# The Road to Red October

League for the Fifth International

## THE BOLSHEVIKS AND WORKING CLASS POWER




***Ninetieth Anniversary Edition***

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This pamphlet's first edition was published in 1987 by Workers Power; then the British section of the Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International, since 2003 renamed the League for the Fifth International. It was authored by Dave Hughes, Clare Heath, Mark Hoskisson and Dave Stockton. This second edition, includes a new introduction and conclusion from Luke Cooper, plus further chapters on the fall of the hated Tsar, The July Days and the Soviet or Parliament controversy, all by Dave Stockton.

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Dave Hughes (1948 - 1991) was the principal writer for Workers Power on Russian history and politics, from the organisation's founding in 1975 to his death in 1991. It is to the memory of Dave - a comrade and a revolutionary fighter still greatly missed - that we dedicate this second edition.

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# Preface

This is the second edition of the Road to Red October. The first was published twenty years ago in November 1987, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Russian Revolution.

At that time Michael Gorbachev ruled the Soviet Union, pursuing in earnest his programme of pro-market restructuring which he called the *perestroika* reforms. The USSR, half of Europe, China, Vietnam and Cuba all stood outside the world capitalist system. Their ruling parties claimed they were "socialist" countries and part of a global communist movement, albeit with rival centres in Moscow and Beijing. All celebrated the October Revolution as the origin of their regimes.

These states, which claimed to stand in the communist tradition, had long since degenerated into bureaucratic dictatorships that stood above the people and ruled over the working class, not under the direction and control of the working class.

In 1987, with Gorbachev accepting the logic of the market, and Margaret Thatcher declaring him to be "a man we can do business with", major offensives were being launched against workers in the west, particularly in Britain and the United States. This included a sustained ideological attack on the very idea of socialism. In publishing The Road to Red October, Workers Power aimed not merely to defend the necessity for and possibility of socialist revolution, but also looked towards the possibility of a successful defence and revivification of the USSR through workers' political revolution against the bureaucratic regimes that had usurped power in the workers' states.

We promoted a workers' response to the developing crisis of Stalinism, one that could restore not the madness of capitalism but the working class democracy and democratic planning that was and is essential if a socialist system is to be established. This task was integrally linked with a defence of the programme of Marxism and of the actions of the revolutionary Bolsheviks in 1917, against criticisms from the right and the 'left' alike.

Today, twenty years after the publication of the first edition, the world has certainly seen some dramatic changes. Most notably, the collapse of the Stalinist states - leaving only isolated Cuba and the bizarrely degenerated North Korea - has ushered in a new period of world capitalism, popularly called globalisation. Far from bringing stability and peace as the ideologues of capitalism promised, it has been marked by imperial aggression, social and economic crises and escalating resistance.

Revolutionary events from Latin America and South Asia, huge resistance from the working class in Europe, Africa and the Asia-Pacific, pre-revolutionary crises in Pakistan, France, Nigeria, revolutionary crises in Argentina, Venezuela, Bolivia, Mexico, Nepal, the armed resistance to imperialist aggression in Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon: all these events show that far from being consigned to the distant past, the epoch of October lives on. We study the successful revolution of October 1917 so that we can make new Octobers in the 21st century: this time to culminate in a second world revolution that consigns not Bolshevism, but capitalism to history.

It is to the new generation of fighters, for whom the Soviet Union is barely even a distant memory, that this pamphlet is addressed.

Luke Cooper, August 2007

# Introduction: a revolution of our time

The Russian Revolution in 1917 shook the world and opened up a new period in world history. The overthrow of capitalism became an immediate question in states across the world. But the context in which this revolutionary storm broke out was truly one of the 20th century's nightmares: the First World War.

Millions of young men were sent to their deaths as colonial powers vied for world domination; while tens of millions of civilians were caught in the crossfire. But what was perhaps most shameful about this tragedy was the support the imperialist powers secured from parties claiming to represent the working class - the parties of the millions-strong Second International. Reneging on their promise "to utilise the economic and political crisis created by the war to rouse the masses and thereby to hasten the downfall of capitalist class rule" they supported the war enthusiastically. French and German "socialists" became recruiting sergeants for their own national bourgeoisie: workers were sent off to kill one another with the blessing of the leaders of their own movement. Revolutionaries faithful to working class internationalism were reduced to a tiny handful.

But rising out of the ashes of the First World War, the Russian Revolution brought hope to millions that an end to the misery and suffering of the capitalist system was within reach.

## The Russian Revolution

In the February Revolution the workers brought down the Tsar through a general strike and uprising of seismic proportions, only to install a provisional government packed with representatives of the Russian bourgeoisie, who were intent on continuing the war with Germany. These reprobates hoped that once they were freed from the shackles of the hated and unpopular Tsar, the losses Russia had suffered could be reversed and the Germans pushed back. For the Russian masses the war had created untold misery. The people were starving, while those fighting suffered horrendous losses - 1.8 million casualties on the front, 1.5 million civilians killed and nearly 5 million wounded.

In economically backward Russia the bourgeoisie and its parties were a weak force and the provisional government was propped up by the dominant parties of the Russian peasantry and the working class - the right wing of the peasant Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs) and the opportunist workers party, the Mensheviks (a faction of the Russian Social Democrat Labour Party). As the crisis of the war and economic hardship deepened throughout 1917 the government came under great pressure. For the Mensheviks and SRs this was made all the greater by the organisation of the Russian working class and soldiers into their own democratic delegate-based councils: the soviets.

The story of how the Bolsheviks (a seperate faction of the Russian Social Democrat Labour party) - initially a small minority - won the leadership of Russia's workers and peasants is told in this pamphlet. It is a story of a party that was nothing like the monolithic and bureaucratic monstrosity that the followers of Stalin (and, equally, the reformists and the anarchists) all paint it as. Indeed, it was only a vigorous democratic debate over its fundamental goals (a debate which was pursued in earnest in April 1917 after Bolshevik leader Lenin returned from exile) that made the socialist outcome of the revolution in October 1917 possible at all.

The Russian Revolution brought hope to millions that an end to the misery and suffering of the capitalist system was within reach

Lenin won the party away from its initial position of giving critical support to the bourgeois provisional government. From then on the Bolsheviks were to argue that the Russian Revolution did not need to pause halfway or to rest content with a "democratic" imperialist government, it needed a workers' government based on the soviets and the armed people. That this was the correct and necessary path, one rooted in a correct estimation of the real contradictions of Russian development and the inability of the 'democratic bourgeoisie' to secure the

victory of the revolution, was proved positively in October 1917, just as its opposite - the Menshevik and Stalinist theory of halting at the "democratic stage" by participating in a cross-class government or 'people's front - has been proved negatively countless times over the last 90 years: in the counter-revolutionary defeats in China11925-27, Spain 1936-39, Indonesia 1965, Chile 1973, Portugal 1974, Iran 1979.

The revolutionary government of Soviet Russia was a threat to the whole world capitalist system and recognised as such by the great colonial powers. Winston Churchill's attitude was typical, when he raged, "Bolshevism must be strangled at birth." Sixteen nations declared war on the fledgling Soviet state and aided the White Army, as they plunged Russia into civil war. Led by Leon Trotsky, the Red Army eventually prevailed, but the Soviet state entered the 1920s isolated and exhausted by the war effort. Revolutionary upheavals in central Europe, which might have relieved the siege of the "Land of the Soviets" went down to defeat. The shattered economy had to be rebuilt whilst making enormous concessions to the peasantry with a market economy in the countryside. By 1922 the dangers of counter-revolution appeared to have subsided but tragically they were replaced by a form of the counter-revolution Lenin and Trotsky had not expected.

## Bureaucratic Degeneration

As the Soviet state battened down the hatches to resist foreign invasion and the White Army, it had developed a powerful bureaucracy who increasingly stood above the Russian masses. In the leadership of the Communist Party they found a voice for their interests in Joseph Stalin. The emergency measures to curtail workers' and party democracy during the civil war were made permanent. After Lenin's death, Trotsky was sidelined and a public campaign was launched against "Trotskyism." He tried to organise the healthy revolutionary fighers into the left opposition, which proposed political and economic policies to reinvigorate the revolution in Russia.

Stalin's rule was catastrophic for the Russian masses and the international working class. It was characterised by a series of wild zigzags in policy, with the only consistent element the desperate desire to maintain bureaucratic rule. At home, Stalin at first opposed Trotsky's call for voluntary collectivisation of agriculture, only later to impose a ruthless forced collectivisation that led to terrible famines. He resisted attempts to curtail the power of the richer peasants, only later to slaughter them by the millions and force them into the collective farms. The same policy was, in essence, applied in industry, with the adoption by Stalin of the left opposition's programme of planning and industrialisation, but implemented in a bureaucratic manner without the critical component of working class control over production. Whilst great strides forward in output were made, ultimately the bureaucratic plan could not match the needs of the workers as they were excluded from any meaningful input over what should be produced and how to improve labour productivity. From the 1950s the bureaucratic plan oversaw annual declines in output and stagnation of the productive forces.

> Stalin's was able to secure his position in the Soviet Union with ruthless, terrible purges, fuelled by his spiralling neurosis.

The tyranny of Stalin's policy at home was matched by his disastrous impact on the strategy of the international communist parties. In the mid-1920s, desperate for international allies for his regime, Stalin instructed communist parties to tail uncritically bourgeois and reformist forces. But in 1928 the reformists were labelled "social fascists" and all alliances for common action with these forces prohibited, most disastrously preventing the German Communists from extending their influence over the social democratic workers in 1931-33, by stopping them from proposing the straight forward necessity of a workers united front against the burgeoning forces of Nazism. Even the destruction of the German working class movement by Hitler did not lead to a rebellion against Stalin's disastrous policy, so utterly bureaucratic had the Communist international become. And yet, by 1936 it was all change again, as Stalin pursued the policy of the "popular front" - where in direct contradistinction to the policy of the Bolsheviks in 1917 - the governments of "democratic capital" were to be given the support of communist forces.

The result was a litany of devastating defeats for the working class movement; in China, France, Spain and Austria the working class went down to terrible defeats.

These defeats were to propel humanity headlong into a new world war. For Trotsky and his small band of followers the impending war and the betrayals of the Communist International signalled the urgency of building a new international. Consequently, in 1938 the Fourth International was founded - but unlike its predecessors it never organised a mass vanguard of the working class under its banner. The defeats of the working class created disillusionment and disorientation among the masses, while Stalin was able to secure his position in the Soviet Union with ruthless terrible purges. When the Second World War came it was so terrible it gave the world a new and disturbing vocabulary; as terms like the holocaust and the atom bomb became familiar to millions.

Trotsky had predicted a post-war revolutionary upheaval and, sure enough, just such an upheaval came, as mass partisan movements in Europe erupted in France, Italy, Greece and Yugoslavia. While energetically supporting the defence of the USSR, Trotsky had anticipated that the Soviet Union and with it Stalinism would suffer major defeats which would open the road to a political revolution. And indeed, Stalin's pre-war destruction of huge swathes of the Soviet officer corps and high command, his illusions in the deal done with Hitler in 1939 (The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) meant that Soviet forces were caught unprepared and nearly collapsed under the Nazi onslaught in 1941. But, from this point on, several factors were to combine to give the USSR final victory.

Firstly, there was the superiority of its planned industrial economy, producing vast supplies of first class weaponry. Secondly, the Soviet workers and peasants responded heroically to the barbaric action of the occupying Nazis. Thirdly we should not discount the huge tactical and strategic blunders by Hitler and the German High Command. All of these played their part in the Soviet victories. Add to this, the entry of the United States into the war and the economic aid it gave to Stalin's Russia.

Finally, in the Soviet Union the Great Purges of 1936-38 had quite literally annihilated any alternative revolutionary leadership inside the Soviet Union - and with it the prospect of a political revolution. Thus, the Soviet Union emerged victorious with its forces expanded into Eastern Europe with a tremendous prestige amongst the international working class. Thus, when the post-war revolutionary upheavals came, rejuvenated Stalinist parties invariably led them. In Eastern Europe capitalism was overturned not by the power of the working class, but in a *bureaucratic* social revolution. Like the Soviet Union, a planned economy was brought into being but the working class did not hold power; it was held fast in the grip of a bureaucratic caste, which extirpated every sign of independent working class organisation before moving against the capitalists.

In the 1930s Trotsky had developed the designation Degenerated Workers' State to describe the Soviet Union. He argued a political revolution was needed to smash the bureaucracy and its armed state machine and reopen the road to socialism. Such a revolution would not need to expropriate property, i.e. carry out a second social revolution, but take hold of the existing state owned industries and planning machinery and run it democratically. It was the planned economy, albeit heavily distorted by bureaucratisation, which made it necessary for communists to continue to defend the Soviet Union.

## The collapse of "communism"

The bureaucracy prevented the revolutionary spread of working class power internationally and blocked the creation of an ever more equal and democratic society internally, leaving it, Trotsky argued, as an agent of world capitalism within the workers state. Thus, he argued "either the bureaucracy, becoming ever more the organ of the world bourgeoisie in the workers' state, will overthrow the new forms of property and plunge the country back to capitalism; or the working class will crush the bureaucracy and open the way to socialism." (*The Transitional Programme of the Fourth International*, 1938)

The Soviet Union and its bureaucracy finally collapsed at the end of the tumultuous events of 1989 to 1991. But while Trotsky underestimated the longevity of the Soviet Union, his analysis of the role the bureaucracy would play in its collapse proved entirely correct. Major waves of political revolutions punctuated every decade after the war from East Germany (1953), Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968), Poland (1980-81) to China and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s. But tragically the crisis of leadership of the world workers' movement meant that there existed no powerful revolutionary alternative with a programme for defending the social gains of the working class and installing workers democracy through political revolution. Indeed, the Fourth International had capitulated to Stalinism following the Second World War when it argued Tito, the Stalinist leader of the Yugoslavian partisan movement, was an "unconscious Trotskyist" and therefore no revolutionary party had to be built in Yugoslavia.

> Even ostensibly Trotskyist forces, concluded "the epoch of October was over"

In the absence of a world party of social revolution ready to intervene and create revolutionary parties in the Stalinist states when they went into crisis, a counter-revolutionary outcome become inevitable. Trotsky's prediction was proved correct, but only negatively as the bureaucracy began the process of restoring capitalism.

In Russia and Eastern Europe political revolutions brought the old regimes down but, in the absence of revolutionary socialist leadership, forces intent on the restoration of capitalism (often bureaucrats posing as democrats) achieved the reintroduction of the market and the destruction of the planned economy. In China the bureaucracy maintained power by using force of arms to put down the political revolution in Tiananmen Square in 1989 and they oversaw the reintroduction of capitalism and the destruction of planning themselves in 1992.

## The Revolutionary Programme

The lasting achievement of Trotsky is the revolutionary programme and method he developed. Drawing on the actual experience of the Russian Revolution and the struggles against Stalinism in its aftermath, he came to an understanding of the communist party, its programme and relationship to the working class, which is of huge importance for us today.

He answered questions such as: What is the relationship between the democratic revolution and the socialist revolution? How can the revolutionary party fight for leadership of the class, while avoiding both opportunism and sectarianism? How should revolutionaries apply the tactic of the united front to the masses, who remain under the leadership of non-revolutionary forces? What role does the workers militia and the insurrection play in the process of revolution? How can the working class unite with the peasants and link their demands to the socialist goal? It is these lessons we seek to draw out in The Road to Red October. Some ninety years after the revolution there could not be a more urgent need to learn these lessons and re-elaborate a revolutionary communist programme for today.

The right wing intelligentsia today present the Russian Revolution as a hopelessly naïve and disastrous attempt at radical social change. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union these people declared ideological victory; capitalism, or so the story goes, had roundly defeated its communist foe. It was apparently reactionary and utopian to even attempt to transcend capitalism. Postmodernists asserted that all "utopias", all "grand narratives" led to disaster, to Stalin or Hitler, Mao or Pol Pot. Better to leave capitalism alone and enjoy it if you could. Even those who wished to "change the world" insisted that the most dangerous thing possible was to "take power" as the Bolsheviks had done in 1917. Even ostensibly Trotskyist forces in the Fourth International concluded "the epoch of October was over."

History has not been kind to this prognosis. As we enter the 21st century, the struggle for socialist revolution appears as immediate and relevant as ever. World leaders claimed with the collapse of the Soviet Union a new period of peace was emerging, but the very policies they pursued have created social and political crisis, war and resistance, pre-revolutionary crises and outright revolutionary upsurges. Governments across the globe, following the prescriptions of the United States and the global financial institutions, have given capital free reign, privatised public services, made us work longer and harder, and locked poor states into global markets rigged against them. Meanwhile, those that openly dare to challenge US imperial power find themselves threatened with military confrontation, invasion and

occupation.

In most regions of the world mass rebellions have challenged the USA superpower and its local agents. From the Iraqi, Afghan and Palestinian resistance to the occupation of their lands, to the mass revolts against neoliberalism across Latin America; from the struggles for democracy and resistance to neoliberalism in South Asia to the fight to defend workers social gains across Europe; the 21st century appears already rich in revolutionary potential and opportunity.

A few great crises of the last period are worth a specific mention. In Argentina between 2001 and 2002 an extended and powerful revolutionary situation developed with general strikes, popular uprisings, factory occupations, and embryonic soviets and elements of dual power. The relevance of the October revolution, the need to learn from it and apply its lessons, could not have been more dramatically illustrated.

Likewise, in Venezuela after the failed coup against Hugo Chavez, a prolonged revolutionary process, again with popular assemblies, arming of militias, factory occupations and workers control has developed. Chavez himself has even spoken of socialist revolution - but his government and the armed forces of the state continue to refuse to break with the bourgeoisie and systematically expropriate the bourgeois class, despite the pressure from below. Here again the lessons of 1917 - of the months from February to October - are critically important.

Bolivia also deserves a special mention. Between 2002 and 2005 huge mass revolutionary upheavals drove two presidents from power and created embryonic soviets. The result was the election of Evo Morales, who like Chavez both embodies the hopes of the masses for revolutionary change and holds them back within the framework of capitalism. In Mexico too the upheaval in 2006 saw millions mobilise and, in one region, the masses developed a proto-Soviet in the form of the Oaxaca Commune.

The world seems neither short of social political crisis, nor resistance. And if all this has happened, in a period of economic boom, what can be expected when the next global recession strikes?

But we should also add a word of caution. If the last hundred years teach us anything, it is that a successful socialist revolution will not happen as a result of some mechanical or unconscious process. Rather, a new generation of militants must be won to a re-elaborated communist programme, which, equally must be built solidly on the revolutionary lessons of February to October 1917. We republish the Road to Red October in the expectation that it will find many readers in the years immediately ahead and help to arm them for the "Octobers" of the twenty first century.

# The fall of the hated Tsar

In 1917 Russia still used the old Julian calendar so it was 13 days behind most other countries which used the Gregorian calendar we still use today. That is why the great events which are called the February Revolution took place between 8-15 March in our calendar. Under the old-style Russian Calendar 23 February to 1 March. But Russia was not simply 13 days behind central and Western Europe. In terms of its political regime it was any thing from fifty to a hundred years behind.

A prolonged revolutionary upheaval in 1905-07, led by the workers and supported by peasant uprisings and mutinies in the fleet and the army, had forced Tsar Nicholas II to introduce some of the formal institutions of a constitutional democracy, notably a parliament called the State Duma. But in reality he still exercised many of the powers of an absolute monarch, a system known as autocracy. Whilst liberal and conservative parties were now allowed, revolutionaries and trade unionists were harassed, arrested at will, their newspapers censored or closed down. Jews and other oppressed nationalities were subjected to pogroms (massacres).

