Revolutionary workers

1917

How the workers made a revolution

Great Days

By Mark Osborn

WHY IS the Russian revolution of October 1917 so important? Because it is the only revolution in which the working class took and held power for any length of time.

The workers of Paris seized power in 1871. But they held power in a city surrounded by hostile French and German capitalist armies for only two months before they were defeated and massacred in their tens of thousands. In Russia the workers held on. They won a prolonged civil war and defeated the armies of no less than 14 capitalist states sent to crush the revolution.

The Russian Revolution is therefore the greatest single event in working-class history. We must learn the lessons of that great working-class victory.

When workers fight the bosses, all the advantages are on their side. The scales are weighted against us and tipped heavily in their favour. They own the means of creating wealth in our society — factories, fields, mines, offices, newspapers, TV stations. They control the parliaments and the governments, including the military and fascistic dictatorships. The armies, the police forces, the jails are also on their side. Remember the miners' strike; or read about the struggles of the South African workers.

And on our side, what have we got? We have no entrenched power and wealth, no established hierarchies and armed forces on our side. Only one class can rule, and the bosses rule. That is what their ownership of society's wealth and control of the state and government amounts to.

The ruling class holds the commanding heights of the state and the economy, and therefore controls society's opinion-forming industries — the churches, schools, newspapers, etc. Most of the time they can rule not just through brute force, but by convincing most people that no better system than capitalism is possible.

Often the capitalists even hold the ultimate allegiance of the leaders of the working-class organisations. Thus you can get an experience like we have had in Britain in the last 20 years. The workers were wonderfully militant and aggressive in industry, letting neither bosses' nor bosses' governments get away with anything. We pushed up wages and won better conditions. We stopped the bosses doing what they liked in industry — so much so that for a long time the employers became depressed and demoralised. We stopped the Labour Government in 1969 bringing in laws to curb and straitjacket the unions. We defeated the Tory government of Edward Heath when it passed anti-union laws, and cleared the way for a Labour government under Harold Wilson...

Yet the movement that could do that proved unable to defend itself against the wiles and treacheries of the Wilson-Callaghan Labour Government. It was unable to stop our strength being sapped and undermined by the economic downturn. It was unable to mount an adequate working-class response to the vicious Tory offensive led by Margaret Thatcher.

Today the labour movement is having to begin to fight back from a very low level. Yet that same working-class movement could have taken power in the early 1970s.

What made the difference between working-class victory in 1917 and the sort of slow-motion, long-drawn-out defeat we have had in Britain over the last decade? The Bolshevik Party made the difference!

That party welded the industrial struggle of the workers together with political questions. It fought off the compromisers and reformists, the bosses' agents in the labour movement. Against the entrenched power of the ruling class, the working class has one advantage: that we are the basic producing class. Without us, nothing moves. But to mobilise that great advantage, we need organisation, unity and a clear strategy. The Bolshevik party gave the active socialists among the Russian working class the means to work out that clear strategy and to unite and organise the workers around it. Without such a party, the workers' struggle would have been split up, sent down blind alleys, and dissipated.

But the Bolshevik party did not appear ready-made out of a spaceship from a different galaxy. It was the product of decades of experience by the Russian working class, and of the struggles of Russian Marxists, in the first place Lenin. The Russian Marxists drew on the long experience of the European labour movement.

Socialists in Britain need to study the Russian Revolution in order to learn from it. This special issue of *Socialist Organiser* is produced to help British socialists do that.

Contents

Socialist Organiser no.335-6. Special issue, 19 November 1987. Typeset and designed by Upstream (TU), 01-358 1344. Printed by East End Offset (TU), London E3.

The story

By Lynn Ferguson

In February 1917 the Tsarist dictatorship which had ruled Russia for centuries was overthrown.

It all started on International Women's Day — March by the Western calendar, but February by the calendar then in use in Russia. Thousands of women workers took to the streets, demanding bread and an end to the war. Soon their demonstrations were swelled by male workers, angered by the inflation, poverty and food shortages.

Strikes and street protests escalated. The workers had decided enough was enough! In the streets of Petrograd, soldiers joined the workers' actions. The fate of the Tsar was sealed.

But the February Revolution did not result in a decisive victory for the working class. The capitalists had their own reasons for discontent with the way the Tsar had been running the war, and they stepped in to take over.

The workers' revolt had been unplanned and without leadership. Many Bolshevik leaders were in exile.

So two competing 'governments' rose out of the February events. One was the Provisional Government — a bourgeois administration, headed first by Prince Lvov and later by the semi-socialist Kerensky. It consisted mainly of Cadets (bourgeois liberals) and Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs, or people who believed in a sort of peasant socialism).

The other government was the Petrograd Soviet — a body of elected workers' representatives, in which Mensheviks, SRs, Bolsheviks and smaller groups were all represented.

The Provisional Government was the 'official' state power, recognised internationally as the successor to the Tsar. Under Menshevik and SR leadership, even the Petrograd Soviet recognised the Provisional Government. But the Soviet claimed the allegiance of increasing numbers of workers and soldiers. Whether the Mensheviks and SRs liked it or not, the Soviet was an alternative government.

Between February and October 1917 there was 'dual power' — two governments facing each other. Such a situation was unstable, and could continue for only a short period. One power or another must be victorious.

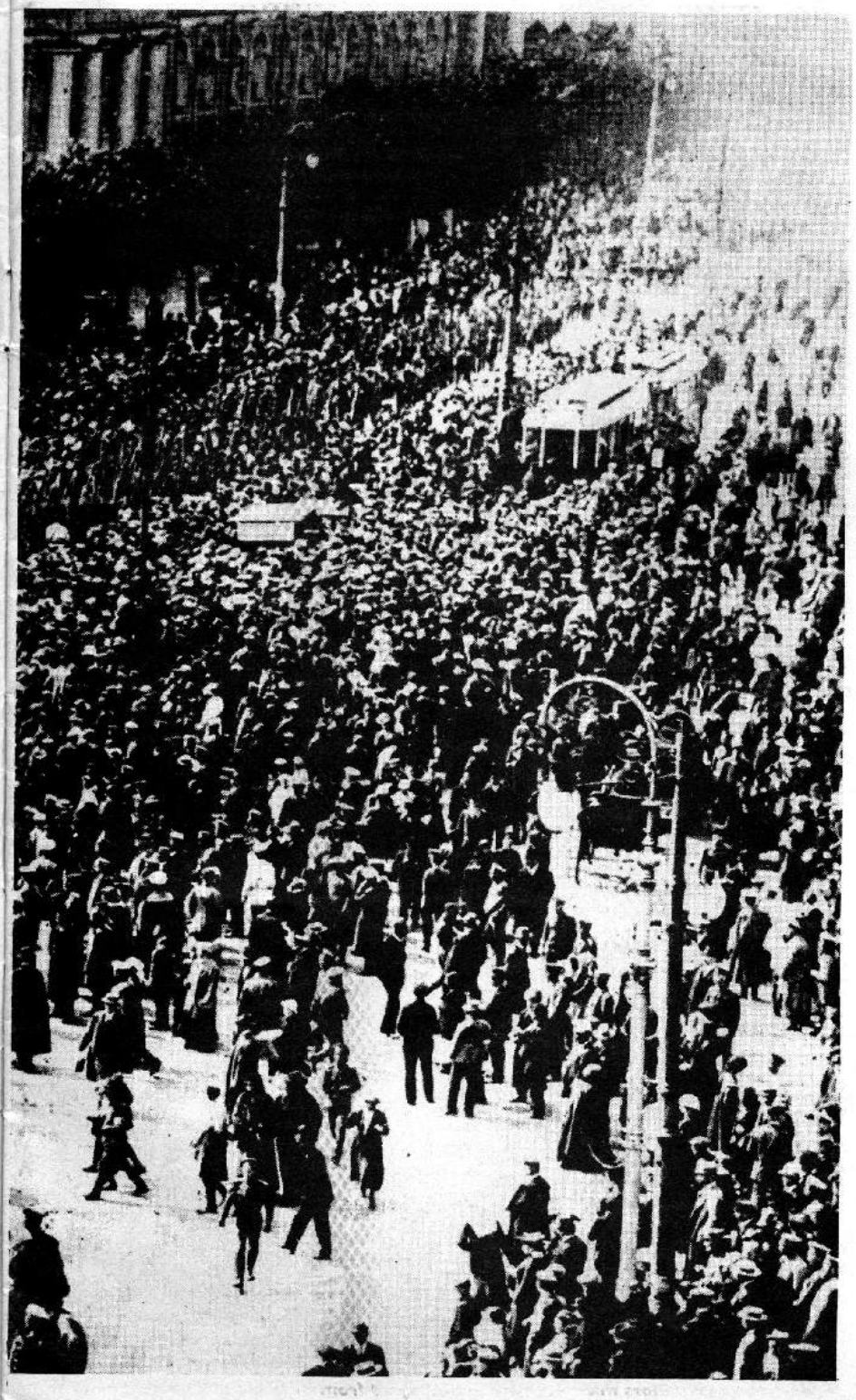
In the Petrograd Soviet itself there were

1917

How the workers made a revolution

14,000 Kronstadt sailors march to defend Petrograd from Kornilov's attempted coup

# of 1917



1917
How the workers made a revolution

enormous differences of opinion over the role of the Soviet vis-a-vis the Provisional Government. The Mensheviks and SRs considered that the revolution had been completed and could not and should not go any further. They wanted cooperation between the Soviet and the Provisional Government. The Bolsheviks were at first not clear in their views. But soon they began to argue for the development of the Petrograd Soviet and the other Soviets as the basis of a new working-class power, and for an attitude of uncomprising hostility to the bourgeois Provisional Government.

The story of the months between February and October is in essence the story of the struggle between these two views.

Lenin's return and the April Theses

On 3 April 1917 Lenin arrived back in Petrograd from exile. After being greeted by his comrades, he turned to address the crowds of workers and soldiers who had gathered to welcome him back. His speech concluded:

"Any day, if not today or tomorrow, the crash of the whole of European imperialism may come. The Russian revolution, made by you, has begun it and opened a new epoch. Hail the world-wide socialist revolution!"

Lenin had made clear his view — that the workers should press forward to a socialist revolution.

Until then, Marxist orthodoxy was that the socialist revolution would take place first in the advanced capitalist countries, like Britain and Germany. Russia was very backward. It had concentrations of modern industry in cities like Petrograd, but the working class was very small compared to the huge masses of the peasantry. The Mensheviks argued that the Russian revolution could only be a bourgeois revolution, led by the capitalist class, and leading to the establishment of a democratic republic.

Lenin agreed that the vast numbers of peasants, who wanted a patch of land of their own rather than common ownership of the means of production, made socialist revolution impossible. But he refined and concretised the perspective. According to Lenin, the bourgeois revolution in Russia could be of a special kind. It could be led by the working class in alliance with the peasantry. Lenin knew

Troops march back from the front

that the bourgeoisie was too weak, too tied to the landlords and the Tsarist state, too fearful of the workers, to take revolutionary action; and he insisted that the workers must not *wait for* the bourgeoisie.

Trotsky agreed with Lenin as against the Mensheviks, but he went further. He believed that the working class, being a class concentrated in the big cities, could take a leading role in its alliance with the numerous but scattered peasantry. And once the working class had taken power, it could not want to hand it back to the capitalists, or to forbid itself for using power for its own ends, such as bringing in a legal eight-hour day. Because of the peculiar nature of Russian society, the possibility existed that even a small working class could retain power and set up a workers' state. The subsequent survival of this state would depend on the action of workers in the advanced capitalist states against their own ruling classes.

Before 1917 Trotsky was not a member of the Bolshevik party, and his was very much a lone voice. The February Revolution pointed to the problems in the 'orthodox Marxist' view. This seemed to be the bourgeois revolution; but could Marxists do any other than support the Soviets against the Provisional Government, with the demands for bread, land and peace which the Provisional Government was obviously incapable of granting?

Some of the Bolsheviks on the spot, in particular Molotov, argued for uncompromising hostility to the Provisional Government. They said that the task of the party was to lead the workers in a fight for working-class state power. But other leading Bolsheviks present in Russia in February 1917, such as Kamenev and Stalin, eagerly awaited Lenin's return, expecting him to reiterate the orthodoxy and to put right Molotov and the like. To their dismay, he did the opposite.

For the next two weeks after Lenin's return, debate raged in the party committees, with most voices initially against Lenin. On 7 April Lenin's 'April Theses' — 'The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution' — were published in *Pravda*. The next day an editorial reply appeared, signed by Kamenev, arguing:

"In so far as concerns Lenin's general scheme it appears to us unacceptable, since it starts from the assumption that the bourgeois revolution is finished and counts on the immediate transformation of this revolution into a socialist revolution".

But at the all-Russian party congress in mid-April, Lenin's position won out. The slogan of 'All power to the Soviets' was adopted. The basic Bolshevik attitude to the Russian revolution was decided.

Trotsky's return

In May the first ministry of the Provisional Government fell apart. This first ministry had consisted of Cadets (Constitutional Democrats — a bourgeois liberal party) with one minister who called himself a socialist, Kerensky. The new administration consisted of ten capitalist ministers and six socialists — Mensheviks, SRs, and independents.

This left the non-Bolshevik leftists with a foot in both camps — progressively losing credibility amongst the workers and peasants as they tied themselves in knots trying to square the policy of the Provisional Government with the policy of the Petrograd Soviet.

The Bolsheviks were not tainted by participation in a coalition with the capitalists, and moreover they were the only party to stand firmly for peace. From now on the influence of the Bolsheviks grew apace.

On 4 May, Trotsky returned to Petrograd from exile in the USA. He was not yet a member of the Bolshevik party, but in his first speech to the Petrograd Soviet he argued for 'All Power to the Soviets'.

He joined a small group of independent socialists known as the 'Mezhraiontsy', who were mainly based in Petrograd. Lenin saw the importance of unity with Trotsky. On 10 May Lenin attended a meeting of the Mezhraiontsy and offered

1917
How the workers made a revolution

them places on the editorial board of Pravda and on the organising committee of the party congress. Trotsky turned this down, wanting a fusion of the two groups rather than incorporation into the Bolshevik party, with which in the past he had had disagreements.

But in July the 4,000-strong Mezhraiontsy group joined the Bolshevik party en masse, accepting the centrality of the party Lenin had built. Without that party, built over many years of patient work, Trotsky's brilliant perspective would have been so many empty words.

The July Days

As the months wore on, the situation in Russia became more critical. The war, costly both financially and in terms of life, dragged on. Food supplies were desperately short. Profiteering and inflation were rife. It seemed to the workers that since February conditions had merely got worse. Anger against the Provisional Government mounted. They were seen at

A thirst for ideas

Chronology

February 1917 — Workers' demonstrations overthrow Tsar. Provisional Government formed under Prince Lvov. Petrograd Soviet formed

March 1917 — First All-Russian Conference of soviets. Publication of Pravda resumed

April 1917 — Lenin returns to Petrograd. Publication of 'April Theses'. Party conference adopts slogan "All Power ot the Soviets".

May — Trotsky returns to Petrograd from USA. Joins 'Mezhvaiontsy' group (United Social Democrats).

10th May — Lenin meets with Mezhvaiontsy group

June — First All-Russian Congress of Soviets

July — July days — massive street demonstrations in Petrograd against the Provisional Government

Prince Lvov resigns, Kerensky appointed as premier

Trotsky and Mexhvaiontsy' join Bolshevik party

August — Attempt at coup by Kornilov

September — Bolsheviks gain majority in Petrograd and Moscow Soviets. Trotsky elected president of Petrograd Soviet

October —

9th — Lenin comes to Petrograd to persuade party to go for insurrection. Petrograd committee agree.

11th — Kamenev and Zinoviev circulate letter of protest at decision to all party bodies.
16th: Petrograd Soviet sets up Military Revolutionary Committee under leadership of Trotsky

18th — Kamenev and Zinoviev protest at decision for insurrection in a letter in non-party press

24th — Final preperations made for insurrection. Delegates to Congress of soviets begin to arrive

25th — morning, key points of city occupeid by revolutionaries. Congress opens.
Winter palace taken. Bolsheviks take majority at Congress.

1917
How the workers made a revolution

best as inept, at worst as traitors. The situation reached boiling point.

On 3 July in Petrograd the 1st Machine Gun Regiment went armed on to the streets, and appealed for support to the workers and soldiers of Petrograd and to the sailors at Kronstadt. An uprising seemed likely.

But such an uprising would be premature. Petrograd was quite advanced politically. The rest of the country was not. An insurrection at this time could only have one outcome — bloody defeat and demoralisation.

The Bolsheviks were faced with a problem. An uprising would be disastrous, but pressure for action was building up. The sailors at the naval base of Kronstadt, who were under Bolshevik leadership, wanted an uprising. At first the Bolsheviks tried to call off any action, but when this proved impossible, they decided to try to take the leadership of the protests.

They could not just wash their hands of the workers', soldiers' and sailors' revolt, premature though it was. They had to stay with the workers and try to make the action as organised and orderly as possible. The Bolsheviks called for an armed but peaceful demonstration.

The demonstrations started on 4 July. The initial march was peaceful and orderly. But then a sniper shot at the tail-end of the march of Kronstadt sailors. Some sailors fired back, but randomly, not knowing where the snipers were hidden. According to Raskolnikov, a leader of the Kronstadt men and a Bolshevik, several sailors were wounded or killed.

But the firing soon fizzled out, and the demonstration continued on its way to the headquarters of the Soviet.

On their arrival at the Tauride Palace, the angry demonstrators virtually laid siege to it. The terrified Menshevik and SR leaders of the Soviet Executive cowered inside, waiting for non-Bolshevik regiments to come to their rescue. Victor Chernov, the leader of the SRs, was sent out to calm down the crowds, and was promptly 'arrested' by furious Kronstadt sailors.

Trotsky and Raskolnikov went to persuade the crowds to release Chernov and to keep the demonstration peaceful. Trotsky stood up on a car bonnet and addressed the crowd. He asked those who wanted to do physical harm to Chernov to raise their hands. Nobody did. Chernov was released and led pale-faced and shaking back into the Tauride Palace.

The next two days were continuous meetings and demonstrations. But the action, despite having adopted the Bolshevik slogans of 'All Power to the Soviets' and 'Down with the Ten Capitalist Ministers', was directionless and uncoordinated. By the end of the second day it had pretty much run out of steam. Right-wing groups gained the confidence to reappear on the streets. The offices of Pravda were smashed up.

By the evening of the 5th accusation were appearing in the bourgeois paper that Lenin and other leading Bolshevik were in the pay of the German military The arrests of Lenin, Zinoviev an Kamenev were ordered. The Provisiona Government took the opportunity t crack down on the Bolsheviks, and withi weeks the backlash spread against othe parts of the workers' movement.

The next month was a bleak time fo the Russian workers. Lenin went int

1917

How the workers made a revolution

The revolution across Europe

The Bolsheviks saw October as the first step in an international socialist revolution. They understood that without revolution elsewhere in Europe — and the world — the Russian Revolution would be isolated in a terribly backward country, unable to build a new socialist society, and would probably face defeat.

Their expectations were by no means unrealistic. The revolution *did* spread. After 1917 Europe was convulsed by revolutionary upheavals. The tragedy of the twentieth century is that none of them were successful.

The most important was in Germany. A revolt by war-weary sailors escalated into a full-scale workers' revolution. Workers' councils on the Russian *Soviet* model spread across Germany. In November 1918, Germany was declared a republic: the Kaiser was deposed.

The dominant political force in Germany was the old Social Democratic Party (SPD) — the most powerful of the pre-war labour movement parties, whose betrayal of internationalism had destryed the old socialist International. The SPD had no intention whatever of leading the German workers down the Bolshevik road. Indeed, as Ebert, who was to become President in January 1919 declared: "I hate the revolution like sin".

But the SPD had to ride the tide of revolution in order to control it. They recognised the authority of the workers' councils and allowed their government to be based partially upon them, the better to diffuse the workers' revolutionary energies. Of course, this was possible because the workers supported their SPD leaders — but it was a support bred largely by naivety. When German revolutionaries warned of the SPD's intentions, the mass of workers refused to listen.

There were two groups to the left of the SPD. The Independents, or USPD, were a recent split based around the old SPD 'centre' but including more left-wing people. Over the New Year of 1918-19, the German Communist Party (KPD) was formed, fusing together the political groups who both supported the Russian Revolution and wanted to follow its example.

The best-known figures in the KPD were Karl Liebknecht — a former SPD deputy famous for his anti-war stand — and Rosa Luxemburg, one of the period's intellectual giants, recently released from prison.

The KPD was late on the scene, and dominated by young, inexperienced militants, who wanted to leap over the existing consciousness of the workers.

In January, in Berlin, the KPD and a section of the Independents attempted to organise an insurrection. Experienced leaders like Luxemburg initially opposed it, but once it was underway, put themselves on its side. But the so-called 'Spartacus uprising' was heavily defeated.

It was the SPD who suppressed it, and a paramilitary force led by an SPD leader that was principally responsible for the deaths of German revolutionaries. Liebknecht and Luxemburg were captured and brutally murdered.

Other revolutionary possibilities presented themselves in Germany up until 1923. their defeat paved the way for the rise of Hitler.

In March 1919, the newly-formed Communist Party led by Bela Kun took power in Hungary. They ruled for four and a half months, attempting to build a regime of Soviet power. But they took a heavy-handed attitude towards the peasant majority in Hungary, and failed to win their support. Eventually the regime collapsed as Czech and Rumanian armies invaded.

In Italy in 1919 a powerful wave of factory occupations spread across the industrial centre of Turin, seeing the creation of factory councils that took over production. In 1920 the factory occupations were to spread more widely. But again, revolutionary possibilities were missed.

The Socialist Party (which had affiliated to the Communist International or Comintern based in revolutionary Russia) had plenty of revolutionary rhetoric, but when it came to the crunch they held a sort of referendum on whether or not to take power, instead of plainly calling on the workers to do so. The situation burned itself out.

In Britain there was widespread sympathy among workers for the Russian Revolution, and a powerful shop stewards' movement that was involved with the early Comintern, although the Communist Party never reached mass proportions. Big strikes followed the end of World War I.

The lesson in all these struggles was that the weakness and lack of preparation on the part of the revolutionaries — the existence or absence of a revolutionary Marxist praty — made the difference between victory and defeat.

1917
How the workers made a revolution

Armed workers in Petrograd

hiding. Trotsky and Lunacharsky were imprisoned. It seemed for a time that the Soviets were definitively lost to the Mensheviks and SRs.

Kornilov

One positive lesson of the July days was that Kerensky's administration, when it came to the crunch, had little resilience of its own, and was heavily dependent on the support of conservative officers.

The conservatives now looked to General Kornilov, the military commander-in-chief, who had himself been appointed by Kerensky. Buoyed up by his increasing popularity among the reactionaries, Kornilov distanced himself from Kerensky and built up his own base of support. On 24 August he declared war on the Provisional Government.

The jailed Bolshevik leaders were visited by representatives of the Kronstadt sailors. Should they defend Kerensky against Kornilov, or attempt to use the opportunity to finish them both off? Trotsky convinced them that the most urgent task was to stop the attempted right-wing coup. Then they could settle accounts with the Provisional Government later.

The Petrograd Soviet set up a Committee for Struggle against Counter-Revolution. Kerensky had to support such moves — but they quickly went much further than he wanted. The Committee for Struggle was later to be revived as the Military Revolutionary Committee which would organise the uprising in October.

Groups of revolutionaries were sent to agitate amongst Kornilov's troops. The troops came over to the side of revolution in droves. Kornilov soon found himself a general without an army. The first serious attempt to mobilise the forces of counter-revolution was defeated.

But the forces of revolution had been mobilised. This successful defeat of Kornilov's revolt against Kerensky shatted the Kerensky administration. The Cadets left the administration, as many of them had privately supported Kornilov. Socialist ministers, suspicious that Kerensky had initially encouraged Kornilov, also left. For the next month Kerensky ruled through a small committee called the Directorate.

In many areas the local Soviets took over full power, saying that this was necessary to ensure that Kornilov's counter-revolutionaries were combatted effectively. Support for the Mensheviks in the Soviets dwindled as they tried desperately to cobble together a new deal with Kerensky.

From now on the Bolsheviks went from strength to strength in the country, whilst the Mensheviks and SRs became more and more isolated. The Bolsheviks' intelligent tactics, in defending the gains of the February Revolution against Kornilov while continuing their political independence from Kerensky, had shifted the political balance. Workers who had armed themselves and set up Red Guards for the struggle against Kornilov now held on to their guns for a struggle against Kerensky.

On the eve of October

By mid-September the Bolsheviks were the majority in the soviets of Petrograd, Moscow and several other major industrial centres. On 23 September, just after his release from power, Trotsky was elected president of the Petrograd Soviet.

The Mensheviks and SRs were now marginalised. Kerensky had cobbled together a new ministry consisting mainly of Cadets. This was the fifth ministry in seven months, and lasted for only a month.

Lenin, still in hiding, was well informed of the situation in the country. In letters to the Central Committee he argued that the time had arrived to organise an uprising. If the party hesitated, the opportunity would slip from their hands and a new counter-revolution would smash the soviets. The party should seize the time.

Kamenev was vehemently against this course of action. Trotsky was in favour, but with a slight difference — that the uprising should be organised through the Petrograd Soviet, and timed to coincide with the forthcoming Second all-Russian Congress of Soviets, where the Bolsheviks would have a majority. In the event Trotsky's view won out. The insurrection was organised through the structures of the Soviet.

By far the greatest disagreement was that between Lenin and Trotsky on one side and Kamenev and Zinoviev on the other. Zinoviev and Kamenev believed that the conditions, both nationally and internationally, were unfavourable for a successful uprising. They completely overestimated the loyalty of the garrison to the Provisional Government. When the Central Committee set the date for the insurrection, Zinoviev and Kamenev leaked the news to the non-party press.

In October, spontaneous revolts of peasants swept the countryside. In the cities, food shortages escalated. Kerensky's government isolated itself even more when, facing German invasion, it planned

to evacuate to Moscow from Petrograd. Some Cadets even whispered that a German invasion might be a good thing — to restore law and order.

This provided a perfect propaganda opportunity for the Bolsheviks. Trotsky announced the Bolsheviks' withdrawal from a sham 'pre-parliament' set up by the Provisional Government, saying:

"With this government of treason to the people and with this council of counter-revolutionary connivance we have nothing in common... In withdrawing from the council, we summon the workers, soldiers and peasants of all Russia to be on their guard and be courageous. Petrograd is in danger! The Revolution is in danger!"

This was no call for national defence, but a call for workers' action to defend themselves and finish off the Kerensky regime. On 9 October the Petrograd Soviet formed the Military Revolutionary Committee. Initially proposed as a body to organise the defence of Petrograd, it was to be the body which organised the insurrection.

From now on the job of the Bolsheviks was to organise the practicalities of the revolution and to consolidate support. Trotsky, Lunacharsky, Kollontai and the other famous Bolshevik orators travelled round speaking to meeting after meeting. Sukhanov, a Menshevik historian of the revolution, writes:

"At the famous Cirque Moderne, where Trotsky, Lunacharsky and Volodarsky took the platform, thered were endless queues and crowds, whom the enormous ampitheatre could not contain... Trotsky ran from the Obukhovsky to the Trobuchnei, from Putilovtsi to the Baltiisky, from the Manege to the barracks; and it seemed that he spoke everywhere simultaneously. Every worker and soldier of Petrograd knew him and listened to him. His influence on the masses and the leaders alike was overwhelming. He was the central figure of those days, and the chief hero of this remarkable chapter of history".

Kerensky meanwhile was trying to remove the pro-Bolshevik garrison from Petrograd. They ignored his orders and stayed put. This 'silent rising', as Trotsky called it, showed where the real strength in Russia lay. The arsenals agreed to supply the workers' Red Guards with rifles.

The Bolshevik Central Committee met, and decided on 20 October as the date of the insurrection, the day that the Congress of Soviets was due to begin in Petrograd. The Mensheviks who controlled the organisation of the Congress then put it back to 25 October.

On 21 October the Soviet instructed the Petrograd soldiers to act under the orders of the Military Revolutionary Committee, and a meeting of the regimental committees adopted this resolution:

"Endorsing all political decisions of the Petrograd Soviet, the garrison declares: the time for words has passed. The country is on the brink of doom. The army demands peace, the peasants demand land, the workers demand employment and bread. The coalition government is against the people, an instrument in the hands of the people's enemies. The time for words has passed. The All-Russian Congress of Soviets ought to take power in its hands and secure peace, land and bread to the people... The Petrograd garrison solemnly pledges itself to put at the disposal of the All-Russian Congress all its forces, to the last man, to fight for these demands. Rely on us..."

The next step was for a thorough plan of action to be drawn up. The Military Revolutionary Committee detailed groups of activists to occupy key positions in Petrograd — railway stations, power stations, the banks, post office, etc. — at a given signal. Trotsky was sent to talk to the soldiers at the 'Peter and Paul' fortress, which was of great strategic importance. He won them over.

The terrified Kerensky government tried one last show of strength. The offices of the Bolsheviks' paper were ransacked and sealed. Petrograd, Kronstadt and Finland (then part of the Russian empire) were declared in a state of siege. Security around the Winter Palace was stepped up. 'Reliable' troops were brought back from the front and sent on to the streets. The plan was to smash the Military Revolutionary Committee and to arrest the leaders of the Petrograd Soviet.

In response, the Smolny Institute, the headquarters of the Petrograd Soviet, was armed with cannon. The Military Revolutionary Committee instructed all regiments to stand ready. When Kerensky issued orders to the cruiser Aurora, the crew instead answered to the Military Revolutionary Committee.

The October uprising

Meanwhile, delegates were arriving for the All-Russian Congress of Soviets.

Kerensky summoned a special session of the 'pre-parliament' in a last-ditch effort to rally support for the Provisional Government. The Mensheviks and SRs panicked, able neither to support the workers' uprising nor Kerensky. They argued the day away, desperately searching for some way out. Since the Provisional Government had proved impotent, a Committee of Public Safety was set up to organise against the insurrection.

Meanwhile the Provisional Government's support evaporated. Soldiers sent to guard the Winter Palace went over to the Bolsheviks, to be replaced by others who followed suit.

Early in the morning of 25 Octo
November by the Western calendar
arsenals, post office, food depot
other key positions were taken over
posed by detachments of soldier
workers. Troops sent to reclaim the
the government refused to do so.

Everything was very tightly orga
Factory committees took on the ta
organising supplies and roundin
counter-revolutionaries. The Mi
Revolutionary Committee was ke
formed of all developments, and wa
to direct detachments where they
needed.

The Congress of Soviets opened
sound of the ship Aurora firing o
Winter Palace. Kerensky and othe
tions of the right wing were taking r
there. Blanks were fired to intim
them.

The Presidium of the Congress
sisted of 14 Bolsheviks, seven SRs,
Mensheviks, and one other. Almos
mediately the right-wing Mensh
stormed out. The remaining Mensh
demanded a new coalition governm
When this was refused they also de
to leave. Trotsky berated them:

**"Our rising has been victorious.
they tell us: Renounce your victory,
make a compromise. With whom?
whom, I am asking, shall we mak
compromise? With those miserable
groups who have left, or with those
make these proposals?**

**But we have seen them in thei
stature. Nobody in the whole of R
follows them any more, and it is
them as equal partners that the millio
workers and peasants... should con
an agreement?... You are mise
isolated individuals. You are bank
You have played out your role. Go v
you belong: to the dustheap of histo**

To this the Mensheviks slunk out o
hall, passing through angry scornful r
of workers and soldiers.

Meanwhile in the Winter Palace K
sky and his cronies still tried desper
to cling on to power. Orders were sen
to the railways to bring in reinforcem
from the front. None arrived. Tr
were ordered to march on the Smoln
stitute. Instead more Red Gu
assembled round the Winter Pa
Kerensky fled in an American diplo
car.

On the afternoon of 25 October, T
sky addressed the Military Revolutio
Committee, announcing victory.
**were told that insurrection would dr
the Revolution in a sea of blood. We
no knowledge of even a single victim**

In the Winter Palace all was chaos.
demoralised reactionaries squab
amongst themselves. Small groups
revolutionaries were sent into the pal
some fighting, some spreading defeat
Meanwhile the shelling continued, int
ed to demoralise rather than in
damage. Soon the Palace was taken,
the joyous people of Petrograd swar
in.

The Congress of Soviets elected a
Bolshevik leadership. The world's
great workers' revolution was victori

1917

How the workers made a revolution

1917

How the workers made a revolution

Contemporary photo-montage of the Bolshevik leaders of the revolution. Note that Stalin is not among them.

The party of victory

By Dion D'Silva

Why was there a workers' revolution in Russia in 1917? Russia wasn't anything like as advanced as Britain or Germany and the working class was numerically dwarfed by the peasantry.

The simple answer is that without the Bolshevik Party there would have been no revolution. For they had built a revolutionary party and movement very different from the chaotic and fragmented organisations in the rest of Europe.

Unlike the bourgeoisie and their role in the bourgeois revolution, the working class is a wage-slave class until it actually takes power. It is also a divided class and even at the best of times only a limited section becomes fully class conscious.

As Trotsky said in Lessons of October, "without a party capable of directing the proletarian revolution, the revolution itself is rendered impossible. The proletariat cannot seize power by a spontaneous uprising."

The Bolshevik party under Lenin's leadership proved to be militant in all three fronts of class struggle, the economic (spontaneous), the political and the ideological.

The party did not come about by people getting together declaring themselves a revolutionary party. The Bolsheviks operated as a faction within the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party from 1903-11. It did not emerge as a party until 1912 when the opposition had collapsed under the pressure of workers' militancy and the hard, tough organisation of the Bolsheviks.

Their ideas about party organisation were modified according to the situation in Russia. Yet the fundamental principle of fighting for international workers' revolution was kept intact.

Lenin argued that the revolutonary party needed to be a tight, active organisation consisting of professional revolutionaries. Far from this distancing the party from the working class it in fact allowed it to be more responsive and open to it. "The stronger our party organisations are, consisting of real Social Democrats and the less wavering and instability there is within the Party, the broader, the more varied, the richer and more fertile will be the influence of the Party on the elements of the working class masses surrounding and guided by it."

Starting like that the Bolsheviks were in the best conditions to gain from the revolutionary struggles of 1905, when many workers joined the party which became more open to take advantage of the situation. The same happened with the 1912 strikes and 1917 revolutions.

The Bolsheviks were not dogmatic in the way they interpreted the Marxist texts. They saw Marxism as a method for analysing a changing world, not as holy writ.

Other former adherents to Marxism

had turned their backs on class struggle and revolution. They argued that political freedom, democracy and the vote removed the need for class struggle. The best one could hope for was to win majorities for reform. Kautsky, leader of the Second International, opposed the Bolsheviks and the form of the Russian Revolution.

Unlike most of the socialist parties, the Bolsheviks opposed the 1914-18 war. Lenin stated: "Internationalism means breaking with one's own social-chauvinists and with one's own imperialist government; it means waging a revolutionary struggle against that government and overthrowing it and being ready to make the greatest national sacrifices...if it should benefit the development of the world workers' revolution."

Within the Russian workers' movement the Bolsheviks had to wage a long and bitter fight against the Mensheviks. Both factions had believed that the only revolution possible in Russia was a bourgeois one. Mensheviks deduced mechanically that it would be led by the bourgeoisie whereas Lenin recognised their weakness as a class. The revolution would be made by an alliance of the working class and the peasantry.

Trotsky agreed with this but argued that such an alliance led by the working class would carry on into a working class revolution which would succeed by spreading to the advanced capitalist countries. The Bolsheviks finally came around to this position. Unfortunately Trotsky didn't join the Bolshevik party until July 1917 — a mistake he regretted for the rest of his life.

The strength of the Bolsheviks lay not only in their tactically flexible organisation and political training but their connections and implantation in the Russian working class.

Though comparatively small, the Russian working class tended to be concentrated in large factories. This lent itself to militant and well organised struggles. The class showed itself to be heroic and defiant in many bitter fights.

On 22 January 1905, thousands of workers were killed or injured by Cossacks while peacefully demonstrating in St. Petersburg. Strikes immediately spread throughout Russia. Discontent continued throughout 1905, and towards the end of the year mass strikes threw up Soviets. In St. Petersburg Trotsky was elected its chairman. Lenin was one of the few people who recognised the full significance of these new forms of workers' organisations.

In 1917, the Bolshevik slogan was 'All power to the soviets' which had again sprung up.

After returning from exile in April 1917, Lenin called for the end of the war and the replacement of the Provisional Government. Opposition came from within the Bolshevik ledaership and initially Lenin was in a small minority. He appealed to the workers and the rank and file Bolsheviks, who finally overturned the conservative leadership pronouncements of Kamenev and Stalin.

The democratic nature of the party is clear from Leon Trotsky's book 'History of the Russian Revolution'. "In a broad party mass a quick organisation took place — leftward and leftward towards the theses of Lenin. District after district adhered to them."

Even though the party had just 240,000 members on the eve of the revolution it provided leadership to millions through the trade unions, the factory and shop committees and the soviets. The elections to the Moscow dumas mark the growing influence of the Bolsheviks. They had 52% of the votes whereas in June the Social Revolutionaries had 58%. The garrison voted 90% for the Bolsheviks, in some detachments over 95%.

Lenin and Trotsky knew that socialism could not survive in one country. They looked to spreading the revolution internationally. However even in highly industrialised Germany in November 1918 the spontaneous uprising of workers and peasants only succeeded in transferring power to the hands of the bourgeoisie because there was no revolutionary party to provide the correct leadership. When the next revolutionary struggle came it was too late for the German communists had not built a revolutionary cadre.

The civil war in Russia took its toll on the working class and consequently the Bolsheviks. The party had differed from others in two important aspects: it had a politically hardened cadre with deep roots in the working class. Lenin soon realised that both these conditions were changing. The bureaucracy was growing and gaining power while the civil war had literally smashed the proletariat. These conditions opened the way for the rise of Stalin.

1917

How the workers made a revolution

Building the new International

From the collapse of the Socialist International at the beginning of World War I, Lenin and the Bolsheviks were committed to the building of a new workers' International — a 'world party of socialist revolution' to group together all the Marxists and unite them around a coherent strategy.

Until the revolution in 1917, the advocates of a new 'Third' International were a small minority. But under the impact of the revolution, tens of thousands of workers flooded to the banner of 'international communism'.

The Third, Communist International, or Comintern, was founded in Moscow in 1919. Soon mass revolutionary parties had been formed in a number of European countries, and Communist Parties were being set up the world over.

In Germany, the Communist Party (KPD) brought together the old revolutionary left of the Social Democratic Party and younger militants radicalised by the war.

After the defeated Spartacus uprising in January 1919, the most experienced leaders, Liebknecht and Luxemburg, were murdered. A younger leadership under Paul Levi precipitated an early split with the 'ultra left' faction who formed the Communist Workers' Party (KAPD) — which rejected all parliamentary activity on principle.

The Comintern executive was opposed to this split, but had to struggle hard for unity. They wanted also to include the left of the 'Independents'.

In Italy, the Socialist Party (PSI) voted to affiliate to the Comintern. The PSI had been unusual for its opposition to World War I, but the Comintern was not convinced of the revolutionary commitment of the party right. The left, led by a doctrinaire ultra-left called Amadeo Bordiga, and the far more subtle Antonio Gramsci, failed to win the PSI to a consistent revolutionary line, and the Communist Party (PCI) was formed by a split in 1921, following the old party's failure to seize the revolutionary possibilities of the previous year.

In France also the majority of the old socialist party voted to join the Comintern and here the right wing split. But eventually the Communist Party was fully formed after further conflicts.

The Comintern imposed strict conditions on its member parties in order to weed out the reformists and vacillators or 'centrists' from party leaderships. This also affected the Independent Labour Party in Britain, which for a while was sympathetic, but was not reliable enough to be allowed into the Comintern.

The Communist Party of Great Britain was formed by the fusion of a number of small revolutionary groups. At its second congress in 1920 (backed up by a big section of a pamphlet by Lenin entitled "Left-wing Communism, an infantile disorder"), the Comintern advised the CPGB to try to affiliate to the Labour Party.

This was typical of the Comintern's approach. Most of the big Communist Parties were formed by splits in the old labour movement parties. They did not appear on the political scene 'out of nowhere'. Where Communist Parties were small, their job was to orient towards the existing mass labour movement and their political parties.

That the route to the mass revolutionary parties was through the existing labour movement is something often forgotten by the left today.

Stalin's counter-revolution

By Geoff Ward

By the end of the civil war in 1921 the Bolshevik Party was in control of a state devastated by war and isolated by the defeat and ebb of working class revolution in Europe. All the main opposition parties had gone over to the counter-revolution and were banned. Like industry, the working class had been decimated by war. Famine and disease stalked Russia. Many workers returned to their peasant roots in the countryside. There at least they could eat.

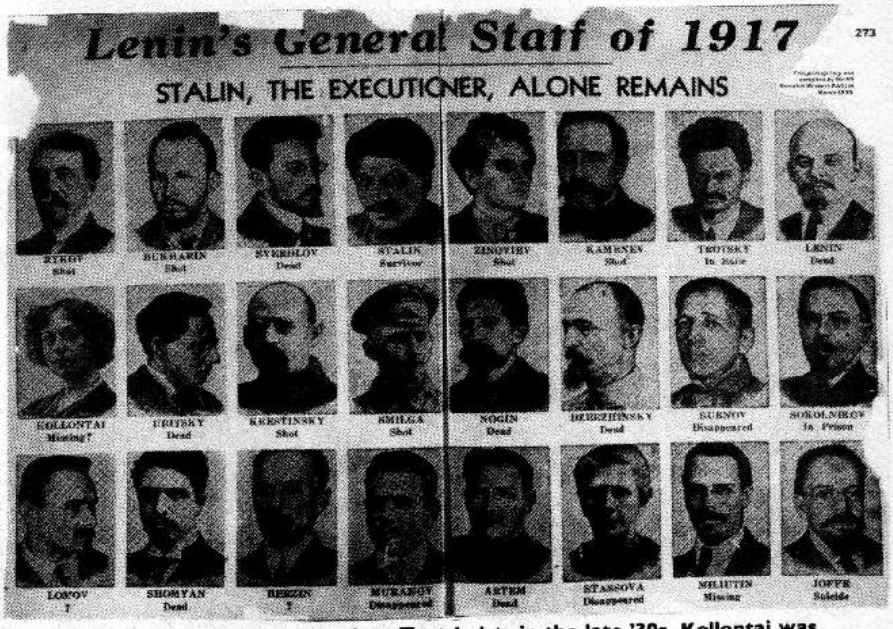
The system of 'War Communism' rested on forced expropriation of grain from the peasants. With the end of the civil war it began to break down. At first Trotsky and Lenin realised that in order to stimulate the economy it was necessary to make concessions to private trade and farming to allow a lengthy growth of capitalism, under the control of the workers' state.

At the 10th Congress the 'New Economic Policy' (NEP) was introduced, despite stormy opposition within the party. Due to the seriousness of the situation the congress took the uprecedented decision to ban factions, understanding this to be a temproray expendient.

The effect of NEP was to strengthen the rich peasants (kulaks) and entrepreneurs ('NEP men') at the expense of the working class and poorer peasantry. With the dispersal of the working class, the soviets had been seriously weakened as organs of democracy and it was to a large extent the 'Old Guard' of the Bolsheviks who ran the state apparatus.

Lenin, by now suffering major illness, began to turn his attention to the dangers of bureaucratisation, as the distinction between party and state began to blur. The Bolsheviks partly depended on the bureaucracy they had inheritted from Tsarism and Lenin was keen to shield the party from being assimilated into this system.

As Lenin's strokes grew worse, disabling him, the problems of leadership of the Communist Party became an urgent consideration. The 11th Party Congress in 1922, the last attended by Lenin, elected Stalin as General Secretary. With this post Stalin began to concentrate enormous powers running the party machine; placing local party secretaries; appointing Bolsheviks to government posts.



Poster produced by the American Trotskyists in the late '30s. Kollontai was not in fact missing. She survived and died as Stalin's ambassador to Sweden in 1952.

Trotsky, however, was considered second only to Lenin. The organiser of the Red Army; leading authority in the Communist International; responsible for important areas of Soviet diplomacy and increasingly working closely with Lenin.

> "Stalin with his wide powers of appointments sought to eliminate from important posts people who were possible supporters of Trotsky, thereby consolidating his position as the party's master"

Then an incident involving Stalin and the local self government of Georgia gave Lenin a new insight into Stalin's deceitful bullying and repressive measures directed against the Russian nationalities.

With the approach of the following Congress in March 1923 Lenin planned a bombshell: to have Stalin removed as General Secretary. This, combined with Lenin's description of Trotsky in his 'Last Testament' as the "most able man on the Central Committee' was designed to ruin Stalin. However the Politburo decided not to publish the "Testament" and Trotsky allowed a compromised deal in which he didn't speak up on the Georgian Affair.

In the background a faction had formed within the Politbureau — the triumvirate — of Stalin, Zinoviev, and Kamenev — with the intention of preventing Trotsky becoming Lenin's successor. Stalin was re-elected General Secretary and with the death of Lenin on 21st January 1924 the triumvirate were free to suage a ruthless campaign against Trotsky.

Straight away a vociferous slander campaign was launched to create the heretical myth of "Trotskyism". All Trotsky's past disagreements with Lenin were dragged up and distorted in an attempt to portray Trotsky as always an anti-Leninist and anti-Bolshevik even after the revolution.

At the following Party congress Zinoviev and Kamenev initiated the exalted glorification of Lenin which later became a state cult.

Stalin with his wide powers of appointments sought to eliminate from important posts people who were possible supporters of Trotsky, thereby consolidating his position as the party's master.

In October 1923, to combat the growing bureaucratisation, 46 leading Bolsheviks issued a statement protesting at the hierarchy of secretaries, a statement demanding freedom of criticism, debate, better economic planning and a special conference. With the Politbureau and the Central Committee behind the triumvirate Trotsky was censured and the opposition was threatened with disciplinary action for breaching the 1921 ban on factions.

At this time attention was focussed on the French occupation of the Ruhr area of Germany. A revolutionary situation developed which the German Communist Party might have been able to use.

The German movement was defeated because of indecision and other mistakes made by the German CP. This had a demoralising effect in Russia, emphasising the isolation of the Russian Revolution.

The following year Stalin began for the first time to expound his theory of 'Socialism in One Country' — that the Soviet Union could achieve socialism exclusivly with its own resources without spreading the revolution to more advanced countries. In this theory Stalin was expressing the will of the growing bureaucracy, particularly the younger generation of administrators who resisted the idea that the fate of the Soviet Union depended on International revolution.

With this theory Stalin was not only challenging Trotsky's 'Permanant Revolution' but Lenin's repeated argument that it was nonsense to talk of building a completely socialist society in a country as backward as Russia.

During the spring and summer of 1924 Stalin recruited 240,000 new members to the party under the Leninist levy. Those Bolsheviks who had been with the party since 1917 or earlier now made up less than 1% of the membership. By allowing anyone into the ranks of the Bolshevik Party the so-called 'Leninist levy' signalled the death of the party Lenin built.

At the 13th Party Congress in 1924 bitter attacks were renewed on the Opposition with Zinoiviev calling for Trotsky's expulsion and demanding that he recant his veiws. Trotsky answered the slanders indirectly when he published "The Lessons of October", where he analysed the role played by the present leaders in the Russian revolution.

With the packing of delegates to the Congress it was a foregone conclusion that the oppostion would lose. Trotsky was soon stripped of his position as Commissar of War.

By 1926 the turn towards the rich peasants was in full swing, with Bukharin the ideologue of the right telling them to 'enrich themselves'. The richer peasants were beginning to regain their confidence with their new-found wealth and privileges.

The bureaucracy was increasingly differentiating itself from the working class. Military officials; technicians; party functionaries; managers were gradually becoming an independent social layer rising above the working class and defending their own material privileges.

Stalin's doctrine of 'Socialism in One Country' meant that the Communist International was being transformed into an instrument of Russia's domestic policy.

With the defeat of the Left Opposition a division opened up between Stalin and Bukharin on the one hand and Zinoviev and Kamenev. Around the 14th Party Congress reflecting on where Stalin's policy of encouraging the rich peasantry and NEP was leading, Zinoviev and Kamenev publically criticised 'Socialism in One Country' and called for a free debate on the issues and a return to Soviet democracy. Both sides packed the Congress with their supporters, yet Trotsky remained distant from the split in the ruling faction although he had anticipated it. At first he did not know which side, if any to support.

"By the mid-30's Stalin had murdered not only the Trotskyists, Zinovievists, Bukharinists and others... he had also slaughtered most of his original faction."

Zinoviev and Kamenev were defeated and their supporters lost their positions up and down the country. Zinoviev and Kamenev joined with Trotsky's Left Opposition to form a 'United Opposition.'

With each new defeat of the working class internationally the bureaucracy was able to rise higher. In Britain the General Strike was defeated by the TUC utilizing the cover of the Anglo-Soviet Council and later in China the honourary member of the Comintern, Chiang Kaishek, butchered thousands of Chinese communists in the Shanghai massacre of May 1927 after Stalin instructed them to subordinate themselves to the Kuomintang.

By the summer of 1926 the newly formed United Opposition organised to take their platform to the Party. The Opposition had something like 8,000 adherents against a total number of 400,000 and they were reduced to clandestine meetings in peoples homes and had to contend with party meetings broken up by Stalinist thug squads. In this hostile environment even anti-semetism that poisonous vapour with which the rotting carcase of Tsarism had poisoned Russia for decades before 1917 — was used against the Opposition.

Stalin would borrow elements from the Opposition's program if it was useful — like the call for an increase in wages. By October 1927 Stalin decided that the Opposition must be expelled from the Central Committee before they could use the forthcoming congress to attack Stalin's policy in China.

By November they were expelled. The opposition decided to use the occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of the Revolution to make an impact on the masses of workers. Their demonstrations are broken up and the crowds of workers watch passively. With their final defeat Zinoviev and Kamenev surrender to Stalin and apply for re-addmission to the party as rank and file members.

Now the opposition was firmly routed. Trotsky was sent into exile to Alma Alta in Soviet Asia. Then Stalin took a sharp turn seemingly to the left adopting much of the Opposition's platform but in a much more brutish form directing his fire against Bukharin. He announced the elimination of the kulaks as a class and embarked on forced collectivisation of the farms. He also announced the first Five-Year Plan with a crash program of industrialisation

The Stalinist bureaucracy fell out with the NEP bourgeoisie, with whom they had allied against the working class, and its organisation, The Left Opposition. As Trotsky would later put it, the bureaucracy fought the NEP bourgeoisie to decide which of them, bureaucracy or bourgeoisie, would have control of the wealth of society. The bureaucracy won, emerging as the sole master of Russian society.

After they had won they continued to wage a one-sided civil war against the remnamnts of Lenin's Bolshevik party, until it was thoroughly uprooted and destroyed. Stalin's faction too had started life as part of Lenin's party. By the mid-'30s Stalin had murdered not only the Trotskyists, Zinovievists, Bukharinists and others of Lenin's party, he had also slaughtered most of his original faction.

The Moscow trials of 1936, '37 and '38 were public events which registered the vast subterranean civil war in which Stalin crushed and extirpated Bolshevism. A river of working-class blood separates Stalinism and Bolshevism.

At the end of the subterranean civil war the new Stalinist bureaucracy — the grave-digger of the Russian workers' revolution — was the sole master of the USSR. And so it remains to this day. Only a new workers' revolution in the USSR can change that.

1917

How the workers made a revolution

Myths and reality

1917

How the workers made a revolution

By Liz Millward

Lenin's party did not seek to create a 'democratic centralist' state, in which all social life was under the command of the Central Committee.

'Democratic centralism' was the name given to the way the Bolshevik Party was organised. There were two basic ideas: in conditions of repression and clandestinity, an effective party needed a high degree of centralisation; but as far as possible the party members should decide policy. When repression was less severe (as in Russia in 1905, or — more so — in countries like Britain today), the system means that there is full democratic discussion, a vote, and after the vote party unity in action. Between conferences elected bodies function as a leadership.

It was never the Bolsheviks' intention that the state and society should be organised on these principles. Nor, in the early years, were they.

Later the Stalinists imposed a 'party line' on everything — including such things as visual arts and creative writing. 'Socialist realism' subordinated the artist to the party.

By contrast, in the years immediately following the revolution, there was a wild flowering of art, writing, architecture, and lively debate on such issues. Trotsky, among others, vigorously defended artistic freedom and the right of artistic independence from the 'party line'.

Too close a relationship between party and state did not develop in Russia. But it developed as a result of the revolutionary government's self-defence during the Civil War. In a desperate situation, governments take desperate measures. Possibly the Bolsheviks took some decisions too lightly; but it is easy to be critical with hindsight.

Certainly the Bolsheviks were opposed both to the kind of state that eventually emerged in Russia and to 'democratic centralism' as it came to be understood in the Communist Parties of the 1930s. It came to be a system of rigid top-down control. It had never been so in Lenin's day.

The Bolsheviks were not a monolithic party.

The later idea of Communist Parties — and of various Stalinoid 'Trotskyist' sects — as undemocratic and mind-numbing machines staffed by yes-men is often projected back onto the Bolshevik Party. But the Bolsheviks were not at all like that.

Before the revolution, the Bolsheviks had frequent and often public debates. Even at the height of the revolution, there were public debates about major issues.

When Lenin returned to Russia in April 1917 he found that he disagreed profoundly with the local Bolshevik leaders. There was a wide-ranging and intense *debate* about the whole question of revolutionary strategy, which Lenin eventually won — in a vote — at a party conference.

The Bolsheviks did not plan a one-party state

Russia ended up as a one-party state, and those who want to emulate today's USSR believe that a one party state is a basic socialist principle.

That was not the Bolshevik aim. Indeed the original revolutionary government was a coalition of the Bolsheviks and a party called the Left Social Revolutionaries.

Gradually other political parties were prohibited. But this was because of the civil war. No government in the world allows parties to operate freely in the middle of a war if they are making propaganda for the other side — and in the civil war that was the situation.

Other political parties deserted the Bolshevik government, but the masses did not. At least, a big enough section of the masses continued to support the Bolsheviks to enable them to *win* the civil war — despite the immense odds stacked against them.

Workers' democracy *should* allow for a plurality of parties. In fact it could allow more access to the media for small parties, who would be given use of facilities (printing presses, TV, etc) in proportion to their proven support.

The one-party-system is a Stalinist abomination.

Stalinism was not produced by Bolshevism.

A monolithic, top-down system of command in a one-party state was never the Bolshevik programme. To consolidate their system the Stalin faction had to exterminate the 'old Bolsheviks'.

The strength of that faction — of the privileged bureaucracy which still holds power — was dependent upon a range of *material* factors. Russia was an economically backward country, devastated by years of war and civil war, isolated as the revolutionary wave in Europe was defeated.

During the civil war, thousands of people fled the cities for lack of food — but a terrible famine was burning the countryside dry.

The bureaucracy policed the bread queues — and in doing so got an unfair share of the bread. Gradually it cut its links with the tired, depleted and hungry working class.

So the Stalinist counter-revolution depended upon all of these historical and social factors. Even if the Bolshevik Party *had* been organised in the Stalinist model, the form of party organisation *by itself* would not have structured a whole social system.

In fact, it was the degeneration of the state, and the development of the social structure (i.e. the emergence of the bureaucracy) which created the Stalinist-model party.

Stalinism was not the only way to develop the economy. The socialist alternative was not utopian.

Stalinism developed the economy on the backs of the working class. That's what the theory of 'socialism in one country' developed by the Stalinists in the late 1920s was about. The Bolsheviks never imagined for a moment even that they could survive in power without international revolution, never mind that a new society could be built. 'Socialism in one country' was and is a contradiction in terms.

'Socialism in one country' is often presented as a 'practical' option, against the 'impractical' alternative offered by Trotsky.

The Trotskyist Left Opposition never advocated exclusive concentration on 'world revolution' and forgetting about the USSR's economic development.

But socialist revolution in advanced capitalist countries would be decisive for the economic progess of the USSR — through the international economic planning it would make possible. As Isaac Deutscher once put it, 'socialism in *one* - country' meant giving up on socialism in any others. The USSR turned its back on the European working class, subordinating their interests to the diplomatic needs of the Kremlin.

The leaders of the revolution

Lenin

By Trudy Saunders

Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, known to history as Lenin, was the main leader and organiser of the Bolshevik Party. He was born in 1870, the son of a school inspector, and early on in life had experience of the revolutionary movement. When Lenin was 17 his older brother Alexander was hanged for his part in an attempted assassination of the Tsar.

Before the turn of the century, Lenin committed himself to the small but energetic Russian Marxist movement. Forced like many revolutionaries into exile, Lenin helped to edit Iskra (the Spark), a Marxist newspaper sent into the country.

Lenin made an early theoretical contribution. His 'The Development of Capitalism in Russia' tackled the common view of non-Marxist revolutionaries that Russia could pass directly to socialism without any capitalist development. Lenin showed that capitalism was *already* developing, creating new social classes.

In "What is to be done?" Lenin criticised both the ramshackle organisation of the Marxist movement and a tendency to ignore political questions in favour exclusively of trade unionism.

The Marxist movement split in 1903 into its Bolshevik and Menshevik factions: essentially the Mensheviks opposed Lenin's call for tighter organisation. In fact during the 1905 revolution the two wings reunited with the Bolsheviks accepting minority status, but in the long run this was a permanent split.

The 1905 revolution convinced Lenin of a strategy for the workers' movement in the next round of revolutionary struggle. Against the Menshevik idea that the workers should put off socialist struggle until after the capitalists had replaced the Tsar in power, Lenin argued for a democratic government of the workers and poor peasants — the 'revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry'.

But the revolution was defeated, and in the years that followed Lenin had to argue doggedly both with those who wanted to give up, and those who refused to acknowledge defeat and wanted to continue as before.

One of Lenin's distinctive characteristics was this determination to think things through and *convince* people. His opponents often saw him as a mad sectarian who never stopped arguing; but this was because Lenin took *ideas* seriously and wanted always to achieve the greatest clarity of ideas that was possible.

In 1914 the World War shattered the international socialist movement. The socialists who held to their principles, opposed the war and called for international workers' solidarity were a small minority.

Lenin argued for 'turning the imperialist war into a civil war' — for developing the revolutionary possibilities presented by the social crisis the war had created, rather than simply trying to win 'peace' that would only be a return to the old status quo.

Lenin also tried to analyse both the war itself and the underlyng causes of the socialist movement's collapse. He argued that capitalism had reached a new level of development, in which monopolies and trusts dominated the economy, and in which the drive for markets, sources of raw materials and colonies led to war. The World War was an 'imperialist, robbers' war' that workers had no interest in supporting.

At the same time, colonial super-profits enabled the capitalists to buy off a section of the labour movement — which is why they had abandoned socialism and lined up with the bosses' war.

Lenin argued that the workers should support anti-colonial revolts against the imperialist powers. One of the worst aspects to the right wing leaders' betrayal of socialism was their support for colonialism.

When the Russian Revolution broke out, Lenin was still in exile. Arriving in Russia in April 1917 he had to confront a new conservatism in the Bolshevik leaders' approach. Lenin argued for the working class to take power through their councils or 'soviets'.

In his 'State and Revolution', written in 1917, Lenin spelled out the Marxist attitude towards both the existing capitalist regime, and the democratic workers' state needed to move towards socialism. He explained how the Soviets were the basic institutions necessary for workers' democracy.

The October revolution was made possible by the existence of the Bolshevik Party, but Trotsky, for example, argued that without Lenin himself, the October revolution would not have taken place, so decisive was his intervention.

After the revolution, Lenin was a vital influence not only in Russia but in the Communist International. In particular he helped fight the 'ultra-lefts' who expected to be able to make revolutions without any thought given to the existing consciousness and illusions of the workers.

Lenin fell seriously ill in 1922, and until his death in January 1924 was unable to speak. But during that time he tried to rally the Bolshevik Party against the threat of 'bureaucratic deformations' in their regime represented most clearly by Stalin.

Lenin failed. His wife was later to say that if he had lived, he, too, would have been put to death by the Stalinists.

Trotsky

By Cathy Nugent

"A rising of the masses of the people needs no justification. What has happened is an insurrection and not a conspiracy... Here no compromise is possible. To those who have left and to those who tell us to do this we must say: you are miserable bankrupts, your role is played out; go where you ought to be into the dustbin of history!"

Leon Trotsky, speaking to the All-Russian Congress of Soviets on the morning after the October insurrection.

Leon Trotsky was many things. He was an agitator and a party builder. He was a prolific and talented writer. His writing

1917

How the workers made a revolution

1917
How the workers made a revolution

Trotsky, Lenin and Kamenev

embrace all kinds of issues. Often they are very harsh, even bitter: but they were always connected to the class struggle. During the civil war he became a military strategist ensuring that the revoluton was successfully defended. He was never a compromiser.

Trotsky began his revolutionary career while he was a student in Odessa. He was 18 when, in 1898, he was first imprisoned for his political activities. Later he was exiled in Siberia.

In 1902 he escaped and fled to London. Here he worked alongside other Russian Marxists in exile, including Lenin, on the journal Iskra. Iskra was a paper of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party. In the 1903 dispute over organisational matters Trotsky argued against the majority (Bolshevik) position. He did not join the Bolsheviks until July 1917.

As chair of the St. Petersburg Soviet, Trotsky played an important role in the revolutionary movement of 1905. That movement was brutally crushed. He was again arrested and sent to Siberia, but escaped on the journey and again made his way abroad.

There, Trotsky tried to summarise the experience of 1905 and what it meant for the Russian working class movement.

Russian capitalism, he argued, had developed differently to other European countries. The Russian bourgeoisie was too feeble to lead its 'own' revolution. It was unable to sustain a fight against the Tsarist autocracy, and establish a democratic republic.

Instead, Trotsky (and Lenin also) looked to the small, but powerful Russian working class to lead this fight. However, (and here Trotsky's arguments were unique) the workers would not, could not stop there. Having taken state power they would be forced to carry out distinctly socialist measures. This was to become known as the theory of Permanent Revolution.

After his escape from Russia, Trotsky spent the years before 1917 in Vienna, Paris and briefly in New York, returning to Russia in May 1917.

Trotsky played a vital role in the Bolshevik struggle for power: in his leadership of the Petrograd Soviet and as chair of the Military Revolutionary Committee which planned and carried out the October insurrection in Petrograd.

After the revolution Trotsky became Commissar of War. He build and organised the Red Army, travelling to the fronts in the famous armoured train equipped with everything from ammunition to a printing press!

In 1924 Lenin died. Trotsky was the best known surviving leader of 1917. Already the party and the state were becoming dominated by a bureaucracy led by a clique around Joseph Stalin, who was squirming his way into power.

Trotsky had begun to criticise the policies of the party and its direction in 1923. Lenin had also taken a stand against Stalin but he was paralysed and was soon to die.

Although the parties of the Third International were largely aware of the bitter struggles going on in the Russian party, a campaign had been launched against Trotsky and other oppositionists. As a consequence the Third International followed the same direction of political degeneration.

Those who challenged the policies of Stalin and his cronies called themselves the Left Opposition. Its platform was workers' democracy and for the reassertion of the principles of the Russian Revolution and the Communist International in its early years.

Trotsky was expelled from the Communist Party in 1927 and in 1928 he was exiled to Alma Ata, a far eastern province of the Soviet Union.

Later, in 1929, he was exiled and spent the remaining years of his life struggling to revive the degenerated revolution and trying to build revolutionary parties which could lead the workers' revolution throughout the world.

Small groups of Marxists split from the bankrupt Communist Parties to join him. But his co-thinkers in the Soviet Union were imprisoned and then butchered by Stalin in the mid-1930s.

In the notorious Moscow Trials of 1936, 1937, and 1938, the surviving leaders of the revolution were tortured or blackmailed into confessing that they were fascist agents (and had been even during the revolution!). Trotsky was the chief defendant (in absentia) in all these trials.

Trotsky launched the movement for the Fourth International which was finally declared in 1938. He was murdered by one of Stalin's thugs in August 1940.

Trotsky never gave up the fight. He fought against the bourgeoisie and imperialism, against Stalinism and the degeneration of the revolution, against the murderous betrayals of the Communist Parties, and for the building of a new revolutionary movement througout the world.

In the cause of working class socialism Trotsky never compromised or flinched. During all the long series of defeats which he lived through during the last two decades of his life Trotsky never gave way to despair.

Reduced to a few thousand supporters scattered throughout the world, he nevertheless gave everything he had to the struggle to recreate mass revolutionary working class parties.

In his 'Testimony', written a few months before his death, he left us this message:

"For forty-three years of my conscious life I have remained a revolutionist; for forty-two of them I have fought under the banner of Marxism. If I had to begin all over again I would of course try to avoid this or that mistake, but the main course of my life would remain unchanged. I shall die a proletarian revolutionist, a Marxist, a dialectical materialist, and, consequently, an irreconcilable atheist. My faith in the communist future of mankind is no less ardent, indeed it is firmer today, than it was in the days of my youth.

"Natasha has just come up to the window from the courtyard and opened it wider so that the air may enter more freely into my room. I can see the bright green strip of grass beneath the wall, and the clear blue sky above the wall, and sunlight everywhere. Life is beautiful. Let the future generations cleanse it of all evil, oppression, and violence and enjoy it to the full."

L. Trotsky
27 February 1940
Coyoacan

V.I.Lenin

Lenin and insurrection

This extract from **Leon Trotsky** describes how the Bolsheviks planned the uprising, combining reliance on the working class with ruthless military realism.

1917
How the workers made a revolution

The date of the Second Congress of the Soviets was set, at our insistence, to coincide with the end of the Democratic Conference, that is for October 25th. In view of the fever of agitation which was mounting from hour to hour, not only in the workers' districts but also in the soldiers' barracks, it seemed to us that it would be most expedient to focus the attention of the Petersburg garrison on that particular day on which the Congress of Soviets would have to decide the question of the seizure of power.

The workers and the soldiers, being properly prepared for this, would proclaim their support for the Congress. Our strategy was, in fact, an offensive one: we advanced to win power; but our propaganda was based on the assumption that enemies were intent on dispersing the Congress of the Soviets and that therefore we had to repulse them ruthlessly.

In this whole plan we relied on the powerful tide of revolution which was rising all the time everywhere and was allowing the enemy no respite and no repose. Even the most backward regiments remained, at worst, neutral. In such conditions the government's slightest move against the Petrograd Soviet would have immediately assured our decisive preponderance. Lenin, however, feared that the adversary might succeed in bringing in a small but resolutely counter-revolutionary number of troops, might attack first and in this way gain the advantage of surprise. By catching the party and the Soviet off their guard, by arresting the top leaders in Petrograd, the enemy would in this way decapitate the whole movement and then, gradually render it powerless. "We dare not wait, we dare not delay," urged Lenin.

Such was the situation when, at the end of September or at the beginning of October the now famous night session of the Central Committee took place in the Sukhanovs' flat. Lenin arrived absolutely determined this time to carry through such a resolution as would leave no room for doubt, vacillation, procrastination, passivity, and delay.

Moreover, even before he had taken his stand against the opponents of the armed rising, he rebuked those who connected the uprising with the Second Congress of the Soviets. Somebody told him that I had said "We have already fixed the date of the rising for 25 October." I had indeed repeatedly said this, when I argued against those comrades who saw the road of revolution leading through pre-parliament and through 'impressive' Bolshevik opposition in the Constituent Assembly.

"If the Congress of the Soviets, where the Bolsheviks are in a majority, will not take power," I maintained, "then Bolshevism, as a whole, will have to pay a heavy price for this. In that case the Constituent Assembly will probably not be convened at all. By the mere fact that after all that had happened before, we did convene for October 25th the Congress of the Soviets which, we knew before hand, had an assured Bolshevik majority, we have publicly pledged ourselves to seize power not later than on that date."

Vladimir Ilyich protested violently. The question of the Second Congress of the Soviets, he said, was of no interest to him:

1917

How the workers made a revolution

what importance had it at all? Would the Congress take place? And suppose that it did take place, what would follow? We had to win power and not tie ourselves to the Congress. It was ridiculous and absurd to warn the enemy about the date of the rising. At best, the date of October 25th could be used to hoodwink the enemy, but it was imperative that the rising should break out sooner and independently of the Congress. First the party must seize power, arms in hand, and then we could talk about the Congress. We should pass over to action immediately.

As in the July Days, when Lenin definitely expected that 'they' would shoot us all, he now analysed the whole situation from the point of view of our enemies: the bourgeoisie would gain most if it attacked us suddenly, disrupting the revolution and then finishing it off bit by bit. As in July, so now, Lenin overrated both the shrewdness and the vigour — and perhaps the material possibilities too — of our opponents. To some degree Lenin's appraisal of the enemy had a purpose which was tactically correct: by overestimating the enemy's forces he aimed at stimulating the party and provoking it to redouble its efforts.

And yet the party could not seize power by itself, independently of the Soviets and behind its back. This would have been a mistake, the consequences of which would have affected the attitude of the workers and might have had harmful repercussions within the Petersburg garrison. The soldiers knew their delegates in the Soviet; it was through the Soviet that they knew the party. If the uprising had taken place behind the back of the Soviet, independently of it, without its authority and not openly and for all to see as a further step in the struggle for power, there might have been a dangerous confusion among the troops. Besides, one should not forget that in Petersburg, side by side with the local Soviet, there still existed the old All-Russian Central Executive Committee at the head of which stood the SRs and the Mensheviks. Only the Congress of the Soviets could be set against this Committee.

After all, in the Central Committee itself there existed three distinct factions: first, those who opposed the seizure of power and whose logic of the situation led them to reject the slogan 'all power to the Soviets'; second, Lenin, who demanded the immediate organisation of the uprising independently of the Soviets; and the third faction, which considered it imperative to link the uprising closely with the Second Congress of the Soviets so that even the date of the two events should coincide. "In any case", insisted Lenin, "the rising must precede the Congress, otherwise they will disperse you and you will have no chance to convene the Congress."

Finally, according to the proposed resolution the uprising was to take place not later than October 15th. About this, as far as I can remember, there was hardly any discussion. Everybody understood that this was an approximate date, a point of time, as it were, which could, according to circumstances, be advanced or delayed, but only for a matter of days. The need for a 'deadline' and a close one at that, was absolutely clear.

The main debates at the sessions of the Central Committee were, of course, devoted to the struggle against the fraction which opposed armed rising altogether. I would not undertake to reproduce here Lenin's three or four interventions during the last session, when he discussed the following questions: Should we seize power? Is it time to seize power? Will we be able to remain in power after the insurrection? At that period and also later Lenin wrote many pamphlets and articles dealing with these problems. His way of reasoning, when he addressed the session, was, of course, the same; it is impossible, however, to convey the general atmosphere, the tenseness of these passionate improvisations permeated through and through with the effort to impart to critics, to the hesitant, to the doubting his own thought, his own willpower, his own conviction and his courage. The destiny of the revolution was in the balance. The meeting ended late at night. Every one of us felt like a patient after a surgical operation. Together with a few comrades I spent the rest of that night in Sukhanov's home.

> "Lenin's appraisal of the enemy had a purpose which was tactically correct: by overestimating the enemy's forces he aimed at stimulating the party and provoking it to redouble its efforts."

The further course of events, as is well known, helped us a great deal. The attempt to disband the local garrison resulted in the formation of a revolutionary war committee. Now we were in a position to 'legalize' our preliminaries for the uprising, to back them by the authority of the Soviet, and also to show how vital our cause was for all the troops in Petrograd. In the short spell of time between the session of the Central Committee in Sukhanov's home and October 25th I met Vladimir Ilyich only once, I think, and even this one meeting I recall rather hazily. When was it? It must have been some time between October 15th and 25th.

I remember that I was very curious to learn what Lenin's reaction had been to the 'defensive' character of the speech I made at the session of the Petrograd Soviet: I had branded as false all the rumours according to which we were preparing an armed rising for October 22nd (which was 'The Day of the Proletarian Soviet'); at the same time I had warned that we would meet every attack against us with a merciless and resolute counter-attack. When I saw Vladimir Ilyich it struck me that he was in a rather serene and confident mood, and, I should say, he was less suspicious. He not only had nothing critical to say about my speech, he even approved of it, considering its defensive tone useful as a means to lull the vigilance of the enemy.

He, nevertheless, kept on shaking his head and asking: "Won't they forestall us? Won't they attack all of a sudden?" I was trying to prove that from now on everything would go on almost automatically. During that conversation, or at least during a part of it, Comrade Stalin was present, if I am not mistaken. It might be, however, that I am here compressing two meetings into one. Generally speaking, I must admit that my recollections of the last few days before the actual upheaval became extremely confused and as if telescoped in my memory, so that it is difficult for me to sort them out and establish clearly the time and place of every incident.

My next meeting with Lenin occurred on the very day of October 25th in the Smolny Institute. At what time? I have no idea, but it must have been towards evening. I well remember the anxious tone of his first inquiry about the state of negotiations which we were conducting with the General Staff of the Petrograd district concerning the future of the local garrison. The newspapers had just announced that the negotiations were nearing a favourable conclusion. "So you are aiming at a compromise solution, are you?" asked Lenin, his glance piercing us. I answered that we had 'leaked' to the newspapers this reassuring piece of news on purpose: this was our *ruse de guerre* just before the general battle. "Ah, that's good, good, excellent," he sang out joyfully and gaily; he started pacing up and down the room vigorously, rubbing his hands energetically: "That's ve-ry excellent!" Military stratagems always appealed to him. To deceive the enemy, to make him look foolish — wasn't this a delightful prospect! In this case the cunning manoeuvre had quite a special significance: it really meant that we had embarked directly upon the decisive course of action. I related to him that our

military operations were already well advanced and that several important points of the city were in our hands. Vladimir Ilyich noticed (or perhaps I showed him) a poster printed the day before in which we threatened with summary execution any person caught in the act of plunder or looting during the uprising.

At first Lenin seemed disconcerted, even a little doubtful perhaps. But then he said: "Well, that's right." With breathless impatience he kept on inquiring about the smallest details: for him they constituted irrefutable proof that this time the tide of events was irreversible, that the Rubicon had been crossed, that there was no possibility of retreat, no way back. He was, I remember, greatly impressed by the fact that in a written order I called upon the Pavlovsky regiment to secure the safety of the presses in which party and Soviet newspapers were being printed.

"And what, the regiment came out?"

"Yes, it did."

"And the papers are going to be published?"

"Yes, they are."

Lenin was overjoyed; he was cheerful, laughing, rubbing his hands. Then he lasped into silence, thought for a while, and said:

"Oh, all right, one can proceed in this fashion as well, provided we seize power."

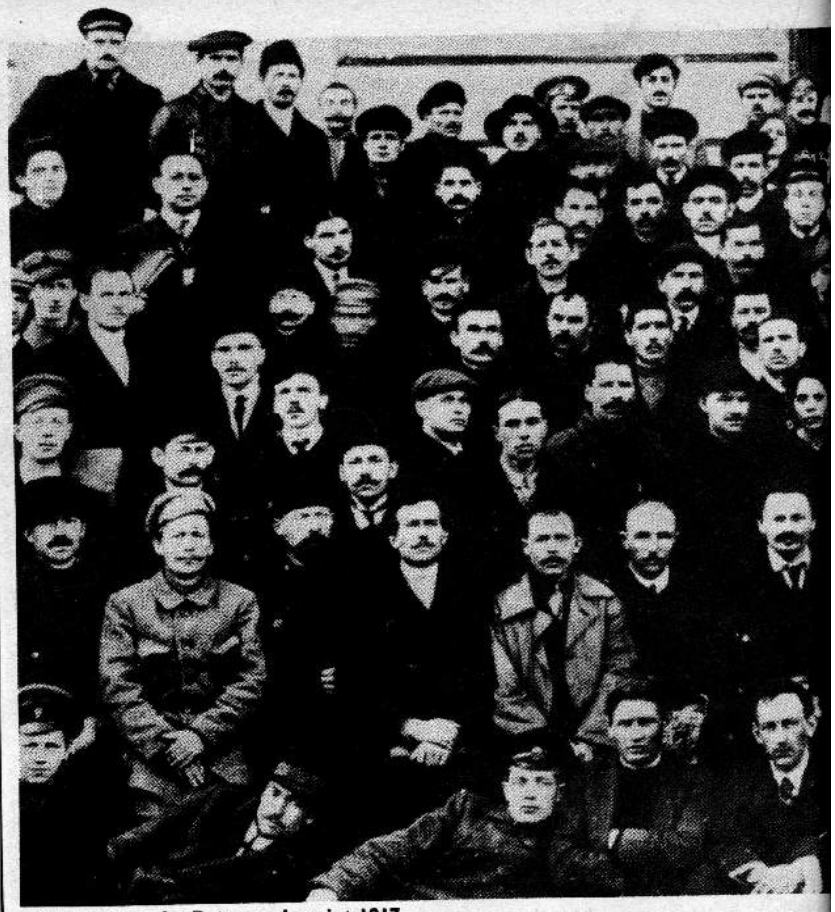
I understood that it was only then that he finally made peace with the fact that we were not proceeding by way of a conspiracy and a plot. But till the very end he was apprehensive lest the enemy thwarted our plans, or attacked us, throwing us off balance. Only now, that is on the evening of October 25th, he became more composed and gave his definite approval to the manner in which affairs were being conducted. I said that he became "more composed", but then he immediately started worrying about a whole series of problems, small and not so small, material, and less so, connected with the further course of events.

"Listen," he would say, "wouldn't it be better to do this in such a way? Shouldn't we try and do this or that? Wouldn't it be advisable to appeal to so and so? Or call out such and such?"

All these interminable questions and suggestions may have seemed disconnected, but they all had the same source: the intensity of the thought which with one great sweep embraced the totality of the revolution.

1917

How the workers made a revolution



Delegates to the Petrograd soviet 1917

Workers' democracy — what it was and what it will be

What kind of political system did the Russian revolution aim to create? What was workers' democracy? And what example did the Russian revolution set for workers' revolutions of the future? Michele Carlisle looks at the nature of working class rule

Although the USSR is today a symbol of totalitarianism, the Russian Revolution itself was profoundly democratic. When the Bolsheviks took power in October 1917, they did so in the name of the *soviets*, or councils of workers', soldiers' and peasants' deputies. These councils represented a new form of democratic rule, more democratic than any parliament that has ever existed.

The Soviets were first set up during the revolution of 1905 (although something similar to them had existed during the short-lived Paris Commune of 1871. Workers in different factories, different areas of cities (and from different parties) elected representatives to the councils. These delegates, unlike parliamentary representatives, could be regularly re-

1917

How the workers made a revolution

elected: the people who chose them could recall them at any time — so there was a very high degree of accountability.

As a form of government, Soviet democracy has other major features. It breaks down the division between the making of laws and their implementation, between 'legislature' and 'executive'. Instead of a permanent civil service separate from elected representatives, all functions of government are subject to democratic control.

Similarly, in this system there is no separate armed force outside the sphere of democratic control: the people themselves are armed to organise their own policing and self-defence. This is not a mad-house of 'everyone with guns' like the nightmare picture of the USA today: the 'militias' in Russia were *democratic* bodies under the control of the community and so they should be in the future.

City-wide, region and ultimately national government is all based on the Soviet principle of democracy; local committees elect deputies to the larger ones. So there is a pyramid of accountable representatives.

In Russia in 1917, this *political* form of democracy was supplemented by others at an economic, workplace level. *Workers' control of production* was a basic element to the whole system of workers' democracy.

In capitalist societies with parliamentary systems, democracy never interferes with the basic economic functioning of the system. The bosses rule in the workplace; no matter what is decided in parliament, the bosses continue to rule.

Workers' democracy breaks down this division. The workers control their own work process *and* control the government. After 1917, the workers' democracy was gradually eroded until it was destroyed by Stalin. Was it perhaps all a utopian dream?

In fact bodies very similar to the Soviets have been common to all workers' struggles that have come close to winning power. For example, the committee established in Gdansk in Poland in August 1980 was essentially the same. Other such bodies were formed in many other big class struggles.

Immediately after the Russian Revolution, soviet-type bodies were enthusiastically set up by workers following the Russian example — for example in Germany in 1918-19.

So the soviets were not just a Russian idiosyncrasy. They have been formed many times in history because they correspond to the needs of the working class.

Workers' democracy was crushed in Russia for many reasons — but not because democracy itself is impossible to sustain. It was difficult in a backward society, isolated and ravaged by years of war, including civil war, to maintain democracy. The workers were exhausted and demoralised. These social factors allowed the bureaucracy to develop.

But these factors need not be repeated in future. A workers' revolution in a rich capitalist country — provided that it made every effort to spread itself to other countries — could develop a healthy working-class system of rule.

Would it be a multi-party state? Russia evolved into a one-party state, and all so-called 'socialist' regimes in the world today are one-party states. Initially in Russia this was the result of emergency measures implemented during the civil war. Like any government, the Bolsheviks banned opponents who were trying violently to overthrow them.

But a workers' democracy should allow different political parties — all those who accept the legal framework of the state and don't seek to destroy it through violent activity. Even pro-capitalist parties would be allowed on this basis.

Would the revolutionaries give up power if voted out in an election? Of course the new system was in Russia, and would be anywhere, brought about by revolutionary means. All historical experience proves that a government based on a parliamentary majority could not just vote to set up a workers' democracy — the bosses would resist. The bosses and their system have to be overthrown.

So the system of workers' democracy — Soviets — would *replace* parliament. If the socialists lose their majority in the workers' councils — so be it. But in practice, anti-socialists who have a majority in a system of workers' councils would want to abolish the system. It is of course difficult to imagine pro-capitalist parties winning a majority on such a basis. Working class people who have made a revolution will not easily be conned into accepting a return to the old system of exploitation.

In the long run, workers' democracy is a step *towards* socialism, rather than socialism itself. Socialism will be a new form of society, in which all the old classes have disappeared, exploitation and oppression are a thing of the past, and poverty and want have been abolished. The inhuman forces of the market will have been completely replaced with democratic, conscious planning for human need.

Such a society will be more democratic than anything we can presently imagine. New forms of organisation will probably be found to run society. We can't predict. But we do know that bodies like the Russian Soviets will be necessary in the years and decades that follow a socialist revolution — the necessary basis from which the socialist society of the future can develop.

Trotsky on permanent revolution

Over a decade before 1917, Trotsky foretold that the anti-Tsarist revolution in backward Russia would be a full workers' revolution. Other Marxists — even Lenin until 1917 — held that such a thing was either not possible or could only be a short episode, after which the bourgeoisie would assume power. Trotsky's ideas were summed up in the theory of permanent revolution worked out during the defeated revolution of 1905-7. Today that theory has been reduced to an empty catchphrase by many who call themselves Trotskyists. Yet without understanding the theory of permanent revolution you cannot understand why the Russian Revolution took place and why it degenerated. Here Leon Trotsky explains his view of Permanent Revolution.

The permanent revolution, in the sense which Marx attached to this concept, means a revolution which makes no compromise with any single form of class rule, which does not stop at the democratic stage, which goes over to socialist measures and to war against reaction from without; that is, a revolution whose every successive stage is rooted in the preceding one and which can end only in complete liquidation of class society.

To dispel the chaos that has been created around the theory of the permanent revolution, it is necessary to distinguish three lines of thought that are united in this theory.

First, it embraces the problem of the transition from the democratic revolution to the socialist. This is in essence the historical origin of the theory.

The concept of the permanent revolution was advanced by the great Communists of the middle of the nineteenth century, Marx and his co-thinkers, in opposition to the democratic ideology which, as we know, claims that with the establishment of a 'rational' or democratic state all questions can be solved peacefully by reformist or evolutionary measures.

Marx regarded the bourgeois revolution of 1848 as the direct prelude to the proletarian revolution. Marx "erred." Yet his error has a factual and not a methodological character. The Revolution of 1848 did not turn into the socialist revolution. But that is just why it also did not achieve democracy. As to the German Revolution of 1918, it was no democratic completion of the bourgeois revolution; it was a proletarian revolution decapitated by the Social Democrats; more correctly, it was a bourgeois *counterrevolution,* which was compelled to preserve pseudo-democratic forms after its victory over the proletariat.

Vulgar "Marxism" has worked out a pattern of historical development according to which every bourgeois society sooner or later secures a democratic regime, after which the proletariat, under conditions of democracy, is gradually organised and educated for socialism. The actual transition to socialism has been variously conceived: the avowed reformists picture this transition as the reformist filling of democracy with a socialist content (Jaures); the formal revolutionists acknowledge the inevitability of applying revolutionary violence in the transition to socialism (Guesde).

But both the former and the latter considered democracy and socialism, for all peoples and all countries, as two stages in the development of society which are not only entirely distinct but also separated by great distances of time from each other.

This view was predominant also among those Russian Marxists who, in the period of 1905, belonged to the Left Wing of the Second International. Plekhanov, the brilliant progenitor of Russian Marxism, considered the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat a delusion in contemporary Russia. The same standpoint was defended not only by the Mensheviks but also by the overwhelming majority of the leading Bolsheviks, in particular by those present party leaders, without exception, who in their day were resolute revolutionary democrats but for whom the problems of the socialist revolution, not only in 1905 but also on the eve of 1917, still signified the vague music of a distant future.

The theory of the permanent revolution, which originated in 1905, declared war upon these ideas and moods. It pointed out that the democratic tasks of the backward bourgeois nations led directly, in our epoch, to the dictatorship of the proletariat and that the dictatorship of the proletariat puts socialist tasks on the order of the day.

Therein lay the central idea of the theory.

While the traditional view was that the road to the dictatorship of the proletariat led through a long period of democracy, the theory of the permanent revolution established the fact that for backward countries the road to democracy passed through the dictatorship of the proletariat. Thus democracy is not a regime that remains self-sufficient for decades, but is only a direct prelude to the socialist revolution. Each is bound to the other by an unbroken chain. Thus there is established between the democratic revolution and the socialist reconstruction of society a permanent state of revolutionary development.

The second aspect of the theory has to do with the socialist revolution as such. For an indefinitely long time and in constant internal struggle, all social relations undergo transformation. Society keeps on changing its skin. Each stage of transformation stems directly from the preceeding. This process necessarily retains a political character, that is, it develops through collisions between various groups in the society, which is in transformation. Outbreaks of civil war and foreign wars alternate with periods of 'peaceful' reform. Revolutions in economy, technique, science, the family, morals, and everyday life develop in complex reciprocal action and do not allow society to achieve equilibruim. Therein lies the permanent character of the socialist revolution as such.

The international character of the socialist revolution, which constitutes the third aspect of the theory of the permanent revolution, flows from the present state of the economy and the social structure of humanity. Internationalism is no abstract principle but a theoretical and political reflection of the character of world economy, of the world development of productive forces, and of the world scale of the class struggle. The socialist revolution begins on national

1917

How the workers made a revolution

1917

How the workers made a revolution

Trotsky in a prison cell after 1905

foundations — but cannot be completed on these foundations alone. The maintenance of the proletarian revolution within a national framework can only be a provisional state of affairs, even though, as the experience of the Soviet Union shows, one of long duration. In an isolated proletarian dictatorship, the internal and external contradictions grow inevitably along with the successes achieved.

If it remains isolated, the proletarian state must finally fall victim to these contradictions. The way out for it lies only in the victory of the proletariat of the advanced countries. Viewed from this standpoint, a national revolution is not a self-contained whole; it is only a link in the international chain. The international revolution constitutes a permanent process, despite temporary declines and ebbs.

The struggle of the epigones is directed, even if not always with the same clarity, against all three aspects of the theory of the permanent revolution. And how could it be otherwise, when it is a question of three inseparably connected parts of a whole? The epigones mechanically separate *democracy* and the *socialist* dictatorship. They separate the *national* socialist revolution from the *international*. They consider that, in essence, the conquest of power within national limits is not the initial act but the final act of the revolution; after that follows the period of reforms that lead to the national socialist society. In 1905, they did not even grant the idea that the proletariat could conquer power in Russia earlier than in Western Europe. In 1917, they preached the self-sufficing democratic revolution in Russia and spurned the dictatorship of the proletariat. In 1925-27, they steered a course toward national revolution in China under the leadership of the national bourgeoisie. Subsequently, they raised the slogan for China of the democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants in opposition to the slogan of the dictatorship of the proletariat. They proclaimed the possibility of the construction of an isolated and self-sufficient socialist society in the Soviet Union. The world revolution became for them, instead of an indispensable condition for victory, only a favourable circumstance. This profound breach with Marxism was reached by the epigones (i.e., the Stalinists, whom Trotsky considers the epigones of Lenin) in the process of permanent struggle against the theory of the permanent revolution...

Women and revolution

It was women workers, demonstrating in the streets of Petrograd, who triggered the February Revolution in 1917. For Russian women, the workers' revolution was one of the greatest liberating events in history. In a world where women were still almost universally denied even the vote, the revolution admitted women to full and equal citizenship, created the freest abortion and divorce laws then known, and tried to lift the burden of housework from women. Ruth Cockroft tells the inspiring story of women in the Russian Revolution and the dismal tale of what the Stalinist counter-revolution did to women in the USSR.

A strike by working women in Petrograd was the spark to the revolution of February 1917. These militant women were organising around demands for shorter working hours, maternity benefits, better working conditions and an end to the war.

For women the vision of the Russian Revolution was the vision of real liberation where women were able to take part equally in all areas of social and political life, being freed from the burdens and drudgery of child rearing, cooking, cleaning and servicing.

Lenin described housework as "Barbaric, unproductive, petty, enervating, stupefying and depressing". Such a description is testimony to the wide-ranging changes that the Revolution had created in consciousness and attitudes towards women.

The aim and vision of the Revolution was to institutionalise and to bring within the sphere of society all the functions of bourgeois family life. Communal eating, maternity hospitals, creches, kindergartens, schools and communal laundries, along with full legal rights, access to divorce and the right of women to control fertility actually meant that for a time Soviet women had won a much greater freedom and formal equality and access to greater individual rights than women have ever experienced under bourgeois democracy.

Women were no longer isolated and atomised within individual family units because the aim of the Revolution was to replace that family unit which was at the heart of women's oppression.

Today, interviews with Soviet women, smuggled from Moscow, portray a different reality than the aims and desires of the revolutionary women of 1917; "You know our systems are antiquated. They don't beat us the way they did under the Czars, but otherwise nothing has changed". For today's Soviet women, life under a bureaucratic and totalitarian regime is quite simply a distorted and mocking mirror image of the demands of 1917.

The dissolving of the old family and its replacement by something better proved to be much more difficult for the socialist state, under the conditions of civil war and war communism, than had been anticipated. Cultural life was barren and there was a general lack of resources. Very soon communal laundries proved to be inadequate and food prepared and dished up en mass was bland and unappetising. With the New Economic Policy, families once again had to begin to rely upon their own isolated efforts to acquire the simple necessities of life.

While women were the backbone of the day-to-day struggle to maintain themselves and their families at a level of subsistence they had the dual burden of working long days because a gain of the revolution was the abolition of unemployment. The creches that children were placed in while women worked were described by Trotsky as "orphan asylums".

> **The aim and vision of the revolution was to institutionalise and to bring within the sphere of society all the functions of bourgeois family life."**

At the same time the abandonment of children by mothers was endemic simply because of the inability to cope and the growth in levels of prostitution not only testified to the general poverty of women but also to the fact that power and money had once again come to the fore in determining sexual relations.

This return to sexual barbarism in women's lives was linked directly to the loss of a political battle within the CPSU between the Left Opposition and a rising, privileged layer of bureaucrats, most prominent of whom was Stalin. Not only was it in the interests of this layer of society to usurp women's position because from it they could afford maids, nurses and other such servants, but also because the family was an institution which secures unequal personal relationships and teaches the young to submit to authority. It was in the bureaucracy's interest to see this return to the home in order to stabilise its own rule.

The consolidation of Stalin's rule meant that women also suffered under the pressures of the five year plans where savage exploitation of the working class and peasants was used to achieve industrialisation. In addition bad planning of the economy and bureaucratic mismanagement led to underproduction of the basic consumer goods.

This led to the notorious queues where women stand for hours in appalling conditions in order to obtain food. Children "need things you have to stand in line for, things you have to use a lot of energy to get. (They) need vitamins and it is almost impossible to buy oranges if you work all day."

As early as 1930 Stalin dissolved the women's section of the Party, the Zhenvtdel, and since that time women have been unable to organise independently of the state. A series of attacks on women's legal rights followed. In 1936 abortion was illegalised and by 1944 motherhood medals were distributed to women who had had

1917
How the workers made a revolution

1917

How the workers made a revolution

five or six children and laws preventing divorce were introduced. Ignorance and lack of contraception meant that women were mutilated while trying, illegally, to abort unwanted pregnancies.

From this horrific situation there has been an unwanted twist. In 1968 abortion was once again legalised, and it is now the most commonly used method of birth control. Women, on average, have seven or eight abortions, some have 15. It is widely known that condoms are unreliable and the pill dangerous. Abortions are carried out without the availability of drugs unless you have the contacts to go private. Clearly, contrasts as stark as those that exist between the bourgeois woman and the proletarian woman also exist in the USSR.

Women's wages are needed to hold family life together, even though they are often 50% lower than men's wages. Women cannot afford to take their year's unpaid maternity leave and so babies are left with older female relatives.

Only 60% of women apply for nursery care because of bad conditions and disease, while places in better nurseries are oversubscribed.

After the war, as well as bearing children, women worked in heavy industry and it is little surprise that women have welcomed a return to more traditional jobs such as nursing and typing as an escape from being overburdened.

It has been fashionable for the soft Stalinists of 'Marxism Today' to blame these terrible conditions on 'patriarchy' which they claim permeates the male-dominated CPSU. Their solution lies in promoting more women into political life through the higher echelons of the state.

Gorbachev's reforms may go some way in achieving this, but it will provide no solution for proletarian women who need to become part of political life by organising independently of the state around demands that cannot be so different to those of the women workers in Petrograd in February 1917.

One Moscow woman describes the illusion of equality: "It is difficult to be a woman here, with emancipation we lead such abnormal twisted lives, because women have to work the same as men do."

The fact is that emancipation does not exist. Instead the equality of women and men has been converted by the bureaucracy into "an equality of deprivation of rights" upon which the regime relies for its power and privilege.

The national question

In two countries of pre-war Europe the national question was of exceptional political significance: in Tsarist Russia and in Hapsburg Austria-Hungary. In each of these the workers' party created its own school. In the sphere of theory, the Austrian Social-Democracy, in the persons of Otto Bauer and Karl Renner, considered nationality independent of territory, economy and class, transforming it into a species of abstraction limited by so-called "national character."

In the field of national policy, as for that matter in all other fields, it did not venture beyond a corrective status quo. Fearing the very thought of dismembering the monarchy, the Austrian Social-Democracy strove to adapt its national programme to the borders of the patchwork state.

The programme of so-called "national cultural autonomy" required that the citizens of one and the same nationality, irrespective of their dispersal over the territory of Austria-Hungary and irrespective of the administrative divisions of the state, should be united, on the basis of purely personal attributes, into one community for the solution of their "cultural" tasks (the theatre, the church, the school, and the like). That programme was artificial and utopian, in so far as it attempted to separate culture from territory and economy in a society torn apart by social contradictions; it was at the same time reactionary, in so far as it led to a forced disunion into various nationalities of the workers of one and the same state, undermining their class strength.

Lenin's position was the direct opposite. Regarding nationality as unseverably connected with territory, economy and class structure, he refused at the same time to regard the historical state, the borders of which cut across the living body of the nations, as a sacrosanct and inviolate category.

He demanded recognition of the right to secession and independent existence for each national portion of the state.

In so far as the various nationalities, voluntarily or through force of necessity, coexist within the borders of one state, their cultural interests must find the highest possible satisfaction within the framework of the broadest regional (and consequently, territorial) autonomy, including statutory guarantees of the rights of each minority. At the same time, Lenin deemed it the incontrovertible duty of all the workers of a given state, irrespective of nationality, to unite in one and the same class organisations.

The national problem was particularly acute in Poland, aggravated by the historical fate of that country. The so-called PPS (Polish Socialist Party), headed by Josef Pilsudski, came out ardently for Polish independence; the "socialism" of the PPS was no more than a vague appendage of its militant nationalism. On the other hand, the Polish Social-Democracy, whose leader was Rosa Luxemburg, counterposed the slogan of Polish independence the demand for the autonomy of the Polish region as a constituent part of democratic Russia. Luxembourg proceeded from the consideration that in the epoch of imperialism the separation of Poland from Russia was economically infeasible and in the epoch of socialism — unnecessry.

She looked upon "the right of self-determination" as an empty abstraction. The polemic on that question lasted for years. Lenin insisted that imperialism did not reign similarly or equably in all countries, regions and spheres of life; that the heritage of the past represented an accumulation and interpenetration of various historical epochs; that although monopolistic capitalism towers above everything, it does not supersede everything; that, notwithstanding the domination of imperialism, the numerous national problems retained their full force and that, contingent upon the internal and world conjunctures, Poland might become independent even in the epoch of imperialism.

It was Lenin's view that the right of self-determination was merely an application of the principles of bourgeois democracy in the sphere of national relations. A real, full-bodied, all-sided democracy under capitalism was unrealisable; in that sense the national independence of small and weak peoples was likewise "unrealisable". However, even under imperialism, the working class did not refuse to fight for democratic rights, including among them the right of each nation to its independent existence.

Moreover, in certain portions of our planet it was imperialism itself that invested the slogan of national self-determination with extraordinary significance. Although Western and Central Europe have somehow managed to solve their national problems in the course of the nineteenth century, in Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa and South America the epoch of national democratic movements had not really begun to unfold until the twentieth century. To deny the right of nations to self-determination is tantamount in effect to offering aid and comfort to the imperialists against their colonies and generally against all oppressed nationalities.

The problem of nationalities was considerably aggravated in Russia during the period of reaction. "The wave of militant nationalism," wrote Stalin, "called attention from above to numerous acts of repressions by those in power, who wreaked their vengeance upon the border states for their love of freedom, calling forth in response a wave of nationalism from below, which at times passed into crude chauvinism." This was the time of the ritual murder trial of the Kiev Jew Bayliss. Retrospectively, in the light of civilisation's latest achievements, especially in Germany and in the USSR, that trial today seems almost a humanitarian experi-

The Tsarist Empire was justly described as 'the prison house of nations'. It oppressed a vast number of peoples and nationalities. The Bolshevik Revolution broke down the walls and gates of that prison house, liberating the peoples. But the Stalinist counter-revolution has turned the USSR into an even bigger prison house of nationalities than the old Tsarist Empire. The Bolshevik approach to the national question was one of their distinctive contributions to Marxism. Without it the Russian Revolution would not have been possible. Without the same approach to questions like Ireland and the Middle East, socialists today will be disoriented. Here **Leon Trotsky** makes a concise outline of the Bolshevik teachings on the national question.

1917

How the workers made a revolution

The Tsar's subjects

1917
How the workers made a revolution

ment. But in 1913 it shocked the whole world. The poison of nationalism began to affect many sections of the working class as well. Alarmed, Gorky wrote to Lenin about the need for counteracting this chauvinistic rabidness. "As for nationalism, I quite agree with you," replied Lenin, "that we must cope with it more earnestly than ever. We have a splendid Georgian staying with us here who is writing a long article for *Prosveshcheniye* (Enlightenment), after garnerning all the Austrian and other material. We will bear down on it." The reference was to Stalin.

Gorky, long connected with the party, knew all its leading cadres well. But Stalin evidently was utterly unknown to him, since Lenin had to resort to such an impersonal, although flattering, expression as "a splendid Georgian". This is, by the way, the only occasion when Lenin characterized a prominent Russian revolutionist by the token of his nationality. He had in mind, of course, not a Georgian, but a Caucasian: the element of primitiveness undoubtedly attracted Lenin; small wonder that he treated Kamo with such tenderness.

During his two months' sojourn abroad Stalin wrote a brief but very trenchant piece of research entitled "Marxism and the National Problem". Since it was intended for a lawful magazine, the article resorted to discreet vocabulary. Its revolutionary tendencies were nonetheless distinctly apparent.

The author set out by counterposing the historico-materialistic definition of nation to the abstracto-psychological, in the spirit of the Austrian school. "The nation," he wrote, "is a historically-formed enduring community of language, territory, economic life and psychological composition, asserting itself in the community of culture." This combined definition, compounding the psychological attributes of a nation with the geographic and economic conditions of its development, is not only correct theoretically but also practically fruitful, for then the solution to the problem of each nation's fate must perforce be sought along the lines of changing the material conditions of its existence, beginning with territory. Bolshevism was never addicted to the fetishistic worship of a state's borders. Politically the point was to reconstruct the Tsarist empire, that prison of nations, territorially, politically, and administratively, in line with needs and wishes of the nations themselves.

The party of the proletariat does not enjoin the various nationalities either to remain within the bounds of a given state or to separate from it: that is their own affair. But it does obligate itself to help each of them to realise its actual national will. As for the possiblity of separating from a state, that is a matter of concrete historical circumstances and the relation of forces. "No one can say," wrote Stalin, "that the Balkan War is the end of internal and external circumstances that one or another nationality in Russia will deem it necessary to postulate and to solve the problem of its own independence. And, of course, it is no business of the Marxists to place barriers in such cases. But for that very reason Russian Marxists cannot get along without the right of nations to self-determination."

The interests of the nations which voluntarily remain within the bounds of democratic Russia would be fenced off by means of "the autonomies of such self-determined units as Poland, Lithuania, the Ukraine, the Caucasus, and the like. Regional autonomy is conducive to a better utilisation of the natural wealth of the region; it does not divide citizens along national lines and makes it possible for them to group themselves in class parties." The territorial self-administration of regions in all spheres of social life is counterposed to the extra-territorial — that is, platonic — self-administration of nationalities in matters of "culture" only.

However, most directly and acutely significant, from the point of view of the proletariat's struggle, was the problem of the relations between workers of various nationalities inside the same state. Bolshevism stood for a compact and indivisible unification of workers of all nationalities in the party and in the trade unions on the basis of democratic centralism.

"The type of organisation does not exert its influence on practical work alone. It places an indelible stamp on the worker's whole spiritual life. The worker lives the life of his organisation, within which he develops spiritually and is educated...The international type of organisation is a school of comradely feelings, of the greatest agitation in favour of internationalism."

One of the aims of the Austrian programme of "cultural autonomy" was "the preservation and development of the national idiosyncrasies of peoples." Why and for what purpose? asked Bolshevism in amazement. Segregating the various nationalistic portions of mankind was never our concern. True, Bolshevism insisted that each nation should have the right to secede — the right, but not the duty — as the ultimate, most effective guarantee against oppression. But the thought of artificially preserving national idiosyncracies was profoundly alien to Bolshevism. The removal of any, even disguised, even the most refined and practically "imponderable" national oppression or indignity, must be used for the revolutionary unification rather than the segregation of the workers of various nationalities. Wherever national privileges and injuries exist, nations must have the possibility to separate from eath other, that thus they may facilitate the free unification of the workers, in the name of a close rapprochement of nations, with the distant perspective of the eventual complete fusion of all. Such was the basic tendency of Bolshevism, which revealed the full measure of its force in the October Revolution.

The Russian revolution and US blacks

Under constant prodding and pressure from the Russians in the Comintern, the party made a beginning with Negro work in its first ten years; but it recruited very few Negroes and its influence in the Negro community didn't amount to much. From this it is easy to draw the pragmatic conclusion that all the talk and bother about policy in that decade, from New York to Moscow, was much ado about nothing, and that the results of Russian intervention were completely negative.

The earlier socialist movement, out of which the Communist Party was formed, never recognised any need for a special programme on the Negro question. It was considered purely and simply as an economic problem, part of the struggle between the workers and the capitalists; nothing could be done about the special problems of discrimination and inequality this side of socialism.

The best of the earlier socialists were represented by Debs, who was friendly to all races and purely free from prejudice. But the limitedness of the great agitator's view on this far from simple problem was expressed in his statement:

"We have nothing special to offer the Negro, and we cannot make separate appeals to all the races. The Socialist Party is the party of the whole working class, regardless of colour — the whole working class of the world." (Ray Ginger: *The Bending Cross*.) That was considered a very advanced position at the time, but it made no provision for active support of the Negro's special claim for a little equality here and now, or in the foreseeable future, on the road to socialism.

And even Debs, with his general formula that missed the main point — the burning issue of ever-present discrimination against the Negroes every way they turned — was far superior in this regard, as in all others, to Victor Berger, who was an outspoken white supremacist.

1917

How the workers made a revolution

Like life-giving rays from the sun, the effects of the Russian Revolution were felt throughout the world, and in the most unexpected places. Black people in the USA then lived under a vile American version of apartheid. Inspired by the Bolshevik teaching that oppressed people had the right to fight back and the right to unconditional support from socialists, US communists adopted a radically new approach to the black question. In this article, **James P Cannon**, himself a leader of the early US Communist Party and a founder of American Trotskyism, describes what the Russian Revolution meant for black liberation in the USA.

James P Cannon

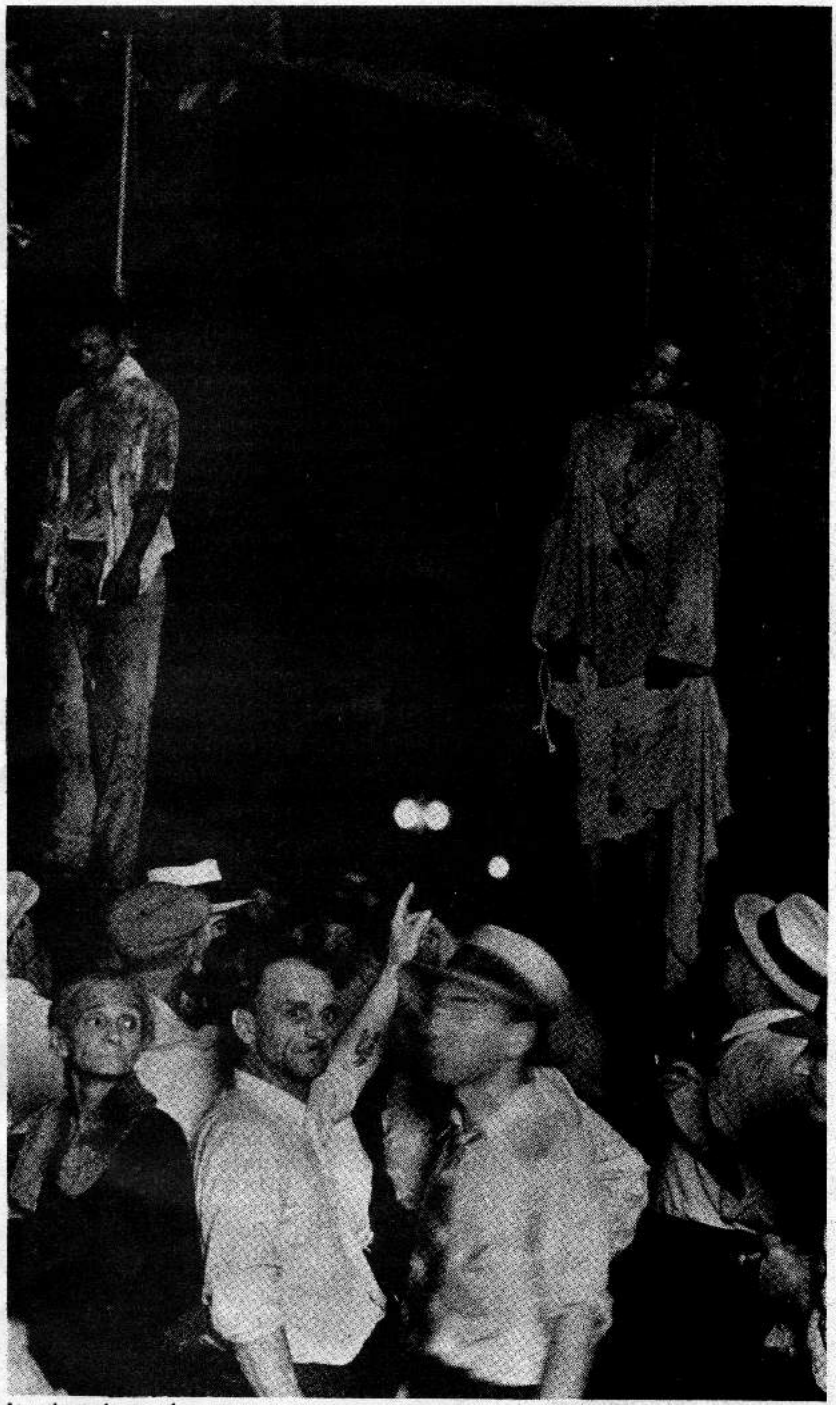
Here is a summary pronouncement from a Berger editorial in his Milwaukee paper, the *Social Democratic Herald:* "There can be no doubt that the Negroes and mulattoes constitute a lower race." That was "Milwaukee socialism" on the Negro question, as expounded by its ignorant and impudent leader-boss. A harried and hounded Negro couldn't mix that very well with his Milwaukee beer, even if he had a nickel and could find a white man's saloon where he could drink a glass of beer — at the back end of the bar.

Berger's undisguised chauvinism was never the official position of the party. There were other socialists, like William English Walling who was an advocate of equal rights for the Negroes, and one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People in 1909. But such individuals were a small minority among the socialists and radicals before the First World War and the Russian Revolution.

Such was the traditional position inherited by the early Communist Party from the preceding socialist movement out of which it had come. The policy and practice of the trade union movement was even worse. The IWW barred nobody from membership because of "race, colour or creed". But the predominant AFL unions, with only a few exceptions, were lily-white job trusts. They also had nothing special to offer the Negroes; nothing at all, in fact.

The difference — and it was a *profound* difference — between the Communist Party of the Twenties and its socialist and radical ancestors, was signified by its break with this tradition. The American Communists in the early days, under the influence and pressure of the Russians in the Comintern, were slowly and painfully learning to change their *attitude*; to assimilate the new theory of the Negro question as a *special* question of doubly-exploited second-class citizens, requiring a programme of special demands as part of the overall programme — and to start doing something about it.

Everything new and progressive on the Negro question came from Moscow, after the revolution of 1917, and as a result of



Lynch mob murderers

the revolution — not only for the American communists who responded directly, but for all others concerned with the question.

By themselves, the American communists never thought of anything new or different from the traditional position of American radicalism on the Negro question. That, as the above quotations from Kipnis' and Shannon's histories show, was pretty weak in theory and still weaker in practice.

The simplistic formula that the Negro problem was merely economic, a part of the capital-labour problem, never struck fire among the Negroes — who knew better even if they didn't say so; they had to live with brutal discrimination every day and every hour.

There was nothing subtle or concealed about this discrimination. Everybody knew that the Negro was getting the worst of it at every turn, but hardly anybody cared about it or wanted to do anything to try to moderate or change it.

The 90 percent white majority of American society, including its working class sector, North as well as South, was

1917

How the workers made a revolution

saturated with prejudice against the Negro; and the socialist movement reflected this prejudice to a considerable extent — even though, in deference to the ideal of human brotherhood, the socialist attitude was muted and took the form of evasion.

The old theory of American radicalism turned out in practice to be a formula for inaction on the Negro front, and — incidentally — a convenient shield for the dormant racial prejudices of the white radicals themselves.

The Russian intervention changed all that, and changed it drastically, and for the better. Even before the First World War and the Russian Revolution, Lenin and the Bolsheviks were distinguished from all the other tendencies in the international socialist and labour movement by their concern with the problems of oppressed nations and national minorities, and affirmative support of their struggles for freedom, independence and the right of self-determination.

The Bolsheviks gave this support to all "people without equal rights" sincerely and earnestly, but there was nothing "philanthropic" about it. They also recognised the great revolutionary potential in the situation of oppressed peoples and nations, and saw them as important allies of the international working class in the revolutionary struggle against capitalism.

After November 1917 this new doctrine — with special emphasis on the Negroes — began to be transmitted to the American communist movement with the authority of the Russian Revolution behind it.

The Russians in the Comintern started on the American communists with the harsh, insistent demand that they shake off their own unspoken prejudices, pay attention to the special problems and grievances of the American Negroes, go to work among them, and champion their cause in the white community.

It took time for the Americans, raised in a different tradition, to assimilate the new Leninist doctrine. But the Russians followed up year after year, piling up the arguments and increasing the pressure on the American communists until they finally learned and changed, and went to work in earnest. And the change in the attitude of the American communists, gradually effected in the Twenties was to exert a profound influence *in far wider circles* in the later years.

Revolutionaries and the mass movement

Two articles by Leon Trotsky

The great lesson of the Russian revolution was the necessity of a Marxist party for success to be possible. But over the years the Bolsheviks have had many imitators, all of whom have failed. It is not enough to learn the lesson by rote. It needs to be fully understood.

How was this Bolshevik party built? How were similar parties built in other countries? What relationship did they have to the labour movement that went before them?

'Build the revolutionary party' is the catchphrase of many groups, most significantly perhaps the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP). They see the 'revolutionary party' as a group *separate* from the existing labour movement — especially its political wing, the Labour Party — and separate from the organic process of development within that movement.

Neither the Bolshevik party nor the other mass communist parties were built in such a way. They were the product of the development of their labour movement — not a straightforward, 'peaceful' development, but one involving splits, conflicts and an interaction between the internal life of the labour movement and the class struggle in general. They did not appear out of nowhere, like gods from the machine in ancient Greek tragedy, suddenly resolving all difficulties.

These two extracts from writings by Trotsky put a general historical perspective on the Russian revolution and the nature of revolutionary politics. The first is taken from 'War and the International' (1915); the second is from 'On the policy of the KAPD' (1920), which is in 'The First Five Years of the Communist International', volume 1.

Hermann Gorter was one of the founders of the Dutch Communist Party and a leading spokesperson for the ultra-left in the International. The Communist Workers' Party of Germany (KAPD) was an ultra-left split from the Communist Party in 1920. It opposed participation in Parliament on principle.

Theoretically the German labour movement marched under the banner of Marxism. Still in its dependence on the conditions of the period, Marxism became for the German proletariat not the algebraic formula of the revolution that it was at the beginning, but the theoretical method for adaptation to a national-capitalist state crowned with the Prussian helmet.

Capitalism, which had achieved a temporary equilibrium, continually revolutionised the economic foundation of national life. To preserve the power that had resulted from the Franco-Prussian War, it was necessary to increase the standing army. The middle class had ceded all its *political* positions to the feudal monarchy, but had intrenched itself all the more energetically in its *economic* positions under the protection of the militaristic police state.

The main currents of the last period, covering forty-five years, are: victorious capitalism, militarism erected on a capitalist foundation, a political reaction resulting from the intergrowth of feudal and capitalist classes — a revolutionising of the economic life, and a complete abandonment of revolutionary methods and traditions in political life. The entire activity of the German Social Democracy was directed towards the awakening of the backward workers, through a systematic fight for their most immediate needs — the gathering of strength, the increase of membership, the filling of the treasury, the development of the press, the conquest of all the positions that presented themselves, their utilisation and expansion. This was the great historical work of the awakening and educating of the "unhistorical" class.

The great centralised trade unions of Germany developed in direct dependence upon the development of national industry, adapting themselves to its successes in the home and the foreign markets, and controlling the prices of raw materials and manufactured products.

Localised in political districts to adapt itself to the election laws and stretching feelers in all cities and rural communities, the Social Democracy built up the unique structure of the political organisation of the German proletariat with its many-branched bureaucratic hierarchy, its one million dues-paying members, its four million voters, ninety-one daily papers and sixty-five party printing presses. This whole many-sided activity, of immeasurable historical importance, was permeated through and through with the spirit of possibilism.

In forty-five years history did not offer the German proletariat a single opportunity to remove an obstacle by a stormy attack, or to capture any hostile position in a revolutionary advance. As a result of th mutual relation of social forces, it was constrained to avoid obstacles or adapt itself to them.

In this, Marxism as a theory was a valuable tool for political guidance, but it could not change the opportunist character of the class movement, which in essence was at that time alike in England, France and Germany.

For all the undisputed superiority of the German organisation, the tactics of the unions were very much the same in Berlin and London. Their chief achievement was the system of tariff treaties. In the political field the difference was much greater and deeper. While the English proletariat wre marching under the banner of Liberalism, the German workers formed an independent party with a Socialist platform. Yet this difference does not go nearly as deep in politics as it does in ideologic forms and the forms of organisation.

Through the pressure that English labour exerted on the Liberal Party it achieved certain limited political victories, the extension of suffrage, freedom to unionise, and social legislation. The same was preserved or improved by the German proletariat through its independent party, which it was obliged to form because of the speedy capitulation of German liberalism.

And yet this party, while in *principle* fighting the battle for political power, was compelled in actual practice to adapt itself to the ruling power, to protect the labour movement against the blows of this power, and to achieve a few reforms. In other words: on account of the difference in historical traditions and political conditions, the English proletariat adapted itself to the captalist state through the medium of the Liberal Party; while the German proletariat was forced to form a party of his own to achieve the very same

1917

How the workers made a revolution

The funeral of German revolutionary Karl Liebknecht

1917

How the workers made a revolution

political ends. And the political struggle of the German proletariat in this entire period had the same opportunist character limited by historical conditions as did that of the English proletariat.

The similarity of these two phenomena so different in their forms comes out most clearly in the final results at the close of the period. The English proletariat in the struggle to meet its daily issues was forced to form an independent party of its own, without, however, breaking with its liberal traditions; and the party of the German proletariat, when the War forced upon it the necessity of a decisive choice, gave an answer in the spirit of the national-liberal traditions of the English Labour Party.

Marxism, of course, was not merely something accidental or insignificant in the German labour movement. Yet there would be no basis for deducing the social-revolutionary character of the party from its official Marxist ideology.

Ideology is an important but not a decisive factor in politics. Its role is that of waiting on politics. That deep-seated contradiction, which was inherent in the awakening revolutionary class on account of its relation to the feudal-reactionary state, demanded an irreconcilable ideology which would bring the whole movement under the banner of social revolutionary aims. Since historical conditions forced opportunist tactics, the irreconcilability of the proletarian class found expression in the revolutionary formulas of Marxism. Theoretically, Marxism reconciled with perfect success the contradiction between reform and revolution. Yet the process of historical development is something far more involved than theorising in the realm of pure thought.

The fact that the class which was revolutionary in its tendencies was forced for several decades to adapt itself to the monarchical police state, based on the tremendous capitalist development of the country, in the course of which adaptation an organisation of a million members was built up and a labour bureaucracy which led the entire movement was educated — this fact does not cease to exist and does not lose its weighty significance because Marxism anticipated the revolutionary character of the future movement. Only the most naive ideology could give the same place to this forecast that it does to the political actualities of the German labour movement.

The German Revisionists were influenced in their conduct by the contradiction

between the reform practice of the party and its revolutionary theories. They did not understand that this contradiction is conditioned by temporary, even if long-lasting circumstances and that it can only be overcome by further social development. To them it was a logical contradiction. The mistake of the Revisionists was not that they confirmed the reformist character of the party's tactics in the past, but that they wanted to perpetuate reformism theoretically and make it the only method of the proletarian class struggle.

Thus the Revisionists failed to take into account the objective tendencies of capitalist development, which by deepening class distinctions must lead to the Social Revolution as the one way to the emancipation of the proletariat. Marxism emerged from this theoretical dispute as the victor all along the line. But Revisionism, although defeated on the field of theory, continued to live, drawing sustenance from the actual conduct and the psychology of the whole movement.

The critical refutation of Revisionism as a theory by no means signified its defeat tactically and psychologically. The parliamentarians, the unionists, the comrades continued to live and to work in the atmosphere of general opportunism, of practical specialising and of nationalistic narrowness. Reformism made its impress even upon the mind of August Bebel, the greatest representative of this period.

The spirit of opportunism must have taken a particularly strong hold on the generation that came into the party in the eighties, in the time of Bismark's anti-Socialist laws and of oppressive reaction all over Europe. Lacking the apostolic zeal of the generation that was connected with the First International, hindered in its first steps by the power of victorious imperialism, forced to adapt itself to the traps and snares of the anti-Socialist laws, this generation grew up in the spirit of moderation and constitutional distrust of revolution.

They are now men of fifty to sixty years old, and they are the very ones who are now at the head of the unions and the political organisations. Reformism is their political psychology, if not also their doctrine. The gradual growing into Socialism — that is the basis of Revisionism — proved to be the most miserable Utopian dream in face of the facts of capitalist development. But the gradual political growth of the Social Democracy into the mechanism of the national state has turned out to be a tragic actuality — for the entire race.

The Russian Revolution was the first great event to bring a fresh whiff into the stale atmosphere of Europe in the thirty five years since the Paris Commune. The rapid development of the Russian working class and the unexpected strength of their concentrated revolutionary activity made a great impression on the entire civilised world and gave an impetus everywhere to the sharpening of political differences. In England the Russian Revolution hastened the formation of an independent labour party. In Austria, thanks to special circumstances, it led to universal manhood suffrage. In France the echo of the Russian Revolution took the form of Syndicalism, which gave expression, in inadequate practical and theoretical form, to the awakened revolutionary tendencies of the French proletariat.

And in Germany the influence of the Russian Revolution showed itself in the strengthening of the young Left wing of the party, in the rapprochement of the leading Centre to it, and in the isolation of Revisionism.

The question of the Prussian franchise, this key to the political position of Junkerdom, took on a keener edge. And the party adopted in principle the revolutionary method ofthe general strike. But all this external shaking up proved inadequate to shove the party on to the road of the political offensive. In accordance with the party tradition, the turn towards radicalism found expression in discussions and the adoption of resolutions. That was as far as it ever went.

1917

How the workers made a revolution

A reply to Comrade Gorter

What does Comrade Gorter propose? What does he want? Propaganda! This is the gist of his entire method. Revolution, says Corade Gorter, is contingent neither upon privations nor economic conditions, but upon mass consciousness; while mass consciousness is, in turn, shaped by propaganda.

Propaganda is here taken in a purely idealistic manner, very much akin to the concept of the eighteenth century school of enlightenment and rationalism. If the revolution is not contingent upon the living conditions of the masses, or much less so upon these conditions than upon propaganda, then why haven't you made the revolution in Holland?

What you now want to do amounts essentially to replacing the dynamic development of the International by methods of individual recruitment of workers through propaganda. You want some sort of simon-pure International of the elect and select, but precisely your own Dutch experience should have prompted you to realise that such an approach leads to the eruption of sharpest divergences of opinion within the most select organisation.

As a result of his idealistic point of view Comrade Gorter staggers from one contradiction to another. He begins with propaganda as the all-encompassing means of educating the masses and later arrives at the assertion that the revolution is accomplished by "deeds and not words." He needs this for his fight against parliamentarism.

By no means unilluminating is the fact that Comrade Gorter was compelled to deliver a ninety-minute speech in order to prove that revolutions are not accomplished by speeches but by actions. Previously he had informed us that the masses can be prepared for actions by propaganda i.e. again, mind you, by speeches. But the whole gist of the matter is this, that Comrade Gorter wants a select group of agitators, propagandists and writers, who remain undefiled by such vulgar activities as parliamentary elections, or by particiation in the life of trade unions, but who through impeccable speeches and articles keep on "educating" the masses until they become capable of accomplishing the Communist revolution. This approach, I repeat, is utterly permeated with individualism.

Comrade Gorter looks upon trade unions and parliamentarism as suprahistorical categories, as magnitudes that are given once and for all. And since the utilisation of the trade unions and of parliamentarism by the Social Democracy failed to lead to revolution, therefore Comrade Gorter proposes that we turn our backs upon the trade unions and parliamentarianism, not noticing that he thereby is, at the given moment, turning his own back upon the working class itself.

As a matter of fact, the Social Democracy — from whom we broke by breaking with the Second International — marked a certain epoch in the development of the working class. This was not the epoch of revolution but the epoch of reform.

Future historians, comparing the bourgeoisie's course of evolution with that of the proletariat, may say that the working class, too, had a reformation of its own.

What was the gist of the bourgeois Reformation? At the dawn of its independent historical action, the bourgeoisie did not immediately set itself the task of conquering power but sought instead to secure for itself, within the framework of feudal society, living conditions most comfortable and best suited to its needs. It proceeded to enlarge the framework of the feudal state, to alter its forms and to transform it into a bureaucratic monarchy. It transfigured religion, personalising the latter, that is, adapting religion to

Rosa Luxemburg

1917
How the workers made a revolution

bourgeois conformities. In these tendencies we find expressed the relative historical weakness of the bourgeoisie. After securing these positions for itself, the bourgeoisie went on to the struggle for power.

Social Democracy proved incapable of translating Marxism into social-revolutionary action. The role of the Social Democracy dwindled to an attempt to utilise bourgeois society and the bourgeois state in the interests of the working masses. The goal of the conquest of power, although formally set forth, exercised virtually no effect upon the actual practice. Activities were not directed toward the revolutionary utilisation of parliamentarism but towards adapting the working class to bourgeois democracy.

This adaptation of a proletariat not yet fully conscious of its own strength to the social, state and ideological forms of bourgeois society was apparently a historically inevitable process, but it was just that and nothing more, that is, a historical process delimited by the given conditions of a given epoch.

This epoch of proletarian reformation gave birth to a special apparatus of a labour bureaucracy with special mental habits of its own, with its own routine, pinch-penny ideas, chameleon-like capacity for adaptation, and predisposition to myopia.

Comrade Gorter identifies this bureaucratic apparatus with the proletarian masses upon whose backs this apparatus has climbed. Hence flow his idealistic notions. His thinking is not materialist, non-historical. He understands the reciprocal relations neither between the class and the temporary historical apparatuses, nor between the past epoch and the present.

Comrade Gorter proclaims that the trade unions are bankrupt; that the Social Democracy is bankrupt; that Communism is bankrupt and the working class is bourgeoisified. According to him we must begin anew and start off with — the head, i.e., with select groups, who separate and apart from the old forms of organisation will carry unadulterated truth to the proletariat, scrub it clean of all bourgeois prejudices and, finally, spruce it up for the proletarian revolution. As I have already said, idealistic arrogance of this type is the obverse side of profoundest skepticism.

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The hearts of workers — according to Comrade Gorter — are far too filled with a slavish worship of parliamentarism. This is true. But one ought to add that in the hearts of certain ideologists this slavish worship is supplemented by a mystical fear of parliament. Comrade Gorter thinks that if he keeps a kilometre away from the buildings of parliament that thereby the workers' slavish worship of parliamentarianism will be weakened or destroyed. Such a tactic rests on idealistic superstitions and not upon realities.

This is true. But one ought to add that in the hearts of certain ideologists this slavish worship is supplemented by a mystical fear of parliamentarism. Comrade Gorter thinks that if he keeps a kilometer away from the buildings of parliament that thereby the workers' slavish worship of parliamentarianism will be weakened or destroyed. Such a tactic rests on idealistic superstitions and not upon realities.

The Communist point of view approaches parliamentarianism in its connection with all other political relations, without turning parliamentarianism into a fetish either in a positive or negative sense. The parliament is the instrumentality whereby the masses are politically deceived and benumbed, whereby prejudices are spread and illusions of political democracy maintained, and so on and so forth.

No one disputes all this. But does the parliament stand secluded by itself in this respect? Isn't petty-bourgeois poison being spread by the columns of the daily newspapers, and, first and foremost, by the Social-Democratic dailies? And oughtn't we perhaps on this account refrain from utilising the press as an instrument of extending Communist influence among the masses? Or does the mere fact that Comrade Gorter's group turns its back upon the parliament suffice to discredit parliamentarianism?

Were this the case, it would signify that the idea of the Communist revolution, as represented by Comrade Gorter's group, is cherished by the masses above everything else. But in that case the proletariat would naturally disperse the parliament without much ado and take power into its own hands.

But such is not the case. Comrade Gorter himself, far from denying, on the contrary grotesquely exaggerates the masses' respect and slavish worship of parliamentarianism. Yet what conclusion does he draw? That it is necessary to preserve the "purity" of his own group, i.e., sect.

In the final analysis Comrade Gorter's arguments against parliamentarianism can be levelled against all forms and methods of the proletarian class struggle, inasmuch as all of these forms and methods have been deeply infected with opportunism, reformism and nationalism. Warring against the utilisation of trade unions and parliamentarianism, Comrade Gorter ignores the difference between the Third International and the Second International, the difference between Communism and Social Democracy; and, what is most important, he fails to grasp the difference between two specific historical epochs and two specific world situations.

Comrade Gorter admits, incidentally, that prior to the revolution Liebknecht's parliamentary speeches were of great significance. But, says he, once the revolution starts, parliamentarianism loses all meaning. Unfortunately Comrade Gorter does not explain to us just what revolution he is talking about. Liebknecht made his speeches in the Reichstag on the eve of the bourgeois revolution. Today in Germany both the bourgeois government and the country are heading for the proletarian revolution.

The next revolution

Seventy years on, the USSR is ruled by a totalitarian bureaucracy, workers have no rights, national minorities are brutally oppressed both in the USSR and in Eastern Europe. A new revolution is needed. Lynn Ferguson looks to the future.

The Russian revolution was betrayed. Workers' democracy was destroyed and a totalitarian dictatorship erected on the revolution's ruins.

Today, the bureaucratic dictatorship is trying to reform itself. Mikhail Gorbachev's *Glasnost* and *Perishoika* are the bureaucracy's way of reorganising its rule, and attempt to overcome its long-term crisis.

But Gorbachev is no revolutionary. He is the latest in the line of the Stalin dynasty. He has nothing in common with Lenin and the Bolsheviks and the people who made the Russian revolution.

The real inheritors of the revolution today are those working class militants who are fighting Gorbachev from below — people like Vladimir Klebanov, a Ukrainian miner being kept in a mental asylum to stop his attempts to form free trade unions.

A new revolution is needed in the USSR. The workers need to overthrow the bureaucrats — hard line Stalinits and softer reformers alike — and replace them with a workers' democracy. The Russian revolution has to be made again.

In Eastern Europe, where Russia imposed its rule after World War Two, worker' struggles have pointed the way. In East Germany in 1953, Hungary in 1956, Czchoslovakia in 1968 and Poland in 1980-81, workers' revolutions shook the repressive, bureaucratic regimes to their foundations.

In all these countries a major concern was and is the winning of real independence from the USSR. And within the USSR there are many national minorities, some like the Ukrainians savagely oppressed. The Bolshevik programme was for the right of all nations to self-determination — and the future socialist revolution in the East will emblazon that right on its banner. The Russian empire also has to be destroyed again.

Vladimir Klebanov: imprisoned for trade union activity

Gorbachev's reforms may open up new possibilities for independent working-class action in the USSR itself — despite Gorbachev's intentions. In the not too distant future, we may see revolutionary movements in the Eastern bloc still greater than those in 1917 and after, which in destorying the nightmare distortion of socialism that exists there, transforms their societies and in conjunction with socialists in the West build a new, socialist world.

Whatever was done to the Russian revolution by the bureaucrats who betrayed it, in the socialist society of future they will look back at 1917 as the time the workers made their first successful bid for power.

1917

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