

КОММУНИСТИЧЕ

50c

70th Anniversary

# RUSSIAN REVOLUTION 1917

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*INQABA YA BASEBENZI*  
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# The Russian Revolution, 1917

The Russian Revolution was the greatest step forward in history.

The working class, though a minority, led all oppressed and exploited people in smashing the Tsarist dictatorship. Taking state power through their Soviets (councils), the armed workers overthrew landlordism and capitalism, laying the first foundations for a state owned and planned economy.

Tragically, the workers' democracy established in October 1917 became isolated and was later destroyed by the rise of Stalinist dictatorship. The way to genuine socialism has been barred by a new bureaucratic elite.

Nevertheless, the Russian Revolution itself remains a lighthouse to the black working class of South Africa and to struggling workers and youth everywhere. Seventy years on, its lessons are no less vital for us to study today.

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(Reprint of articles appearing in *Militant*, Marxist weekly of the British labour movement, to mark the 70th anniversary of the Russian Revolution.)

## Anton Nilson

70 years ago Anton Nilson fought alongside Lenin, Trotsky, and countless others to preserve the gains of the October Revolution against the armies of imperialism and the White guards in the civil war.

His political commitment to the working class had begun 12 years earlier when, inspired by the 1905 revolution in Russia, he joined the Swedish Young Socialists. In 1908 he was sentenced to death in Sweden for blowing up a ship in which scabs, brought from England to break strikes in the textile industry and on the docks, were being housed.

Fury at the sentence among workers in Sweden and abroad forced this to be commuted to life imprisonment.

By 1917 the turmoil in Russia was reverberating amongst workers in Sweden and on May Day 10 000 workers demonstrated outside the prison demanding Anton's release. They threatened to storm the prison, and the government issued an order that if this happened he was to be shot. The workers were persuaded to remain outside the prison, and Anton kept his life. However, the demonstration precipitated the resignation of the right-wing government, and within a few months he was free again.

## Revolution

In September 1918 he arrived in a Russia gripped by the fervour of the revolution and arming itself against the counter-revolution. He became a pilot in the newly formed Red Army and organised the air defence of Moscow, later taking command of the air-force on the Baltic Front. For his services his comrades elected him to receive an award from Trotsky.

The scarcity of fuel during the civil war made flying hazardous: "We had to use wood alcohol... this created a lot of black smoke, with flames belching out behind. Luckily the fuel was so bad, it could not burn clothes. Nevertheless it was somewhat disconcerting to be 3-4 000 feet up with flames all around you."

After victory in the civil war Anton stayed in the Soviet Union until 1928—witnessing the rise of the bureaucracy around Stalin: "Stalin took the state police, which had been formed against the counter-revolution, and turned it against socialists," he says. In contrast Trotsky "tried to follow the line of the October revolution."

When he returned to Sweden, Anton opposed discussions held by the Communist Party with the Nazis: "If they came to power, I said, they will not discuss with the CP; they will hang us."

The Stalinists responded by expelling him from the party.

But despite the terrors of Stalinism, and the setbacks in the world revolution which followed, Anton maintained a commitment to Marxism and his belief in the inevitable victory of the working class:

"My political life has been based on one belief: 'October is correct'".

On November 11 Anton Nilson celebrates his 100th birthday. *Inqaba Ya Basebenzi*, the journal of the Marxist Workers's Tendency of the ANC, salutes him and his enduring role in the struggle of the working-class of the world to complete the process begun by the October Revolution of 1917.

## Revolutionary greetings to comrades in South Africa from Anton Nilson, on the seventieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution.

### ANTON NILSON SENT THIS MESSAGE TO *INQABA*:

"To all freedom fighters in South Africa—  
"Ever since my youth, throughout this century and part of the last, the imperialist powers have ruled over Africa, and held its people in slavery and underdevelopment. Today across Africa millions are locked in a great struggle against world capitalism.

"I have followed these developments closely from my youngest years, and today still follow the heroic struggle that you are involved in. The most important thing is that you in South Africa keep united in your struggle.

"Capitalism is guilty of your oppression. Ultimately, there is no alternative but socialism. Private property over the resources of the earth is the greatest theft by those who have taken it and made other people slaves, unpropertied, proletarians.

"In Africa, as in all parts of the world, the task is to destroy this system, and to take over the entire globe for common management. Then a future for the people to live on this earth can be kept and developed. If you carry this struggle forward, we in Europe will be inspired by your achievements.

"In the history of working-class struggle only the October revolution successfully conquered capitalism and carried through public ownership for the people. From 1918-1928 I participated personally in this revolution, and it is the best period in my hundred year life.

"We fought against military occupation by the capitalist powers that wanted to crush the revolution. The Russian October Revolution became no episode of a local kind but united all the Russian peoples psychologically—defeating all attempts by capitalism to smash it.

"In the first days of the revolution the bourgeois papers of the world wrote that Bolshevism, the leader of the revolution, would only be an episode of 14 days or so. But this year the Revolution celebrates its seventieth anniversary, with the Soviet Union having become since then one of the world's strongest countries.

"The whole idea of the revolution penetrated deep into the oppressed peoples, and was the foundation of a will and determination to win. The Bolsheviks built their revolution as a world revolution, but were left alone to follow Marx's appeal 'Proletarians of all countries unite'. They had no other country to follow, but had themselves to pave the way for a new Russia, abolish serfdom and Tsarist absolutism, and carry through the elimination of capitalism in the country.

"Your struggle too is of the utmost importance to the downtrodden workers of all countries in the international struggle for socialism. I therefore appeal to



Top: Anton Nilson today. Bottom: During the civil war, with an Albatross aircraft.

you that reforms to the capitalist system will not be enough—you must lay the foundations for a socialist system in order to achieve lasting progress.

"I salute you all good fighters in South Africa. Unite together and liquidate Apartheid. We must work hand in hand in Europe, Africa, and Asia if we are to achieve our goals.

"Long live the October Revolution that has shown the way! Long live the South African struggle for liberty!"

*Anton Nilson* 30.9.87

# The revolution that shook the world

**Peter Taaffe,**  
editor of *Militant*, summarises the story  
of 1917 and its lessons for workers today

## Vital role of Bolshevik leadership

The revolution, and the introduction of a planned economy, laid the basis for the transformation of Russia from the 'India' of Europe to the second most powerful economy and country on the globe. Despite the squandering of the advantages of the planned economy by the monstrous one-party, totalitarian regime which subsequently arose, the Russian Revolution has been more than justified in the colossal development of industry and society and also the living standards of the mass of the population since 1917.

It is impossible to understand the present world situation without understanding the Russian Revolution and its subsequent degeneration. But the Marxists will also be analysing the revolution from another standpoint. Only in Russia, following the overturn in October, did the workers' take power and establish real workers' democracy. In the last 70 years there have been not a few opportunities for the working class to follow 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, not once but ten times between 1931-37, attempted to take power.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, a revolutionary wave even greater than that which followed the Russian revolution, swept Western Europe. In 1968 in France, the working class organised a general strike of ten million. De Gaulle fled to Germany believing that 'the game was up' yet the French workers were not able to emulate their Russian counterparts of fifty years before.

And we have had the experience of the Portuguese revolution of 1974, when the capitalist state disintegrated. The great majority of the Portuguese officer caste were radicalised, groping in the direction of 'socialism'.

In the Russian revolution, the officers remained hostile to revolution. And yet nowhere except in Russia did the working class take power.

## Lenin and Trotsky.

The one factor that was missing in all these revolutions, but which was present in October 1917, was the 'subjective factor', a workers' leadership capable of preparing in good season the working class for the socialist transformation of society. 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.

Lenin prepared for the Russian revolution by a study of the lessons of the Paris Commune of 1871 and the first Russian revolution of 1905. In the same way, the advanced workers today can prepare for their struggles, which will be on a higher plane even than 1917, by examining the process of the Russian

revolution.

Events will not develop in exactly the same fashion as, nor with the speed of, the Russian revolution. Nevertheless, the struggles of the working class are similar in all capitalist countries. The laws of revolution and of counter-revolution, which Trotsky brilliantly analysed in his masterly *History of the Russian Revolution*, apply in all countries.

The first condition of revolution is the split in the ruling class. "Revolution starts from the top" said Marx. Feeling the subterranean revolt of the masses, the summits of society split into different groupings. One section seeks a solution in the suppression of the mass movement. Another sees the need for 'reforms from the top' in order to prevent revolution from below.

Although only in outline at this stage, we see a similar process developing in the Tory party in Britain in the split between the 'dries' and 'wets'.

Miliukov, the leader of the capitalist Kadet Party, in urging concessions from the Tsar in 1915, declared: "We are treading a volcano...tension has reached its extreme limit...a carelessly dropped match will be enough to start a terrible conflagration". Albeit in more diplomatic language, this is the warning 'Tory 'wets' have given many times to Thatcher and her right-wing cabal in the Tory cabinet.

The Chirac government in France did 'drop a match', and was only saved temporarily from a conflagration, a movement involving the majority of the French working class, by hasty concessions to the students. In Spain this year, the refusal of the Socialist government to retreat before the students and then the fact of its retreat under pressure—ignited an explosion of the working class.

## 'We cannot live like this any longer'

The fear of Miliukov in 1915 was well founded. Russian workers and peasants were groaning under the burdens placed on them by the First World War. Two and a half million Russian workers and peasants were killed, and an additional two and a half million were wounded in the war. The Russian soldiers based in France were sent to their slaughter by the French general staff eager to conserve French troops. The workers and peasants were just cannon-fodder. "The one thing the Russian generals did with a flourish was to drag human meat out of the country. Beef and pork are handled much better" (Trotsky).

Striking workers were automatically sent to the front, thereby increasing the circle of agitators who began to raise their heads and find support amongst the soldier mass in opposition to the war. The army itself began to disintegrate with desertion and the shooting of officers. Fabulous war profits were made by the capitalists while the court jeweller, Faberge, boasted that he had never before done such flourishing business.

The opposition of the Russian working class was reflected in the colossal increase in strikes. A widespread strike developed in January 1916 in Petrograd on the anniversary of 'Bloody Sunday' when workers were massacred in the 1905 revolution. The number of strikes doubled during that year. From economic strikes to political strikes, from partial and sectional struggles to the idea of a general strike, the movement of the Russian workers and peasants took on a convulsive form in 1916.



The year 1917 opened with strikes and food riots in Petrograd. The idea that "we cannot live like this any longer" gripped the working class and peasant masses. Thus another condition for revolution, the preparedness of the working class to go the whole way, developed in the months before the February revolution.

The intermediary layers, particularly the peasantry, were drawn behind the working class in this period. Trotsky points out: "A revolution breaks out when all the antagonisms of a society have reached their highest tension". It is possible that in 1916 if the Tsarist regime had made concessions, events could have perhaps have developed differently in the first period of the revolution. But the process would not have been fundamentally different.

The tasks which confronted Russia were the need for a thorough going 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. Historically these were the tasks of the capitalist democratic revolution.

But Lenin, unlike his alleged disciples in the leadership of the Communist parties today, had taught the Russian workers that the liberal capitalists were incapable of carrying through such a democratic revolution in Russia. 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. 4 000 million roubles were owed by the landlords to the bankers and the expropriation of the landlords would endanger the investments of the bankers and industrialists. The landlords and capitalists were linked with the bureaucracy and the system was crowned by the Tsarist regime which was used to alternately stupefy the masses and crush the opposition.

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 dismissed the dictator Primo de Rivera in the hope of avoiding revolution, but ended up following him into exile.

Running like a red thread through Lenin's teachings is distrust of the liberal capitalists by the workers. This policy is diametrically opposed to that pursued by the present leaders of the Communist Parties on a world scale.

Lenin was utterly opposed to a programmatic bloc with the liberal capitalists. He argued that only by the decisive action of the working class was it possible to tear the middle class, including the peasantry, away from those parties.

## The working class takes power

The honour of beginning the February 1917 revolution fell to the women textile workers of Petrograd on International Women's Day. Indignant at bread rations, whilst the capitalists made fabulous war profits, and with many of them having husbands and sons at the front, 90 000 came out on strike.

The next day, half the industrial workers struck in support. Slogans of "Down with the aristocracy, down with the war" were raised by demonstrating workers who fought with police, but attempted to win over the soldiers and Cossacks (who had suppressed the 1905 revolution).

An attempt to use the troops against the workers failed, with only the officers being prepared to fire on demonstrators. After clashes with workers, the troops turned on the officers and the Tsarist army collapsed.

Thus by 28 February the 1 000 year old Tsarist autocracy had collapsed. The working class was the real power, but they were not conscious of this.

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



Armed workers and revolutionary soldiers attacking the Tsar's police during the first days of the February revolution.

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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 phase of the revolution the masses had taken the line of least resistance, giving massive support to the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries. Big events would teach them the correctness of the perspectives, strategy and tactics of the Bolsheviks.

But the working class learns rapidly in revolution. The Bolsheviks grew quickly. They numbered 2 000 members in Petrograd in February 1917, 16 000 by April (with 79 000 nationally) and by late June 32 000 members. By the time of the October revolution, they had developed into a force of 240 000 on a national scale.

### Sharp turns

But the revolution did not develop in a straight line. Within the nine months between February and October, there were many sharp turns in the situation.

In the April days, with the continuation of the war, already the workers in Petrograd were becoming disillusioned with the Provisional government. 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 the Social Revolutionaries, refused to ratify the eight hour day.

The 'July Days' saw the working class of Petrograd, 400 000 strong with soldiers participating, demonstrating for the eviction of the ten capitalist ministers from the coalition: "Down with the offensive, and All Power to the Soviets".

The 'July Days' was a stage we have seen in all revolutions. The 'June Days' of 1848, the 'Spartacist Uprising' in January 1919, and the 'May Days' in Barcelona in 1937, represented the understanding of the masses that the gains of their revolution were being snatched out of their hands, and their deliberate attempts to prevent this.

The Bolsheviks 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 the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. The masses could only learn this from bitter experience.

The July days led to reaction, with repression against the Bolsheviks and the imprisonment of Trotsky, while Lenin was driven underground. But when the counter-revolution, in the figure of General Kornilov, attempted a coup in August, it was defeated by the working class, with the Bolsheviks playing the most prominent role. The troops of Kornilov refused to take action against Petrograd 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 need the whip of counter-revolution. The August events gave an enormous access of strength and 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 25th October.

Some European and American capitalists dismissed the

October revolution with the prediction that it would be over in a week. *The Times* quoted approvingly Naklukoff, the overthrown Kerensky government's ambassador to Paris: "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". (9 November 1917).

The capitalists in Russia took a longer and more 'tragic' view than this worthy. General Zalesky mournfully surveyed the situation: "Who would believe that the janitor or watchman of the Court building would suddenly become Chief Justice of the Court of Appeals, or the hospital orderly manager of the hospital, the barber a big functionary, yesterday's ensign the commander-in-chief, yesterday's lackey or common labourer burgermaster, yesterday's train oiler chief of division or station superintendent, yesterday's locksmith head of the factory?"

## Now to complete the work begun in 1917!

Lenin and Trotsky had seen the Russian revolution merely as the prologue to the international revolution. In isolation, backward Russia was not ready for socialism. The beginning of socialism meant a higher level of productive forces than even the most developed capitalist economy. This was only possible on a world scale. In the phrase of Lenin, capitalism had broken at its weakest link. But the Russian revolution was envisaged as the beginning of a series of revolutions in Europe and on a world scale that would usher in a world socialist federation.

Lenin's confidence in the possibility of world revolution was justified by the convulsive events of 1918 and particularly 1919, when the ruling class itself believed that it was about to be overthrown. The only thing that saved them were the leaders of the Social Democratic Parties.

The isolation of the revolution in turn allowed the growth of a privileged bureaucratic caste in Russia itself. Gradually power was taken from the soviets and concentrated in the hands of millions of officials in the state machine, the party and the army. The mass of the working class were elbowed aside and the original democratic and internationalist aspirations of the Russian revolution were suppressed.

The Gorbachev regime today, despite its recent declarations on 'democracy', is a million miles removed from the Russian revolution in the heroic period of Lenin and Trotsky. There was more democracy in the weak Russian workers state of October 1917, beset by civil war and the 21 armies of imperialism, than in Russia today.

### Political revolution

It will take a new revolution, a political revolution to restore workers' democracy, before Russian society can begin to move towards socialism. Drawing on the treasure trove of ideas of Lenin and Trotsky in this way, it will be possible to complete the work that the Russian workers began 70 years ago and establish a socialist Britain as a link in a world socialist federation.

# The fall of the Tsar

By Kevin Ramage

**The February revolution in Russia opened nine months of titanic class struggle which culminated in the coming to power of the working class, led by the Bolshevik Party headed by Lenin and Trotsky.**

Revolution broke out first in Russia because the war placed the greatest burdens on what was industrially the most backward nation in Europe. In Lenin's words, "capitalism broke at its weakest link."

The outbreak of the war had initially cut across a revolutionary movement which was developing in Russia in July/August 1914. From having the support of 80 per cent of the active workers, the Bolsheviks, who opposed the imperialist war, were driven underground, as backward layers of the working class, mobilised by the war, embraced the ideas of patriotism.

The "unity of the nation" produced at the beginning of an imperialist war is really only a mask. As war drags on, it exposes all that is rotten in society, sharpening all the social contradictions. So it was in Tsarist Russia. The war only postponed the struggle, deepening the eventual revolutionary upheavals.

Fifteen million, overwhelmingly peasants, were drafted into the army, where they faced a uniformity of misery which made them open to the ideas of the working class. By 1917 over 800 000 workers were concentrated in defence industries in Moscow, and 300 000 in Petrograd, mainly in huge factories employing thousands. In contrast with previous struggles in Russia, the cities and countryside were brought together in their determination to be done with Tsarist autocracy.

Every great revolution begins at the top as the ruling class, with no clear way forward, split over what course of action to take. In January 1916 a strike wave developed against food shortages and speculators. Feeling the movement building up from below, a section of the ruling class favoured making limited concessions.

During late 1916, the mystic monk Rasputin was murdered and plots were laid for a 'palace coup' to remove the Tsar and the Tsarina. The signs of splits in the ruling class opened the floodgates of revolution. The tensions brought about by the war, of five million dead or wounded, of the army's bread ration being cut by a third between December 1916 and February 1917, of the shortages of food in the towns, burst to the surface.

The February Revolution began on the 23rd (dates are on the old Russian calendar; add 13 days for modern calendar) with a strike by women textile workers in Petrograd. On International Women's Day, 90 000 were on strike, including many soldier's wives. They marched to the Duma (a truncated parliament) demanding bread, which as Trotsky commented was like demanding milk from a he-goat. On the following day half of the industrial workers of Petrograd joined the strike.

As the strikes grew, the slogans rapidly changed to directly political challenges to the regime: "Down with the autocracy! Down with the war!"

Yet none of the workers' organisations initially called for the strikes. Indeed, the most militant Bolshevik organisation, the committee in the industrial Vyborg area, feeling the tension,

but not believing the time was right for an insurrection which they saw could develop out of the strikes, initially opposed the call for strikes on 23 February. Thus one of the most oppressed and least organised layers, perhaps not as burdened by consideration of where their strike could lead, but burning with desire to take action, opened the floodgates of revolution.

The police tried to break up the crowds, aided by Cossacks (cavalry), some mounted police, and occasionally by infantry. The crowds fought the police, but tried to neutralise the Cossacks and win over the soldiers in action.

On the 25th, cadet officers fired on demonstrating workers, killing 16. On the 27th there were further demonstrations and troops were called out to suppress them.

After clashes with the workers, the troops began to mutiny. In some places the workers had succeeded in uniting with the soldiers, penetrating the barracks and receiving rifles.

## Already too late

The 1 000 year old monarchy fell under these hammer blows. As in the Spanish revolution of 1936, when unarmed workers stormed the barracks in Barcelona, Madrid and Valencia, and were joined by some soldiers, the real power, "armed bodies of men" was in the hands of the workers.

The response of the ruling clique, revolution staring them in the face, was akin to Nero 'fiddling while Rome burned'. Rodzianko, conservative president of the Duma, telegraphed to the Tsar on the 27th: "The situation is becoming worse; measures must be taken immediately, for tomorrow will be too late". In reality it was already too late. But when the Tsar received the telegram he commented: "Once again the fat-bellied Rodzianko has written me a lot of nonsense, which I won't even bother to answer".

The next day the Tsar telegraphed his wife before leaving for the capital by train: "In my thoughts I am always with you. Magnificent weather. I hope you are well and calm". But the rail workers rerouted and blocked the Tsar's train, while in



*Tsar Nicholas II in 1917, with members of his family and army officers.*

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Tauride Palace (the former house of the Duma) the soviet of workers' deputies was already in session.

Starting where the experience of the defeated revolution of 1905 left off, the workers and soldiers had immediately organised Soviets—committees of workers, soldiers and sailors democratically elected directly from the workplace, barracks, or ships, with no privileges and subject to recall by their electors. From the outset the soviets had a wider scope than in 1905, above all incorporating delegates from the soldiers' and sailors' organisations.

Reflecting the intense pressure of the movement of the masses, at one of its first sittings, on 1 March, the Soviet issued the famous 'Order No 1' which included the following:

"The Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies has decreed:

1) Committees to be elected immediately in all companies, battalions...from the elected representatives of the rank and file of the above mentioned units.

2) In all political actions, troop units are subordinate to the Soviet...and to the committees thereof.

3) The orders of the military commission of the state Duma are to be obeyed, with the exception of those instances in which they contradict the orders and decrees of the Soviet (*Editor's emphasis*)

4) All types of arms...must be placed at the disposal of company and battalion committees, and under their control, and are not, in any case, to be issued to officers, even upon demand..."

The Soviets had the overwhelming support of the workers, soldiers and sailors. All that was required was to link up the Soviets on an all Russia basis, a declaration by the workers' leadership that all power would henceforth be vested in the Soviets, the arrest of the old ministers, and workers' power could have been established peacefully without further struggle.

## Provisional government

But as the Communist and Socialist parties, aided by the anarchists, were to do in Spain in 1936, the leaders of the Soviet, at the outset the reformist Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, handed power back to the capitalists. Without Marxist leadership, this led to bloody defeat in Spain.

In Russia, the Menshevik and SR leaders handed power to an unelected "Provisional government" dominated by the liberal capitalist Constitutional Democrats (Kadets). They rationalised their cowardice with high sounding phrases. They argued the workers cannot take power but must support the party of the liberal bourgeoisie. Pointing to Russia's backwardness they argued that, as in France in 1879, the immediate revolution was a bourgeois democratic one, with the tasks of overcoming feudalism, distributing land to the peasants, establishing a democratic regime, and clearing the way for modern development.

No Marxist in Russia disagreed that these were the tasks. But Lenin constantly warned against any illusions in 'liberal' capitalists and for the independence of the working class, seeing the working class in alliance with the peasants as the force that would overthrow the remnants of feudalism. Trotsky in his brilliant theory of permanent revolution which was borne out in the course of 1917, went further, explaining that in the epoch of imperialism, the bourgeois-democratic tasks could only be resolved under the leadership of the working class moving in the direction of socialism.

The Mensheviks claimed to be for socialism, but only in the distant future. The Russian capitalists were linked through the banks by a thousand links to the class of feudal

landowners. This ruled out any thoroughgoing land reform which was the fundamental task of the bourgeois-democratic or capitalist revolution in Russia. On the other hand the Russian capitalists were tied hand and foot to foreign, mainly Anglo-French, capital from which they drew the lion's share of their investment.

This in turn made a just and democratic peace in the war impossible as long as power remained in the hands of the landlords and the capitalists.

While the Kadets had been opposed to the Tsarist regime, which placed obstacles in the way of the free development of capitalism, they were a million times more afraid of the revolutionary movement of the workers and peasants. When finally confronted with the fact of a victorious revolution, they first tried to negotiate with the Tsar to set up a constitutional monarchy, and resisted at every stage attempts to actually tackle the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution.

This paradox of February 1917, of the masses moving towards seizing power, not being fully conscious of the situation and the tasks, and the movement being sidetracked by the reformist leaders, is not unique. It is present in every



Top: The awakened masses. Bottom: The Petrograd Soviet in April 1917, when it was dominated by Mensheviks.



great revolutionary upheaval, as in Spain in 1936 and in Portugal in 1974.

So how did the Mensheviks and the SRs become the leadership of the Soviets? By its very nature revolution draws into activity not only the advanced layer, but also stirs up the mass. They learn very rapidly in the course of the revolution. But in the first instance the majority will seek the line of least resistance. In Russia they tended to support the Menshevik and SR leaders who said: "the revolution has overthrown the autocracy; now all that is needed is to wait for the Constituent Assembly (democratic government) to be convened to resolve the issues of the war, land, etc".

Their patriotic position in the war, combined with mild opposition to the Tsarist regime, led to many of the intelligentsia, lower ranking officers etc, as well as politically less active layers of the working class, initially supporting the Mensheviks and the SRs. Also during the war they had not faced the same hounding which the Bolsheviks suffered. They had the best known faces in the eyes of the masses. At the outbreak of the revolution they had the speakers to address meetings, journalists to write papers etc, while the main Bolshevik leaders were in emigration, exile or in prison.

In his classic *History of the Russian Revolution*, Trotsky asked the question: "Who led the February Revolution? The revolution fell like thunder from the sky, says the president of the Social Revolutionary Party, Zenzinov." Trotsky then records an account of the Menshevik leader, Skobelev, who was to become a minister in the Provisional government within a month, declaring on the 25th February that the "disorders had the character of plundering which it was necessary to put down." "How was it with the Bolsheviks?... Kayurov, one of the leaders of the Vyborg section, asserts categorically: 'absolutely no guiding initiative from the party centres was felt.'

At this stage all the principal Bolshevik leaders were in exile or abroad. Trotsky concludes that while there were no clear leaders, the revolution was not "spontaneous", but was a product of specific conditions that had developed, of the conditions in Russia, the experience of the 1905 revolution, and the presence in the factories and among the soldiers of a scattering of "conscious and tempered workers educated for the most part by the party of Lenin... This leadership proved sufficient to guarantee the victory of the insurrection, but it was not adequate to transfer immediately into the hands of the proletarian vanguard the leadership of the revolution."

This was added to by the confusion which existed amongst the Bolshevik leaders who were in Petrograd. The resumption of the Bolshevik paper *Pravda* was warmly welcomed by the workers, its second issue selling 100 000 copies. But its attitude to the Provisional government was unclear. While some articles correctly attacked it as a regime of capitalists and landlords, others were ambivalent.

The position of the Bolsheviks was further confused with the return from exile of Kamenev, Stalin and Muranov on 13 March, who immediately took over the editing of *Pravda* and turned its line sharply to the right. On the 14 March Stalin made the cautious appeal to "maintain the rights that have been won in order to finally beat down the old powers and move the Russian revolution forward", a position which echoed that of the reformist leaders of the Soviet, to "support the Provisional government in so far as it struggles against reaction, defends democracy etc." This position earned Lenin's sharp rebuke that "it was like asking brothel keepers to give up sin"!

The next day Kamenev wrote an article which advocated national defence of the regime of the Provisional government: "we shall stoutly defend our own liberty." These policies amounted to seeing the Bolsheviks as the loyal 'left

opposition' in a capitalist government, in a similar manner to the idea of 'Popular Front' blocks between workers' and 'radical' capitalist parties put forward by 'Communist' parties today.

When these issues of *Pravda* reached the factories they aroused a storm of indignation among the workers which forced Stalin and Kamenev to be more cautious, but they still refrained from any fundamental attack on the Provisional government or its war policy.

## No support

In reality there were only two people who understood the situation, Lenin in Switzerland and Trotsky in New York. Writing on 4 March, with only scanty information, Lenin grasped the character of the Provisional government: "the new government that had seized power in Petrograd, or, more correctly wrested it from the proletariat, which has waged a victorious, heroic and fierce struggle, consists of liberal bourgeois and landlords. Only a workers' government... can give the people peace, bread and full freedom".

Two days later he sent a telegram: "Our tactics; no trust in and no support of the new government; Kerensky (the one SR in the government, Editor) is especially suspect; arming of the proletariat is the only guarantee, immediate elections to the Petrograd City Council; no rapprochement with other parties.

As early as 28 February, receiving only confused reports of 'disturbances' and 'bread riots', Trotsky wrote: "We are witnessing the beginning of the second Russian revolution." When the composition of the Provisional government and its appeals for 'order' became known he wrote: "The powerful avalanche of the revolution is in full swing, and no human force will stem it."

The Mensheviks and SR leaders denounced Lenin's thesis as "sectarian, ultra-left and adventurist." Characterising the revolution as "democratic and not socialist" they effectively postponed the struggle for socialism to a distant future. The policy of 'popular frontism' today is merely a resurrection under a different guise of the Menshevik idea of class collaboration and the theory of 'stages'.

The fatal flaw of Menshevism (and of the Stalinists and their co-thinkers today) is that the only way of carrying through the bourgeois-democratic revolution today is by transfer of power to the working class. That was precisely the position put forward by Lenin in the spring of 1917, summed up in the slogan "All power to the Soviets" and that Trotsky had worked out in his theory of permanent revolution based on the experience of the 1905 revolution.

The magnificent movement of the workers, soldiers and sailors in the February revolution had smashed the old Tsarist regime, and placed power in the hands of the reformist leaders. Petrified they sought compromise with the bourgeoisie. This opened a period of dual power, that is of two opposing forces, the provisional government of representatives of the capitalists attempting to restore "order", and the soviets, which despite their leaders, represented the desire of the workers to overthrow capitalism.

This was to last until the "July Days", when, given time by the reformist leaders of the Soviets, the capitalists inflicted a defeat on the workers. But it was only a temporary setback. An attempted reactionary coup by General Kornilov in August was defeated by the arming of the workers by the Bolsheviks. Very rapidly the Menshevik-SR leadership of the soviets was discredited, the Bolsheviks gained a majority in the Soviets, and in October, only nine months after the fall of Tsarism, power was firmly in the hands of the working class.

# Bolsheviks adopt a programme for power

Lenin's *April Theses* form one of the most decisive manifestos in the history of 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 crystallised 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 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 they were working on the basis of a confused perspective, derived from a misinterpretation of Lenin's previous position, that the 'Old Bolsheviks' adopted a policy which prefigured the disastrous Popular Frontism of the Stalinist leaders in the 1930's 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 the 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 the power, carry through the bourgeois-democratic tasks—but at the same time implementing radical changes in their own interest 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 completed 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



Trotsky and Lenin.

account of the relationship of forces resulting from Russia's uneven development.

Elements of modern industry had been 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 conscious and dynamic force, and the peasantry, the preponderant 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 soviet-type organisations. '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 world-wide revolutions. A revolutionary government in Russia would, through collaboration with revolutionary workers' governments in 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 the 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. They 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 his 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 revolu-

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tion...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."

### 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 proletariat 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, 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 Kuo mintang. 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 in many countries—always 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' organisations to the interests of national-capitalist leaders.

In many cases this has meant support for bonapartist, including military bonapartist leaders. Sukharno in Indonesia, Kassim in Iraq, Goncalves in Portugal—the list could be extended around the world many times.

In Chile between 1970-73, the CP leaders supported the popular government of 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

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# The July Days

## —turning point in the revolution

The Russian revolution is the richest experience in the history of the working class.

February 1917 saw a massive movement which toppled the Tsar's dictatorship. In April Lenin returned from exile and denounced the coalition government of capitalist politicians and compromising socialists, or 'moderates' as the press would undoubtedly call them today. He drew up a programme for his party, the Bolsheviks, which meant a complete break with the 'Provisional government' and the capitalists.

These events are described in the foregoing articles. Here TONY CROSS explains the events that came to be known as the 'July Days', when the capital city teetered on the brink of another revolution.

The Provisional government had solved none of the country's problems.

The war dragged on, meaning slaughter at the front and starvation at home. Workers in the cities were aggravated by food shortages on the one hand, while profiteers made fortunes from arms production and the black market on the other.

In the villages, peasants were beginning to get impatient with airy promises that the land would be redistributed leading to no official action.

The soldiers were demanding an end to the war with more

and more urgency. The bulk of them were peasant conscripts. Not only did they wish to avoid death at the front, but by now they also wished to return to their villages for the harvest, lest their crops rot in the field.

Meanwhile, the capitalists regarded the intervention of the masses into history with hatred. They sabotaged the economy in order to discredit the revolution and organised a creeping lock-out.

The February revolution had exploded independently of even the socialist parties and had succeeded in destroying Tsarism. But, above the heads of the masses, the Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionary leaders formed a coalition government with liberal princes and capitalists in the leading positions.

February also saw the revival of the soviets, councils elected by workers, soldiers and peasants in city wards, towns and villages and then at regional and national level. They were a focus of workers' democracy, which had more authority with the masses than the Provisional government.

The Mensheviks and SRs had the majority in them. The masses had confidence in these leaders whom the Tsar's regime had denounced as dangerous revolutionaries and in some cases gaoled or exiled.

But the compromisers, as the Bolsheviks called them, had accepted the dictates of the Kadets, who controlled the provisional government. The government and Soviet leaders



stage of revolution, with the struggle for worker's power and socialism postponed beyond the horizon. Following this line, the CP 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 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 paralysed 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 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.

seemed paralysed by the contending class forces the revolution had aroused and the masses became increasingly frustrated with the compromisist leaders.

The workers of Petrograd were the quickest to draw the political conclusions from their frustration, and their politicisation infected the soldiers posted in the city. The centralised Tsarist state had meant that the capital had a decisive social weight in Russian society. A large proportion of the working class was concentrated in the city too. So rotten was the Tsarist regime, that insurrection in Petrograd alone had been enough to finish it off. The provinces had followed Petrograd with little trouble.

So, when the compromisers betrayed their hopes before their very eyes, the Petrograd workers and soldiers moved quickly towards the slogans of Lenin and the Bolsheviks.

The Bolsheviks understood that they could not win the Menshevik and SR workers and peasants simply by issuing an ultimatum to them to drop their established party allegiances. Just as today workers support mass parties, because of the tradition they represent, so most Russian workers and peasants looked to these reformist leaders.

## Soviet power

So the Bolsheviks' slogans demanded of these parties' leaders that they do the job their supporters expected them to do.

Their key demands were that the socialists break with the Kadets and take political power into their own hands. The compromisers could easily have done this by declaring the executive of the Soviet the government of the country. The Bolshevik slogans "Down with the ten capitalist ministers!" and "All power to the soviets!" became increasingly popular amongst the masses.

Already in June, the Bolsheviks had called a demonstration

to coincide with the first all-Russian soviet congress. They had been under special pressure from the soldiers who opposed the government's plans for a new military offensive.

The compromisers had an overwhelming majority at the congress. It demanded that the Bolsheviks call off their demonstration. But it had been forced to call an official soviet demonstration for the following Sunday, under the blandest possible slogans.

It was a huge success...for the Bolsheviks! 400 000 attended, but to the compromisers' horror, their banners bore the Bolsheviks' 'extremist' slogans. Despite this, the government continued on its rightward course. On 18 June the new offensive started.

The June demonstrations showed the Bolsheviks were the leading political force in Petrograd. But the same was not yet true for the rest of the country.

Millions of soldiers at the front and peasants in the provinces had only just heard of them, and that through the usually vitriolic reports of the capitalist press and the compromisers. They still had confidence in their leaders, even though they often put forward the Bolsheviks' demands of "bread, peace and land".

Lenin understood that soon these illusions would turn into their opposite. But pressure was mounting in Petrograd for immediate action against Kerensky's government.

Ultra-left sectarians imagine that revolutionaries merely have to find the most left point on the political spectrum and occupy it. But a serious workers' party has to weigh all the political, strategic and tactical considerations in a situation in order to achieve victory.

The Bolsheviks could have taken power in Petrograd in June or July. But the rest of the country would not have followed suit. There would have been a repeat of the Paris Commune of 1871. There the workers in the French capital had taken power briefly, but were eventually butchered into submission by the Prussian army in collaboration with the French capitalist class.

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One of the reasons for this tragic defeat was the Commune's isolation from the rest of France, which allowed the reactionaries to regroup outside the city.

In Russia there was the added danger that many front-line soldiers at that stage believed that their comrades' refusal to go to the front jeopardised their chances of going home. So the Bolsheviks had to restrain the Petrograd masses from a showdown with the government.

This was not the most popular policy, especially with many of the soldiers who imagined that the possession of guns gave them an easy solution to all problems. They imagined that a further revolution could be accomplished as easily as February's.

Even sections of the Party, the rawest recruits and those closest to the impatient masses, were affected by the prevailing mood, and were less than enthusiastic in putting the Party's position over.

### Government in crisis

On 2 July, the Kadets threw the government into crisis. Using some timid concessions to Ukrainian nationalism as a pretext, the four Kadet ministers resigned. In reality, they knew that the offensive was collapsing and decided to let the compromisers deal with the consequences on their own.

At the same time a company of machine-gunners were due to leave for the front. On hearing that the coalition had been

destroyed, and with it the compromisers' excuses for their political inaction, the gunners' regiment sent delegates round factories and regiments calling for an armed demonstration.

By 7.00 p.m. the factories were at a standstill and a massive demonstration had assembled. Unlike in the early days of the revolution, middle-class well-wishers were absent. "Today only the common slaves of capital were marching" said one participant. The Liberal, Nabokov, saw only "insane, dumb, beastlike faces".

The Bolsheviks were faced with an accomplished fact. They tried to restrain the masses, but to no avail. The Party's Petrograd Committee, which was meeting at the time, had to reconsider the position. Just as irresponsible as advocating a mistaken course of action, would have been abandoning the masses to their fate once they had taken that course.

Marxists cannot always choose the ground on which to fight. Sometimes workers feel forced to take action regardless of whether their leaders feel it is tactically advisable. If battle becomes inevitable, Marxists must advocate the best tactics in the circumstances so that the masses will suffer fewer setbacks and draw correct conclusions from their experiences.

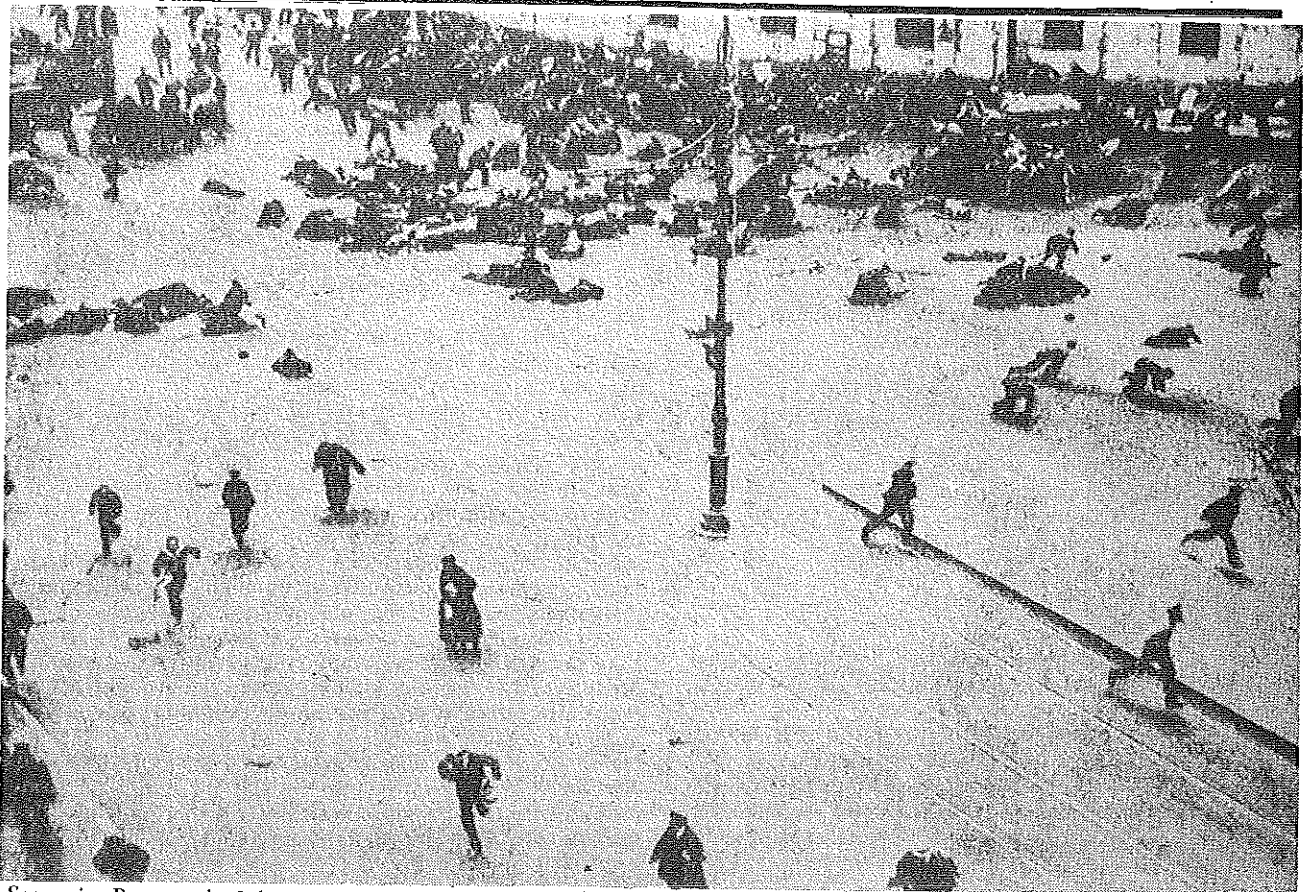
By now, reactionaries were provoking skirmishes with the demonstrators which they hoped would come to a bloody head. The Committee, along with representatives of the Central Committee, issued an appeal for a peaceful demonstration which would present its demands to the Soviet executive, and joined the march.

The demonstrations continued for a second day, this time joined by 10 000 from the Kronstadt naval fortress. Inevi

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*"The fact of the matter is that it was not an ordinary demonstration; it was something considerably more than a demonstration, but less than a revolution. It was an outburst of revolution and counter-revolution together, a sharp, sometimes sudden elimination of the middle elements, while the proletarian and bourgeois elements made a stormy appearance." Lenin on the July Days.*

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Scene in Petrograd, July 1917, after a demonstration was attacked by troops loyal to the Provisional Government.

tably, provocateurs fired on the demonstration. In the evening, two Cossack squadrons sparked off a small battle which claimed 13 lives.

When they finally faced the Soviet leaders, the workers got nothing but empty phrases. "Take the power, you son of a bitch, when they give it to you", one worker shouted at a 'socialist' minister.

At the height of the demonstrations, the rich had rushed to the stations, desperate to get out of town. As the movement began to subside, workers found in the better-off areas were attacked and beaten as the reactionaries regained confidence.

The Bolshevik Central Committee called on workers and soldiers to end the demonstration and this time their call was heeded. At five o'clock in the morning, the Soviet's leaders were 'saved' from the workers lobbying them by officers and soldiers led by a well-known Menshevik lieutenant.

### Vital lesson

Workers and soldiers were disoriented by the lack of results from this massive movement. Why was it not possible to repeat February's success with the same ease? The July Days were a temporary blow to their morale.

The rightists on the other hand were tremendously emboldened. The compromisers had been terrified by the masses and had proved that they would not act against capitalism. The reaction raised its head. The Bolsheviks were particularly viciously attacked. They were accused of organising an attempted insurrection, the exact opposite of the truth.

Despite the painful consequences, in some senses the July Days were an essential experience for the Bolshevik Party and the advanced workers.

Afterwards Lenin pointed out that if the compromise leaders had put the slogan "All power to the Soviets" into action, Russian society would have been transformed peacefully. In the July Days, Petrograd's workers and soldiers tried to force the Mensheviks and SRs to adopt a common programme with the Bolsheviks. "Many still cherished the illusion that everything could be obtained by words and demonstrations," remarked Trotsky.

The partial defeat taught them that the Bolshevik leaders had been right in warning that the task was not so easy as it had seemed at first. They learned that the reformist leaders had to be replaced.

For a final showdown with the capitalists, the Petrograd workers were forced to conclude, a general staff was necessary and that general staff was the Bolshevik Party. Even out of a setback the Party won a deeper loyalty from and authority over the masses.

Trotsky later pointed out that the most difficult task of the October revolution was not the seizure of power, but enduring the struggles and privations necessary to hold onto it.

Here too, the July Days and their aftermath were an essential lesson "...At that time our workers and soldiers would not have fought and died for Petrograd," Lenin said. Subsequent events were to teach them that power could be won and kept only by their own efforts and self-sacrifice tied to the leadership of Lenin's and Trotsky's party.

"As a technical trial," the Kadet leader Miliukov wrote, "the experience was for them (the Bolsheviks) undoubtedly of extraordinary value...It was evident that when the time came for repeating the experiment, they would carry it more systematically and consciously."

The Bolsheviks did absorb the lessons of the July Days and they were invaluable for the victory in October.

## July—August

# The month of the great slander

After the defeat of the July days, the Bolsheviks had their backs to the wall. Their press had been smashed and many of their leaders were 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 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 Bolsheviks".

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

The Bolsheviks 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 Bolsheviks 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 days 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. Mud slinging 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 Bolsheviks? One of the initiators of this business, the attorney general, Bassarabov, 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 of the Executive Committee (of the Soviet), and in the name of the Central Committee of the Bolsheviks 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 fulfil 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 sympathise 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 convinced Lenin that the Compromisers were washing their hands of the case, and leaving it to the mercies of the White 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 an 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 centre of the party abroad during the war was struggling with cruel need; a hundred francs was a big sum; the central organ was appearing



Cartoon from a capitalist paper in July. Caption reads: "Lenin wants a high post?... Well, a position is ready for him."

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 organisation during the war years amounted to a few thousand roubles, 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 rumour of your papers," wrote the soldiers...

The character of the accusations, and of the accusers, inevitably give 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 aforethought, 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 even 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 per cent 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 are 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 an 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 orchestra, 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.

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## August 1917: **Kornilov's coup fails**

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By Rob Sewell

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**Russia in 1917 saw the forcible entry of the masses on to 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 future struggles.

The inevitable immediate 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 early 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

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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 paralysed. 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 Knox 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 the 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 fascist 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 11 August 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 24 August under the pretext of a "Bolshevik rising", Kornilov told his general staff to redirect the army to march on Petrograd.

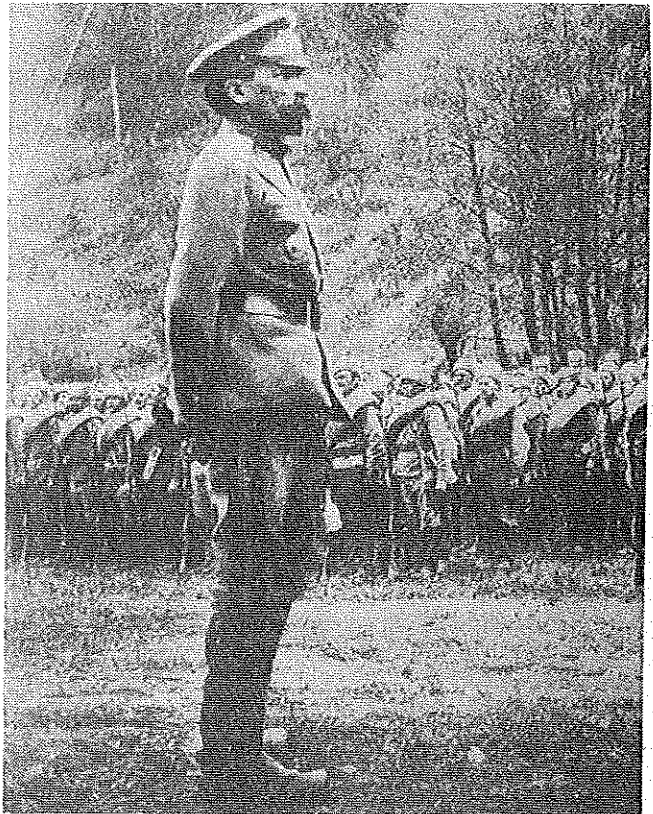
Parallels can be drawn with Franco's rebellion in 1936 and Pinochet in 1973. When the ruling class sees no alternative it will drop all its democratic talk and turn to military dictatorship to crush the masses by force. The Bolsheviks gave leadership to the struggle in Russia, defeating Kornilov and 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 news of the attempted coup. True to form the



Top: General Kornilov. Bottom: Bolshevik soldier persuading Kornilov's troops to disobey orders.

Kadet ministers resigned on 26 August 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 28 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 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 programmes 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 centred on the defence of Petrograd. Mass meetings were held which passed resolutions attacking Kornilov and demanding the release of the July prisoners.

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

The Soviet of Factory-Shop Committees helped co-ordinate 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 Organisations. The Petrograd Carters' Battalion pledged their 500 carts to help shift military supplies, while the Sixth Engineers organised a 600 man detachment to build defence fortifications.

The Baltic Fleet followed suit with the Kronstadt garrison dispatching 3 000 armed sailors for Petrograd's defence. 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 that 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 paralysed. 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, and 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 realised 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 1 September.

**This defeat for the counter-revolution abruptly shifted the balance of forces to the left. The revolt radicalised 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 front lines 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 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 labouring 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' lock-out 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 realise 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 co-incidence, 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 their every action, every democratic demand, was denounced as "Bolshevism". There was hardly a factory or a military unit that didn't have its "Bolshevik" who in reality had never been near the Party.

## Polarisation

An enormous polarisation 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 lock-outs 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 the 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 flood-tide of support towards the Bolshevik Party, a tide that would carry the Party through to 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



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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 Bolshevised. 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 programme of Lenin.

After Kornilov had shown the threat of reaction, new leaders crowded to the front in these bodies, forming special committees for the defence 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 "putch" by a small minority. In their millions the workers, soldiers and peasants looked at the programme they needed: "Bread, Peace and Land", realised 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 rest of 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 to a flood.

The whole of Russian society was polarising 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 any illusions in an "easy" end to the war.

The capitalist Kadet Party, along with the Compromisers, the SRs and Mesheviks, 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 right-wing majority voted, against the Bolshevik 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



Armed workers from the factories of Petrograd on guard in one of the streets of the capital in November 1917 after the Bolsheviks took power.

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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 radicalisation of the peasantry interacted with and fed the leftward shifts within the army, overwhelmingly from a peasant background.

This whole period was characterised 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 centre of every one of them—a Bolshevik. In the barracks and factories, there were thousands of "Lenins". Karl Marx long before had explained that an "idea" can become a great material force, if it corresponds to a social movement, and such were the ideas and programme 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 organise 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 centres of capitalist authority in the army, the ministries and the Winter Palace.

That decisive action came to revolve around the Second Congress of Soviets, organised 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 favour, 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

### "We choose 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 from 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 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 roubles-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."

over-ripe 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 the 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 favour of organising 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 re-arming 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 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 the 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, organised the defence 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 the 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 labour 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 faced by 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 combativity 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 or suppressed 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.

## An explanation of some terms used in this supplement.

**Bolsheviks:** Revolutionary wing of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour 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 organisational 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 its 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 programme called for "free, popular rule, nationalisation of the land and nationalisation 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 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 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 between February and October, but not 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 that 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:** 9 January 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 the 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.