A vast secret police network, the Okhrana, was the only up-to-date feature of the Russian state and it spied on all oppositionists. It was responsible for the publication in 1903 of the notorious anti-semitic forgery, the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. The Tsar himself personally sponsored a forerunner of fascism, the Black Hundreds. Its ideology centred on anti-semitism. Nicholas II and his wife the German-born Tsarina Alexandra were themselves pathological anti-semites as their private correspondence reveals, they even personally encouraged pogroms. They ordered bloody repression against the workers, most famously on 9 January 1905, the original Bloody Sunday, when hundreds of unarmed workers and their children were shot down in the streets and squares around the Winter Palace in St Petersburg (renamed Petrograd in 1914).

A vast secret police network, the Okhrana, was the only up-to-date feature of the Russian state and it spied on all oppositionists

In 1914 the Russian empire, by now allied with France which was its main source of the huge loans keeping its creaking system afloat, entered the First World War against Germany and Austria-Hungary. France had high hopes that the Tsar's huge peasant army, "the Russian steamroller", would crush the German armies in the east, enabling it to break through in the west.

It was not to be. After a few early successes, the Tsarist armies were defeated in disastrous battles and rolled back through the Empire's western borderland, suffering huge casualties. The Tsar, who in mid-1915 assumed formal command, was directly embroiled in the disaster. His government fell into the hands of a court camarilla around his wife and her "spiritual advisor", the drunken half-crazed monk Grigori Rasputin. They changed the government at will and removed many of the more competent generals, adding to the chaos and disrupting the war effort.

By late 1916 the Russian army had lost between 1.6 and 1.8 million soldiers, with an additional two million prisoners of war and one million missing out of the 14 million it had mobilized since 1914. The front was on the point of collapse. Even the ruling class of landowning aristocrats now craved regime change. In mid-December 1916, conspirators led by Prince Yusopov and Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich, assassinated Rasputin. The entire extended royal family- apart from the Tsar and his wife- warmly congratulated the blue blooded terrorists.

At the same time the Russian bourgeoisie - the capitalist class - was also plotting "regime change". They still heartily supported the war because they wanted to seize the choicest parts of the German and Ottoman empires and share in the spoils of Allied victory. In this sense the Russian capitalist class, backward and weak as it was, was nevertheless an imperialist bourgeoisie. The dominant bourgeois political parties in the Duma were the Octobrists - conservative liberals who supported the Tsar's deceitful constitution of 1905 - and the Cadets (Constitutional Democrats). They passed resolutions calling for a ministry

answerable to the Duma. Their leaders were, respectively, Alexander Guchkov and Pavel Milyukov.

The French and British backed the bourgeois and aristocratic opposition to the Tsar and Tsarina and their court clique. Buchanan, the British ambassador, told the Tsar at the end of 1916 that he needed to regain the confidence of his people. "Don't you mean they have to regain my confidence," the royal moron replied. With reactionary conservatives and moderate liberals alike plotting against him, with even his wartime imperialist allies in open collusion with them, Nicholas' entire regime was headed for collapse.

The first condition of a revolution is that the ruling class is unable to go on ruling in the old way. This condition was met in full. The other condition is that the exploited classes are unwilling to be ruled in the old way. This was also soon to be fulfilled.

## The first Revolution

The Russian working class was only a small minority of the population of the vast Empire but it was powerfully concentrated in a few major cities, the twin capitals Petrograd and Moscow. Wartime production had led to a substantial increase in the number of factory workers in the two capitals: from 242,600 in Petrograd in 1914 to 391,800 in 1917. In Moscow their numbers grew from 153,223 to 205,919. The giant Putilov works in Petrograd alone had 30,000 workers by 1917, making it the largest factory in the world.

In Petrograd and Moscow people were starving. Women queued for hours, starting at two in the morning, to bring home barely enough bread for their family to survive on. The winter of 1916-17 was a desperately cold one; temperatures fell to minus -40oC. Meanwhile the rich and the war profiteers lived a life of ostentatious luxury.

The revolution began with a lockout and strike at the Putilov works. On 21 February, the Putilov management locked out a section of their workers, provoking a strike. The workers demonstrated and other factories came out in their support. Scuffles and protests also took place outside bakers' shops, when supplies ran out. The next day, 22 February (8 March in Western Europe) was International Working Class Women's Day. Early in the morning thousands of women were on the streets, textile workers spearheaded their ranks.

Well over 7,000 left their looms. Chanting "Bread!" they marched through Petrograd's Vyborg district, the city's main centre of heavy industry, to the New Lessner works, the Nobel plant, the Russian Renault factory and finally the Erikson mills. Their numbers began to swell as workers, men and women, from all over the city left their jobs to protest. By ten o'clock, 20,000 were marching. Before noon, numbers had swelled to more than 50,000.

The next day the demonstration grew even bigger, reached more than 214,000 workers from more than 2,000 factories and enterprises. By now they were shouting not only for bread but an end to the war and occasionally the overthrow of the autocracy. The Vyborg workers marched towards the centre of Petrograd, finally coming to a halt at the wide Neva river. The bridges were blocked by Cossacks (peasant cavalry) and soldiers. The people, however, walked across the solidly frozen ice. The Cossacks and the soldiers did not move.

The third day of the revolution proved the decisive day. Attention now focused on what the city's garrison would do. The exact number of troops in Petrograd at this point is unknown; figures of between 220,000 and 466,000 men are given. In addition there were the hated police (3,500 men) and the Cossack cavalry (3,200). What would they do? The final and decisive factor in the success of a revolution was about to come into play: the morale of the soldiers. How would they respond, faced with workers willing to die? Would they obey officers, ordering them to kill people, who might be their fathers and brothers, their sisters, wives, girlfriends and mothers?

Women queued for hours to bring home barely enough bread for their family to survive on

The marchers' columns were by now more frequently led by members of the revolutionary parties: particularly the Bolshevik Party, plus Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries. They did not and could not act as a centralised leadership of the whole movement. Repression and illegality made this impossible. The average Bolshevik, for example, was able to undertake only around three months of underground activity before being arrested.

Who were these revolutionaries? Most of them were very young, with an average age of 16-17. Many joined the party between the ages of 13 and 15. A larger number of the main leaders had been active in the 1905 revolution, but even these were only in their late twenties or early thirties.

Lenin and the principal leaders of the Bolshevik Party were all in exile, either in Western Europe or in distant Siberia. Lenin was not able to return from exile to Petrograd until 3 (16) April, in the famous "sealed train" provided by the German authorities for the Swiss socialist exiles of all parties. Other leaders, like Lev Kamenev, Yakov Sverdlov and Josef Stalin, arrived from Siberia in mid-March. The most senior leader in Petrograd was the metalworker Alexander Shlyapnikov. He alone was in any sort of regular correspondence with Lenin and the party leadership abroad. Together with Petr Zalutskii and Vyacheslav Molotov, he formed the national leadership of the Bolshevik Party.

Perhaps half the party membership was concentrated in the Vyborg district, a huge concentration of metal working factories and textile mills. In Vyborg a district committee made up of Vasily Kayurov, Ivan Chugurin and Dmitry Pavlov led the local Bolshevik Party. They were to become the de facto leadership in the coming days.

The total number of Bolsheviks in Petrograd at the onset of the February revolution was just 2,000. They had organised party nuclei in the key factories: around 75-80 in the Old Lessner factory, some 30 in the Russo-Baltic and Izhorsky shipyards and smaller groups in other factories. In the giant Putilov works, with its 30,000 employees, there were 150 Bolsheviks. These party cadres were influential leaders but not yet recognised spokespersons of mass factory organisations- indeed such organisations did not yet exist.

Initially the Bolshevik leadership in Petrograd had been working

towards an escalation of strikes and mass demonstrations, with a timetable stretching from 9 January, the anniversary of Bloody Sunday 1905, to May Day; the latter was to serve as the signal for an armed uprising. But first the lockout and strike at the Putilov works on 22 February and then the huge response to the demonstration on International Women's Day upset these plans. Kayurov and the Vyborg committee had actually initiated the call for the International Women's Day march. Vyborg was the main centre of the textile mills. But they did not foresee and initially did not want this mobilisation to continue on the following days. Kayurov records in his memoirs his indignation with the women strikers for not carrying out the instructions of the party. He feared it would lead to premature clashes with the troops.

"At a certain point in a revolution the masses suddenly move into action, and the rising quantity of their exasperation undergoes a qualitative transformation"

Leon Trotsky, in his epic History of the Russian Revolution, remarks that at a certain point in a revolution the masses suddenly move into action, and the rising quantity of their exasperation undergoes a qualitative transformation. Of course they need courageous, determined leaders, initiators of action, new ones as well as old militants from past struggles. But for this qualitative change to occur they do not always need a highly structured organisation and prepared plan. Thus, at a certain conjuncture, the masses move far faster than even the best revolutionary leadership.

Nonetheless, by the 25 February the Bolsheviks realised that they had a full-blown revolution on their hands. Still they were unable, for logistical and perhaps also for political reasons to issue a leaflet until 27 February. Sunday 26 February was the most worrying day. The troops obeyed orders to fire on demonstrators and many workers were killed. Police raids resulted in the arrest of many revolutionary leaders; Shlyapnikov escaped by the skin of his teeth but was completely isolated. Kayurov and the Vyborg organisation, however, remained intact. The Vyborg district committee now became, de facto, the Bolshevik leadership in Petrograd, and thus responsible for the party's tactics in the crucial days of the February revolution. At that moment, they feared that the movement had been defeated.

But on the next morning - 27 February - Kayurov and the Vyborg fighting detachment led a daring raid on an arsenal, removed its stocks of rifles and mounted an attack on the prisons holding the revolutionaries, setting them free. They then went on to launch attacks on the police stations. At the same time Shlyapnikov's plans too came to fruition. This was the day the troops in Petrograd decisively came over to the side of the revolution. Various memoirs, both from Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, make it clear that across the city members of the Bolshevik Party were in the thick of the fighting, playing a leading role in winning over the troops, seizing arms, forming detachments in the factories, and helping organise and give slogans to the mass demonstrations.

The loyalty of the soldiers now hung in the balance; as usual in mutinies it was the non-commissioned officers who took the lead. That night in the Volynsky regiment, Sergeant Kirpichnikov addressed his fellow soldiers:

"Fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers and even brides are begging for bread. Will we strike them down? Have you seen the blood which runs in the streets? I propose that we do not march tomorrow."

The entire regiment vowed they would not fire on the people. Following their lead, that day more than 66,000 soldiers joined the side of the revolution.

The Volynsky was soon joined by the Pavlovsky, Litovsky and Preobrazhensky guards' regiments. Under Bolshevik leadership the central arsenal of the Petrograd garrison was broken into - 40,000 rifles and 30,000 revolvers were distributed. When the guards' regiments marched out of their barracks, their regimental bands struck up the republican marching song of the bourgeois revolution, the Marseillaise. At this point everybody realized that the Tsar was finished... apart from the Tsar himself.

Tsar Nicholas' ministers panicked. They resigned en masse and fled. It was left to the chairman of the parliament, the Duma, Mikhail Rodzianko, a member of the Octobrist Party, to telegram Nicholas, pleading with him to do something before it was too late. Nicholas' response was typically myopic and cretinous. He told his Court Minister Frederiks:

"Again that fat-bellied Rodzianko has written me a lot of nonsense, which I won't even bother to answer."

Nicholas finally decided to return to the capital, believing that somehow his imperial presence would restore order. En route to Petrograd, his train was stopped by revolutionary railworkers, who simply told the Tsar of All the Russias that he would not be allowed to return to the capital. The train tried another line but was stopped again. The workers vetoed his every move. The Tsar's diary records the pathetic end to his reign and his dynasty: "Ruzsky came in the morning and read me his long telephone conversation with Rodzianko. In his words, the situation in Petrograd is such, that at present a ministry from the Duma is powerless to do anything, because they are opposed by the Social Democratic Party in the guise of the worker's committee (i.e. the soviet of workers and soldier deputies - ed.) My abdication is necessary. Ruzsky communicated his conversation to headquarters, and Alexe'ev to all the commanders-in-chief. By about 2.30 answers had arrived from all. The crux of the matter is that it is necessary to take this step, for the sake of Russia's salvation and of maintaining calm in the army at the front. I agreed..."

One of Nicholas' last moves had been to suspend the Duma. It had been thrown into a frenzy of indecision. If they defied the Tsar, not only might they one day feel his wrath, but, even worse, their defiance might encourage the revolt of the masses. That was the last thing the liberal bourgeoisie wanted to happen. Indeed they had actually pleaded for the Tsar to restore order, that is, for the troops to fire on the workers. Here was no revolutionary bourgeoisie such as the Mensheviks dreamed of, but a thoroughly counter-revolutionary one, such as Lenin and Trotsky insisted they were.

## The soviet

Only on 1 March (14 March) when it became clear that the Tsar's

ministers had fled, the garrison was completely on the side of the revolution, and the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks had summoned the factories of the capital to elect delegates and send them to the Tauride Place to reconstitute the Petrograd Soviet, did Rodzianko, Milyukov and co. finally decide that since they could not stop the revolution they had to lead it. Thus did the provisional government come into existence - not to lead a revolution but to abort it.

On 27 February the revolutionary movement triumphed on the streets. In these vital days the Bolshevik fighters stood at the head of the movement, not alone but in larger numbers than the Mensheviks, the Socialist Revolutionaries or the Mezhrayontsi (a grouping, strong in Vyborg, standing between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks and favouring a reunification of the old Russian Social Democratic Labour Party). But victory brought a sudden and rapid change in the leadership of the movement. The Menshevik leaders, who had been freed from prison, did not rush to take part in the fighting but rather to the Tauride Palace where the Duma was sitting. There they began to make arrangements for calling the first session of a Petrograd soviet, a council of workers deputies, the institution that had led the revolution in the city in 1905.

Now that the fighting and danger was over thousands of people from the intelligentsia and professional classes flooded into the ranks of the "revolutionaries". Such was the Menshevik Nikolai Sukhanov, who attended the first session of the soviet on the evening of the 27th and who became a member of its Executive Committee. Another was Alexander Kerensky, a lawyer close to the populist SR's Party, who was to become the soviet's vice-chairman.

Now that the fighting and dangers were over, thousands of people from the intelligentsia and professional classes flooded into the ranks of the "revolutionaries".

The first evening meeting of the Petrograd soviet gathered some 250 workers' delegates. But delegates from the regimental barracks that had risen in revolt soon joined them. It was decided to make the soviet into a "council of workers' and soldiers' deputies". The meeting also issued its famous "Order No. 1", which directed all the soldiers to obey exclusively its orders.

A situation of dual power was established. On one side was the soviet which had the allegiance of the revolutionary worker and soldier masses. The soviets spread across the vast Russian empire with amazing speed and took effective power because the soldiers obeyed them, as did the armed workers' militias. Everywhere the local soviet's approval was needed for supplies or troops to move.

But on the other hand the majority of delegates within the soviets turned out not to be Bolsheviks but either Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries or non-party people. The Mensheviks led the soviets into a position not of taking state power into their own hands, but of supporting the new bourgeois provisional government. This was headed by a liberal aristocrat, Prince Lvov, a member of the Cadets. Its leading figures were Paul Milyukov of the Cadets and Alexander Guchkov of the Octobrists. Both were determined to carry on with the imperialist war and, if possible to save the Romanov dynasty by finding a liberal member of it to head a constitutional monarchy. But the most dynamic force in the provisional government was the petit bourgeois radical lawyer Alexander Kerensky. He too was determined to carry on the imperialist war "until final victory".

In short the programme of the Duma meant that the demands for which the masses had fought and died - bread, an end to the war, the end of Tsarism - would be ignored or compromised out of existence. Once again the counter-revolutionary character of the bourgeoisie was on display. But the determination of the Mensheviks that the revolution was a bourgeois revolution and that therefore power had to be handed to representatives of the capitalist class, meant that the bosses were to receive the fruits of the revolution as a free gift.

When the focus of events moved off the streets and into the Tauride palace, the Bolsheviks immediately lost the initiative and the leadership of the movement. This was due in part to their own uncertainty as to what to do when it came to the question of government. Should they critically support the provisional government? All the instincts of the Petrograd fighters said no. But at the same time they had no clear slogan as to who should form a government or what to do to install it.

# When Women set Russia ablaze

The specific role of women workers in the February revolution occurred because of the very acute way the war had affected them. The mobilisation of soldiers and production for the war effort led to enormous deprivation in the cities and villages of Russia. As early as April 1915 there were riots by women demanding bread, and these continued sporadically right through to 1917.

Between 1914 and 1917 the number of women employed in the factories increased because of the conscription of men to the front line. Women earned about half the wages of men. They were concentrated in textiles and chemical industries, where hours were long and conditions poor. They often suffered physical and sexual harassment from the bosses and their lackey foremen. The intensity of the oppression of these women led to explosive rebellions.

## International Women's Day

By February 1917 the class struggle was intensifying. Although there were many strikes in Petrograd during January and February, none of them sparked the whole city in the way the women were to do. In preparation for International Women's Day, Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and the Mezhraiontsy group (a group of socialists committed to neither the Bolsheviks nor the Mensheviks) planned propaganda and educational meetings for the day. In the Vyborg district on 20 February some workers called for a strike. But all socialist organisations argued that the class was not ready for a mass strike because of inadequate political preparation or contact with the soldiers.

The action was intended to be limited to factory meetings in order to make propaganda. The socialist groups all underestimated the mood of the women workers in the factories. One account records: "The largely female staff of the Vasilesky Island trolley-park [tram station], sensing general unrest a few days before 23 February, sent a woman to the neighbouring encampment of the 180th Infantry Regiment to ask the soldiers whether they would shoot at them or not. The answer was no, and on the 23rd, the trolley car workers joined the demonstration."

On the morning of the 23rd several illegal meetings were held in textile factories in the Vyborg district around the theme "War, high prices and the situation of the woman worker". Anger boiled over at these meetings. One by one they voted to strike, but did not leave their protest at that. Taking to the streets in their thousands, the women marched to nearby factories, shouting for the workers, women and men to join them. The flying picket was dramatically effective. By 10:00 am ten factories were shut with 27,000 workers on strike. By noon it was 21 plants with 50,000 strikers!

Many accounts report the women entering factories, banging on the gates, throwing snowballs at windows to get workers out. It seems that where factories did not immediately respond to the call to join the action, more direct methods were used. Flying rocks and pieces of iron were persuasively used at some plants. In the Vyborg district there were 59,800 men and women on strike by the end of the day, 61 per cent of all factory workers. Rank and file Bolsheviks played a leading role in pulling plants out alongside the women workers, but many of the leaders were far more reluctant. The Vyborg leader Kayurov wrote later:

Rank and file Bolsheviks played a leading role in pulling plants out alongside the women workers

"...to my surprise and indignation... we learned... of the strike in some textile factories and of the arrival of a number of delegates from the women workers who announced [that they were going on strike]. I was extremely indignant about the behaviour of the strikers, both because they had blatantly ignored the decision of the district committee of the party, and also because they had gone on strike after I had appealed to them only the night before to keep cool and disciplined."

Despite such indignation the Bolsheviks were able to quickly overcome these feelings and seize the opportunity offered to

them. Agreeing to build the strike, they gave political leadership by raising the slogans, "Down with the autocracy! Down with the war! Give us bread!"

In other districts of the city, strikes were less extensive, but no less militant. Over the whole city between 20 and 30 per cent of the workers struck, with over 80 factories shut. The demonstrators from the Vyborg district were determined to reach the governmental centre of Petrograd, but the police blocked their way at one of the bridges. Eventually the demonstrators began crossing the ice of the frozen River Neva. However, the police managed to contain them, albeit with difficulty. A police report of the day explained: "At 4:40pm crowds of approximately 1,000 people, predominantly women and youths, approached Kazan Bridge on the Nevskii Prospekt from the direction of Mikhailovskaia street, singing and shouting 'give us bread!'"

## Anger and desperation

The demonstrations were not confined to those who went on strike - women queuing for bread quickly joined in. One manager reported coming out from his bakery shop to announce that there was no more bread: "No sooner had this announcement been made than the crowd smashed the windows, broke into the store and knocked down everything in sight."

Such acts were widespread. The Bolsheviks argued against "vandalism" and tried to direct the protests by organising meetings and by calling for a three day general strike plus intensified propaganda towards soldiers. In the following days the number of workers on strike increased steadily. The government sent police and troops in to disperse the demonstrators by any means necessary, but the revolutionary wave was able to meet this challenge by winning Cossacks over and eventually whole regiments joined the insurgents.

Workers were arming themselves in their militia, and it was women workers who played a vital role in breaking the troops from the regime. As Trotsky's account reveals: "A great role is played by women workers in the relation between workers and soldiers. They go up to the cordons more boldly than men, take hold of the rifles, beseech, almost command, 'Put down your bayonets; join us!' The soldiers are excited, ashamed, exchange anxious glances, waver; someone makes up his mind first, and the bayonets rise guiltily above the shoulders of the advancing crowd. The barrier is opened; a joyous 'Hurrah!' shakes the air. The soldiers are surrounded. Everywhere arguments, reproaches, appeals - the revolution makes another forward step."

The mass strike eventually won to its side the vast numbers of peasants in uniform, the soldiers. Exhausted by the deprivation caused by the war, sickened by its carnage, these soldiers were eager for change. The action of the working class ignited their rebellion and made the fall of the autocracy inevitable. Without its military power the Romanov dynasty could not last a minute. The Tsar's wife expressed the arrogant short sightedness of the autocracy when she wrote to her husband:

"This is a hooligan movement, young people run and shout that there is no bread, simply to create excitement, along with workers who prevent others from working. If the weather were very cold they would probably stay at home. But all this will pass and become calm, if only the Duma will behave itself."

## The regime falls

These words, expressing hope that events would be settled by the weather and the tame parliamentarians of the Duma (its Bolshevik deputies were in prison or exile), were forced down the throat of the pampered Tsarina by the revolution. Within the borders of the Russian empire, modern capitalism coincided with a peasant economy that was staggering in its backwardness, and meant misery for some hundred million peasants.

The mass strike eventually won to its side the vast numbers of peasants in uniform, the soldiers.

The combination of a land starved peasantry and a highly concentrated urban working class (four million strong) obliged the autocracy to maintain a vicious political dictatorship. But the existence of the autocracy - and then the war - intensified the contradictions of Russia's combined and uneven social development to the limit. When they exploded the seemingly all powerful Tsarist regime fell in a matter of days. As Trotsky and Lenin both observed, the chain of world capitalism had broken at its weakest link.

The development of the revolution and the abdication of the Tsar opened up a whole new period for the Russian working class. The bourgeois provisional government that emerged from the February revolution was unstable, balanced alongside organs of a different kind of power, the soviets of workers' and soldiers' deputies.

Within the factories, workers were emboldened. Factory committees sprang up, demanding control over pay and conditions. The workers' militia conflicted with the weaker civil militias of the government.

Women workers continued to play an important role. They were among the most determined to win an eight hour day. They sought decent wages and supported demands for equal political rights, including the vote. Three thousand women laundry workers launched the first major strike against the provisional government, demanding the eight hour day, a living wage and expropriation of the laundries. The Bolsheviks sent Alexandra Kollontai to work alongside the women.

Later, the party set up a Women's Bureau, led by Vera Slutskaya. This relaunched the paper Rabotnitsa (Woman Worker) and built up support in the factories, among soldiers' wives and led large demonstrations against the war.

## Revolutionary lessons

The role of women workers in the Russian Revolution was magnificent, and taught the revolutionary leadership much. But their very spontaneity meant that they were not always in the revolutionary vanguard throughout 1917; they struck, demonstrated and rioted because of the intensity of their oppression, but this also reflected their newness to political and trade union activities.

This is often true of working class women - their role within the workforce as a "peripheral" element, poorly paid, shifted in and

out of work depending on the fortunes and needs of capitalism leads to them being generally poorly organised in unions and political parties. Even where membership of unions is high, women are rarely active in the leadership because of their oppression which denies them time, due to domestic commitments, and they face obstruction by male leaders.

This lack of traditional organisation has contradictory results: on the one hand women can be the most militant fighters, because they are unfettered by the conservatism, which can so often take root inside the union organisations; but, on the other hand, it makes women easy targets for anti-working class propaganda.

In the weeks after the February Revolution liberal bourgeois feminists mobilised thousands of working class women to demonstrate for women's suffrage and continuation of the war! The Bolsheviks were able to establish a mass base among women by mid-1917, which led them once again to demonstrate against the war, but this took special efforts at organisation and propaganda.

The lessons we can learn from the Bolsheviks and working women in this period are rich indeed. The revolution, as Lenin was to point out years later, would never have succeeded without the mobilisation of women. Special forms of propaganda and organisation are needed to win them to the side of the revolutionary party, but, once won, they will be the most brave and militant fighters for they have so much to gain!

# Lenin re-arms the party

The explosion of anger that swept aside the Tsarist regime in February 1917 led to a profoundly contradictory situation at the level of state power. Conservative and liberal politicians declared themselves the Provisional Government, although they had not participated in, let alone led, the uprising. They were deeply fearful of where the mass mobilisations and the workers' and soldiers' councils - the soviets that mushroomed - would lead. The revolution had given the soviets power. Now it had to be stopped.

However the leaders of the Petrograd Soviet also wanted a return to order. The Menshevik (reformist) leadership of the Executive Committee - Nikolai Chkheidze, its chairman, and Matvei Skobelev - together with the right wing of the Social Revolutionaries (SRs) and Alexander Kerensky, were convinced that the Russian Revolution, as a bourgeois revolution, must find its expression in a bourgeois government. The Soviet executive pledged support to the Provisional Government.

> As far as the ruling class were concerned, the revolution had given the soviets power. Now it had to be stopped

While the mass of Soviet delegates agreed to this, they also established (independently of the executive) an "observation committee" to watch over the Provisional Government on behalf of the Soviet. This expressed both working class mistrust of the Provisional Government and a belief that the Soviet's job was to pressure that government to ensure it kept its promises. As a mass meeting of the Petrograd cable workers declared on 3 March:

"We consider the essential issue of the moment to be the establishment of strict control over the ministers appointed by the State Duma, who do not enjoy popular confidence. This control must be constituted by representatives of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies."

The workers looked to the Soviet to exercise that control. Workers' resolutions were automatically sent to the Soviet, not the Provisional Government. The soldiers too, who had mutinied to make the revolution, would accept no deployment orders not signed by the Soviet. What had emerged was a situation of dual power: power divided between representatives of two irreconcilable class forces. The working masses saw the Soviet as the weapon of their struggles. The bourgeoisie saw the Provisional Government as its bastion against those struggles. State sovereignty was, in reality, split. This inherently unstable situation is called dual power.

Such an arrangement reflected illusions on the part of a majority of workers in the feasibility of a partnership with the bourgeoisie. The leaders of the Soviet did not recognise that dual power was a shifting and unstable moment in struggle, the outcome of which must be resolved on behalf of one or other of the contending classes. They saw it as a permanent agreement between equal partners. As Leon Trotsky later put it: "In the revolution of 1917, we see the official democracy consciously and intentionally creating a two power system, dodging with all its might the transfer of power into its own hands."

Thus dual power can never be an objective of struggle - except in the sense of seeking the maximum strength for the workers organisations and the minimum for the remaining forces of the bourgeoisie. In reality it could only have been a prelude to one side or the other breaking the stalemate and depriving the other class of all power. As Trotsky explained:

"Either the bourgeoisie will actually dominate the old state apparatus, altering it a little for its purpose, in which case the soviets will come to nothing, or the soviets will form the foundation of a new state, liquidating not only the old governmental apparatus, but also the domination of those classes which it served."

## The Bolsheviks unprepared

Until Lenin's return to Russia on 3 April, the momentous events of the February Revolution found the Bolshevik Party program-

matically unprepared for its outcome - dual power. A special conference was been summoned, lasting from 2-10 April, assembling 149 delegates representing 79,000 party members. It soon revealed an organisation with serious divisions about the way forward.

The Petersburg Committee, in charge of the whole city with its 15,000 party members, took the most conservative stance, believing that that the tasks of the day remained those of the democratic revolution. On 3 March they resolved to: "...not oppose the power of the Provisional Government in so far as its activities correspond to the interests of the proletariat and of the broad democratic mass of the people."

"The world-wide socialist revolution has already dawned" - Lenin

This position was completely evasive about how "far" the Provisional Government was actually serving the interests of the masses, and implied no immediate challenge to the dominant Menshevik line within the Soviet executive.

The District Committee in Vyborg - the main industrial heart of the city - advanced a programme of demands that expressed mistrust of the Provisional Government. But they too continued to believe that the character of the revolution remained a democratic, bourgeois one.

The Russian Bureau of the exiled Central Committee - comprising Alexander Shlyapnikov, Vyacheslav Molotov and P A Zalutsky - veered between several different positions. At first they called for Provisional Revolutionary Government to be formed, from above, by the parties represented on the Soviet executive. Its agenda was to be confined to the "three whales" of Russian Social Democracy's minimum programme: the eight-hour day, the democratic republic and the confiscation of landed estates and their transfer to the peasantry, as well as preparing a constituent assembly.

Once again the perspective was of a purely democratic stage, beyond which the revolution could not go. Indeed initially this led them to ban leaflets issued by the more "left" Vyborg district calling for the formation of a soviet-based government from below. However this perspective of a pact with the other Soviet parties ran into a major obstacle. The Mensheviks and SRs, far from wanting to participate in a workers government with the Bolsheviks, wanted to enter one with the bourgeois parties, the Constitutional Democrats (Cadets) and the even more conservative Octobrists. Both of these parties wanted to carry on the war effort at all costs.

The rapid realisation of this fact pushed the Russian Bureau to the left and by 22 March it was characterising the Soviets as the embryos of a new state power.

It was the editorial board of the Bolshevik daily paper Pravda that occupied the most right-wing stance within Bolshevism. Edited by Joseph Stalin, M N Muranov and Lev Kamenev, the paper declared on 7 March: "As far as we are concerned, what matters now is not the overthrow of capitalism but the overthrow of autocracy and feudalism."

Stalin reasoned: "The Provisional Government has, in fact, assumed the role of defender of the conquests of the revolutionary people . . . At present, it is not in our interest to force events by hastening the eviction of bourgeois strata who, inevitably, will one day detach themselves from us."

On 15 March, Kamenev used Pravda's pages to advocate conditional support for Russia's war effort now that the autocracy had been overthrown. Small wonder then that by mid-March rank and file worker Bolshevik cells in the Vyborg district were voting for calls to expel the Pravda leadership from the party.

This confusion was partly a product of the contradictions of Bolshevism's previous position that the bourgeois revolution, though it should be led by the workers and peasants (unlike the Mensheviks who insisted the bourgeoisie must lead it) must end in a "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry". This government was to constitute a self-limited stage, distinct from the socialist revolution. Yet February 1917 saw the logic of the mobilised masses' demands pushing beyond the minimum programme of the democratic republic. The soviets, militia and factory committees were the embryo of a new type of state, whose content was working class democracy, transcending the limits and forms of bourgeois democracy.

In their own particular ways the contending Bolshevik factions were either attempting to limit the struggle to the terrain of democratic demands (the Petrograd Committee and Pravda) or were striving to go beyond this (Vyborg and the Russian Bureau), but were as yet incapable of consistently posing this as a programmatic goal.

## Shock at Finland Station

Lenin announced his change of position in public immediately on his return from exile to everyone at the reception at the Finland Station. The Menshevik Chkheidze, at the head of the Petrograd Soviet's official welcoming party, pleaded with Lenin to play his part in "the closing of the democratic ranks".

Lenin, to his consternation, ignored his words and declared to the crowd: "The world-wide socialist revolution has already dawned. . . Any day now the whole of European capitalism may crash. The Russian Revolution accomplished by you has paved the way and opened a new epoch. Long live the world-wide socialist revolution."

It was Lenin who was able to transcend the limitations of the old Bolshevik programme and perspective. And it is testimony to the vitality and strength of the Bolshevik cadres, as historically constituted since 1903, as well as to the open and democratic debate in the party that led to its programmatic re-armament at the crucial hour.

This refutes the Stalinist myth that Bolshevism was always monolithic, that temporary factions and internal struggle were alien to it. Likewise it refutes the Menshevik and anarchist dogma that Bolshevism was rigid and inflexible, incapable of learning from the revolutionary masses. It is, in short, the practical proof of the correctness of democratic centralism - ensuring full democratic debate and then a focused and disciplined carrying out of a decision once taken.

Why had Lenin changed his perspective on the historic tasks which the Russian Revolution could accomplish? His writings during the war, especially Imperialism: the Highest Stage of

Capitalism (1916) led him to see that Russia was one, albeit exceptionally weak, link in the chain of world imperialism. It was not just a backward country - it was one entire historic stage behind Western Europe, thus awaiting its bourgeois revolution in order to progress to capitalism. Of necessity, therefore, the programme of an ongoing Russian Revolution could no longer be conceived of in the terms of an isolated national and democratic revolution, but instead as a component of the international revolution against capitalism itself.

This realisation - coupled with a sharp recognition of the nature and potential of the soviets in February and March 1917 as a different type of state, one directly participated in by the worker and peasant masses, not standing over them and oppressing them - made it possible for Lenin to re-elaborate and refocus the Bolshevik programme in the face of Russia's social explosion. This was to pit him against each of the contending Bolshevik groupings in Petrograd and enable him to create a higher synthesis out of their most healthy reflexes, especially the reflexes of those closest to the rank and file insurgent workers.

It was now necessary to smash the old bureaucratic police and military state machine of the exploiting classes

Lenin's initial responses to the Russian Revolution were expressed in a series of articles submitted to Pravda, his Letters from Afar. These had been written in Switzerland between the outbreak of the February Revolution and his departure for Russia. Their political content constituted such an alarming break with the "old Bolshevism" still dear to Stalin and Kamenev that the editors published only a curtailed version of one of the letters.

In these articles Lenin argued that the soviet was "an organisation of workers, the embryo of a workers' government", and that the only guarantee of destroying Tsarism lay "in arming the proletariat, in strengthening, extending and developing the role, significance and power of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies".

Lenin realised that what was now necessary was to smash the old bureaucratic police and military state machine of the exploiting classes and replace it with a state of a new type based on councils of delegates elected in the workplaces, barracks and villages, and recallable at the shortest notice by their electors.

This process was underway thanks to the actions of the masses in the February Revolution, but it needed to be completed consciously if the remnants of the old state machine, the army under the former Tsarist High Command, were not to use it to carry through a counter-revolution, which would sweep away the democratic gains of the workers, which, he emphasised, already made Russia "the freest and most democratic country in the world".

In forming the militia and the soviets, the Russian workers had taken a course in which "they themselves should constitute these organs of state power". In his third letter Lenin announced:

"I said that the workers had smashed the old state machine. I would be more correct to say have begun to smash it."

The dual power outcome of the February Revolution necessitated either the transition to the workers' council (soviet) state or the triumph of bourgeois reaction.

## A break with "old Bolshevism"

In order to programmatically re-arm the Bolshevik Party for the struggle Lenin presented his "April Theses", The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution.

Lenin clearly explained that the task was to advance from the first stage of the revolution in which the insufficiently class conscious workers had needlessly ceded power to the bourgeoisie to a second stage "which must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants".

Of necessity this meant the Bolsheviks adopting a stance of refusing all political support to the Provisional Government and maintaining intransigent opposition to any talk of "revolutionary defencism" as long as Russia was waging an imperialist war.

But most importantly it meant recognising that the struggle had gone beyond the democratic programme, not because a democratic stage had been completed (as Stalinist historians have always claimed) but because the struggle for a parliamentary republic would be a backward step compared with the struggle to realise the potential of the workers' council state that existed embryonically in the soviets. Only this outcome of the unresolved dual power could ensure the economic and political well being of the working masses.

As Lenin put it: "To return to a parliamentary republic from the Soviet of Workers Deputies would be a retrograde step. Instead the party must fight for the abolition of the police, the army and the bureaucracy, and for all these functions to be passed to the whole armed people."

However Lenin was also clear that his programme did not envisage the immediate "introduction" of socialism, i.e. a totally socialised and planned economy. In reality the proletarian revolution was to begin the transition to socialism, as an integral part of the international revolution. It could do so by establishing soviet control over a single national bank and bringing "social production and the distribution of products at once under the control of the Soviets of Workers' Deputies".

At its very heart, the 10 April Theses foreshadowed a programme of transition from dual power - the limits and dangers of which Lenin increasingly warned of - to the proletarian dictatorship, the goal of the Marxist programme.

Lenin's struggle to re-arm the Bolsheviks met with bitter resistance from many of his comrades. When Kamenev published the theses in Pravda, he prefaced them with the remark: "As for the general scheme of comrade Lenin, it seems to us unacceptable in that it starts from the assumption that the bourgeois-democratic revolution is ended, and counts upon all immediate transformation of this revolution into a socialist revolution."

Lenin's reply to such criticism was clear and to the point: "My answer is: the Bolshevik slogans and ideas on the whole have been confirmed by history; but concretely things have worked

out differently; they are more original, more peculiar, more variegated than anyone could have expected. To ignore or overlook this fact would mean taking after those "old Bolsheviks" who more than once already have played so regrettable a role in the history of our Party by reiterating formulas senselessly learned by rote instead of studying the specific features of the new and living reality."

He went on to explain: "The revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry has already become a reality in the Russian revolution... The Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies - there you have the 'revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry' already accomplished in reality. This formula is already antiquated. Events have moved it from the realm of formulas into the realm of reality, clothed it with flesh and bone, concretised it and thereby modified it."

Over a process of three weeks of argument and debate in all the districts and cells of the party, Lenin won the majority to his programmatic line of advance. Putting its wavering and vacillating behind it, the Party now set out to win the masses to recognition of the potential power of the soviets and the fast-growing workers' militia, the Red Guards. The Party now embraced a programme of transition to workers' power.

Breaking with a view of the Russian Revolution as an isolated national event, the Party now fought for the Russian workers to stand in the vanguard of the international revolution. As Lenin told the party conference that endorsed his line: "The great honour of striking the first blow has fallen to the Russian proletariat, but it should never forget that its progress and revolution are but part of a world-wide and growing revolutionary movement which is daily becoming more powerful . . . We cannot see our task in any other light."

Thus the tenth thesis of the April Theses stated as a key goal of the Bolsheviks: "We must take the initiative in creating a revolutionary International, an International against the social chauvinists and against the Centre." By this Lenin meant an International, which excluded and fought those who supported the imperialist war, had gone over to the bourgeoisie and those who would not fight them but vacillated between imperialism and proletarian revolution.

## Lessons of April 1917

In the Bolshevik Party Lenin had forged an instrument for revolution that had been tempered by years of struggle - both theoretical and practical, both internal and external. This Party was, despite the waverings of some of its leaders, a revolutionary party receptive to the needs of the revolution. Moreover it was an internally democratic party which could be won to change its positions. The triumph of Lenin's line reflected the strength of the Party itself and not just Lenin's genius. As Trotsky put it:

"The revolutionary tradition of the Party, the pressure of the workers from below and Lenin's criticism from above, compelled the upper stratum during the months of April and May, employing the words of Stalin, "to come out on a new road".

# Workers control - dual power in the factories

In February 1917 the Russian workers overthrew the Tsarist regime, only then to accept a government of the bourgeois parties, the Cadets and the Octobrists. They ceded state power to the bourgeoisie while maintaining their soviets (councils) to oversee and pressure the government. A similar process took place in the factories and mines. The dual power that existed at state level was mirrored in the workplaces.

The Petrograd workers returned to work after the February revolution, determined to destroy the old tyrannical regime with which the management and police ran the factories. They rapidly imposed the eight-hour working day on the employers by simply leaving work once eight hours were up. They demanded, and often secured, full pay for the "work" they had done on the streets toppling the old regime in February. But most importantly they had accounts to settle with those who had cruelly exploited and humiliated them in the old days.

The Petrograd workers returned to work after the February revolution, determined to destroy the old tyrannical regime with which the management and police ran the factories

Government appointees had run large sections of Russian industry. Once the power of their chief patrons was broken many of the directors and managers simply fled. Some workers, for example those at the Okhta explosives plant, returned to find themselves without a factory administration at all. Elsewhere the workers kicked out those with a record of brutality who dared to return.

A veritable festival of "carting out" hated bosses in wheel barrows accompanied the return to work. The director of the giant Putilov Works and his aide were dumped into a canal. In the Thornton textile mill the women workers chased out thirty factory police who had dared to show their faces. Mass meetings of the workforce discussed and decided on hiring or new workers and ejecting those workers that were "company men and women". At the Cartridge plant workers expelled 80% of the technical staff. At the first power station, workers voted to bar all the directors from the premises as "henchmen of the old regime and recognising their harmfulness from the economic point of view and their uselessness from the technical".

In all the major industrial centres the workers elected factory committees to represent them in the new order.

The factory committees should not be confused with shop stewards committees on the British model where each section or "shop" elects their own steward. They were elected by the entire workforce at general meetings. In certain plants factory committees existed alongside shop stewards committees with sharply differing tasks.

In many state run plants, the factory committees initially had to take responsibility for running the factory, because their management had disappeared. In the factories, just as at the state level, they handed power back to bourgeois managers and directors when the latter put in an appearance.

## Inspection and control

The parallels with the soviets' relationship to the government do not end there. While the factory committees in general recognised the employers and managements' technical and economic responsibilities, they reserved for themselves the right to observe and inspect the carrying out of these functions. This mirrored the soviets' insistence that they were overseeing the Provisional Government's work.

Crucially, the factory committees demanded and effected "control over internal order". In plants throughout Russia the committees raised very similar demands; that they should control the length of the working day, the level of the minimum wage, the length and times of rest and all hiring and firing. In this

most fundamental way they challenged the right of the employers and their representatives to manage their factories and mines.

Workers' control at this stage meant asserting factory committee authority over these matters of "internal order". And it meant working class vigilance over the workings of management. It was a highly unstable and contradictory situation, prolonged only because the bosses had no alternative but to accept it, since after the February revolution they could not hope to call in the police or the army to "restore their rights."

In general the workers held back from taking responsibility for the management of their plants. At the Patronnyi Works they did not constitute themselves as an alternative management. Nevertheless the factory committee purged the entire administration and then retained for itself an "observing" function. This method was codified at a conference of state sector worker representatives on 15 April, which resolved that:

"Not desiring to take upon ourselves the responsibility for the technical and administrative organisation of production in the given conditions until the full socialisation of the economy, the representatives of the general factory committee enter the administration with a consultative voice."

A situation, within which workers' representatives daily transgressed rights that managements traditionally hold sacred, could never have become permanent. As at the state level, so in the factory, one class or the other would have to prevail eventually. For the most advanced sections of the proletariat workers' control was only a transitional phase on the road to socialism. As the Putilov workers declared of their workers' control regime:

"The workers are preparing themselves for the time when private ownership of the factories and mills will be abolished and the means of production, along with the buildings erected by the workers' hands, will be transferred to the working class. Therefore, in doing this small matter one must continually keep in mind the great and principal aim towards which the people are aspiring."

For the employers this situation was viewed as a mere passing phase, an irksome but temporary concession, until they could re-establish the full use of their state to restore their traditional prerogatives and their unfettered rule in the factory.

## Dangers of class collaboration

During April and May there was mounting evidence, of both a dramatic deterioration in the performance of Russian capitalism, and of the fact that the capitalist class looked to the mounting economic chaos to break the strength of the workers. Often, for initially patriotic motives, workers were becoming increasingly suspicious that the employers and state managers were deliberately obstructing war production.

With supplies running out, factory committees frequently took upon themselves the job of procurement, through workers' delegations to the coal, iron and timber producing areas. To this extent the factory committees were in danger of becoming an accomplice to a more effective capitalist management. Yet at the very same time they were proving that only the organisations of the working class could effectively avert an economic catastrophe.

Once again, however, the instability of dual power was demonstrated. Either the factory committees would become class collaborationist participation bodies or they would have to go beyond their "observing" role towards the socialist revolution.

As shortages mounted and management threatened closures so the concept of workers' control did go beyond "overseeing" the bosses. Having seen what the bosses were doing, it had to mean struggle against their plans for shutdown. In Petrograd, the capital city, the main centre of heavy industry and thus of the revolutionary proletariat, this took an especially sharp form, as the bosses prepared to "relocate" production by moving their factories out of the city and thus disperse the vanguard of the Russian working class.

A good example of this reality was the Langezipen machine factory in Petrograd. At the end of April there were severe shortages and rumours of closure were rife. The factory committee posted guards at the factory entrance in order to prevent the administration leaving. As expected management announced plans to keep the plant going!

A similar pattern of further encroachment on management rights was being established throughout the major plants during May. As management and employers recovered confidence after the February and March revolutionary mobilisations subsided and the pro-capitalist policies of the Provisional Government took effect, they increasingly used the authority workers had ceded back to them to shut down or run down the plants.

The employers and managers were prepared to disorganise production in pursuit of their class goals - the weakening of the power of the workers. The struggle for control over production now took on a sharper form.

Of the workers' parties only the Bolsheviks were prepared to take up and lead the fight for workers' control. The party clearly saw this fight as part of the struggle for proletarian revolution. The Mensheviks were strongly opposed to any such struggle against capitalism. As their paper Rabochaya Gazeta put it: "Our revolution is a political one. We destroy the bastions of political authority, but the bases of capitalism remain in place. A battle on two fronts against the Tsar and against capital is beyond the forces of the proletariat."

## Centrality of workers' control

In the face of mounting sabotage the struggle for workers' control played a central role in the Bolsheviks' programme for the transition to a socialist revolution. In his *Resolution on Economic Disorganisation* of late May Lenin argued:

"The only way to avert disaster is to establish effective workers' control over the production and distribution of goods. For the purpose of such control it is necessary, first of all, that the workers should have a majority of not less than three quarters of all the votes in all the decisive institutions and that the owners who have not withdrawn from their business and the engineering staffs should be enlisted without fail."

That control was to be exercised by the factory committees, the unions and the soviets. It was to be made possible by opening

the books of the companies to workers' inspection and it was to be extended to financial and banking operations. It was, however, not possible for workers to exercise effective control simply at the level of individual enterprises. For the system of control to "be developed into the full regulation of the production and distribution of goods by the workers" it had to embrace control over the economy exercised at a state level through a state responsible directly to the workers' own organisations.

## Revolutionary rupture

Lenin returned to this theme and placed it at the centre of his programme in The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat it, a pamphlet produced in September. Again he argued: "There is no way of effectively combating financial collapse except that of revolutionary rupture with the interests of capital and that of the organisation of really democratic control, i.e. control from 'below', control by the workers and the poor peasants over the capitalists."

Given the clarity of the Bolsheviks' call for workers' control at plant and state level it was not surprising that their growing strength in the workers' movement was first evident in the factory committees. The first conference of Petrograd factory committees, meeting in late May, endorsed the Bolshevik programme. So too did all subsequent factory committee conferences.

The factory committees maintained their own central council of committee delegates. As such they brought together the best-organised plants in citywide coordination. They were more immediately responsible for the day-to-day concerns of workers than were the soviets. They were responsible directly to general meetings. It was not surprising, therefore, that the mounting Bolshevik tide amongst the workers should be initially reflected in the committees rather than in the soviet leadership.

However, the very strength of the committees, as exclusively proletarian, workplace organisations, meant they were not able to play the role of mobilisers of all the exploited and oppressed. By their nature, unlike the soviets, their coordination excluded the soldiers and beyond them, the mass of the peasantry.

The mounting economic chaos that was grippng the country by spring, with unemployment growing, gave the employers the opportunity to step up their offensive against the factory committees. Now they set out to stop them meeting in work time, to put an end their control of hiring and firing and also to allow them to ship valuable plant and machinery out of Petrograd.

Under Bolshevik leadership the committees replied with determined resistance. Most committees now had their own armed militia to defend the plant and the workers against counter-revolution. A Moscow worker, Postavshchik, described what happened when the Bolsheviks won leadership in his plant: "On 1 June as soon as the new factory committee was elected with a Bolshevik majority... a detachment of 80 men was formed, which in the absence of weapons drilled with sticks, under the leadership of an old soldier, Comrade Levakov."

At the time of Kornilov's attempted coup (chapter seven) it was the Central Council of Factory Committees that played a key role in distributing arms to the various plant militias. When the employers launched their autumn offensive they were taking on committees that were armed with guns and ammunition as well as with Bolshevik leadership.

The sharpening polarisation in the plants could not be resolved except at the level of state power. As more factory committees resisted management plans so more employers pulled out. Production became increasingly disorganised while the committees became the de facto power in the plants.

Their power extended beyond the struggle to maintain production. Certain factory committees ran their own farms, canteens, shops and maintained procurement squads to go into the countryside to buy food from the peasants. As well as drilling young workers in the military arts the committees often maintained their own educational and cultural commissions.

The Putilov Committee, for example, took the latter task very seriously urging their fellow workers: "Comrades, do not let slip the opportunity of gaining scientific knowledge. Do not waste a single hour fruitlessly. Every hour is dear to us. We need not only to catch up with the classes with whom we are fighting, but to overtake them."

## Resolution of the crisis

The seizure of power in October resolved the crisis of dual power to the advantage of the working class. With the passing of undivided state power into the hands of the soviets, the state could now at last play its part as an executive organ of workers' control of production and distribution. The factory committees could take their place as overseers of production with the full backing of state power.

In turn that state power legalised the control of workers' committees elected by all employees at general meetings. It gave them the right to inspect all books, documents and stocks. Their decisions were now to be binding on those owners who remained.

The struggle for workers' control in the plants was an indispensable component of the Russian workers' onslaught against "management's right to manage". They learned to control industry and inspect accounts for themselves. And from that control and inspection came an immeasurably strengthened will and ability to resist the plans of the bosses. Such a situation could only have been transitory. Either the bosses could have rolled back the gains of the workers and reasserted their old authority, or the workers would have to break the power of the bosses in its entirety. The events in Russia prove that workers control of factories is not enough in itself, the working class must also seize state power to ensure that the gains they made are not rolled back.

# All power to the Soviets

The October Revolution in Russia was carried through by the Bolshevik Party under the slogan 'All Power to the Soviets'. In the course of the 1905 and, decisively, in the 1917 revolutions, Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks had come to understand the historic significance of the soviet form of organisation. The soviet, a council representing all of the exploited and oppressed groups, basing itself on the principle of direct elections, recallability and the abolition of bureaucratic privilege, was rightly seen by the Bolsheviks as the best possible organisational expression of the power of the proletariat and its allies. It was the best possible basis for the dictatorship of the proletariat the soviet state. In 1938 Trotsky wrote in the Transitional Programme that: 'The slogan of soviets, therefore, crowns the programme of transitional demands,' He explained that in the struggle for power soviets were the means for uniting all of the forces struggling against capitalism. In Lenin and Trotsky's view there was no substitute for soviets as organs of working class power. What led them to this view was the actual nature of the soviets themselves.

The October Revolution in Russia was carried through by the Bolshevik Party under the slogan 'All Power to the Soviets'

## Soviet representation

The soviet form of organisation directly elected councils arises at the point where the day to day struggles of the masses take place in the context of a revolutionary crisis. Soviets are an extraordinary form of organisation to deal with the extraordinary problems posed by a revolutionary situation. Precisely because of this, they are more immediately sensitive and responsive to the needs and wishes of the masses than the established, often bureaucratic, forms of organisation. They are representative of workers and their allies in struggle. A participant in the local (Rajon) Soviet in Vyborg in 1917 gives a flavour of this truly representative characteristic of the soviet form: '...the masses of the Rajon (Vyborg) brought all their needs and expectations to the Soviet, for them it was the meaningful and accessible organ of power. From morning to night workers, youth, soldiers, came with various problems. None went away without an answer.'

Compare this proximity of the soviet to the rank and file with the distance the TUC bureaucrats place between themselves and their six and a half million members! By virtue of representing the masses in struggle the soviet develops another characteristics It is uniquely suited to serve as an instrument for revolutionary struggle. Because it is truly representative of these masses it can all the more easily and effectively, call them to arms. In 1905 and 1917 the Petrograd Soviet was able to mobilise tens of thousands across industries in strike action to secure the eight hour day. Its job was to co ordinate and direct the struggle of those to whom it was accountable. Of the 1905 Soviet in Petrograd, Trotsky commented that it resembled a 'council of war, more than a parliament'.

This very feature was what made Trotsky optimistic in 1917 that the soviets were susceptible to Bolshevik influence. The test of action could not be easily delayed by a cumbersome bureaucratic machine. Every passing hour posed a new problem for the soviets to resolve in practice. The programme of revolutionary action can, quickly and often dramatically, reveal its superiority to the masses. The programme of delay and compromise of reformism is not protected by the million and one delaying mechanisms of the parliamentary talking shop. Trotsky noted:

"Of all the forms of revolutionary representation, the soviet is the most flexible, immediate and transparent. But it is still only a form. It cannot give more than the masses are capable of putting into it at a given moment. Beyond that it can only assist the masses in understanding the mistakes they have made and correcting them. In this function of the soviets lay one of the most important guarantees of the development of the revolution."

The third vital element of the soviet form that led Lenin and Trotsky to value it so highly for the purposes of revolution, was that it was an embryonic organ of power, of workers' power. This was revealed in both 1905 and 1917. The soviets developed out of strikes but took on the functions of administration, of organising supplies and of organising a proletarian militia. In the strikes of 1905 the soviet was born in Russia. The first one developed in Ivanovo Voznesenk, in May. During a strike by 40,000 workers in this textile town, 110 deputies elected by the strikers met on the river bank. The significance of this meeting was that it united all the workers of the district on a city wide basis, irrespective of trade or skill.

The Petrograd proletariat the vanguard in 1905 as it was in 19

17 was quick to emulate its brothers and sisters in Ivanovo Voznesenk. During the October general strike 40 delegates met in the Technological Institute and established a soviet to organise the strike, but also to do more. It declared:

"The assembly of deputies from all factories will form a general workers' committee in St Petersburg. The committee will strengthen and unify our movement, represent the St Petersburg workers to the public, and decide actions during the strike as well as its termination."

## A 'second government'

This was no mere strike committee. By November it had 562 delegates. It issued Izvestia as a daily bulletin-occupying the printing presses of the bourgeois papers to ensure it was regularly and professionally produced. Under Trotsky's leadership it advanced a programme of political demands aimed against the power of the Tsarist autocracy. It forbade the distribution of papers that were censored by the state. Only those bearing an 'uncensored' stamp from the Soviet were distributed. Most significantly, it continued its existence and its struggles after the strike was terminated. The St Petersburg chief of police was so worried about the Soviet that he warned, prophetically, that it was threatening to become a 'second government'. Its potential as an organ of workers' power revealed itself in October 1905. This potential was realised in October 1917.

Initially in 1905 the Bolsheviks were suspicious of the Soviet. They saw it as a Menshevik ploy to set up a rival non party body, through which they could then outmanoeuvre the Bolsheviks. This suspicion stemmed from the Soviet's refusal to confine itself to purely trade union questions. A leading Bolshevik agitator, P Mendelev, declared:

"The Soviet of Workers' Deputies has no right to exist as a political organisation, and the Social Democrats must resign from it, since its existence damages the development of the Social Democratic movement, The Soviet may exist as a trade union organisation or it should not exist at all."

## Menshevik intentions

The suspicions that the Bolsheviks felt towards the Soviet, more precisely to the Mensheviks who they believed were behind the Soviet, were far from groundless. The Mensheviks were enthusiastic to build soviets as 'workers' congresses'. These congresses could, in Martynov's words, serve as the means of 'exerting revolutionary pressure on the will of the liberal and radical bourgeoisie'. The Mensheviks believed the role of the proletariat was to encourage the bourgeoisie forward during the democratic revolution. The soviet, as a form of local government and workers' congress was seen, not as an organ of power, but a pressure point on the bourgeoisie. Moreover, the Mensheviks believed that it was within such a forum that a mass party of the working class one which would encompass multifarious political trends could be built. Thus for Martynov the soviet was 'abnormal', but could be used to achieve the norm of international Social Democracy, a mass party:

"...that is wide enough to include or render superfluous organisations on the pattern of the soviets of workers' deputies."

Lenin perceived the real essence of the soviets - their representative nature, their capacity for revolutionary struggle and their potential as organs of power despite the influence of Menshevism within them. By posing the soviets, not as an alternative to the Bolsheviks, but as the organisational means of fulfilling the Bolshevik's governmental slogan- the Provisional Revolutionary Government Lenin won the Party to the need for the struggle for leadership within the soviets. For him the soviets were both 'instruments of insurrection' and 'cells of the new revolutionary power'. In 1906 he wrote of the Petrograd Soviet

"That was the face of the new power or rather its germinal form, since the victory of the old power destroyed the young shoots very early on."

In February 1917, following the overthrow of the autocracy, the young shoots sprouted once again. This time the Bolsheviks, after Lenin's return and the triumph of his April Theses which placed socialist revolution and the creation of a soviet government as a workers' and peasants' government on the immediate agenda, waged a struggle to make the soviets the sole organs of power throughout Russia. The Mensheviks, bound hand and foot to the bourgeoisie, sought to contain the soviets to a monitoring and advisory role over the capitalist Provisional Government. In fact, after February power was split between the bourgeoisie and the soviets, a situation of dual power prevailed.

## Workers' and soldiers' delegations

In the afternoon of 27 February 1917, in the Tauride Palace, a group of Petrograd workers' leaders set up the Provisional Executive Committee of the Sovjet of Workers' Deputies. It agreed to elect deputies on the basis of one per 1000 workers. When it met in the evening there were between 40 and 50 deputies present. At the meeting of the soviet soldiers, as well as workers, were represented. Deputies elected from the army companies that had joined the revolution were instrumental in turning the Petrograd Soviet into an organisation of workers and soldiers.

The significance of this was immense. Not only did it bring military support and arms to the soviet, it brought the peasantry for the soldiers were, for the most part, 'peasants in greatcoats' into contact with the proletariat. It helped forge the alliance that was eventually to be consummated in the revolutionary workers' and peasants' government after October.

After the evening meeting of 27 February the Soviet went from strength to strength. In Petrograd eleven major (local) soviets were set up by late March. The central Petrograd Soviet grew, through March, to a body of 3000 delegates. Through out the length and breadth of the old empire, soviets sprang up. There were 400 by May, 900 by October. At the first All Russian Soviet Congress in June 1917 1090 delegates representing 20 million workers, soldiers and peasants assembled in the capital.

The Soviets developed in more than just a numerical sense. To the consternation of their initial Menshevik leaders they constantly intruded into government business. In the naval base town of Kronstadt where the Bolsheviks and Left SRs were in a majority from the outset, the Soviet declared in May:

"The sole power in the city of Kronstadt is the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, which acts with the Petrograd Soviet in government matters."

The Soviet dismissed the Provisional Government's representa-

tive in the city and even declared a republic.

This struck terror into the hearts of the compromisers in the Petrograd Executive Commmittee, Tsereteli and Skobelev were dispatched to persuade the Kronstadters to desist from such actions. But these compromisers were like Canute before the advancing tide helpless to prevent it. Everywhere, the dynamic of the soviets was pushing them in a similar direction to Kronstadt. In the Bolshevik stronghold of Vyborg in Petrograd, home of the major factories, the soviet oversaw workers' control in the factories and took over the prison bakery at Kresty to ensure that the workers got bread.

The Vyborg factories were at the forefront of the struggle for soviet power from early on. In April, the bourgeois minister Milyukov was forced out of the Provisional Government following the publication of his note to the allies declaring Russian fidelity to the Tsar's war aims. In response Vyborg issued the loudest calls for an end to dual power. The resolution of the Optico Machine Construction factory typified the Vyborg mood:

"...Therefore, we find the Milyukov Guchkov Co. not corresponding to their appointment and recognise that the only power in the country must be the soviets of workers' soldiers and peasants' deputies, which we will defend with our lives."

## Contradictions of dual power

Until June Vyborg and Kronstadt were relatively isolated in calling for the resolution of the dual power. The bourgeoisie was well aware of the problem it faced, having to co exist with the power of the soviets, Guchkov expressed his grasp of that problem as early as 9 March:

"The Provisional Government has no real power. Its orders are endorsed only by the soviets of workers' and soldiers' deputies. stated bluntly, the Provisional Government exists only by the soviets' permission."

The point about the dual power situation was that until September the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet looked to throughout Russia for leadership granted that permission. The Executive concluded a deal with the bourgeois hasbeens of the State Duma Committee and then told the workers and soldiers:

"As long as the agreement between the Petrograd Workers and Soldiers' Soviet and the Provisional Government is not breached, the Provisional Government must be regarded as the sole legal government for all Russia."

After the departure of Guchkov and Milyukov and the entry of Soviet representatives into the Provisional Government Tsereteli drew the logical conclusion from the Mensheviks/Right SR point of view and argued:

"Now, all power would be yielded [by the soviet WP] to the Provisional Government... [the soviet must] not meddle in administrative business. We should not hinder national government, but sound the alarm in case of mistakes."

Why were the compromisers able to insist on deference to the Provisional Government by the mass of workers and peasants for so many months? In the first place, it was because the Mensheviks and Right SRs were stronger than the Bolsheviks within Russia at the outbreak of the February Revolution. They were better placed than the Bolsheviks to rapidly assume positions of leadership in the soviets. As such they were able to play on the genuine fears workers had of counter revolution, to limit the role of the soviets to monitoring the government. Remembering the persecution that followed 1905 many workers were not prepared to assume sole responsibility for the fate of the revolution. The Menshevik thesis of leaving government to the bourgeoisie fitted in with such fears. As a delegate to the April City Conference of Bolsheviks ruefully put it;

"When the proletariat still feared to take power into its hands, at that time the bourgeoisie made its way to the Duma and began to issue proclamations and elect deputies. Our best workers, fearing counter-revolution, facilitated the accidental composition of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies."

## Critical support for government

But it was not only fear that played a part. Until Lenin's return no party of the revolution was, or had ever, advocated constructing soviet power as the immediate objective of the revolution. The Bolshevik formula was for a revolutionary provisional government. Even leading figures in the party like Kamenev, advocated critical support for the Provisional Government created in February. It is not surprising, therefore, that the mass of the working class and army saw their job as keeping the government on the democratic straight and narrow. Typical of this outlook was the resolution of the Baltic Shipbuilding Factory, which proclaimed:

"...full confidence in the Soviet, and we are sure that the Soviet, basing itself upon our trust and the support of organised revolutionary democracy, will be able to force the Provisional Government to take into account the wishes of the revolutionary army and people."

From the end of April to July the Bolsheviks, initially a weak fraction within most soviets (40 out of 3,000 deputies in Petrograd at the end of March), hammered away at the slogan 'All Power to the Soviets'. Their aim was to escape the pro-bourgeois politics of the compromisers and win leadership in a soviet republic established if possible, by peaceful means. By June they were beginning to make considerable headway.

## Workers blame capitalists

The Provisional Government was incapable of solving the great problems of economic production of the land question or of the war. More and more the workers came to blame the capitalists for obstructing the solution of these burning problems. More and more they looked to their own organisations to do the job for them. When the Soviet leadership banned a Bolshevik demonstration out of fear in June, they were obliged to call an official march to let off steam. The march was over 400,000 strong and was made up of workers and soldiers. The rest of 'democracy' cowered in the cafes and salons. Despite the 'official' character of this march, its moods and slogans reflected the fast growing influence of Bolshevism. Eyewitness to the march, Sukhanov, noted:

"And again, and again, as the insistent call from the very bowels of the revolutionary capital, as destiny itself, like the fateful Burnham Wood, they came toward us: 'All power to the Soviets!', 'Down with the ten capitalist ministers!'"

The drive to counter revolution after the July Days (see Chapter 5) caused the Bolsheviks to debate a change of slogans with regard to the soviets. The illegalisation of the Bolshevik Party, the arrest of many of its leaders and the repression against the most advanced workers and soldiers, all measures backed by the Soviet leadership, the SRs and the Mensheviks, led the Bolsheviks to drop the slogan 'All power to the Soviets'. The Bolsheviks hopes for a peaceful development of the revolution evaporated.

# The July Days

In the spring and early summer of 1917, it became more and more clear that the Provisional Government would not address any of Russia's crying needs. The war-weary soldiers' yearning for peace, the cry for bread from the workers of the cities, the peasants' calls for the aristocrats land to be distributed to them - all were met with delay and diversion. The government made the continuation of the war its overriding priority. A government of the imperialist bourgeoisie, mortgaged to Anglo-French imperialism and with its own designs on the Turkish Empire and Eastern Europe, could not seriously contemplate a separate peace.

The Provisional Government headed by Prince Lvov united liberal aristocrats and landowners with manufacturers, bankers and merchants from the two main bourgeois parties - the Cadets led by Pavel Milyukov, and the more conservative Octobrists led by Alexander Guchkov. These constituted the right wing majority of the government. Its left wing was represented by Alexander Kerensky, a member of the Trudovik (Toilers) Party, which was a radical peasant party in the post 1905 Dumas (parliaments).

Petrograd witnessed almost ceaseless demonstrations often swelling to half a million strong

Petrograd witnessed almost ceaseless demonstrations often swelling to half a million strong. Inflation soared and real wages fell. Unemployment increased rapidly. All these attacks drove the workers to strike, to march, and to create factory committees which took action to preserve jobs. The bourgeoisie's reaction was summed up by the Cadet daily paper Rech: "Russia is being turned into a kind of lunatic asylum."

The Menshevik leaders, who had, according to their long held political perspective, presented the bourgeoisie with control over "its" revolution, discovered that these gentlemen were not in the slightest bit grateful for it. Indeed almost from the outset they fomented economic chaos hoping to create the conditions for a restoration of "order". The Moscow industrialist Riabushinsky said: "The emaciated hand of hunger will seize the members of the different committees and soviets by the throat."

In the countryside peasant soviets began to spring up and - slowly at first - the peasants began to take things into their own hands. In March disorders were reported in 34 districts, in April 174, in May 236, in June 280 and in July 325. The landowners' manor houses went up in flames and the peasants began to occupy the lands robbed from them by the great Emancipation swindle of 1861. The mir - the age-old village commune - took on a new life, and the rich peasants (kulaks), who had benefited from Tsarist land reforms and left their mir, were often obliged to return. Rent ceased to be paid. The news of this turmoil reached the young peasant conscripts at the front and magnified the wave of desertions. The deserters returning to their villages were different men to the boys who had left. Through military training they had acquired technical skills and discipline. They had seen the brutality and incompetence of their upper class officers. They had lost their unreasoning faith in the priests. Some had read - or had read to them - the leaflets and papers of the Bolsheviks. As the year progressed this radicalising of the multi-millioned peasant masses went on apace.

The historic party of the peasantry, the Socialist Revolutionaries (or SRs), still held the overwhelming allegiance of the peasants but events were to begin undermining this too. In early May a governmental crisis erupted. The Soviet had, under mass pressure, issued an appeal for a peace "without annexations and indemnities" and had renounced imperialist war aims. Milyukov, in transmitting this declaration to the Allies, assured them that the government would "fully observe the obligations assumed towards our allies." Mass demonstrations of soldiers and workers erupted under the slogans "Down with the Provisional Government!" and "Guchkov, Milyukov, Resign!"

Clashes occurred with bourgeois demonstrators. General Kornilov, then commander of the Petrograd garrison, requested

permission to fire on the anti-government demonstrators. This the government dared not do and the crisis was resolved only with Milyukov's resignation and the bringing into the government of another four "socialist ministers", including the SR leader Victor Chernov as Minister of Agriculture, and the promotion of Kerensky to the War Ministry. Chernov and the SRs were thus put in a position of having to hold back the peasantry on behalf of the landowners and capitalists. At an Allied military conference in January the Tsarist high command had rashly promised their Anglo-French paymasters a spring offensive against the Austrians in Galicia. The Allies had no expectation of a Russian victory but merely hoped that the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of half-trained and badly armed peasants would hold up the Central Powers and deflect them from an offensive on the Western Front. Kerensky was determined to carry out this inheritance from the Romanovs. The ruling class saw the offensive as an opportunity to restore order at the front, in Petrograd and in the other major cities.

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The seven million soldiers at the front greeted the news of the proposed offensive with apprehension. The huge Petrograd garrison, with hundreds of thousands of armed soldiers, heard it with overt hostility. The radicalisation of the soldiers was speeded up. In Petrograd the soldiers were represented in the Soviet. They had been guaranteed full civil rights when not on duty by the Petrograd Soviet's famous "Order Number One". Normal discipline had broken down and committees had to counter-sign every officer's order if it was to be carried out.

The Bolsheviks, whose struggle for workers' control was winning them ever stronger positions in the factories, now devoted a massive effort to increasing the party's position in the barracks and in the trenches.

On 31 March the Bolshevik Military Organisation was founded. A commission was appointed to direct its work. Its most prominent leaders were Nikolai Podvoisky and Vladimir Nevsky. Another key figure was the Kronstadt sailor Fyodor Raskolnikov. The Military Organisation published a popular daily paper from mid-April onwards with a circulation of over 50,000 - half in Petrograd, half at the front. It described the wretched conditions of soldiers lives; printing hundreds of letters and resolutions from units the length and breadth of Russia, as well as agitating for the Bolsheviks' key slogans.

In early June as the preparations for the offensive began - including attempts to transfer weapons and men to the front from Petrograd - the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets convened in the capitol. It sat from 3 to 24 June. Of its 822 delegates with voting rights the SRs had 285, the Mensheviks 248 and the Bolsheviks 105. The rest belonged to smaller tendencies like the Mezhraiontsy (Interdistricters or "United Social Democrats") led by Leon Trotsky and Anatoly Lunacharsky, who had ten delegates.

The right wing socialist and populist parties still had a very sizeable majority. The Bolsheviks stood out as the clearest anti-Provisional Government force. When Tsereteli, the most vigorous Menshevik leader (and a minister in the provisional government), addressed the congress, Lenin made perhaps the most prophetic heckle in history. Tsereteli goaded the audience at the meeting:

"At the present moment there is no political party which would say: 'Give the power into our hands, go away, we will take your place.' There is no such party in Russia."

"There is!" Replied Lenin from his seat.

The response of the majority of the delegates was laughter. In the next month however the attitude of the leaders of the majority soviet parties was to change first to fear and then to hatred as the Bolsheviks experienced a surge in their influence and an upsurge in the revolutionary workers and troops of Petrograd and the sailors of the northern fleet at Kronstadt and Helsingfors.

From early June Kerensky and the government were constantly trying to ship munitions, weaponry and units of the garrison to the front in preparation for the coming offensive. The All-Russian Soviet Congress on 8 June voted full support to Prince Lvov and the government, thereby effectively endorsing its plans for an offensive. The spontaneous pressure of the soldiers and sailors was for demonstrations against the renewed war and the attempts to disperse or disarm the revolutionary regiments who, with the workers, had made the February Revolution. The Bolshevik Military Organisation stood on the left of the Party. Podvoisky advocated a mass armed demonstration to act "as a battering ram that would effect a breach in the Congress". This proposal caused a sharp disagreement between the left wing of the party led by Lenin and the right led by Kamenev. Lenin wished to undermine - and if possible prevent - the new offensive with a massive anti-war demonstration whose central slogan would be the call to transfer all power to the soviets. This was designed to try and force the majority SR and Menshevik parties to break with the Provisional Government, with the Cadets and Octobrists, and take power. Hence the Bolsheviks slogan which made this clear: "Down with the ten capitalist ministers!"

## Armed counter-revolutionaries

Kamenev and the right were opposed to a demonstration at all but if it were called they insisted it must be unarmed. The Military Organisation insisted this was impossible. The central area of Petrograd was the scene of mounting patriotic demonstrations by right wing bourgeois forces. The officer cadet schools of the capital were nests of armed counter-revolutionaries that the Provisional Government protected.

The anti-semitic, proto-fascist Black Hundred organisation still existed in a scarcely underground form. Workers' and soldiers' demonstrations against the war and the government would undoubtedly be attacked. Lenin found himself opposed not only by Kamenev and the right, but even by Zinoviev, his closest co-

thinker during the war, and by Krupskaya. Nevertheless a joint conference of the Central Committee, the Petrograd Committee and the Military Organisation bureau voted for a demonstration on 9 June.

The Bolsheviks were not the only force urging a demonstration. The Petrograd Anarchist-Communist Federation were agitating fiercely for an armed demonstration. But they posed as its immediate objective the overthrow of the Provisional Government, the destruction of the state and the installation of a Petrograd Commune.

Clashes between the anarchists and the troops loyal to the Provisional Government provided the pretext for the Soviet Congress passing a resolution banning all demonstrations. Faced with a ban voted for by all the workers' and peasants' parties except the Bolsheviks and the Mezhraiontsy, the Central Committee conceded to the soviet legality of the ban and abandoned the demonstration. The Party and the Military Organisation, despite their anger at the ban and indeed their disagreement at the retreat, carried out the manoeuvre in a disciplined fashion.

If April had seen the right of the Party nearly pull Bolshevism into the dead end of "defending the fatherland", July was to see the left almost pull the party into the ditch of adventurism and putschism.

Delighted at their "triumph" the Mensheviks over-reached themselves and proposed an official soviet demonstration on 18 June under the official slogans. This demonstration turned against its organisers' intentions and the platforms of official soviet delegates from all over Russia were obliged to witness a massive parade almost totally under Bolshevik slogans. Maxim Gorky's paper Novaya Zhizn conceded that it "revealed the complete triumph of Bolshevism" amongst the Petrograd proletariat. Bewildered provincial soviet delegates said to Bolshevik demonstrators: "In Petrograd you are the power but not in the provinces, not at the front. Petrograd cannot go against the whole country." This was something that Lenin and the cooler heads on the left of the party realised. But in the Military Organisation the tremendous success of 18 June carried away what caution there was left.

If April had seen the right of the Party nearly pull Bolshevism into the dead end of "defending the fatherland", July was to see the left almost pull the party into the ditch of adventurism and putschism. Lenin, Zinoviev, Sverdlov and Stalin were to be obliged to bloc with the right to hold back the far left of the Party. They were to be aided in this difficult task by Trotsky whose closeness to, and solidarity with, the Bolsheviks during the "July Days" was to seal his final and irrevocable rallying to Bolshevism.

By 19 June news of the offensive reached Petrograd further incensing the garrison. At first the news was of victories directed, as the offensive was, at war weary and demoralised Austrian troops in Galicia, many of whom belonged to the oppressed nations of the "fossil monarchy". Yet by 24 June the offensive ground to a halt and was followed by a massive German counter-attack on the northern front. By 3 July stories of the army's headlong retreat and disintegration began to filter back to the capital.

On 16 June an all-Russian conference of Bolshevik military organisations, with 107 delegates representing upwards of 30,000 members, met in Petrograd. It was the scene of repeated calls from rank and file delegates for the organisation of an immediate armed uprising. On 20 June the First Machine Gun Regiment was ordered to provide 500 machine guns and two thirds of its strength for transfer to the front. This regiment, made up largely of working class soldiers, was a stronghold of the Bolsheviks. It refused the orders and turned to other regiments for support. This increased calls within the Military Organisation for an insurrection. At the session of the Military Organisation conference that day Lenin came out sharply against such an idea:

"If we're now able to seize power, it is naive to think that we would be able to hold it. We have said more than once that the only possible form of revolutionary government was a soviet of workers', soldiers' and peasants' deputies. What is the exact weight of our fraction in the Soviet? Even in the Soviets of both capitals, not to speak of others, we are an insignificant minority."

## A cold shower

Lenin concluded: "The proletarian party must fight for influence within the Soviet." It must "patiently explain" to the masses the errors and deception of the majority parties, "then they will come to the Bolsheviks." A participant later recalled that Lenin's speech was like a cold shower and was received with disappointment and even with dissatisfaction.

In the Military Organisation a majority opposed Lenin's position, as did a powerful faction of the Petrograd committee led by Latsis, Naumov and Stukov. Many of the people who had eagerly supported Lenin in April were now dismayed and began to pursue a divergent policy. Pravda and Soldatskaya Pravda carried on a different agitation. The former stressed the need for the immediate calling of elections to a constituent assembly and a mass campaign to win control of the Petrograd Soviet, whilst the latter carried articles which urged immediate action against the government.

On 3 July the Machine Gun Regiment planned a mass demonstration to the Congress of Soviets meeting in the Tauride Palace. Involved in this decision were the anarchists whose attitude was summed up by their spokesman Bleikhman:

"Overthrow the Provisional Government, not in order to turn power over to the bourgeois soviet, but to take it into your own hands."

The Bolshevik leaders Nevsky and Podvoisky, far from holding back the machine gunners, also urged them on but with a different objective. Their aim was to force the Soviet Congress to take the power.

## "Into the streets! Move out!"

On 3 July a postal workers' strike gripped the capital. Machine

gunners went to all the major regiments, factories and to Kronstadt urging them to "come out". Some regiments flatly refused and proclaimed neutrality between the government and the insurgents. But the Moskovsky, the Finlandsky, Pavlovsky and Grenadier regiments agreed to take part in mass meetings. All the factories on the Vyborg side, 30,000 workers from the giant Putilov works and 10,000 Kronstadt sailors enthusiastically responded to the call. In Putilov the Bolshevik chair of the factory committee announced the vote with the cry "Down with the Provisional Government! Into the streets! Move out!"

## The Bolshevik Central Committee came out against an armed demonstration

By now the Bolshevik Central Committee became aware of what was going on. Lenin was temporarily across the border in Finland taking a brief rest when events began to move rapidly. The Central Committee came out against an armed demonstration and instructed party militants to oppose the demonstration. Latsis angrily replied "Again we must be fire hoses. How long will this last!"

But by now it was too late to put out the fire and in any case the majority of militants were quite carried away with the surging quasi-insurrectionary mood of the soldiers, sailors and workers. In general however the Bolshevik slogans "Down with the ten capitalist ministers!", "All power to the Soviets" and "Down with the offensive" massively predominated over the anarchist influenced ones. In Kshesinskaya's mansion, which had been expropriated to use as the Bolshevik headquarters, there was momentary confusion. The Military Organisation, the Petrograd Committee and the Central Committee met in joint session. Messengers rushed in reporting that barrack after barrack, factory after factory could not be restrained. It was obvious that the party must participate actively now and try to give the inflamed masses leadership. But what was to be the objective and how far the movement should still be reigned in? The answers to such questions were far from clear. The target of the demonstrations was to be the All-Russian Soviet Congress meeting in the Tauride Palace. Obviously the demand was for them to take power. But if they would not? What then? No one had a clear answer to this question.

Seventy thousand demonstrators filled the centre of the city. In the bourgeois quarters around the Nevsky they were fired on by rightist elements, Black Hundreds or officer cadets eager to provoke the soldiers. Despite this, led by military bands, they reached and encircled the Tauride Palace. Delegations entered and pressed their demands upon the majority soviet leaders, Chkheidze, Tsereteli and Chernovo They were intransigent. The congress passed a resolution "indignantly opposing all attempts to influence their will by force." Yet little force was being used beyond the huge numbers that filed past the palace and thunderously applauded speeches by Zinoviev, Trotsky and others.

The next day, 4 July, the demonstrations were far larger, reaching half a million or more. Significantly the numbers of soldiers were less and the proportion of workers much greater. Many regiments stayed in their barracks, refusing alike the calls of the Bolshevik agitators and the pleas for help of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet Congress.

However at Kronstadt the sailors had commandeered several boats and soon 20,000 sailors and Kronstadt workers were disembarking along the Neva embankments. They marched en masse to Kshesinskaya's mansion to hear what the Bolshevik leaders had to say. Lenin had meanwhile hurried back from Finland. He was furious with the Military Organisation cadres. "You should be thrashed for this!" he hissed as he stepped onto the balcony of the mansion to address the sailors.

The provocations against the demonstrators continued. On 4 July five were killed and 25 wounded. These treacherous attacks plus the frustration of the refusal of the Menshevik and SR leaders to yield to their demands, led to ugly scenes outside the Tauride Palace. Trotsky rescued Victor Chernov from a crowd. Angry fist-shaking workers screamed at the terrified SR leader: "Take power when it's given to you, you son-of-a-bitch!"

Here was encapsulated the contradictions of mass consciousness at this stage of the revolution. The masses had lost confidence in the Menshevik and SR policies and slogans. They had firmly espoused the Bolshevik slogan of a soviet government but they had not yet lost their faith in the existing Soviet leaders, or rather, only through precisely this experience were the workers and soldiers shedding these illusions.

Despite the excitement of the anarchists and the optimism of many rank and file Bolsheviks, even in Petrograd the majority of soldiers and workers would not have supported a Bolshevik seizure of power against the Soviet. In Russia as a whole and at the front, a Bolshevik overthrow of the government and the dissolution of the Soviet Congress would have thrown the working class into confusion, pitting its more backward majority against its revolutionary vanguard and turning the overwhelming mass of the peasant soldiers against it.

The Bolsheviks and the Mezhraiontsy thus had to act responsibly towards this mass upsurge of the workers and soldiers. Firstly Lenin and the Central Committee of the Bolsheviks - aided by Trotsky, Lunacharsky and other Interdistricters - tried to avoid a disorganised mass uprising that would undoubtedly be subject to provocations by the rightists and which could not in reality culminate in the overthrow of the government. When the masses refused to heed the party they put themselves at the head of the demonstrations, fighting to make sure that they were as disciplined, as well guarded and as restrained as possible.

Lastly they utilised the July upsurge to put the maximum pressure on the right wing Menshevik and SR leaders to take the power, thus carrying to its culmination this tactic and exposing their unwillingness to do this to the whole of Petrograd.

However the fomenting of the mass insurgency by the left of the Party was a serious tactical blunder and the Party was soon to suffer for it. Yet even the repression that followed only helped to further expose the Mensheviks and SRs as wretched tools of the counter-revolution. If the first response of a section of workers and the majority of soldiers was disillusionment and suspicion of the Bolsheviks (Had they tried to seize power? Were they put up to it by the Germans?), the second response to seeing Chernov, Tsereteli and co raining blows on the Bolsheviks in common with Kerensky, Milyukov and Kornilov was revulsion and indignation.

## A counter-revolutionary orgy

The collapse of the July insurgency was as sudden as its upheaval. On the 4/5 July the Soviet Congress sat through the night delaying any definitive reply to any of the workers' demands. The worker and soldier demonstrators and delegations outside thinned and departed. Suddenly through the courtyard and corridors of the Tauride Palace the thunder of marching feet could be heard. Theodor Dan, a prominent Menshevik, mounted the rostrum in triumph to announce "Troops loyal to the (Soviet) Central Executive Committee have arrived!"

To the accompaniment of a regimental band the majority delegates rose to bawl the Marseillaise, casting malicious and revengeful looks at the Bolsheviks, the Mezhraiontsy and at Martov's "Menshevik Internationalists". Martov himself bitterly exclaimed: "A classic scene of the start of counter-revolution!" And so it was momentarily. On 5 and 6 July what a Menshevik witness described as a "counter-revolutionary orgy" reigned in central Petrograd. Workers and revolutionary soldiers were beaten up and thrown into the canals by Black Hundred gangs. The garrison commander seized the opportunity to disarm the Machine Gun Regiment and to send a force of cadets to smash Pravda's presses. some Bolsheviks were shot dead in the street by the counter revolutionaries. Last of all the Bolshevik headquarters were seized and ransacked.

The Provisional Government had been able to win over some of the more backward regiments because of manufactured "evidence" that Lenin was a German spy, and that the Bolsheviks were being paid by the Germans to sabotage the offensive. Warrants were issued for the arrest of Lenin and Zinoviev. Other leaders like Kamenev were arrested. The party reeled under the hammer blows of counter-revolution.

# How the Bolsheviks won leadership of the masses

The Russian workers, particularly those in Petrograd, had suffered a very real setback after the mass street demonstrations of the July Days. Although the Bolshevik leadership had opposed any attempt to seize power as premature, given the balance of class forces across Russia, they had demonstrated at the head of the armed masses. Now as the demonstrators dispersed, recovering from its fright, the Provisional Government went onto the offensive. The bourgeois press accused the Bolsheviks of leading a failed putsch, slandered their leaders, like Lenin and Zinoviev, as "German agents" attempting to sabotage the Russian military offensive then underway.

The Russian workers, particularly those in Petrograd, had suffered a very real setback after the defeats of the July Days

Key Bolshevik leaders such as Lev Kamenev, close allies such as Leon Trotsky and Anatoly Lunacharsky from the Interdistrict Organisation (the Mezhrayontsy) and hundreds of rank and file Bolsheviks were arrested and imprisoned. Military cadets, former police officers and members of the proto-fascist Black Hundreds, carried out individual shootings and lynchings. In such witch hunt conditions the party decided that Lenin and Zinoviev should go underground, first in the countryside near Petrograd and later in nearby Finland.

The circulation of the party press halved in the month following the July Days. The morale of party members in the factories was shaken by the sudden turn around in the situation. Yet as early as mid-July Yakov Sverdlov, a superb organiser and the senior Bolshevik leader left at liberty in the capital, was able to report "the mood in Petrograd is hale and hearty. We are keeping our heads. The organisation is not destroyed." Less than a month later the tide had turned again and was now flowing strongly in favour of the Bolsheviks. By the end of August the party had 240,000 members, three times that in April. What had brought about this rapid and dramatic change?

The answer lay not simply in the steadfastness of the Bolsheviks cadres, embodied in organisers like Sverdlov, nor yet in the principled yet flexible character of Bolshevik tactics and strategy, important as these were. It lay in the failure of the counter-revolution to inflict a decisive defeat on the vanguard of the working class and stabilise the military, political and economic situation of the country. Firstly the "Kerensky offensive" at the front rapidly collapsed in the face of mass mutinies and desertions by the Russian troops and a German and Austrian counteroffensive. Prince Lvov, who had headed the government since the February revolution resigned and Alexander Kerensky, the war minister, and the leading figure in the cabinet since early May, took over as premier. Kerensky wanted to play the part Napoleon Bonaparte played in the French Revolution – that of stemming the revolutionary surge and isolating and destroying its most radical representatives the Bolsheviks, much as Napoleon crushed the remnants of the revolutionaries of 1792-4 (the Jacobins and their immediate successors). He demanded the banning of the Bolshevik party but the Mensheviks and SR ministers vetoed this, knowing that this would be a dangerous, even an impossible, step. He ordered the disarming of the workers factory militia, the Red Guard, and in this he was successful. He ordered the despatch to the front of some of the most radical regiments in the city garrison. But as Trotsky later observed this was to send 40,000 thoroughly politicised agitators to the trenches.

The High Command piled on the pressure for Kerensky to "restore order" in the army grew. Alexei Brusilov the army's commander-in-chief publicly demanded:

"There cannot be dual authority in the army. The army must have one head and one authority."

He wanted the complete and total restoration of military discipline, including the officers' right to shoot 'mutineers'. However Kerensky, whose own role as would be Bonaparte and 'strongman' rested on a balancing act between the soviets and the counter-revolution played for time by dismissing Brusilov and replacing him with Lavr Georgievich Kornilov, hitherto commander of the

Petrograd military district - a man of no less counter-revolutionary opinions but more limited intelligence – he was described by a fellow commander as having "the heart of a lion but the brains of a sheep."

No sooner was Kornilov appointed than the imperialist bourgeoisie and the landowners began to rally around him, giving him lavish receptions and calling him the "saviour of Russia." It was plain they saw him as their saviour from the working class and its soviets, i.e. as just the man to instal a counter-revolutionary dictatorship.

However – their ambitions aside- neither Kerensky nor Kornilov was a Napoleon. More important still the dynamic element of the Russian revolution, the proletariat and its Bolshevik vanguard, were far from being a spent force.

Despite the repression which closed the Bolshevik paper Pravda and temporarily drove most of the party leaders underground the Bolshevik Party survived the weeks of 'German Agent' hysteria that swept the country after the July days. Lenin and Zinoviev in hiding at Razliv, just across the Finnish border were able to send letters and documents. As early as 13 July the Party was able to hold a two day strategy conference of the Military Organisation, the Central Committee and the committees of the Petrograd and Moscow districts.

## Mensheviks and counter revolution

Lenin prepared for this a document *The Political Situation*. It consisted of four theses. Thesis one proclaimed that "the counter revolution has actually taken state power into its hands", and that Russia is "virtually a military dictatorship" whose policy "is preparation for disbanding the soviets". Thesis two stigmatised the Mensheviks and SRs for having completely "betrayed the cause of the revolution by putting it. in the hands of the counter revolution" for which they now act as "mere figleaves". Thesis three proclaimed that all hope of a peaceful transition had vanished for good and that now an armed workers' uprising was necessary. Consequently Lenin argued that the slogan 'All power to the Soviets' must be withdrawn. The reason Lenin gave was that a) 'it was a slogan for the peaceful development of the revolution' and b) 'power has changed hands' and the Mensheviks and SRs have 'completely betrayed' the revolution. The fourth thesis explained that the Party must combine legal with illegal work aiming towards an insurrection the aim of which would be "to transfer power to the proletariat supported by the poor peasants, with a view to putting our party programme into effect."

Lenin was aware of the danger of separating the organisational form from its political leadership. Under reformist leadership soviets can play a reactionary role- as indeed they did in July 1917 in Russia. However, with a revolutionary leadership the soviets would, once again, play a revolutionary role. The struggle for new soviet actually became in August 1917, the struggle for Bolshevik leadership. The existing soviets were renovated and cleansed of their reactionary leadership.

## Lenin and the soviets

Lenin – temporarily removed from the scene of action in the capital, for once misestimated the strength and completeness of the counter revolution. He was correct to characterise Kerensky's intentions as bonapartist but he judged this to be more complete than was in fact the case. There were, as yet, only conflicting elements of bonapartism rather than a finished bonapartist regime in Russia. These clashing elements went by the names of Kerensky and Kornilov. Their conflict, when it broke cover at the end of August, was to lead to a decisive weakening of the forces of the counter-revolution. In short the situation in Russia in July and August was more that of a "democratic counter-revolution," one that preserved the legality of the mass workers organisations – soviets, the workers parties, factory committees etc, but which directed severe repression against its vanguard, the Bolsheviks.

By the July meeting of the Bolshevik leadership Lenin had come to the conclusion that the key governmental slogans that the Bolsheviks had used to such good effect up to and in the July Days – 'All power to the Soviets' – and 'Down with the ten capitalist ministers' were now outmoded. From hiding he warned the Bolsheviks:

"Too often has it happened that, when history has taken a sharp turn, even progressive parties have for some time been unable to adapt themselves to the new situation and have repeated slogans which had formerly been correct but had now lost all meaning—lost it as "suddenly" as the sharp turn in history was "sudden".

Methodologically Lenin was right that when a major turning point occurs in a revolution the old slogans cannot simply be repeated unchanged in changed circumstances. The above slogans had been in effect a call on the Mensheviks and the SRs to take the power, with a promise that the Bolsheviks would, whilst remaining in complete opposition to them within the soviets, not attempt their armed overthrow and moreover defend their government against any attempt to do so by the counter-revolutionary forces. But the July Days proved that the Mensheviks and SR's would cling to their alliance with the bourgeoisie, even when hundreds of thousands of workers and soldiers offered them the power. Lenin's analysis was as follows:

"The cycle of development of the class and party struggle in Russia from February 27 to July 4 is complete. A new cycle is beginning, one that involves not the old classes, not the old parties, not the old Soviets, but classes, parties and Soviets rejuvenated in the fire of struggle, tempered, schooled and refashioned by the process of the struggle. (...) We must, at the beginning of the new cycle, proceed from the triumphant bourgeois counter-revolution, which triumphed because the Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks compromised with it, and which can be defeated only by the revolutionary proletariat. Lenin argued that the Bolsheviks must now prepare for an armed insurrection against the Provisional government and the present Soviet regime."

In fact Lenin was not only overestimating of the completeness of the counter-revolution's triumph but also linking the call for power to the Soviets too narrowly to the perspective of a peaceful transfer, one which he had argued since April was possible. The dual power - or rather the pole of it represented by the workers' soviets, had indeed been greatly weakened by the Mensheviks and SR's support for the counter-revolution. But even now their support was far from total. They themselves had good cause, to fear the counter-revolution represented by Kornilov. He plainly wished to destroy the soviets and the soldiers' committees' altogether.

The triumph of the counter-revolution would mean the end of the

right wing socialists and populists too. Rumours of an impending coup were rife in the last weeks of August. If Kornilov actually moved to do this then it was likely the Mensheviks and the SRs – or at least their followers - would have to fight. That or the Bolsheviks would completely outflank them by initiating and leading the workers resistance.

However Lenin was correct to warn the party not to fetishise the existing soviets with their Menshevik leadership. Lenin looked to other organs like the factory committees, where Bolshevik influence was growing massively, as a more revolutionary mass base for the Bolsheviks to strike for power.

But in fact the soviets proved more responsive, more democratic and more active as instruments of the revolution than Lenin supposed. Moreover the slogan 'All Power to the Soviets' could and would take on different meanings to that of being simply a call for a Menshevik and SR government.

Thus it is noteworthy that the Bolshevik leadership in Petrograd, whilst they de-emphasised the slogan in this latter form, never withdrew it in its broader meaning – that the working class and the soldiers must break with the bourgeoisie and take power through their own democratic councils. At the Second City Conference of the Petrograd party many speakers came out against Lenin's position as argued for by Stalin. One delegate argued:

"There were moments when we had to fear the dispersal of the soviets but this time has now definitively passed."

Volodarsky supporting him added:

"People who claim the counter-revolution is victorious are making judgments about the masses on the basis of their leaders. While the Menshevik and SR leaders are shifting rightwards, the masses are moving leftwards. Kerensky, Tseretelli and Avksentiev are caliphs for one hour. [...] Bearing this in mind, it is clear that the slogan 'All Power to the Soviets' is not obsolete."

The party's refusal to go all the way with Lenin was indeed fortunate since the Bolsheviks would soon have to deploy the slogan again. Briefly in September, it was used once more as a call on the Mensheviks and SRs to break with the Provisional Government and Kerensky. More famously it was used in October as a call for a Bolshevik majority government.

The whole debate shows how utterly false is the Stalinist and bourgeois historian's common viewpoint that the Bolshevik Party was a monolithic block under the iron grip of an always correct (or, for the academics, dictatorial) Lenin. As we saw in April, in the July Days and as shall see again in the run up to the October Revolution itself the party engaged in vigorous internal debates about the correct way forward. Lenin often had to argue hard for his line and was neither always successful nor always tactically right, despite his overall strategic brilliance.

## The plot thickens

In fact Kerensky's bonapartism rapidly proved not so much a dictatorship as a precarious balancing act between revolution and counter-revolution. From 12 to 15 August he summoned a 'State Conference' in Moscow to mobilise support for his attampts at "strong government." Held in the Bolshoi Theatre, home of the Imperial Ballet, Kerensky tried to placate both the serried ranks of the representatives of big business and the officer corps to his right and the Menshevik/SR soviet delegates to his left. Referring to the July Days he ranted:

"May everyone know, and may those know who have already attempted to raise an armed hand against the people's government, that these attempts will be crushed by iron and blood" (....) Our patience has reached a limit and anybody who exceeds that limit will come up against a force whose repressive strength will remind these criminals of the old regime."

Kerensky's hysterical assertions of power fooled neither side, but least of all did they convince the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie that he was the man of destiny, the man to save Russia. In fact during Kornilov's own highly theatrical arrival for the State Conference in Moscow was greeted by Radichev, a representative of the Cadet Party, with the significant cry - "Save Russia and her grateful people will crown you!"

Meanwhile, the army high command and the bourgeois parties stepped up their plotting to carry out a full scale counter-revolution, to install a military dictatorship.

Even before July the Bolsheviks had established themselves as the leadership of key fighting units of the working class. Their influence in the factory committees had increased, with 82% of the delegates at the August All Russian Factory Committee Conference endorsing their call for soviet power. They led a succesful general strike in Moscow against the State Conference, even though the strike had been fiercely opposed by the right wing leadership of the Moscow soviet.

More and more sections of workers were demanding a break from Kerensky and the Provisional Government. This was demonstrated by a frankly pro-Bolsevik resolution from the young workers of Putilov:

"We, the youth, having learnt from the experience of our fathers how dangerous it is to fraternise with the bourgeoisie, declare that it will be a fearful hour when we, the youth, for the salvation of the revolution take to the streets to destroy with our young hands those parasites who live off the blood and sweat of the toilers . [We express] our profound scorn for the Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks who continue to cohabit with the bourgeoisie and allow themselves to be led on a leash by Kerensky and Tseretelli."

Major battles lay ahead and this was patently clear to the most class-conscious workers. But the July Days had taught the workers the need for discipline and clarity about their objectives, the need to avoid premature and sporadic outbursts.

# Kornilov's coup and the united front

Kerensky's government though increasingly exposed was still trying to crack down on the organised workers. Kerensky was himself plotting a coup, but it was to be his coup, not the generals. On 24 August he closed down the Bolshevik press once again. But unfortunately for him decisive circles of the bourgeoisie were preparing to oust him and his government. In co-ordinated blow on the 27 August the bourgeois Cadets resigned from the Provisional Government and General Kornilov, announced that he was marching on Petrograd "to restore order in the capital". There was of course no disorder in the capital but the long depressed stock market suddenly soared as the capitalists anticipated the counter-revolution's victory. Privy to the whole plot was Sir George Buchanan, the British ambassador whose Embassy was something of an organising centre for the coup within the capital.

The soldiers and cassocks that were ordered to march on Petrograd were units that were deemed to be more reliable and could be put to work killing revolutionaries. In order to ensure their loyalty they were told by their officers that Petrograd was being run by German spies, that an uprising had taken place at the behest of the German military.

Kerensky who was privy to and indeed in agreement with Kornilov's measures to crush the Soviets and soldiers committees, suddenly realised to his horror that the general intended to overthrow the whole Provisional Government, including himself. That would be the end not only for his own bonapartist ambitions but possibly his life. Thus Kerensky, in fear and trembling as to the consequences of doing so, turned to the Soviet to save himself.

The Mensheviks and the SRs too panicked when they realised a coup was underway. For six months, under the cover of the "dual power regime" they had allowed the forces of counter-revolution a chance to gather their strength and strike back. Now in terror they had to turn to the Bolsheviks to rescue them. The Party was now put to the test of leading a united front of resistance to the counter-revolution.

The news of Kornilov's march on Petrograd led to huge mass meetings in the factories. Every one of them vowed to defend the city and urgently demanded arms from the Soviet Executive. The Baranovskii Machine Construction factory resolved:

"We demand that the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet, give arms to the workers, who not sparing their lives, will stand as one in defence of the just rights of revolutionary democracy, and together with our brethren soldiers, will erect an impassable barrier to the counter-revolution."

Thousands of Petrograd workers threw themselves into the struggle to stop Kornilov, at least 25,000 enlisted for the Red Guards who were co-ordinated by the Soviet's Military Revolutionary Committee. The government was forced to re-arm the militia they had disarmed in July. At Putilov 8,000 of the workforce were sent to perform defence and agitation duties. Those who remained behind achieved three weeks output of cannon in three days in order to defend the revolution!

The Menshevik leadership of the Petrograd Soviet were obliged to set up a Committee of Struggle against the counter-revolution and to invite the Bolsheviks to participate in it. There were three delegates apiece from the SRs, the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks plus delegates from the main trade unions. But this no longer represented the real balance of forces as Sukhanov a Menshevik-Internationalist recorded in his *Memoirs*:

"The committee making defence preparations had to mobilise the worker-soldier masses. But the masses insofar as they were organised were organised by the Bolsheviks and followed them. At the time theirs was the only organisation that was large, welded together by elementary discipline and linked with the democratic lower levels of the capital Without it the committee was impotent."

The Bolshevik party had grown so rapidly that by the end of August it had some 240,000 members nationwide. Kerensky was thus forced to cower behind a proletarian wall defending Red Petrograd, fearful of what rearming the Bolsheviks would mean. But in the short term he simply had no alternative. The Bolshevik leaders were released from jail and the party's propaganda and agitation was given free rein. Bolshevik militants were prominent in all the mobilisations to halt Kornilov.

The problem for the Bolsheviks was how to use these mobilisations to win the remaining sections of masses, soldiers as well as workers, definitively away from the Mensheviks, that is how to intensify the contradictions between the rank and file Mensheviks

and SRs and their compromised leaders?

## Kamenev and Lenin develop the policy

Until the outbreak of the Kornilov coup Lenin had stuck to his line that because the counter-revolution had already occurred in July, talk of a military coup was Menshevik play acting. He vigorously demanded no blocks or alliances with the Mensheviks. Only as the reality of the situation bore in on him and the opportunities it offered became clear did he change his tactics.

Fortunately once again the Bolsheviks on the ground realised the necessity of united action with the Mensheviks, the SRs and even Kerensy. Kamenev formulated the basis of a united front. Lenin too now realsed the key to success lay in 'indirectly' campaigning against Kerensky "by demanding a more and more active, truly revolutionary war against Kornilov". The aroused workers must be mobilised to press partial demands on Kerensky which would develop the militant mood and reawakened confidence of the rank and file while exposing the weakness and vacillation of their leaders. He formulated demands on them, including the arrest of the Cadet leader Milyukov and Duma President Rodzianko who were backing Kornilov. He included the legalisation of the transfer of the land to the peasants, and workers' control over grain distribution and the factories.

The workers were mobilised to make demands on Kerensky which developed the militant mood while exposing the weakness of their leaders.

The Bolsheviks immediately demanded the arming of the Petrograd workers and the summoning of the militant Kronstadt, Vyborg and Helsingfors garrisons to Petrograd. The demand for weapons and training for the workers was immense. Trotsky described the scene:

"In the districts, according to the workers' press, there immediately appeared whole queues of people eager to join the ranks of the Red Guard. Drilling began in marksmanship and the handling of weapons. Experienced soldiers were brought in as teachers. By the 29th, guards had been formed in almost all the districts. The Red Guard announced its readiness to put in the field a force of 40,000 rifles."

Involving the workers in the fight for their demands in the revolutionary defence of Petrograd was for Lenin, the means of taking them forward politically. That is why he insisted that demands be presented:

"...not only to Kerensky, and not so much to Kerensky as to the workers, soldiers and peasants who have been carried away by the course of the struggle against Kornilov."

In denying Kornilov the right to overthrow Kerensky Lenin was in fact digging Kerensky's grave, and the graves of all those who sought to compromise with him. As Lenin put it:

"We are changing the form of our struggle against Kerensky. Without in the least relaxing our hostility towards him, without taking back a single word said against him, without renouncing the task of overthrowing him, we say that we must take into account the present situation. We shall not overthrow Kerensky right now. We shall approach the task of fighting against him in a different way."

This means of waging the struggle against Kornilov and Kerensky proved a resounding success. Kornilov was stopped in his tracks as his army dissolved around him under the pressure of Bolshevik agitators and sabotage by militant railway workers. Trotsky describes the scene as the Cossacks approached Petrograd:

"From the direction of Petrograd innumerable delegations continued to arrive from regiments sent out to oppose the Kornilovists. Before fighting they wanted to talk things over. The revolutionary troops were confidently hopeful that the thing could be settled without fighting. This hope was confirmed: the Cossacks readily came to meet them. The communication squad of the corps would seize locomotives, and send the delegates along all railroad lines. The situation would be explained to every echelon. Meetings were continuous and at them all the cry was being raised: 'They have deceived us!'"

This led to mutiny amongst the approaching troops. Even the so-called Savage Division of Caucasian mountaineers, when they realised that there was no "pro-German uprising" in Petrograd arrested their officers and deserted Kornilov. Within days the advancing column literally dissapated like steam.

The political prestige of the Bolshevik Party took a giant leap forward in the aftermath of Kornilov's defeat and Kerensky's humiliation. The demands of the united front, addressed to Kerensky, the SRs and the Mensheviks, but carried into life by thousands of rank and file workers in the committees of struggle, was "only" for the limited goal of defeating Kornilov. But by combining unity in action with a merciless critique of Kerensky and the conciliating Menshehvik and SR leadership of the soviets the Bolsheviks proved to hundreds of thousands of workers that they were the only consistent defenders of the revolution. The united front was a bridge to the masses and a weapon against their reformist misleaders.

General Kornilov's defeat at the hands of the Petrograd workers opened the final phase of the Russian Revolution. The workers had arms once again. A new confident tone was to be heard in factory meetings throughout the capital city. Factory after factory replaced their Menshevik or SR delegates to the Soviet with Bolsheviks.

In September the Petrograd Soviet passed its first Bolshevik resolution calling for a government of 'the revolutionary proletariat and peasantry'. In opposition the Mensheviks could only muster 15 votes out of 1,000 delegates for the Provisional Government! The Moscow Soviet passed a Bolshevik resolution four days later. The spectre of a Bolshevik majority at the nationwide congress of soviets was looming and with it the possibility that All Power to the Soviets might mean political power in the hands of the Bolsheviks and their allies.

# Lenin's struggle for the insurrection

The October insurrection, which took power into the hands of the workers and poorest sections of the peasantry, was no historical accident. It flowed from two factors decisive for the victory of any proletarian revolution.

On the one hand it arose inevitably from the deepening crisis that gripped Russian society in the autumn of 1917. The February Revolution, which overthrew the Tsar had ushered in an inherently unstable period of dual power.

The bourgeoisie, through the Provisional Government, held formal control over the state apparatus. But they did so only with the permission of the workers', soldiers' and peasants' soviets the embryo of another state power.

The bourgeoisie lived, breathed and tried to rule courtesy of the reformist leaders of the soviets, the Mensheviks and the right wing of the peasant based SRs.

The October insurrection, which took power into the hands of the workers and poorest sections of the peasantry, was no historical accident.

As the months wore on the situation of dual power became less and less acceptable to both the bosses and the working masses. This created crisis after crisis. One way or the other it had to be resolved. Either the bourgeoisie would launch a second Kornilov into action to crush the revolution, or the workers would lead society out of its impasse by establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat.

By the autumn of 1917 this was the stark choice facing the classes in Russia. It was the objective precondition for the insurrection. Trotsky later noted:

"A mass uprising is no isolated undertaking which can be conjured up at any time one pleases. It represents an objectively conditioned element in the development of a revolution, as a revolution represents an objectively conditioned process in the development of society."

Subsequent history has shown all too often however that favourable objective conditions - an acute revolutionary crisis - do not on their own guarantee the victory of the proletariat This was shown with tragic consequences in Chile, Portugal and Iran. To mobilise the proletariat for the direct struggle for power and weld it into a fighting force capable of destroying the bourgeoisie's state, a conscious leadership is required - a subjective factor.

The October insurrection proved that the revolutionary party, armed with the correct programme, tactics and strategy, and prepared to arm itself and the class with rifles too, is the indispensable pre-requisite for victory.

Immediately after the Kornilov affair Lenin expressed the belief that a peaceful development of the revolution was once again possible. In his article *On Compromises* Lenin explained that if 'All power to the Soviets' could be realised forthwith, that is, if the Menshevik and SR leaders in the soviets could be forced by the pressure of the masses to break from the bourgeoisie then:

"In all probability it could secure the peaceful advance of the whole Russian Revolution, and provide exceptionally good chances for great strides in the world movement towards peace and the victory of socialism."

The dim chance for this compromise lay in the fact that workers were distrustful in the extreme of the bourgeoisie in the aftermath of Kornilov. Their pressure was a material factor. It could perhaps, be exerted to the point where the Mensheviks and SRs would be forced to make some sort of break - at least formally - with the chief capitalist party, the Cadets.

## Loyal opposition refused

But before the ink was dry on the article he had written Lenin received news that Kerensky was planning to form a five person

directory, and strengthen his drive to establish a Bonapartist dictatorship for the bourgeoisie. Even now the Mensheviks and SRs refused to consider the proposal for a 'socialist' only government based on the soviets within which the Bolsheviks would accept the role of loyal opposition. Upon receipt of this news Lenin suggested re-titling his article Belated Thoughts. He wrote:

'Perhaps the few days in which a peaceful development was still possible have passed too. Yes, to all appearances, they have already passed.'

Henceforth Lenin concentrated his thoughts on how to take the revolution forward under Bolshevik leadership. In less than a fortnight he concluded that the rising was an immediate necessity. Over the following weeks Lenin fought a relentless struggle to win the Bolsheviks to this perspective. He quickly grasped that in a matter of weeks the objective situation had dramatically changed. He fought to change the party line accordingly. He struggled to make the subjective factor equal to the tasks of the objective situation.

In the countryside, as the days of the harvest passed, the peasant masses renewed their ferocious war against the landowners.

The crisis of the dual power situation intensified on every front during September and October. In the countryside, as the days of the harvest passed, the peasant masses renewed their ferocious war against the landowners. The agrarian question, which Trotsky called the 'subsoil of the revolution' acquired decisive importance. Traditionally the peasants looked to the SRs as their representatives. Yet the SRs were openly collaborating with the landowners. The Provisional Government, of which the SRs were an integral part declared in September - as instances of violence against the landowners rose from 440 in August, to 958 that:

"...all must experience alarm over the disorders which were happening everywhere in the wildest forms."

The pitchforks that pierced the overfed bellies of the landowners worried the SRs far more than the cruel land hunger that existed amongst the peasant masses. All the SRs could offer the peasants was that on an unspecified day a constituent assembly, which the bourgeoisie were successfully preventing from being convened, would solve the land question. Unimpressed the peasants continued their land war. October saw 42.1% of all instances of land seizure since the fall of the Tsar.

## Natural allies

The peasant land war, spurned by the SRs and opposed by the bourgeoisie, had found a natural ally in the proletariat's revolutionary struggle. This in turn immeasurably strengthened the proletariat as the leader of all the oppressed and downtrodden in Russia. As Trotsky put it:

"In order that the peasant might clear and fence his land, the worker had to stand at the head of the state: that is the simplest formula for the October Revolution."

The land war and the struggle of the proletariat were also increasingly enmeshed with a wave of struggles for autonomy by the nationalities imprisoned within the Tsarist empire. In the east Bashkirs and Kazakhs fought for autonomy as a means of getting land. Throughout the lands of the empire national struggles erupted and were directed against Kerensky's dithering Provisional Government. Moreover, the phenomenal spread of soviets throughout the nationalities increasingly meant that autonomy became identified with soviet power.

Amongst the soldiers, sailors and workers the continuation of the war and the threat of famine increased mass hostility to Kerensky. The Baltic fleet was dominated by the Bolsheviks. Garrison after garrison followed them. The Soviets began to return ever more convincing Bolshevik majorities as the crisis deepened. This process of radicalisation was well underway by early September. Indeed when some Bolsheviks saw Lenin's On Compromises they were indignant that a rightist course was being proposed.

Slutsky, from the Petrograd Committee, argued on 7 September:

"As in the factories, so among the poverty stricken peasants we see movement leftwards... For us to consider compromises now is ludicrous. No compromises! ... Our task is to clarify our position and to prepare unconditionally for a military clash."

In fact Lenin himself was quickly moving towards the same conclusion. The crisis had matured. Delay would prove fatal. The Bolsheviks must launch the insurrection.

Lenin's views were communicated to the Central Committee (CC) in a number of letters and discussed on 15 September. Lenin argued that the forthcoming Democratic Conference to which the Bolsheviks were aiming to send a sizeable delegation, would not resolve the problem it was due to debate the question of the government. He expressed his belief that the Mensheviks and SRs would weight the conference in favour of the petit bourgeoisie. It would deceive the peasants and the workers. At the same time the authority of Bolshevism was increasing all of the time. He wrote:

"We have the advantage of certain victory, for the people are already near to exhaustion and after showing them the importance of our leadership in the Kornilov days, and then offering the bloc members a compromise and having it refused by them amidst vacillation on their part which has continued ever since, we are giving the whole people a sure way out."

That way out was a Bolshevik government which could only be installed by smashing the reformist leadership and the whole bourgeois state apparatus out of the way. All the efforts of the Bolsheviks should be directed towards the factories and barracks, not the Democratic Conference.

He argued that the Democratic Conference should be told that if it does not accept the Bolshevik programme in full then there will be an insurrection. And, anticipating opposition to this course of action from within Bolshevism Lenin opened the struggle with the vacillators by declaring that the waverers should be left 'in the waverers camp'.

Lenin's new course hit the CC like a bombshell.

Copies of the letters were destroyed for fear that they might get beyond the CC. Nobody, at that stage, favoured an immediate rising. The Bolshevik plans for the Democratic Conference had been framed along the lines of the On Compromises policy. The declaration to the conference called on the conciliators to break with the bourgeoisie and transfer power into the hands of the soviets. It addressed a series of demands to the conciliators but not, as Lenin had favoured, in the form of an ultimatum.

## Vote for coalition

The Democratic Conference, which opened on 14 September, was itself a factor in winning more Bolsheviks over to Lenin's insurrectionary views. He proved right as to its composition. Delegations were carefully weighted and on the day the Bolsheviks increasingly a majority in the soviets were in a tiny minority at the conference. There were 532 SRs (of whom 71 were Lefts), 530 Mensheviks (only 56 Internationalists amongst them) and 134 Bolsheviks. The urban working class areas were grossly underrepresented.

With such a composition the conference, not surprisingly, voted for yet another coalition between the Soviet parties and the Cadets who, only a few weeks before, had worked hand in glove with Kornilov. The conference went on to establish a council, a Pre Parliament, which was there merely to advise the Provisional Government.

This experience convinced Trotsky and Sverdlov that 'All power to the Soviets' could now only be achieved against the conciliators. It became for them a slogan for an uprising. By the middle of the conference they were moving visibly closer to Lenin's position. The dispute over the rising now took the form of a dispute over whether on not the Bolsheviks should boycott the Pre-Parliament. Trotsky favoured such a boycott and fought for it in the CC. He won 9-8 but the closeness of the vote prompted the CC to consult the Bolshevik delegation at the Democratic Conference. The delegation very much represented the regional and city committee men rather than the party rank and file. They tended to lean to the right. To Trotsky and Lenin's extreme annoyance they voted 77 50 in favour of participating in the Pre-Parliament. Lenin wrote:

"Trotsky was for the boycott. Bravo Comrade Trotsky! Boycottism was defeated in the Bolshevik group at the Democratic Conference. Long live the boycott. We cannot and must not under any circumstances reconcile ourselves to participation ... There is not the slightest doubt that there are noticeable vacillations at the top of our party that may become ruinous."

Nevertheless, the tide in the Bolshevik Party was turning in Lenin's favour. His letters had become known about in wider circles of the Party. Fresh forces representing the proletarian rank and file of the Party were elbowing their way into the debate supporting Lenin's line. His impatience even his threat to resign from the CC was slowly bearing fruit. The first victory came when the CC, on 5 October, finally decided to boycott the toothless Pre-Parliament. This act announced Bolshevism's conviction that the future of the revolution now lay exclusively in the struggle for soviet power. As Trotsky wrote:

"We left in order to say that only soviet power can raise up the slogan of peace and toss it over the heads of the international bourgeoisie to the proletariat of the entire world. Long live the direct and open struggle for revolutionary power in the country."

That walk out received the virtually unanimous endorsement of factory resolutions from throughout Russia.

It signalled that the proletariat had seen enough of their leaders' wheeling and dealing with Kerensky and the bourgeoisie. Now was the time for something completely different.

## A new dimension

On 10 October the CC met again to consider Lenin's views. This time he had donned his disguise (according to Kollontai he looked like a Lutheran minister) and attended despite the risk of arrest by Kerensky's police. Lenin's resolution added a new dimension to his view of the situation-a rising in Russia could spark a European wide revolt.

So important did Lenin regard news he had heard of disaffection in the German fleet that he began his resolution by noting 'The international situation as it affects the Russian Revolution'. This aspect of Lenin's strategy has been systematically downplayed by the Stalinists whose doctrine of 'socialism in one country' contradicts a vital element of Lenin's Marxism.

The meeting came to a vote on Lenin's resolution. It was clear that the line of divide was between settling the fate of the revolution by staging a rising in the immediate future or the postponement of the rising and the acceptance of the role of 'opposition' in a 'democratic' (i.e. capitalist) Russia. The resolution was clear:

"Recognising that an armed uprising is inevitable, and the time fully ripe, the Central Committee instructs all party organisations to be guided accordingly and to decide all practical questions from this standpoint."

The resolution was adopted 10 against 2. The two vacillators were close comrades of Lenin's, Zinoviev and Kamenev.

These two men opposed the rising from the day Lenin first argued for it to the fateful day itself. Kamenev in particular, was a consistent right winger in the party who had never really been reconciled to Lenin's April Theses.

As late as August Kamenev was still trying to build bridges to the Second International by speaking openly in favour of attendance at a proposed reformist peace conference at Stockholm. This was an open break with agreed Bolshevik policy which was against attendance. In the aftermath of Kornilov's attempted coup Kamanev leapt at Lenin's On Compromises and proceeded to give it an extremely right wing and constitutionalist interpretation. Thus when Lenin changed tack and argued for a rising the CC minutes record that Kamenev proposed:

"After considering Lenin's letters the CC rejects the practical proposals they contain, calls on all organisations to follow CC instructions alone and affirms once again that the CC regards any kind of demonstration in the streets as quite impermissible."

This proposal was rejected by the CC, which did not yet want to write off Lenin's proposals altogether.

## Lingering fears

Kamenev was playing on the fear, 'the convulsion of doubt' as Trotsky called it, that lingered in the party after the July defeat. In so doing he was able to enlist wider support than he had ever enjoyed prior to July. In particular he won over Zinoviev.

Zinoviev was wedded to the idea that, with the defeat of Kornilov, Lenin's perspective of peaceful development via 'All power to the Soviets' had become timeless. And, in the event - not at all certain - that the forthcoming second All-Russian Soviet Congress took place, then the influence of Bolshevism would grow and grow. Zinoviev's gradualism, centred more on life in the soviets than Kamenev's, expressed itself in an article he wrote on 27 September:

"In our view the all powerful authority over the Russian land is the Congress of Soviets opening on 20 October. By the time the Congress convenes, if it is able to meet at all, the experience with this new coalition [under Kerensky] will have failed and wavering elements will at long last associate themselves with our slogan, 'All power to the Soviets'. Each day will witness a growth in our force."

In this perspective key decisions are left to chance and to fate.

## Arguments against a rising

Zinoviev and Kamenev, with support from other prominent Bolsheviks like Nogin, Rykov and Riazanov, argued that Lenin's call for a rising was premature. The time was not ripe. The masses were supposedly not yet ready. In particular Kamenev harboured the belief that a coalition of soviet parties including the Bolsheviks (something Lenin vehemently opposed) might emerge from the Democratic Conference.

Thus, while Trotsky was hammering away at the need for soviet power in every address he made to that conference, Kamenev argued:

"The only possible course is for state power to be transferred to the democracy not to the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, but to that democracy which is well enough represented here. We must establish a new government and an institution to which that government must be responsible."

At a Presidium meeting he went on to assure the Mensheviks and SRs of Bolshevik support for a government that was a 'homogeneous democratic ministry'. He stated:

"We will not overthrow such a government. We will support it insofar as it pursues a purely democratic policy and leads the country to the constituent assembly."

'Support insofar as' was the rotten old formula he and Stalin used back in March and against which Lenin's April Theses were directed. It made its reappearance at the Democratic Conference. Even the debacle of the Democratic Conference and the Pre Parliament failed to budge Kamenev. He resisted a boycott right to the end.

The decisive clash with Lenin and Trotsky came a week after the historic 10 October meeting. A much larger CC was held on 16 October with representatives of various other committees also in attendance. It revealed that the vacillators represented a strong current in the party. Although Lenin's resolution for an insurrection was passed once again 19-2, a proposal from Zinoviev, to wait until the Second Congress of Soviets, was defeated 15 against 6. This resolution sharply counterposed to Lenin's given that it was not yet certain the Congress would be convened showed the extent of support for Zinoviev. Those forces were only for a rising in the abstract. Notables such as Kalinin spoke of the rising as a far off event. Nevertheless the die was cast.

Zinoviev and Kamenev, with support from other prominent Bolsheviks like Nogin, Rykov and Riazanov, argued that Lenin's call for a rising was premature.

Faced with this decision Zinoviev and Kamenev betrayed the party. They immediately circulated a letter against the decision to the members. More clearly than ever before it revealed the deeply opportunist kernel within their perspective. They asked if Russia was ripe for insurrection and replied "No, a thousand times no!!!". They pinned all their hopes on the 'excellent' chances that the Bolsheviks had of becoming the biggest opposition in the Constituent Assembly. And they argued as did the reformist Rudolf Hilferding some years later that soviet power and bourgeois democracy should be combined:

"The constituent assembly too can only rely on the soviets in its revolutionary work. The constituent assembly plus soviets here is that mixed type of state institution we are going towards."

In effect they wrote off the crisis that had engulfed Russia as something a yet to be convened constituent assembly could solve. As Trotsky later noted this perspective was based on 'fatalist optimism' which binds:

". . . the proletarian vanguard hand and foot, and by means of the 'democratic' state machinery turns it into an oppositionist shadow of the bourgeoisie bearing the name of Social-Democracy."

While their action in opposing the rising could be explained as a mistake and while their campaign to reverse the decision of 16 October in the party was a breach of democratic centralism, their next move was, as Lenin said, strike breaking. In an article in Gorky's non-party paper, Novaya Zhizn, Kamenev publicly declared his opposition to the CC decision for arising. He did so even though that decision had, obviously, not been published for security reasons. Kamenev was, in effect, giving Kerensky advance notice of the Bolshevik plan.

## Strike breakers

Lenin was resolute in carrying through the struggle against the vacillators, who had now turned into strike-breakers. Zinoviev had acceded to Kamenev performing this act of treachery and was branded as co-responsible by Lenin. In demanding their expulsion from the party, Lenin wrote:

"It is not easy for me to write this about people who were once close comrades but it would seem to me a crime to hesitate here,

for a party of revolutionaries which did not punish prominent strike breakers would perish."

There is a lesson for every revolutionist here. The party had set its course towards the insurrection. That decision had been democratically arrived at. Zinoviev and Kamenev had put their case and lost. They went on to betray the party. For Lenin, at this point, the struggle against vacillation could not be stopped half way. It could not be suspended because these men were friends and comrades. The good of the revolution, the will to victory demanded that they be expelled.

As it turned out they were not thrown out. Stalin even published an editorial note on the affair criticising Lenin's tone and solidarising with Zinoviev. But, with this action Zinoviev and Kamenev destroyed their chances of reversing the party's decision.

Following the affair Lenin pressed, ever more impatiently, for the attack to be launched. On the eve of October, interpreting every delay as a potential new vacillation, he declared of the CC:

"I don't understand them. What are they afraid of? ...just ask them if they have one hundred loyal soldiers or Red Guardsmen with rifles. I don't need anything else."

In fact he had won. Delays from late October were caused by technical rather than political difficulties. Thus, when he arrived without CC permission at the Smolny late on the evening of 24 October, matters were well in hand. Lenin had brought the decisive subjective factor, the revolutionary Bolshevik Party itself, into line with the tasks and potential of the objective situation.

# The October insurrection

It was Trotsky and Sverdlov who perfected the means of achieving the proletarian seizure of power that Lenin was urging on the Party. That means was to be an armed insurrection organised by the Petrograd Soviet's Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC) timed to coincide with, and therefore pass power to, the Second Congress of Soviets. The remorseless struggle of Lenin and the party rank and file was now set to bear fruit.

Lenin had favoured a rising led by the Northern Region Congress of Soviets in mid October. His impatience was leading him, if anything, to underestimate the task of preparing for the rising. His major allies against the vacillators were Trotsky, Sverdlov, Antonov Ovseenko, Bubnov and Sokolnikov but they stood against him on the question of when and how to stage the rising.

While Lenin had sensed the mood of the workers for a rising and acted on it, those comrades who were in more direct contact with every sector of the masses, grasped the conditions under which the masses would actually stage and support a rising.

Their plan from the outset was to deliver power into the hands of the Second All Russian Congress of Soviets, through a rising organised in defence of that Congress against the Provisional Government's attempt to crush it and with it the revolution. Their tactics from 16 October demonstrated the validity of their approach. By subverting the authority and military power of Kerensky from that date until the weekend of 21/22 October, they created the conditions of a certain victory on 24/25 October.

So clear was it that the masses wanted soviet power, and so successful were Sverdlov and Trotsky in their campaign to rally the soviets for the struggle for power, that Lenin was obliged to acknowledge the correctness of their line. The first shots in the campaign for the rising were fired during the garrison crisis which began on 9 October. Kerensky tried to move the bulk of the garrison out of Petrograd since it had largely gone over to the Bolsheviks.

The move, rightly suspected as a means of preparing a counter revolution, was greeted with outrage. A meeting of the Egersky Guards Regiment on 12 October resolved that:

It was Trotsky and Sverdlov who perfected the means of achieving the proletarian seizure of power that Lenin was urging on the Party

"The pulling out of the revolutionary garrison from Petrograd is needed only by the privileged bourgeoisie as a means of stifling the revolution."

The meeting went on to call for soviet power. The Bolsheviks utilised this crisis, over the next week, to establish the Soviet's own Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC). Its task was to defend the revolution. The MRC was staffed by Bolsheviks, Left SRs and anarchists. But as the crisis deepened it was obvious that the Bolsheviks, and in particular Trotsky, led it.

The relationship between the Bolsheviks' own Military Organisation and the MRC, was a vital factor in the success of the insurrection. Trotsky effectively won the argument that the MRC was the appropriate organ of insurrection at the Central Committee on 20 October. In relation to the Military Organisation it resolved.

"...all Bolshevik organisations can become part of the revolutionary centre organised by the Soviet."

Lenin was fearful of the rightist inclinations of the Party Military Organisation. It wanted to delay the rising for two weeks. He supported the view that the MRC should organise the insurrection and set out to convince Bolshevik military leaders Nevsky, Podvoisky and Antonov to accept it.

The Party did not liquidate itself into the MRC. A precondition for victory had been Bolshevism's conquest of leadership in the mass organisations of the revolutionary working class. Through Trotsky the Party led the MRC and through Sverdlov the organisations of the MRC and those of the Bolsheviks were intertwined.

## The 'Day of the Soviets'

Once the MRC was established and had consolidated its ties with the 25,000 Red Guards and at the garrison the Bolsheviks stepped up the action. On 22 October a mass 'Day of the Soviets' was staged in Petrograd. Huge meetings in every proletarian centre in the city rallied to the call for soviet power. In the People's House Trotsky urged the masses on to the last battle after a vote for soviet power:

'Let this vote of yours be your vow with all your strength and at any sacrifice to support the Soviet that has taken on itself the glorious burden of bringing the victory of the revolution to a conclusion and of giving, land, bread and peace!'

A frightened Sukhanov saw the reaction of the crowd to Trotsky: "The vast crowd was holding up its hands. It agreed. It vowed..."

On 21 October the MRC declared that no orders to the army were valid unless countersigned by the MRC. This was an act of mutiny that Kerensky, if he was to survive, could not tolerate. Indeed, when the MRC delivered this directive to the military chief in Petrograd he threatened to arrest their commissars. It was an empty threat. The garrison's units all trusted the MRC. Kerensky had only officers, cadets and the women's batallion under his command.

As the MRC launched this mutiny the Baltic sailors, under the leadership of Bolsheviks like Dybenko and Raskolnikov, were preparing to back the rising. On the pre-arranged signal of 'Send regulations', battleships laden with revolutionary sailors were to come to Petrograd. A participant recalls the scene when the order came through on 24 October:

"What did the Gulf of Finland around Krondstadt and Petrograd look like then? This is conveyed well in a song that was popular at the time:
"From the isle of Kronstadt
Toward the River Neva broad
There are many boats a sailing
They have Bolsheviks aboard'."'

Kerensky was well aware that a rising was imminent. Knowing that the Soviet Congress would sound the death knell of his regime he attempted to move into action. On 24 October he ordered the arrest of the MRC and of recently released Bolsheviks and the closure of the Bolshevik press. His few loyal troops (the junkers) were ordered to raise the bridges that separated the government buildings from the workers' districts.

With calm resolution Trotsky ordered the MRC into action. The Bolshevik print shop was re opened by troops and Red Guards. Smolny, the headquarters of the Soviet and MRC, was turned into an armed camp.

Two figures symbolise the fate of the revolution at that critical point. Kerensky, full of bombast, posing incessantly, pleaded for support from yesterday's bourgeois institutions the Pre Parliament and the officers 'in charge' of Petrograd. Lenin, still on the run, made his way to the Smolny discussing events with a conductress on a streetcar. A few hours later Lenin was addressing the Congress of Soviets, the new power in the land. Kerensky was on the run.

## The insurrection underway

Beside himself with impatience Lenin had arrived at the Smolny to discover that the insurrection was underway at last. Victory seemed more and more certain as the morning of the 25th wore on. Stations were swiftly occupied. The mere shining of the cruiser Aurora's arc lights across the Nikolaevsky Bridge put its cadet guards to flight. Two hundred workers and sailors immediately secured it. The telephone exchange, state bank and all the key junctions were taken by the forces of the MRC. By 10.00am on 25 October the MRC declared:

"The Provisional Government has been overthrown State power has passed into the hands of the organ of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, the Military Revolutionary Committee which stands at the head of the Petrograd proletariat and garrison."

In fact the government was cowering in the Winter Palace. The remainder of the day was like a tense waiting game. More and more insurgents gathered at the Palace. The Congress of Soviets prepared to open. One last push was necessary. The Winter Palace had to be stormed. Kerensky himself slipped away in search of support outside Petrograd. The palace was defended by the Women's Batallion and a few ad ho units of counter revolutionary junkers.

Kerensky was well aware that a rising was imminent. Knowing that the Soviet Congress would sound the death knell of his regime he attempted to move into action.

After a series of delays including comical ones such as the forgetting to bring along the red lantern which had been agreed on as the signal for the attack the Palace was taken with virtually no bloodshed.

A force of Red Guards and sailors stormed the Palace after the Aurora fired her blank shells. The cadets and junkers gave up without a fight. Revolutionary discipline prevented any looting and a bourgeois reporter was compelled to admit that no members of the women's batallion suffered physical or sexual abuse at the hands of the insurgents.

With the Winter Palace secure the rising was complete in Petrograd. Victory in the whole of Russia followed.

That it did so was due to the steadfastness of the Bolsheviks and the decision of the Second Soviet Congress to accept the transfer of power into its hands. It did so in recognition of the fact that the MRC has acted to save the revolution. Its vote was a vindication of Trotsky and Sverdlov's tactics and of Lenin's guiding strategy.

## The imposters leave

The last of the compromisers, the Menshevik Internationalist leader Martov, declared the rising to be a Bolshevik coup against the soviets. The workers, soldiers and peasants answered him with catcalls and hoots of derision as he walked out of the Soviet.

Rebutting their claims that the Bolsheviks had usurped power a young soldier jumped to the platform and stated;

"I tell you now, the Lettish soldiers have many times said 'No More Resolutions! No More talk! We want deeds.' The power must be in our hands! Let these impostor delegates leave this Congress! The Army is not with them."

With that hundreds of working people began to sense the power they held and the correctness of the Bolshevik proposals.

The seizure of power by the MRC was no coup d'etat. The absence of major 'disorders', damage to public buildings and so on was not because the rising lacked a mass character, as ignorant bourgeois reporters suggested. Rather it was because the insurrection was a well planned and highly disciplined action carried through by an apparatus that had mass support. The initial absence of bloodshed and 'disorder' in Petrograd was a reflection of the weakness of the bourgeoisie. However, it would be entirely wrong to conclude from the events of the 24th and 25th in Petrograd that the insurrection was peaceful.

Immediately after the rising the counter revolution mobilised. With a force of battle hardened Cossacks under the leadership of generals Krasnov and Dukhonin Kerensky ordered a 'March on Petrograd' on 27 October.

He followed this force on a white horse as it stormed Gatchina, 27 miles away from the centre of Petrograd. Meanwhile the cadets captured at the Winter Palace were all released by the Bolsheviks. The revolution was generous and trusting to a fault. It learnt of the bloodthirsty perfidy of the bourgeoisie in battle. The cadets immediately seized the telephone exchange in Petrograd and arrested the bolshevik Antonov-Ovseenko. Bitter fighting began in the city. Some 200 people were wounded or killed.

A 'Committee for the Salvation of the Country and the Revolution' was established. At a public meeting it held in Petrograd one of its speakers called for the crushing of the Bolsheviks and the Soviet Government 'without mercy'. The very same people who were spouting about 'democracy' for all they were worth were fantasizing about the violence they could inflict on the working class, its party and its government. Significantly it was not only the open parties of the bourgeoisie who joined the counter revolutionary conspiracy. The Mensheviks and SRs, confirming Lenin's assessment of them in July as counter-revolutionary parties, joined in the attempts to physically destroy the soviets that they no longer led.

> Above all else, the October events proved beyond doubt the viability of proletarian power. They showed the truth of the maxim that no ruling class ever gives up without a fight

Any doubt about the mass support enjoyed by the new regime was dispelled as Krasnov and Dukhonin advanced. On 28 October a state of emergency was declared in Petrograd. Thousands upon thousands of workers, soldiers and sailors rallied to the defence of the city. They erected an impassable barrier to the advancing Cossacks. Then, having caused the White Guards to halt their advance the Red forces struck. At Pulkovo Heights on 30 October workers and Red artillery men hammered the forces of the counter-revolution. Two days later a truce was signed. Kerensky disappeared into oblivion. Petrograd was secure. And yet again the revolution trustingly released its enemies. General Krasnov was set free. He immediately headed south to rally forces for the civil war the bourgeoisie now knew it had to launch.

## The Moscow rising

In Moscow the rising itself was a bloody affair. The Soviet voted overwhelmingly in support of the Petrograd MRC's actions. Immediately the bourgeois parties and the Mensheviks and SRs established a 'Committee of Public Safety' with 10,000 troops at its disposal. This force proved more effective than the Petrograd counter revolutionary Junkers had. It trapped the Red forces in the Kremlin.

After being assured that there would be no reprisals the pro Soviet forces reluctantly surrendered. They learnt a bitter lesson. Despite having had the 'word of a gentleman' that they would not be harmed, the bourgeois officers immediately led their gangs into action. Red Guards coming out of the Kremlin were set upon and beaten to death. All over the city Bolsheviks were being rounded up and shot. These were the actions of the forces of 'democracy'. What a contrast they were to the actions of the proletarian democrats. For when reinforcements came from Petrograd the Red forces in Moscow were able to turn the tide. The White Guards were forced out of every quarter of the city and themselves surrounded in the Kremlin. Red gunners pounded them relentlessly. Eventually they surrendered. The Bolsheviks assured them there would be no reprisals. Unlike a few days before when the Junkers made the same offer only to ignore it and indulge in an orgy of violence, when the Whites filed out of the Kremlin not one of them was set upon.

The capitalists and their wretched reformist apologists frequently blether on about the horrific violence preached by revolutionaries, and the peace loving democratic methods they themselves use. Let them consider the Moscow events. Military violence played its role in the service of the revolution. We revolutionaries recognise the importance of that role. But bloodlust, mindless, spiteful acts of brutality were the preserve of the bosses and their military and political defenders.

The repeated outbreaks of such violence by the forces of the counter revolution as 1918 wore on taught the Bolsheviks the necessity for a Red Terror, for the suppression of those who were determined at all costs to destroy the workers' state. But the Red Terror was a means of ensuring that the peasants kept their land, the workers their control of production, the soldiers their democratic rights. The White Terror had only one objective. To restore the rule of the few over the many in the name of profit and greed.

# Soviets or Parliament?

In nine months of struggle with the bourgeoisie and its agents within the workers' movement the Bolsheviks had won the majority in the soviets to support and carry through the seizure of power. In late October and throughout November, in city after city, in towns and in villages, all over the country the soviets took power into their own hands. But the fate of this power would depend in the short run on whether it could make headway on the very issues that had won the Bolsheviks the confidence of the masses: Bread, Peace and Land.

But the fate of this [soviet] power would depend in the short run on whether it could make headway on the very issues that had won the Bolsheviks the confidence of the masses: Bread, Peace and Land

On 26 October the decrees on peace and on the land were issued. The former called for 'immediate negotiations for a just, democratic peace'. It called for the renunciation of all annexations and of demands for indemnities. It renounced secret diplomacy and announced the impending publication of the Tsarist regime's secret treaties and war agreements to divide up the Ottoman Empire and to establish 'protectorates' over Poland and other central European countries. On the land question the soviet decree announced 'landlord ownership of land is abolished forthwith without any compensation'. The landed estates of the nobility, the Tsar and the church with all their livestock, implements and buildings were transferred to the township land committees and the peasant soviets pending the 'convocation of the Constituent Assembly.'

On 2 November a further decree - a Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia announced the right of the peoples of Russia to free self-determination, even to the point of separation and the formation of an independent state and the abolition of any and all national and national religious principles and disabilities. The linguistic and religious oppression of the erstwhile 'prison house of nationalities' was lifted by the Soviet government's decrees. On 14 November a momentous decree on workers' control was issued. