March separately under your own banners but strike together” was the dictum. This not only raises the level of consciousness but it shows in practice the superiority of militant struggle.

A United Front of Socialist and Communist Parties in Germany could have prevented Hitler coming to power in 1933. But such a vital policy, proved in action in the past was rejected by the Stalinists as ‘counter-revolutionary’. This prepared the defeat of the German proletariat at Hitler’s hands.

In Russia the local soviets were reinvigorated under the guidance of the Bolshevik activists as the enthusiasm of the masses centered on the defense of

Petrograd. Mass meetings were held which passed resolutions attacking Kornilov and demanding the release of the July prisoners.

A "Committee of Revolutionary Defense" was set up where the Bolsheviks played a prominent role. Large numbers of workers were organized to erect barricades, dig ditches and put up barbed wire as part of the defense of the capital. Workers' organizations immediately took over the supply and distribution of food to the population.

The Soviet of Factory-Shop Committees helped coordinate the distribution of arms. "Red Guard" units were created and supplied with weapons and materials from the armaments factories. Many new recruits got military training from the Bolshevik Military Organizations. The Petrograd Carters' Battalion pledged their 500 carts to help shift military supplies, while the Sixth Engineers organized a 600-man detachment to build defense fortifications.

The Baltic Fleet followed suit with the Kronstadt garrison dispatching 3,000 armed sailors for Petrograd's defense. The fleet's crew had arrested some disloyal officers, some of whom were summarily shot for treason.

After the Provisional Government asked for assistance the Kronstadt Military Technical Committee sent a message demanding the release of "our comrades, the finest fighters and sons of the revolution who are at this minute languishing in prison."

The Bolsheviks categorically refused to enter the Kerensky government but they were the best fighters against Kornilov. The most militant sailors and soldiers were Bolsheviks.

Trotsky reflects: "During the insurrection ... Kerensky must go to the sailors of the Baltic fleet and demand of them to defend them in the Winter Palace. I was at the time in prison. They took him to the guard and sent a delegation to ask me what must be done: arrest Kerensky or defend him? ... I said: 'Yes you must guard him very well now; tomorrow we will arrest him.'"

The telegraph and railway workers dealt an enormous blow to the counter-revolution. Their leaders instructed their members to redirect 'suspicious' telegrams and by any means block Kornilov's path. They should dismantle tracks and bridges, leave their posts, misdirect trains and delay all counter-revolutionary shipments.

In Trotsky's words: "The railway workers ... did their duty. In a mysterious way echelons would find themselves moving on the wrong roads. Regiments would arrive in the wrong division, artillery would be sent up a blind alley, staffs would get out of communication with their units."

Petrograd stayed a fortress of the revolution. The counter-revolutionary army's movement was paralyzed. Detachments of revolutionary agitators from the factories and Soviets surrounded the stationary troops and harangued them with political propaganda.

Mutinies

The troops had no idea what was happening as their officers had kept them in total ignorance. Mutinies broke out. Officers were arrested in the Savage Division made up of Caucasian mountaineers, the Ussuriishy Mounted Division, which now pledged themselves to the cause of the revolution.

The “counter-revolutionary” army simply melted away; there was never any fighting between Kornilov’s troops and Petrograd. Kornilov’s next in command, General Krymov, encircled by his own troops, reluctantly agreed to negotiate. General Denikin was locked up by his own troops. The revolt had crumbled.

Krymov realized the hopelessness of the situation. “The last card for saving the Motherland has been beaten – life is no longer worth living,” he said, then shot himself. Kornilov was arrested on September 1.

This defeat for the counter-revolution abruptly shifted the balance of forces to the left. The revolt radicalized the masses; in the words of Marx, the revolution sometimes needs the whip of the counter-revolution.

A surge in support now developed for the Bolshevik Party. “This upswing” explained Trotsky “was made possible only thanks to the double-edged Bolshevik policy. While participating in the frontlines of the struggle against Kornilov, the Bolsheviks did not take the slightest responsibility for the policy of Kerensky.

“On the contrary they denounced him as responsible for the reactionary attack and as incapable of overcoming it. In this way they prepared the political premises of the October revolution.”

Through patient and consistent work, with correct tactics and slogans, the Bolsheviks gained a majority in the Petrograd Soviet in early September. This became the springboard for their winning the majority of the working masses to their banner.

Within two months, the leaders of Bolshevism emerged from underground and prison to lead the first workers’ state in history. The events of August 1917 played a decisive role in preparing the party and its leadership for that historic transformation.

October 1917: The Bolsheviks Take Power by John Pickard

November 7 (new-style calendar, October 25 old-style) marks the 70th anniversary of the greatest event in human history. For the first time ever, a state came into existence which represented the

majority of society, the laboring masses, as against a narrow class of exploiters. Through their elected soviets (councils) the workers, peasants and soldiers of Russia took power into their own hands.

Except for the few far-sighted among them, the world's bankers, capitalists and war-profiteers paused only momentarily in their scramble for war booty. But the workers in the factories and the soldiers knee-deep in mud did not fail to register the tremors beneath their feet. For them, the events in Russia were a signal of hope, ushering in a new period of struggle of class against class instead of worker against worker. The soviet state became an inspiration and a call to arms for workers everywhere.

The Bolshevik Party was subjected to fierce repression in July: its papers banned, its leaders jailed or in hiding, all subjected to the slanderous accusation that they were "German agents". But by the end of October, the Party was in power, at the head of a mighty movement of the working class.

These titanic events, in just four short months, are a textbook demonstration of the sharp changes in the mood and political consciousness of the masses in a revolutionary situation. Although the Bolsheviks provided the necessary leadership – the subjective factor without which the October revolution would not have taken place – it was the elemental movement of the many-millioned Russian people that gave an unstoppable impetus to the revolution.

After the suppression of the Bolsheviks, reactionaries of all stripes and shadings began to raise their heads with new confidence and hope. Officers began to demand salutes, ignoring the soldiers' committees; factory owners in increasing numbers began to threaten to close their factories to break the power of the workers' committees. Thus, the ground was prepared for the attempted coup by General Kornilov.

Workers' Movement

But the reaction was not too deep and long lasting, and, before the Kornilov coup dissolved in ignominy, the workers' movement had already begun to recover. Even in late July, the Bolsheviks had begun to regain ground in the soldiers' meetings, in the navy, and in the workers' districts.

In reply to the capitalists' lockout a wave of strikes spread all over Russia, bringing into action for the first time completely fresh and untried layers of the working class. While the more experienced and battle-hardened sections of the workers bided their time – beginning to realize that a different, more serious struggle was necessary – others were catching up in their understanding of the class forces and the issues at stake.

The workers began to ponder over the slanders against the Bolsheviks: is it a coincidence, they asked, that the same people who exploited them and denounced their committees are also the loudest shouters about "German agents"?

The soldiers mulled over the same problems: why was it always the worst and most repressive officers who foamed at the mouth and went into apoplexy at the mention of Bolshevism?

The workers and soldiers knew that they themselves were not German spies and yet every action, every democratic demand, was denounced as “Bolshevism”. There was hardly a factory or military unit that didn’t have its “Bolshevik” who in reality had never been near the Party.

Polarization

An enormous polarization was taking place within Russian society. Soldiers’ committees demanded an end to the interminable and bloody war; peasants demanded – and in hundreds of cases occupied – the landowners’ estates; workers took over factories to break lockouts and management sabotage. The Provisional Government, meanwhile, went on with the war, urged “patience” and “restraint” and denounced the Bolsheviks.

The Kornilov revolt in August petered out into a farce, as Bolshevik soldiers and workers agitated among his troops, spreading the seed of revolution. But the revolt gave a powerful impetus to the leftward shift of the masses.

The warnings of the Bolsheviks, about the Provisional Government preparing the ground for reaction, were remembered by the workers and soldiers. The worst slanderers of all had even supported the attempted coup. The leaders of other “left” parties, the Social Revolutionaries (SRs) and Mensheviks, had scoffed at the Bolsheviks’ dire predictions before August and were now discredited in the eyes of their own members.

There now began a floodtide of support towards the Bolshevik Party, a tide that would carry the Party through October and beyond. Bolshevism, already synonymous with any forward movement or struggle of the masses, was thus made the property of the masses. The Party ranks swelled out of all proportion to their former size.

The SRs lost hundreds of thousands of supporters among the soldiers. These became millions. In the cities, the Mensheviks were virtually wiped out, as workers surged towards the Party of Lenin and Trotsky.

Soviets all over the country followed the lead of Petrograd and returned a majority of Bolshevik delegates. Factory and shop committees, trade union committees, military units and land committees began to be transformed. The soviets of February and March had been weakened by their SR and Menshevik leadership, vacillating and compromising with the capitalist class, tail-ending the Provisional Government, itself slavishly following the policies of the imperialist powers. The July reaction had dealt yet more blows to the soviets.

But now the revival began. The delegations to the established soviets underwent a rapid transformation. At the same time millions of workers and peasants in the far-flung corners of Russia began to establish them for the first time.

As the soviets revived, they were Bolshevized. In the bigger soviets the Bolsheviks were stronger than in the average; among the soldier-worker masses the Party was stronger than in the soviets. Similarly, the closer the committees were to the workers on the shop floor, the sooner there was a majority for the program of Lenin.

After Kornilov had shown the threat of reaction, new leaders crowded to the front in these bodies, forming special committees for the defense of the revolution: military committees, often charged by the soviet with arming the workers, arresting reactionaries and deploying troops. These new leaders, hardened and steeled by events, were overwhelmingly Bolsheviks. The October revolution was to be no “putsch” by a small minority. In their millions the workers, soldiers and peasants looked at the program they needed: “Bread, Peace and Land”, realized which Party supported it, and acted accordingly. If that’s Bolshevism, they reasoned, then I’m a Bolshevik!

In Finland, the Bolsheviks formed a majority coalition in the soviets with the left SRs who had split from the old party. Immediately, the Finnish soviets commanded the loyalty of the working class and the soldiers stationed there. When the Provisional Government demanded that certain units withdraw from Finland, they refused, citing the authority of the Finland Soviets. Finland had already had its “October”, weeks before the Russian empire.

After having dropped the slogan in the weeks after the July events, the Bolshevik Party once again raised the demand of a Soviet Government. In the first week of September the key Petrograd soviet voted for this policy. Others soon followed: Finland, Moscow, Kiev, in days the trickle turning into a flood.

The whole of Russian society was polarizing into two irreconcilable camps. As the attempted coup had shown, the capitalist class now saw no way out other than outright counter-revolution. But the workers had also drawn conclusions: they were now more sober, more serious. The heady days of February were gone, along with many illusions in an “easy” end to the war.

The capitalist Kadet Party, along with the Compromisers, the SRs and Mensheviks, now cooperated in the convening of a “Democratic Conference” to give legitimacy to the Provisional Government and bolster their sagging morale. This artificial body, whose size and distribution of seats were decided from above, bore no relationship to the true balance of class forces in the swirling waters of revolution outside its doors.

The in-built rightwing majority voted, against the Bolsheviks and Left SRs, for a new coalition, but could come to no conclusion about its composition. This indecision, what Trotsky described as a “public confession of its bankruptcy”, corresponded exactly to the paralysis of the ruling class in the streets and barracks.

But like a dying body that clings to life, the representatives of capitalism and their hangers-on continued to go through the motions. They elected a “Council of the Republic” or “Pre-Parliament” to continue its deliberations. The Bolsheviks withdrew from this body, leaving it to its own impotency.

Thus, while society moved inexorably to a decisive conflict over who was to hold power, Prime Minister Kerensky fuffed and fiddled and shuffled the seats around in his Cabinet Room. His new government, the fourth coalition since February, was met among the masses by a mixture of indifference and scarcely concealed contempt.

The orders of the Provisional Government and its representatives were increasingly ignored in the factories, the soviets and, crucially, in the military units. Kerensky's authority was rapidly shrinking to an area conforming approximately to the walls of the Winter Palace.

A serious economic and military crisis now threatened. The capitalists were openly sabotaging industry, closing factories and disrupting transport. Food was becoming scarce in the cities. In frustration, more and more sections of workers took to strike action. The front was in danger of collapsing and the ruling class looked with glee at the prospect of the German army capturing "Red Petrograd".

In the countryside, land seizures and insurrections were increasing. The radicalization of the peasantry interacted with and fed the leftward shifts within the army, overwhelmingly from a peasant background.

This whole period was characterized by an enormous ferment within the masses. Trotsky describes in his *History of the Russian Revolution* how meetings were going on everywhere. Debates, arguments, discussions, mass meetings, and in the center of every one of them – a Bolshevik. In the barracks and factories, there were thousands of "Lenins". Karl Marx long before explained that an "idea" can become a great material force, if it corresponds to a social movement, and such were the ideas and program of Bolshevism in October. As workers visited the front, soldier-delegates visited the factories and both visited the villages, "Bolshevism took possession of the country".

Because of the dislocation of the economy and transport, the soviets were increasingly obliged to intervene and organize the supply of food, light, fuel and transport for the cities and the front. The question of power was being raised in all its aspects. Who was going to run the economy and therefore the government? The soviets or Kerensky? As Trotsky explained, the soviet government grew up from below. But it would only be confirmed by decisive action against the remaining centers of capitalist authority in the army, the ministries and the Winter Palace.

That decisive action came to revolve around the Second Congress of Soviets, organized for October. The leadership elected by the First Congress, the Central Executive Committee, was dominated by the compromisers. They called the new Congress only under the pressure of the soviets. Fearing the worst, they promptly began an agitation against it.

But with the Bolshevik Party conducting a campaign in favor, there began an unstoppable wave of telegrams and resolutions demanding the CEC convene the Congress, and, moreover, demanding that it take power. The CEC did not succeed in postponing the Congress for more than a few days, to October 25.

The question of the Congress was the dominant political question throughout October. Every vital question: the economy, the war, food supplies, the land question, etc., raised the question of power. The masses now understood this and anxiously demanded the question be resolved by the Soviet Congress.

The decisive initiative was taken by the Petrograd Soviet. On the same day that the fourth coalition had been announced, the soviet had elected a new executive with Trotsky, released from prison “on bail”, as its president. A few days later, it also elected the Military Revolutionary Committee, once again under Trotsky’s leadership.

This committee immediately began to establish permanent lines of communication and command with all the different workplaces and military units in the city. It was consolidating a state – what Engels described as essentially “armed bodies of men” – which corresponded to the power that the soviets already possessed. One after another, the remaining military units transferred their allegiance from the army command, still under the nominal control of the Provisional Government, to the soviets through the MRC.

The Committee also began systematic arming of the workers – Red Guards – with the active support of the soldiers. Mixed detachments of armed workers, soldiers and sailors were now seen to be stationed at key points in the city. The capitalists could only look on, wide-eyed with horror, but unable to stem the tide of history.

From his place of hiding, meanwhile, Lenin was directing insistent demands to the Bolshevik leadership that they should prepare the Party to take power. Conditions were overripe for a soviet government, but Lenin feared that some of the old Bolshevik leaders would hesitate at the critical moment. Throughout October, he denounced with increasing anger those he called the “waverers” in the Party.

Lenin understood that in this situation timing was of critical importance. If Bolsheviks were to fail to give a lead and the soviets let slip the opportunity to take power, then the psychology of the workers may have suffered a decisive reverse, leading to disillusionment and inevitable defeat by a new Kornilov.

As it turned out, Lenin’s fears were not without foundation: at the Central Committee meeting that voted in favor of organizing an insurrection, two long-standing Bolshevik leaders, Zinoviev and Kamenev, voted against. Zinoviev argued that “the forces of the opponents are greater than they appear” – but this was merely covering up a lack of confidence in the working class.

That was bad enough, but Zinoviev and Kamenev then published openly their personal opposition to the line being pursued by the Party in a way which exposed to the enemy the plan for insurrection. Lenin fumed at this treacherous conduct, and although it was not acted upon, he even demanded their expulsion from the Party.

But Zinoviev and Kamenev – supported from the sidelines by Stalin, then a little-known figure – were swimming against what was a strong tide in the Party and even more so outside it. The overwhelming majority of the Party, pushed by the now impatient masses, were on the road to power.

As Trotsky later explained, in *Lessons of October*, this episode demonstrated the social law that every serious turning point creates a crisis, even in the leadership of a Marxist party. As with the political rearming of the party in April, so also in October, Lenin had to base himself on the class-conscious traditions of the worker-Bolsheviks to ensure a correct line of march.

The episode also demonstrates the vital importance of the subjective factor in a revolution. The October revolution could not take place spontaneously. It needed a leadership with a conscious understanding of the laws of history, a realistic appreciation of the living forces of the revolution, and from these, a perspective and a goal.

Like a human tidal wave, the Russian masses were hurled in the direction of power. But without a guiding party tied by a million threads to every factory, barracks and village, no order could have been created out of the maelstrom. Likewise, without the conscious role of Lenin and Trotsky guiding the Bolshevik Party itself, the October Revolution would not have taken place, or would have ended in disaster.

The final denouement began on October 24. The Provisional Government at last began to stir itself out of its torpor. It ordered the Military Revolutionary Committee be closed down, and the Bolshevik press be banned. The battleship *Aurora*, whose crew, like those of all big ships and the navy in general was overwhelmingly Bolshevik, was ordered to sail and, for good measure, Kerensky ordered “reliable” units to move to the capital.

In reply, the Military Revolutionary Committee, under Trotsky’s guidance, organized the defense of the Bolshevik press by detachments of soldiers, ordered the *Aurora* to stay put and defend itself from reaction if necessary, and called on all railway workers and troops to hold up any forces advancing towards Petrograd. Kerensky could do nothing.

The MRC was now functioning day and night. There were 200,000 soldiers, up to 40,000 Red Guards and tens of thousands of sailors under its command. All bridges, rail depots, stations, intersections and key buildings were occupied. The Smolny Institute, home to the Petrograd soviet and the Bolshevik Party, was fortified.

On the morning of October 25, the Smolny announced to the world: “The Provisional Government is overthrown. The state power has passed to the hands of the Military Revolutionary Committee”. The last remaining stronghold of the Provisional Government, the Winter Palace, was taken virtually bloodlessly in the next 24 hours.

Power had been taken in Petrograd with barely a shot being fired because of the audacity and determination of the Bolshevik Party and its leadership. In reality, soviet power was consolidated over a period of two or three weeks, but the insurrection, begun on October 12 with the election of the MRC, was only consummated on October 25.

With an overwhelming majority of Bolsheviks and Left SRs, the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets accepted the power presented to it and proceeded to elect the first-ever workers’ government.

In his classic book *Ten Days That Shook the World*, John Reed described how Lenin, coming out of hiding for the first time since July, addressed the Congress and was given a tumultuous welcome. “The trench delegates gaze with all their eyes at this mysterious being whom they had been taught to hate and whom they have learned, without seeing him, to love.” Lenin began his speech simply, saying, “We shall now proceed to construct the socialist order.”

Flame of Revolution

The soviet government kindled the flame of revolution in the minds of workers throughout the world. The October revolution was infused with the finest traditions of the working class: workers’ democracy and workers’ internationalism.

The very first resolution of the Congress was an appeal directed “to all warring peoples and their governments” for a “just, democratic peace.” The Bolsheviks and their supporters understood this as no purely Russian affair, but the beginning of a new world.

Impelled by the horrors of the World War, and with the example of the Russian workers’ government to guide them, the workers of Europe launched themselves in the direction of revolutionary struggle. The German and Austro-Hungarian emperors followed their Russian cousin into oblivion; soviet republics were established in Germany and Hungary; strikes and social upheavals threatened every ruling class. Only the absence of Marxist parties with the same traditions and leadership as the Russian Bolshevik Party prevented the victorious spread of the October revolution in the way Lenin and Trotsky had anticipated.

In their instinct for class self-preservation, the capitalists of Europe, Japan and America forgot the bitter rivalries that had led them to war among themselves a few years earlier. They now turned their attentions to their common enemy. Capitalist states, large and small, sent their armies (21 in all) against the young workers’ republic at one time or another between 1917 and 1921, in an attempt to crush it.

That these attempts failed was due to a combination of factors: the newly-formed revolutionary Red Army, under Trotsky’s leadership, the support and boycotts by workers overseas, and the frequent mutinies of the soldiers and sailors sent against Russia. By 1921, the Revolutionary regime prevailed, although by then isolated and greatly weakened.

The October revolution is rich in lessons for the labor movement today. The exact social conditions of Russia in 1917 are unlikely ever to be repeated, but the methods of Lenin, unbreakable in his determination and his principles, yet flexible in tactics, have a greater relevancy than ever before.

The objective conditions faced by workers today in South Africa, the Philippines and Latin America – and tomorrow in Europe, North America and Japan – are a hundred times better than those of the Bolsheviks. The social

weight of the working class and its potential power have grown immeasurably in the last 70 years.

But the key issue that still needs to be addressed, and the one that stands out in any study of October, is the subjective factor: the question of leadership. No matter how great the courage, self-sacrifice and combativeness of the working class, the socialist transformation of society also needs conscious leadership.

Since the Stalinist reaction, the ideas of Lenin have been distorted beyond recognition in Russia, while that same Stalinism is used to discredit what socialism is. But in both East and West, in the storms and convulsions of the years ahead, the genuine traditions of October will be rediscovered by millions of workers ... and put to good use.

“We Chose the Bolsheviks...”

In many parts of the world, because of the absence of an alternative leadership, social movements have often taken on the mantle of a religious movement of one kind or another. In this light it is interesting how the American journalist, Albert R. Williams, who was in Russia with John Reed in 1917, described how reaction tried to use the Orthodox Church against the Bolsheviks:

“The Bolsheviks made no direct assault upon religion, but separated Church and State. The flow of government funds into the ecclesiastical coffers was stopped. Marriage was declared a civil institution. The monastic lands were confiscated. Parts of the monasteries were turned into hospitals.

“The Patriarch (Archbishop) thundered his protests against these sacrileges but with little effect. The devotion of the masses to the Holy Church proved to be almost as mythical as their devotion to the Czar. They looked at the Church decree giving them hell if they sided with the Bolsheviks. Then they looked at the Bolshevik decree giving them land and factories.” ‘If we must choose’, some said, ‘we choose the Bolsheviks.’ Others chose the Church. Many merely muttered ‘Neechevo’ (it doesn’t matter much), and walked in the church procession one day and in the Bolshevik parade on the next.”

Bourgeoisie’s Last Resort

“In their efforts to befuddle the brains of the masses the bourgeoisie saw an ally in alcohol”, writes Albert Williams. “The city (Petrograd) was mined with wine cellars more dangerous than powder magazines. This alcohol in the veins of the populace meant chaos in the life of the city. With this aim the cellars were opened and the mob invited in to help themselves. Bottles in hand the drunks would emerge from the cellars to fall sprawling on the snow, or rove through the streets, shooting and looting.

“To these pogroms the Bolsheviks replied with machine guns, pouring lead into the bottles – there was no time to break them all by hand. They destroyed three-million rubles-worth of vintage in the vaults of the Winter Palace, some of it there for a century.”

“Tomorrow You May be Ministers

Fyodor Raskolnikov, one of the Bolshevik leaders among the Kronstadt sailors, describes in his memoirs how he found himself in the Kresty Prison, along with Trotsky and other Bolsheviks, after the July days. Noting the way the “politicals” were treated with more caution, or even courtesy compared to other prisoners, he asked why, only to be told by one of his warders: “Here you are today, in prison, but tomorrow perhaps, you may be Ministers.”

Women's & LGBT Liberation in Revolutionary Russia by Emma Quinn

Young people internationally are being politicised by the oppression of women and LGBT people, opening up debates as to how this discrimination and inequality can be ended. EMMA QUINN (Socialist Party, CWI in Ireland) looks at the experience of the Russian Revolution and the radical progressive measures introduced by the Bolsheviks that were seen as part of the initial steps to bring about the full liberation of these two oppressed groupings.

No other event in history has been more distorted by the capitalist establishment than the Russian Revolution. Within revisions of the revolution, the role of women is scarcely mentioned, the massive gains for women won by the revolution even less so.

The complete overthrow of capitalism and landlordism by the Bolshevik Party and Russian working class in 1917 spurred a radical change in society, the likes of which had never been seen before or since. The Bolsheviks were able to take power precisely because they were the voice of the oppressed masses, workers, the poor and women. Wealth inequality and oppression have never been more glaring than today, the combined wealth of the richest 1% will overtake that of the other 99% of the world's population in 2016. Amidst this increasing inequality, the oppression of women and the LGBT community worldwide continues even in the most developed countries and is a hugely politicising and important issue for young people in particular, in Ireland and internationally. In this context it is important to draw out the lessons of the past, and there are none more important than those we can learn from the Russian Revolution.

The Bolsheviks, while stressing the role of the working class as a whole in changing society, recognised that women suffered a double oppression that was routed in capitalism and peasant patriarchy. For the Bolsheviks, the liberation of women was pivotal to the fight for a socialist society. Lenin encapsulated the importance of this in 1920 when he declared that “the proletariat cannot achieve liberty until it has won complete liberty for women”. [i] Women played leading roles in the Bolshevik Party at both national and local levels and the impact of the revolution transformed the consciousness and lives of working class women on a broad scale.

Anti-war agitation and the Bolshevik women

In the run up to the revolution, women played a significant role both in the downfall of the Tsarist regime and the victory of the Bolsheviks. More than any other political force at the time, the Bolsheviks knew and understood the significance of this. When tens of thousands of women took to the streets in February 1917, in the events that triggered the February Revolution, their demands were for justice and peace, as well as bread. The protest erupted on International Women's Day, which was itself introduced to Russia by Bolshevik activist Konkordia Samoiloova only four years previously in 1913.[ii] Bolshevik women played a key organising role in the building of the demonstration. They set up a city-wide women's circle agitating amongst women workers and soldier's wives despite continual harassment by authorities. The Bolshevik Party, including its female members had suffered severe repression from 1914 because of their staunch opposition to World War 1, with many imprisoned or exiled. This and the brutality that the war inflicted on the working class inspired them to commemorate International Women's Day with an anti-war demonstration. On 23 February, the working class of Petrograd spilled onto the streets with women taking the lead calling for people to join them and appealing to soldiers to hold fire and to march with them.

International Women's Day 1917

"On Women's Day, 23 February 1917, a strike was declared at the majority of factories and plants. The women were in a very militant mood – not only the women workers, but the masses of women queuing for bread and kerosene. They held political meetings, they dominated the streets, they moved to the city дума with a demand for bread, they stopped trams. "Comrades, come out!" they shouted enthusiastically. They went to factories and plants and summoned workers to down tools. All in all, Womens Day was a tremendous success and gave rise to the revolutionary spirit" wrote Anna and Mariia Ul'ianov in Pravda on 5 March 1917.[iii]

The Bolsheviks recognised the significance of the radicalisation of women in the summer that followed the February Revolution when a wave of strikes erupted that included laundry workers, the service sector, domestic servants, shop assistants and waitresses. During this period, the Bolsheviks were to the fore of organising women workers. The Bolsheviks, particularly the female members, expended massive effort to reach female workers and soldier's wives and were successfully able to build a base amongst this newly politicised layer of women – despite the difficulties of ingrained sexism, their domestic responsibilities and illiteracy amongst many. Sofia Goncharskaia, a member of the Bolshevik Party, headed the Union of Laundry Workers and played a key role in their action.[iv] Revolutionary women established female study circles amongst strikers in an attempt to politicise and educate the women. Through the strike action, women were pulled into the wider labour struggle and their class consciousness cemented. When the Bolsheviks seized power and over-

threw the provisional government in October, there were more women who stormed the Winter Palace than defended it, though the opposite is often cited.

Most progressive laws in history

On the 17 December 1917, just seven weeks after forming the world's first workers' state, religious marriage was abolished and very easily accessible divorce was legalised. The following month the Family Code was brought into law. The code enshrined legal equality for women and abolished the "illegitimacy" of children. Significantly, and emphasising how vital this was seen to be, the Family Code was introduced by the Bolsheviks while simultaneously trying to end the world war, prevent a civil war, free the peasantry and kick-start industry and the economy.

Throughout the 1920s, the Family Code was added to and each change was accompanied by full public discussion and debate. From its earliest days Russian Socialist propaganda argued for equality for women, but the keystone for the Bolsheviks was women's enslavement in the traditional family. Before the revolution, a woman's life was strictly mapped out – get married, be monogamous, have children be tied to "the eternal drudgery of the kitchen and the nursery".[v] The quality of the lives of women was never considered and their happiness and pleasure were irrelevant. The Bolsheviks immediately set about challenging this and with it the role of the Russian Orthodox Church and patriarchy.

Inessa Armand, director of Zhenotdel, the Women's Bureau that was established, said, "as long as the old forms of the family, home life and child rearing are not abolished it will be impossible to destroy exploitation and enslavement, it would be impossible to build socialism."[vi]

Challenging the traditional family

The revolution made a heroic effort to destroy the so-called 'family hearth' and began to implement plans for a system of social care that included maternity houses, clinics, schools, crèches and kindergartens, social dining rooms and laundries, all aimed to relieve women from the constraints of the home. Paid maternity leave both before and after birth was introduced for women workers and access to nursing rooms in workplaces to allow breastfeeding, with breaks every three hours for new mother, were written into employment laws.

Abortion was legalised in 1920 and was described by Leon Trotsky as being one of a woman's "most important civil, political and cultural rights".[vii] Abortion was free and available through the state, and working women were prioritised.

In November 1918, the first All-Russian Conference of Working Women met, organised by Alexandra Kollontai and Inessa Armand, with over a thousand

women in attendance. The organisers reiterated that women's emancipation went hand in hand with the building of socialism.[viii]

It wasn't long after these changes were made that the forces of reaction launched a civil war on the country that had already been savaged by World War 1. Shortly after the war began, the Women's Bureau, or Zhenotdel, was established. Its aim was to reach out to women, bring them to activity and education and inform them of their new rights. The bureau ran literary classes, political discussions and workshops on how to organise facilities needed in the workplace such as day cares etc. Delegates of women from factories attended education courses run by the bureau that lasted three to six months, and then returned to report to their co-workers.

The Women's Bureau were successful in raising consciousness amongst masses of working women on a range of issues, including child-care, housing and public health and broadened the horizons of thousands of women. By 1922 the number of female members of the now Communist Party exceeded 30,000.

Despite war shortages, the Red Army provided the Women's Bureau with a dedicated train and access to the railways, enabling them to travel around the country, building local branches of the bureau. Thousands of women joined. The branches held small as well as large meetings and discussion circles that specifically discussed issues affecting women.

Kristina Suvorova, a house wife from a small town in the North of the country described the relationship and the sense of inclusion she felt during weekly meetings between soldiers wives like herself and the local Bolshevik party secretary: "We talked about freedom and the equality of women, about warm sinks for rinsing clothes; we dreamed about running water in the apartment... the local party committee treated us with sincere attention, respectfully listened to us, delicately pointed out our errors, little by little taught us wisdom and reason. We felt like we were one happy family."[ix]

Sexual freedom

Throughout the post-revolutionary period the Bolsheviks ensured there was wide and far ranging debate on sexuality, a sea change from the previous regime, even as they struggled to hold out for socialist revolution in other countries, and that came directly from their philosophy of the self-emancipation of the working class.

The changes introduced to the family and the family structure led many to completely change how they approached relationships. In 1921, a survey in Communist Youth showed 21% of men and 14% of women found marriage ideal. 66% of women preferred long term relationships based on love and 10% preferred relationships with different partners. In 1918 there were 7,000 divorces compared to only 6,000 marriages in Moscow.

Alexandra Kollontai defended the radical changes and explained that “The old family in which the man was everything and the woman was nothing, typical family where the women had no will of her own, no time of her own and no money of her own is changing before our very eyes...”[x]

The Bolsheviks believed relationships should be based on choice, personal compatibility and not financial dependence. They attempted to undermine the patriarchal family by providing public services to replace household activities and allow for free leisure time, which they saw as part in parcel to building socialism.

Between 1917-1920s sex debates, explorations and experiments spread across the country. Hundreds of pamphlets, magazines and novels were written about sex. The radicalisation of society didn't stop after the revolution. Pravda printed many articles and letters debating sex. Young people in particular were keen to explore their sexuality, a young woman Berakova wrote in the Red Student 1927:

“I feel girls like us, while we still haven't achieved full equality with men still have sense and vision. The Cinderellas are all gone. Our girls know what they want from a man, without any worries many of them sleep with men because of a healthy attraction. We are not objects or simpletons that men should court, girls know who they choose and with whom they sleep.”[xi]

This was written in a country where only a decade before, abortion, divorce and homosexuality were outlawed.

Prostitution was deliberately decriminalised in 1922, but pimping was outlawed. Clinics that treated women with STIs and provided sex education and job training were opened. Trotsky described prostitution as “the extreme degradation of women in the interests of men who can pay for it”.[xii]

Bolshevik sex crime laws were distinctive in their gender neutrality and rejection of morality and moral language. The law enshrined sex crimes as, “Injurious to the health, freedom and dignity” of the victim. Rape was defined by law as “non-consensual sexual intercourse using either physical or psychological force.”[xiii]

By 1921 the Civil War was over, millions of lives lost, industries destroyed, famine, hunger and disease was rife. The real resources of the state did not correspond with the vision and intentions of the revolutionaries. The economy teetered on the brink of collapse. By 1921, radical measures were demanded and the government introduced New Economic Policy (NEP), which included a limited amount of market mechanisms in an attempt to keep the economy going while they held out for the support of the international working class via another revolution in Germany, a major capitalist economy in which there was a mass socialist working class movement and revolutionary stirrings. The NEP was an attempt to restore production in this context, but resulted in cuts to services, in order to maintain the workers' state while agitating for an international spreading of the revolution.

Given the reality that the state couldn't financially afford to provide for children and it was common for men to abandon mothers, the state began to issue child support orders for women struggling alone to provide for families. The state printed pamphlets and leaflets so women knew their rights. The courts were biased in favour of women and prioritised the child over the financial interest of the men. In one occasion a judge split the payment three ways because the mother had been in a relationship with three potential fathers.

LGBT lives transformed

The Russian Revolution also changed the lives of LGBT people. Under the Tsar, homosexuality was outlawed, "sodomy" illegal; lesbianism, like women's sexuality generally, was completely ignored. After the revolution homosexuality was decriminalised when all anti-gay laws were removed from the Criminal Code in 1922.

In his essay, "Sex and Sexuality in Russia" Jason Yanowitz describes the impact that the revolution had on gay, lesbian and transgender people. Surviving memoirs show many gays and lesbians took the revolution as a chance to live open lives. Same sex marriage was legal, how wide-spread it was is unknown as limited research has been conducted, but at least one court case established its legality. There were people who decided to live as the opposite gender following the revolution and by 1926 it became legal to change your sex on passports. Intersex and trans people received medical care and were not demonised. Research on these issues were state-funded and permission was granted to perform gender reassignment surgeries at the request of the patient. Openly gay people were allowed to serve in government and public positions. Georgy Chicherin, for example, was appointed Commissar for Foreign Affairs in 1918. He was an openly gay man with a flamboyant style. It is inconceivable that such an individual would be given this role by any capitalist state.

In 1923, the Commissar of Health led a delegation to the Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin and described the new laws around homosexuality as being "deliberately emancipatory, widely accepted in society and no one looking to repeal them".[xiv]

Stalinist Counter-Revolution attacks the gains

Years of war against supporters of the Tsar, and imperialist armies intent on smashing the new workers' state, and crucially the inordinate isolation of the revolution in the context of defeats for the German Revolution and other working class uprisings in Europe, created the conditions for a bureaucracy to come to power under Stalin. This represented a political counter-revolution, with Stalin and the bureaucracy using authoritarian measures to smash working class consciousness, activism and democracy at home; using their authority to prevent victories for the socialist movement abroad; all in the interests

of consolidating the privilege of a bureaucracy at the top of a planned economy. This counter-revolution not only moved away from the struggle for socialism, a society that has democracy in every field of work at its heart, but also consciously attacked the gains of women and LGBT people. Progressive laws were retracted. Homosexuality was criminalised again. The patriarchal family was encouraged as a means of social control. In the famous song from the working women's movement of the early 20th century, "Bread and Roses", the line, "the rising of the women means the rising of us all" sums up the need that the bureaucracy had to attack the gains made by women in an effort to regress working class consciousness, activism and agency as a whole.

Incredibly inspiring legacy

The rise of the bureaucracy and Stalin's betrayal of the revolution and reversal of the gains made does not diminish the significance of the Bolsheviks and their programme. Never before had women had such a stake in politics. Never before had a leadership or political force attempted to secure the support of women or the LGBT community and consider their quality of life and happiness. Some of the achievements gained by the Russian Revolution almost a century ago still do not exist in many countries today, including Ireland where the Church and State are still linked, and a heinous constitutional ban on abortion persists. The October Revolution remains an undeniable and inspirational testament to the inextricable connection between the fight against all forms of oppression, and the working class struggle for a socialist change. It's absolutely incredible that, for example, some transgender rights were recognised, decades before the women's liberation and gay liberation movement developed.

The restoration of capitalism in Russia has been disastrous. Neo-liberal capitalism ushered in an era of rapidly declining living standards. This, and the appalling and grave oppression of the LGBTQ community in Russia today point to the utterly reactionary nature of the capitalist system. Capitalism in Russia has meant anything but progress and democracy. Gains made a century ago by the Marxist movement are an anathema to the reactionary Putin regime, one of the most dangerous for LGBTQ people in the world.

The movement that erupted in the South of Ireland around the Marriage Equality Referendum in spring of 2015, and the growing movement in the North for this right, is evidence that working class communities desire social as well as economic equality and are prepared to challenge the establishment. Women in Ireland have borne the brunt of a brutal austerity regime and it was those women who have emerged to play central roles in the referendum as well as in the battle against water charges in the south.

The Russian Revolution shows that the working class is the most powerful force in society and it is only the conscious building of a movement for the 99% that can bring a halt to the thriving inequality for women, for the LGBTQ community and the poor. And like the Bolsheviks did, we must realise that

capitalism simply cannot be defeated without women and in particular working class women, being to the fore of the struggle against the 1%.

[i] VI Lenin, *On the emancipation of Women*, Progress Publishers, 1977, Pg 81

[ii] Jane McDermid and Anna Hillyar, *Midwives of the Revolution – Female Bolsheviks and Women workers in 1917*, UCL Press, 1999, pg 67-68

[iii] *Ibid.* pg 8

[iv] *Ibid.* pg 9

[v] VI Lenin, *On the emancipation of Women*, Progress Publishers, 1977, Pg 83

[vi] Karen M Offen, *European Feminism 1700-1950*, Stanford University Press 2000, Pg 267

[vii] Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, Dover Publications 2004, Pg 113

[viii] Barbara Alpern Engel, *Women in Russia 1700-2000*, Cambridge University Press 2004, pg 143

[ix] *Ibid.* pg 142

[x] Alexandra Kollontai, *Communism and the Family*, 1920

[xi] From Jason Yanowitz's podcast, "Sex and Sexuality in Soviet Russia", <http://wearemany.org/a/2013/06/sex-and-sexuality-in-soviet-russia>

[xii] Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, Dover Publications 2004, Pg 112

[xiii] <http://wearemany.org/a/2013/06/sex-and-sexuality-in-soviet-russia>

[xiv] *Ibid.*

1917 and Black Freedom Movement Legacy by Eljeer Hawkins

The Bolshevik-led Russian Revolution of 1917 was a lightning bolt across the world as the weakest link in the global capitalist chain was broken. In the United States, the idea of the working class, poor, and most oppressed ending the tyranny, violence and private property of the capitalist class was awe inspiring. The Russian Revolution and the establishment of the first democratic workers' republic ushered in a new political paradigm that greatly influenced the black, Caribbean and African diaspora. The leading political and cultural

lights of the historic Black Freedom Movement leaped towards the revolution to learn valuable lessons and methods of struggle.

From Harlem to Russia

This included key activists like black Socialist Party member and labor organizer, A. Philip Randolph, who along with Chandler Owens published the Harlem-based Messenger magazine. They gave their full support to the revolution and were dubbed the Lenin and Trotsky of Harlem.

The revolution influenced the thinking and political program of organizations like the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB) founded by Cyril Briggs, a West Indian-born radical organizer and thinker. The ABB was an all-black organization that combined revolutionary nationalist and communist ideas. It would develop close ties to the Communist Party (CP) and provide an important theoretical strand in the black freedom movement. In the words of historian Mark Solomon, Briggs' ABB "sought to draw together the themes of race patriotism, anti-capitalism, anti-colonialism, and organized defense against racist assault" (Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity: Communists and African-Americans, 1917-1936*).

The Russian Revolution provided artists and activists a new ideological framework to counter the politics of Marcus Garvey's Pan-Africanist Universal Negro Improvement Association, the largest black-led movement at the time, and the reformist middle-class led National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. For example, Jamaican-born activist Claude McKay, Jamaican-born activist and author of the famous poem, "If We Must Die," participated in the 4th Congress of the Communist International in 1922 as a delegate and spent over a year in Russia in discussions with leading members of the Comintern including Leon Trotsky.

Why did black activists draw inspiration from the Russian Revolution and the Bolsheviks? As we point out in our recent pamphlet *Marxism and the Fight for Black Freedom*:

"The Bolsheviks' position on the national question was essential to the triumph of the October revolution. In particular the forceful advocacy of the right to self-determination of all nationalities oppressed by the Tsarist Empire and opposition to every manifestation of Great Russian chauvinism was critical to forging class unity in the course of the revolution."

It was also a key part of the revolution's appeal to radicals among oppressed people the world over.

The Bolsheviks also forced American socialists to rethink their approach to race. As James Cannon, a leading U.S. Marxist, pointed out, "Lenin and the Bolsheviks were distinguished from all others in the international socialist and labor movement by their concern with the problems of oppressed nations and national minorities, and affirmative support of their struggles for freedom, independence and the right of self-determination ...The Russians in the Com-

intern started on the American communists with the harsh, insistent demand that they shake off their unspoken prejudices, pay attention to the special problems and grievances of the American Negroes, go to work among them, and champion their cause in the white community," (On Black Nationalism and Self-Determination, Trotsky).

The Communist Party and Black Freedom

The role of the early Communist Party in the struggle for black freedom is very instructive for workers, youth and people of color trying to build a movement now.

It was not until the 1930s that the Communist Party developed a really significant base in the black working class. The Communist Party's work in the Scottsboro Boys case, defending nine young black men falsely accused of raping two white women in Alabama, was key to developing their base among African Americans.

But tragically, by that stage, the Soviet Union and the Comintern were dominated by Stalinism which led to all its national sections becoming extensions of Kremlin policy which subordinated the class struggle to maintaining the Stalinists' grip on power. In the U.S., the CP's overall role in this period was to act as an obstacle preventing the working class and poor from forging their own mass party independent of the Democrats and the Republicans. The effects of that defeat are still felt today.

But despite the CP's profound political mistakes, their efforts to take up the day-to-day issues facing black workers and build for a working class centered struggle to achieve racial equality within American society remain a powerful example.

The Communist Party work in the north focused on organizing the unemployed, stopping evictions, ending police brutality, and mass union organizing. In the south, the CP was involved in organizing drives in the textile, steel and packing industry and led important strikes like the textile workers' strike in Gastonia, North Carolina in 1929 and the miners' strike in Harlan County, Kentucky in 1931. The CP also tried to organize a sharecroppers union.

They organized anti-racist work in the trade unions against white supremacy and bigotry which resulted in a backlash from some white workers in the South. While this was inevitable in the short term, had the CP pursued a correct approach in building a mass workers party they could have won over a large section of Southern white workers. As it was, the CP grew to 100,000 members at its height with a substantial base among black workers, especially in key Northern cities.

The legacy of the Bolshevik Russian Revolution and the work of the Communist Party among black workers and youth in the 1930s and particularly around the Scottsboro boys case, helped plant the seeds that led to the birth of black freedom movement in the South in the '50s, '60s, and '70s. It also

showed despite all the CP's flaws what a socialist organization with an anti-racist program and roots in the working class could achieve.

“What about Russia” by Pete Dickenson

Did the fall of the USSR prove that socialism will inevitably fail?

This article, by Pete Dickenson, of the Socialist Party (CWI in England and Wales), was originally published on socialistworld.net, the website of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), in 2002.

Millions of people have joined anti-capitalist and anti-globalisation protests internationally; angry at the economic crisis that's wrecking countless lives; at the wars waged by the USA and its imperialist partners, at the oppression, exploitation and environmental destruction of modern-day capitalist society.

Quite rightly socialists direct their main fire against those responsible for the present state of affairs. Official spokespeople for anti-globalisation campaigns often confine themselves to saying what they're against and don't explain what the alternative is, or at best put forward inadequate slogans such as “make the rich pay”.

The anti-globalisation movement cannot be sustained and built unless a convincing socialist alternative is put forward, which says what we're for as well as what we're against. However some will immediately ask “what about Russia? Surely, the collapse of the Soviet Union proved that socialism failed”. To answer this, you need to look at the history and development of the former Soviet Union.

Since the USSR collapsed, academics have been busy rewriting history. One of the new myths is that capitalism before 1917 was developing rapidly and successfully in Russia and the revolution in that year cut across this.

Certainly there was a feverish growth of industry in a few big cities in the Czarist empire, (the Czar was autocratic ruler of a Russian empire stretching from Poland to Alaska), but this activity depended on profits generated by impoverished, super-oppressed workers herded into massive factories.

At the same time, the new capitalist class completely failed to transform the country into a modern industrialised society. In particular, it remained dominated by neo-feudal landlords, ruling over an exploited peasantry only recently released from serfdom. There was no sign of the development of an efficient agricultural sector, run on capitalist lines and capable of supporting wide-scale urban industry.

Also, crucially, the oppression of the empire's non-Russian peoples continued unabated during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, resulting in a seething discontent among them – a bomb ticking away.

These factors undermined the system's stability and created the conditions for revolution. The trigger was the horrific conditions resulting from the first world war, where millions of peasants were slaughtered in the trenches and the country gradually bled to death.

The October 1917 socialist revolution, led by Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolshevik party, was unique – for the first time the capitalist system had been overthrown and a workers' state established. It was based on soviets – committees of workers and soldiers created spontaneously during the revolution to organise activity, that were later to become the organs through which the new society would be built.

Initially the soviets were democratic bodies where strict controls were imposed on elected representatives to prevent them usurping their positions.

Workers' support

THE SUCCESSFUL overthrow of capitalism in Russia caused the ruling classes throughout the world to mount a cruel and bloody civil war which devastated the country and killed millions.

All the main Western countries, including Britain and the USA, sent armies into the country to aid pro-Czarist forces trying to overthrow the new socialist government. But the world's first workers' state emerged victorious due to the Russian workers' and peasants' heroism and self-sacrifice in trying to build a new society.

Victory would have been much harder though if the Bolshevik government had not had support from workers in the West, because the main powers dared not intervene more widely for fear of provoking indignation and revolution in their own countries.

But victory came at a price, since the most class-conscious workers were killed in the war, making it easier for the careerist and the corrupt to infiltrate the soviets and ultimately take them over.

This process was accelerated by the terrible conditions. The USSR was ravaged by famine and disease and devastated by economic dislocation resulting from World War One and the civil war. It took years of back-breaking effort to re-organise society just to get it back to the pre-war level.

In appalling circumstances of a struggle to survive, speculators and careerists prospered and each looked for ways to build their political influence. Gradually the soviets' lower ranks came under their control as they formed alliances with demoralised workers' leaders. They then looked for support higher up in the bureaucracy that was emerging.

They found what they were after in Joseph Stalin, originally a minor figure in the revolution, but hungry for personal power. He saw a chance to consolidate his position by allying himself with the new layer of corrupt bureaucrats.

As a result, by the late 1920s, all vestiges of democracy had been removed from Soviet society by Stalin and his supporters, despite a heroic effort by socialists around Leon Trotsky to defend the October revolution's democratic principles.

European powder keg

WAS THIS degeneration inevitable as the critics hostile to socialism claim, implying that the revolution itself was counter-productive and futile? Lenin, the leader of the revolution, had no illusions of the difficulties facing the Bolshevik government.

He believed, however, that a revolution in Russia would be part of a Europe-wide working-class movement to overthrow their oppressors. When the opportunity arose to take power in October 1917, he had no hesitation in pressing forward, even though Russia's poverty and backwardness made for a very difficult environment to build socialism.

Lenin correctly foresaw that Europe was a powder keg, due to conditions created by the world war, and that a successful uprising in Russia would be a spur to workers in other more developed countries like Germany to take power. The German workers would then come to the aid of their comrades in Russia and ease the difficulties they faced, enabling a healthy democratic workers' state to be built.

This perspective answered the argument of right-wing workers' leaders, who used Marx's writings to oppose the revolution, because he envisaged socialism first starting in the most advanced capitalist country not the most backward.

Lenin's prediction of revolutionary turmoil throughout Europe after imperialist world war and the Russian revolution proved correct. Unfortunately all these attempts to overthrow capitalism were unsuccessful due partly to the revolutionary workers' mistakes and inexperience, but mainly due to betrayals by the leaders of the European socialist parties and trades unions.

This failure was not however pre-ordained; the outcome could only be determined during the struggle itself and, particularly in Germany, the situation was on a knife-edge. Nevertheless, the result was that the world's first workers' state was left isolated and impoverished.

This development allowed a layer of demoralised and corrupt bureaucrats to consolidate their position, because by this time, only the intervention of the international working class, with its democratic traditions, could have dislodged them.

The new bureaucratic caste's wiping out of the remnants of democratic workers' control of society was ultimately to lead to the collapse of the Soviet Union itself.

Colossal wastage

IN THE early 1920s Russia's new government were forced to re-introduce a widespread capitalist market to revive the economy from the devastation inflicted on it. This successfully boosted food production but also created a new class of rich farmers called kulaks.

Socialist opponents of Stalin, particularly Leon Trotsky, warned that the kulaks' economic power would eventually grow so much that they would threaten the regime. Stalin ignored this for years, but then panicked when danger was imminent in the late twenties and took drastic steps to transform Russia from a predominantly agricultural to an industrial society.

A five-year plan was introduced to build up heavy industry at breakneck speed and a programme of repression implemented to "liquidate the Kulaks as a class". The new line was given an ideological cover under the slogan of building "socialism in one country", which consciously rejected the internationalism that until then was at the heart of socialist thinking.

Much to Stalin's surprise, the drive to industrialise made spectacular gains. Growth targets were raised every few months as production exceeded the plan. Within a decade the Soviet Union was an industrial giant rivalling the capitalist powers.

How was this achieved? This transformation was unprecedented – capitalist countries had taken centuries of development to get to this point. The driving force in Russia was the plan of production itself; freed from the shackles of the market system, then in its deepest crisis after the Wall Street crash. There seemed no limit to growth.

The allocation of resources directly by the state planning body, rather than by the "hidden hand" of market forces, ensured a staggering pace of growth.

But the downside to the economic miracle was the huge wastage, up to 30% of production, due to the bungling, corruption and bad planning inherent in the undemocratic command system of economic management. The quality of goods was bad; Trotsky called poor quality the 'Achilles heel' of the planned economy.

The only way round this problem was to introduce a democratic system of control over production where consumers would have real power to ensure that the goods produced were both fit for purpose and made in the right quantities.

The re-introduction of the soviets on democratic lines would have achieved this, but Stalin would not contemplate such a course. Any vestige of democracy would have threatened his regime which, despite the surface calm, was unstable.

Much of the new infrastructure to support industry was built by armies of slave labour political prisoners, where millions perished due to the fiendish conditions imposed on them. The survivors of the camps and the super-exploited workers would have taken a swift revenge if Stalin had loosened the noose for a moment.

Unaccountable bureaucracy

THE RESILIENCE of the planning system was shown again after World War Two when society was rapidly rebuilt after being virtually demolished by the Nazi rampage. By the 1960s the Soviet Union was at its peak, a pioneer of space travel, a superpower rivalled only by the USA. The statistics below demonstrate the economic situation at that time.

The first table shows that in the production of basic industrial commodities, the USSR was in the same league as the main capitalist powers although it never overtook the USA.

The second table shows a more contradictory picture on consumer goods. For simple goods such as footwear there was comparability, but in technology based industries like artificial fibres there was a huge gap which kept increasing over the next 25 years.

It also shows that production of food lagged behind, a legacy of the disastrous forced collectivisation of agriculture in the 1930s, which the USSR never recovered from.

Nonetheless after Soviet leader Khrushchev boasted that the USSR would overtake the West, Britain's then prime minister Macmillan commissioned a secret report to see if it was possible. The research concluded that, on the basis of the then available evidence, it could happen.

But instead the gap between the USSR and the West gradually increased from the 1960s. By the 1980s the Soviet economy was at a standstill. How can this be explained?

Two fundamental inter-linked factors were involved: undemocratic bureaucratic planning could not cope with the needs of a modern, technology-based consumer society while the command system of industrial management failed.

During the Stalin period, bureaucrats were subjected to a carrot and stick approach. They were richly rewarded for reaching planning targets but exposed to fierce reprisals if they failed (one aim of the great purges of the 1930s was to terrorise this group).

This approach 'worked' in the early period. The material incentives were massive particularly since they were starting from a very low base, and the fear factor was terrifying.

By the 1960s, however, repression had eased following Stalin's death. The material incentive was also weaker, since the bureaucrats by then already had an opulent life-style, so managers were content to sit back and enjoy life. Their main priority was to defend their privileges, the development of the economy was of minor concern for them.

The other inter-linked reason contributing to economic decline was the breakdown of the planning system. In the first period of Soviet development the task was to develop basic industries and infrastructure, relatively simple from a planning angle.

There was huge wastage because of the undemocratic methods employed, but the inherent advantages of planning over the market led to dramatically successful results. The USSR also had an ample supply of labour from the peasantry, most of the economic growth was due to putting these people into the labour force.

However after the basic industries were built, the job was to orientate the economy to the mass production of consumer goods. This task involved increasing the productivity of labour by applying modern technology.

This is more complicated from a planning viewpoint, but by the 1960s new planning techniques using computers would have made this technically possible. What was missing was the essential element of democratic control in allocating resources, feeding back consumers' needs to the planning bodies and acting upon them.

The bureaucrats were unaccountable to the consumer, and indifferent to their needs, for reasons discussed above, so nothing happened. As a result the economy went into long-term decline and came to a halt almost completely in the mid 1980s.

Lessons of democracy

THE EFFECT of the economic stagnation was to demoralise large sections of the ruling caste, some of whom began to consider a move to capitalism. However Gorbachev, the Soviet leader from 1985 wanted to reform the system, by bringing in elements of the market and decentralisation to make the command economy work more efficiently (in his opinion).

He gave the Soviet republics huge powers to make autonomous decisions. This policy unwittingly led to political disintegration very rapidly due to an explosive growth of nationalism, which had been suppressed during the Soviet period, but not eliminated.

The process proved unstoppable and the first workers' state collapsed ignominiously. Capitalism, with all its horrors, emerged from the ashes, literally in many cases.

This historical defeat for the working class can be traced back to the eradication of democracy in the Soviet political system in the 1920s which in turn led to economic failure and ultimately political collapse.

The USSR's failure was not a failure of real socialism. Genuine socialism must be based on a non-capitalist planned economy but also has to be linked, in order to function efficiently, to democratic controls at all levels of society. This requirement was not met in Russia.

Even if it is accepted that democracy in the system was vital, critics may still say that the degeneration of the 1917 revolution into dictatorship was inevitable. However this was not the case.

Although poverty and backwardness in Russia created fertile ground for Stalinist totalitarianism, the international movement that the events of 1917 trig-

gered could have cut across this development, by the working class in an advanced country like Germany taking power and coming to the aid of their Russian comrades.

This outcome, which was in the balance, would have made a decisive difference and resulted in history taking a completely different course.

COMPARITIVE FIGURES FOR PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION, 1960s
Production per head of population 1964

	France	Italy	Britain	WGer- many	USA	USSR
Electric Power (kwh)	2051	1474	3418	2835	5984	2013
Sul-phuric Acid (kg)	56	54	59	62	108	34
Cement (kg)	448	436	315	579	319	285

Consumption per head of population 1962-3

	USSR	USA	Britain	France
Meat (kg)	39	85	71	78
Artificial textiles (kg)	1.6	6.7	6.3	5.0
Leather Shoes	2.1	3.7	2.8	2.3

Source: E Mandel, Marxist Economic Theory Vol. 2 Merlin Press 1968 p 558

Lenin – the original dictator? by Per Åke Westerlund

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VLADIMIR LENIN, the main leader of the Russian revolution, made the following insightful observation in mid-1917: “During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes constantly hounded them, received their theories with the most savage malice, the most furious hatred, and the most unscrupulous campaigns of lies and slander. After their death, attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons, to canonise them, so to say, and to hallow their names to a certain extent for the ‘consolation’ of the oppressed classes and with the object of duping the latter, while at the same time robbing the revolutionary theory of its substance, blunting its revolutionary edge and vulgarising it”. (State and Revolution)

In a moment of exaltation when US troops conquered Baghdad on April 10 last year, the US Defense Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, proclaimed that “Saddam Hussein is now taking his rightful place alongside Hitler, Stalin, Lenin, Ceausescu in the pantheon of failed, brutal dictators”. Eighty years after the death of Lenin, the ruling classes globally still link him to the most horrific dictators.

Lenin died 80 years ago, on 21 January 1924, but had by then been seriously ill and away from political work since the end of 1922. Since his death, however, the ruling classes globally have made no attempt at canonisation. Their fear of the Russian revolution, ‘ten days that shook the world’, led them to continue with ‘the most savage malice, the most furious hatred and the most unscrupulous campaigns of lies and slander’. Never before or after have the capitalists been closer to losing their profits and their power worldwide than in the period 1917-20.

Anti-Lenin campaigns are used to scare workers and youth away from revolutionary ideas and struggle. For socialists today, it is therefore necessary to answer the lies and slanders directed against Lenin and the Russian revolution.

The image of an unbroken line from Lenin to Joseph Stalin, and on to Leonid Brezhnev and Mikhail Gorbachov, is maybe the biggest falsification in history. Publications like *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* – by Stephane Courtois, Nicolas Werth, Jean-Louis Panne, Andrzej Paczkowski, Karel Bartosek, Jean-Louis Margolin (Harvard University Press, 1999) – say nothing about the policies of the Bolsheviks led by Lenin or the decisions made immediately after the October revolution in 1917. They hide the enormous struggles of the 1920s, started by Lenin himself, to stop the rise of

Stalinism. They cannot explain the one-sided civil war Stalin conducted in the 1930s against anyone connected to Lenin.

One distinguished historian who did differentiate between Lenin and Stalin was EH Carr, who described how Lenin's regime encouraged the working class to take an active part in the business of the party and the nation. That position on democracy and workers rights' was completely opposite to the dictatorship established by Stalin. It was the workers' councils, the soviets, which took power in October 1917, and it was their elected and recallable delegates who appointed the government. Workers' rights, including the right to strike, were enshrined. The setting up of factory committees and collective bargaining were encouraged. The Bolsheviks were not in favour of banning any party, not even the bourgeois parties, as long as they did not take up armed struggle. In the beginning, the only organisation banned was the Black Hundreds, which was made up of mobs organised as a proto-fascist party specialising in physical attacks on radicals and pogroms against Jewish people.

Stalin's counter-revolution

THE BOLSHEVIK GOVERNMENT proved to be the most progressive in history in its first decisions. These included new laws on women's rights, the right to divorce and to abortion. Anti-semitism and racism were forbidden by law. Oppressed nations were given the right to decide their fate. It was the first state which attempted to create a new socialist order, despite terrible material conditions.

Lenin's Soviet Union and his political programme were smashed by Stalinism. The coming to power of the Stalinist bureaucracy meant a counter-revolution in every field, apart from the nationalised economy. Rights for workers, women and oppressed nations were all put under the iron heel. Instead of 'dying away', which was Lenin's perspective for the apparatus of the workers' state, it grew into an oppressive military-police machine of gigantic proportions. Stalinism was a nationalistic dictatorship, a parasitic organism living on the body of the planned economy.

This was not an inevitable result of the workers' revolution, but was caused by concrete circumstances, the isolation of the revolution – particularly the defeat of the German revolution of 1918-23 – and the economic backwardness of Russia. Stalinism, however, could not take power without resistance, without a bloody political counter-revolution. Stalin's purges and witch-hunts in 1936-38 were not blind actions, but the response of the bureaucracy towards growing opposition to its rule. The main accused in the show-trials was Lenin's ally from 1917, Leon Trotsky, and his followers, who were imprisoned and executed by the thousands. Trotsky – who defended and developed the programme of Lenin and the Bolsheviks – was expelled from the Soviet Union in 1929 and murdered by Stalin's hired assassin in Mexico in 1940. (See *Socialism Today* No.49, a special commemorative issue on the sixtieth anniversary of Trotsky's assassination) Trotsky became the main enemy of Stalin's regime because he had actually led the revolution in 1917 alongside Lenin (while

Stalin had been hesitant and remained on the sidelines), he analysed and exposed the terror regime of Stalin in detail, and he had a programme for overthrowing Stalinism and for the restoration of workers' democracy.

Bourgeois politicians and social democrats in the West also attacked Trotsky as a revolutionary Marxist leader. They understood that his ideas were not just a threat to Stalin but to the capitalists' power as well. During the Moscow Trials in 1936, the Norwegian government did not allow Trotsky, who was then in Norway, to publicly defend himself. When Stalin in 1943 closed down the Communist International (which was set up in 1918 to link revolutionary groups across the world), in order to achieve an alliance with the US and Britain, the New York Times commented that Stalin finally had renounced 'Trotsky's idea of world revolution.

Stalin's former spy chief, Leopold Trepper, later wrote: "But who did protest at that time? Who rose up to voice his outrage? The Trotskyites can lay claim to this honour. Following the example of their leader, who was rewarded for his obstinacy with the end of an ice axe, they fought Stalinism to the death and they were the only ones that did... Today, the Trotskyites have a right to accuse those who once howled along with the wolves". (The Great Game, 1977) We can compare his comment with Winston Churchill's, who in the 1950s named Stalin as a 'great Russian statesman'.

Before the political counter-revolution of Stalinism, the leadership under Lenin and Trotsky did not act from their own interests as first priority. Principles guided their actions, above all to take the workers' struggle forward on a world scale. They admitted when they were forced to retreat or compromise.

Stalinism, on the other hand, used the conditions from the years of civil war and mass starvation to build an entirely new political system. Stalinist society was described as a perfect ideal, a dream world. Dictatorship was introduced, not only in the Soviet Union, but in all the 'communist' parties internationally. This continued even when the economies of the Stalinist countries were at their peak in the 1950s and 1960s. The living debates and traditions of the Bolshevik party had been terminated in the 1920s and 1930s.

Stalinism in words kept a connection to the revolution, Marx and Lenin, and turned them into religious icons because this helped strengthen these regimes. The bureaucracy wanted to take the credit for the revolution, which in itself is proof of its attractive power. The end result, however, was to discredit the very concepts of Marxism and 'Leninism' in the minds of workers and oppressed people globally. 'Leninism' became the slogan of a parasitic dictatorship.

This Stalinist falsification of Lenin's ideas and of Marxism was accepted without question by the social democrats and the ruling classes internationally. They all had an interest in hiding Lenin's real ideas. Trotsky and his supporters defended the political heritage of Lenin, and were opposed to the cult of personality which Stalin constructed. In contrast to superficial criticism from politicians in the West, Trotsky had a scientific and class-based programme against Stalinism. Trotsky, for example, warned against Stalin's military-led,

forced collectivisation of agriculture in 1929-33 (while some anti-Lenin propagandists claim that it was Lenin who forced through collectivisation).

In the book, *Revolution Betrayed*, written in 1936, Trotsky explained in detail how Stalin's policies were the opposite to Lenin's: on culture, the family, agriculture, industry, democratic and national rights, etc. On all international issues, Stalinism broke with the programme and methods of Lenin, above all the need for the independence of the working class: in the Chinese revolution of 1925-27, the struggle against fascism in Germany, the Spanish revolution in the 1930s, and in all other decisive struggles. Today's anti-Lenin commentators, by stressing that revolutionary struggle is 'unrealistic', thereby end up in Stalin's camp against Lenin and Trotsky.

1917: what was achieved?

THE REVOLUTION IN February 1917 overthrew the tsar's dictatorial regime. The provisional government which replaced the tsar, however, continued the policies which had led to revolution in the first place. The horrors of the first world war continued, the land question remained unsolved, national oppression was actually stepped up, hunger in the cities worsened, there were no elections and huge repression was directed against workers and poor peasants. These developments, hardly mentioned by bourgeois historians, laid the basis for the Bolsheviks' mass support and for the October revolution.

While Rumsfeld and Co rely on mere slogans, books like *The Black Book of Communism* are an attempt to give a factual and historical justification to Rumsfeld's slander. Nicolas Werth, who wrote the chapter on the Bolsheviks, attempts to virtually avoid the politics of the autumn of 1917. He briefly skirts over the decrees on peace and land agreed at the second Soviet congress, the meeting which elected the new government led by Lenin.

It was this meeting which adopted the policies demanded by the poor since February, and which they themselves had already started to implement – a drastic redistribution of land. It was the Bolsheviks who actually implemented the slogan of the Social Revolutionary party, 'land to the toiler' – land to the 100 million peasants and landless. (The Social Revolutionaries had wide support among the peasantry, but split along class lines in 1917. Its left wing joined the Soviet government – before attempting to overthrow it in 1918.) Thirty thousand rich landowners, hated by all layers of the peasantry, lost their land without compensation.

The decree of the Bolshevik government on peace was a decision of world historic proportions, longed for by millions of soldiers and their families for more than three years. This effect of the Russian revolution and the subsequent German revolution a year later, in ending the first world war (in November 1918), is completely buried by the slander campaigns against Lenin and the revolution.

Werth, in *The Black Book*, writes that the Bolsheviks "seemed" to appeal to non-Russian peoples to liberate themselves. In fact, the government declared

all people equal and sovereign, advocated the right to self-determination for all peoples, including the right to form their own states, and the abolition of all national and religious privileges.

The decisions to abolish the death penalty in the army and to ban racism, which show the real intentions of the workers' regime, are nowhere mentioned in *The Black Book*. The same goes for Soviet Russia being the first country to legalise the right to abortion and divorce. Entirely new, too, was the right for workers' organisations and ordinary people to use printing presses, making freedom of the press more than empty words. The fact that criticism could be raised on the streets is verified by many eyewitness reports. The reformist Mensheviks and the anarchists operated in total freedom and could, for example, organise mass demonstrations at the funerals of Georgi Plekhanov and Prince Pyotr Kropotkin (in 1918 and 1921) respectively.

At the third Soviet congress, the first after October 1917, the Bolshevik majority increased further. The new executive committee elected at this congress included 160 Bolsheviks and 125 Left Social Revolutionaries. But there were also representatives of six other parties, among them two Menshevik leaders. Soviet democracy was spreading to every region and village, where workers and poor peasants established new organs of power, local soviets, which overthrew the old rulers. Soviet rule meant that some smaller privileged groups in society did not have the right to vote: those who hired others for profit or lived off the work of others, monks and priests, plus criminals. This can be compared with most European countries where, at that time, the majority of workers and all women lacked trade union rights and the right to vote.

Lenin explained the historic importance of the revolution: "The Soviet government is the first in the world (or strictly speaking, the second, because the Paris Commune [1871] began to do the same thing) to enlist the people, specifically the exploited people, in the work of administration. The working people are barred from participation in bourgeois parliaments (they never decide important questions under bourgeois democracy, which are decided by the stock exchange and the banks) by thousands of obstacles, and the workers know and feel, see and realise perfectly well that the bourgeois parliaments are institutions alien to them, instruments for the oppression of the workers by the bourgeoisie, institutions of a hostile class, of the exploiting minority".

At the same time, Lenin always had an internationalist perspective. He even warned against using the Russian experience as a model to be followed everywhere: "Proletarian democracy, of which Soviet government is one of the forms, has brought a development and expansion of democracy unprecedented in the world, for the vast majority of the population, for the exploited and working people". "It should be observed that the question of depriving the exploiters of the franchise is a purely Russian question, and not a question of the dictatorship of the proletariat in general". (*The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, 1918)

Lenin noted that a victory for the working class "in at least one of the advanced countries" would change the role of the Russian revolution: "Russia will cease to be the model and will once again become a backward country (in

the ‘Soviet’ and the socialist sense)”. (Left-wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder, 1920)

Anti-Soviet ‘crusade’

IN PETROGRAD, THE workers’ representatives took power in October almost without any bloodshed. If anything, the Bolsheviks were too lenient with their enemies. In Moscow, generals who attempted to stop the workers with arms were not imprisoned if they promised not to do it again!

The enemies of the Russian revolution, on the other hand, acted according to the motto that against the Bolsheviks all methods were permissible, noted Victor Serge in his book, *Year One of the Russian Revolution* (1930). First they hoped that the military would crush the new government directly after October. When that failed, they instigated uprisings and sabotage, while re-arming a counter-revolutionary ‘White’ army.

The oppressed nationalities – the Baltic countries, Finland, Ukraine, etc – had been under direct rule from the provisional government set up in February 1917. Given the possibility of national self-determination after October, the national bourgeoisie distinguished itself, not by the wish for independence, but by inviting imperialist troops to attack the revolutionary government. In Ukraine, the German army expressed its gratitude by banning the very ‘radan’ (parliament) which had invited it. National rights were not guaranteed in Ukraine until Soviet power under the Bolsheviks had prevailed.

The Swedish anti-Lenin author, Staffan Skott, unintentionally proves the liberating effect of the revolution, and how this was later crushed by Stalin: “Under the tsar, the Ukrainian and Belorussian languages had not been allowed. After the revolution, the independent culture in both countries developed quickly, with literature, theatre, newspapers and art. Stalin, however, did not want ‘independence’ to go too far and become real independence. After the 1930s there was not much left of Ukrainian and Belorussian literature – almost all authors had been shot or sent to prison camps to die”.

After October, “people from the left-wing of the Social Revolutionaries” were the only ones cooperating with the Bolsheviks, Werth writes in *The Black Book*, to create an impression of Bolshevik isolation. But he has to admit that, at the end of 1917, there was no serious opposition able to challenge the government. The weakness of the counter-revolutionary violence, at that stage, also gives a true picture of the intentions of the Bolsheviks. If Lenin’s aim was to start a civil war – which *The Black Book* and others claim – why then did the civil war not start until the second half of 1918?

In the first half of 1918, a total of 22 individuals were executed by the ‘Red’ side – less than in Texas under governor George W Bush. Peaceful politics still dominated. There were lively debates in the soviets between Bolsheviks and other political currents.

However, the officer caste and the bourgeoisie in Russia and internationally were determined to act militarily. The civil war in Finland in the spring of

1918, where the White side won at the cost of 30,000 workers and poor peasants killed, was a dress rehearsal for what would happen in Russia. With the aim of invading and defeating the Russian revolution, a new alliance was quickly formed by the two imperialist blocs which had been at war with each other for three years (15 million died in the first world war). British war propaganda against Germany totally ignored the German invasion of Russia in the spring of 1918.

It was Churchill who in 1919 coined the expression 'the anti-Soviet crusade of 14 nations'. By then the Soviet government was surrounded by the White generals, Pyotr Krasnov and Anton Denikin, in the South, the German army in the West, and Czech forces in the East.

Most of the invasion took place in 1918. British troops arrived in the port of Murmansk, North-West Russia, in June. Two months later, British and French forces took control of Arkhangelsk, with the US joining them later. The US, with 8,000 troops, and Japan with 72,000, invaded Vladivostok in the Far-East in August. German and Turkish forces occupied Georgia, later under British control. Georgia became the base for General Denikin's army. Among others involved were Romania, a legion of Czech former prisoners of war, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and the Baltic countries.

On 30 August 1918, the Bolshevik leader, Moisei Uritsky, was murdered, and Lenin was seriously wounded in an attempt on his life. Two months earlier, the right wing of the Social Revolutionaries had killed another Bolshevik, V Volodarsky, press commissar for the Petrograd soviet. The increasing blood lust of the opposition parties was again proved in Baku, capital of Azerbaijan. The Bolsheviks lost their majority in the Baku soviet, where Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries welcomed British troops to 'establish democracy'. Contrary to the mythology, the Bolshevik leaders peacefully resigned – but were then arrested and executed on the order of the British general, W Thompson. The realities of civil war triumphed over the preparedness of the Bolsheviks to offer other parties the possibility to win a majority within the working class.

The 'red terror' proclaimed by the Bolsheviks in September 1918 had nothing in common with what today is called terrorism. The 'red terror' was public, agreed by the Soviet power, and directed against those who had declared war against the government and the soviets. It was in defence of the revolution and the liberation of the oppressed, against imperialist exploitation of colonies and slaves.

The examples of Finland and Baku had shown to what lengths the 'White terror', the counter-revolutionary generals, were prepared to go. Even Werth in *The Black Book* is obliged to refer to the mood in the White camp. 'Down with the Jews and the commissars', was one of the slogans used against Lenin and Grigori Zinoviev, a prominent Bolshevik (eventually framed in one of Stalin's show trials and executed in 1936). The brutality of the civil war in Ukraine can only be explained by the anti-semitism of the counter-revolution. The White soldiers were fighting under slogans such as, 'Ukraine to the Ukrainians, without Bolsheviks or Jews', 'Death to the Jewish scum'. The Red Army smashed Cossack uprisings which were linked to Admiral Aleksandr Kolchak's forces.

The Black Book claims the Cossacks were especially persecuted, but their intentions were clear and uncompromising: 'We Cossacks... are against the communists, the communes (collective farming) and the Jews'. Werth estimates that 150,000 people were killed in the anti-semitic pogroms conducted by Denikin's troops in 1919.

Another alternative?

IN RUSSIA IN 1917 and the following years there was no possibility of a 'third road' between Soviet power and a reactionary military-police dictatorship. The Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries, in particular, put the issue to the test. Already during the first world war, major parts of the Menshevik leadership had capitulated and joined the chauvinist or patriotic camp, supporting tsarist Russia in the imperialist war. When the soviets dissolved the Constituent Assembly in January 1918, the two parties entered into negotiations with French and British representatives. In cooperation with the bourgeois Cadet party (Constitutional Democrats) they established a new constituent assembly in Samara, South-West Russia, in June 1918, under Czech protection. This assembly dissolved the soviets in the region. Massacres were conducted against Bolsheviks. Even the newspapers of the assembly itself referred to "an epidemic of lynchings".

The final argument from the anti-Lenin, anti-revolutionary campaign is that 'communism' has killed more than 85 million people – the arch anti-communist, RJ Rummel, says 110 million. But even an examination of the figures given in The Black Book counters the claim that Stalinism and the regime of Lenin were one and the same. Stephane Courtois claims that 20 million of the 'victims of communism' were killed in the Soviet Union. For the period 1918-23, however, the number of victims is said to be 'hundreds of thousands'. That figure from the civil war can be compared, for example, to the 600,000 killed by the US bombing of Cambodia in the 1970s, or the two million killed as a result of the military coup in Indonesia in the 1960s. The Black Book places responsibility for all victims of the civil war in Russia, including the 150,000 murdered in the pogroms organised by the White army, on Lenin and the Bolsheviks. According to Serge, 6,000 were executed by the Soviet authorities in the second half of 1918, as civil war raged, less than the number of dead in one single day at the battle of Verdun in the first world war.

From the period up to Lenin's death, Courtois also counts five million dead as a result of starvation in 1922. The Russian communists and their supporters internationally showed how this catastrophe was a result of the economic embargo and conscious starvation policy of the Western powers from 1919 onwards. Exports to and imports from Russia were in practice zero. Sweden was among those countries blockading Soviet Russia.

Even the 'body-counting', anti-Lenin academics end up recording that most of the deaths "caused by communism" listed in The Black Book on Communism took place under Stalin or subsequent Stalinist regimes. That, however, does not change the position of Courtois or other anti-communists. They do not

warn against Stalinism, but against “the desire to change the world in the name of an ideal”.

The Red Army prevailed in the civil war because of the mass support for the social revolution, both in Russia and abroad. It was the threat of revolution at home which forced the imperialist powers to withdraw from Russia. Within six months of the launch of the Communist International in 1918, one million members had joined. Half of them lived in countries and regions previously ruled by the Russian tsar. The new communist parties internationally, however, did not have the experience of the Bolsheviks, who built the party through two decades of struggles – the revolution in 1905, the mass support of the Bolsheviks in 1913-14, etc. The defeats of the revolutions in the rest of Europe – above all in Germany – laid the basis for Stalinism. Now it is time for a new generation of socialists to learn the real lessons of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, in preparation for impending world-shaking events.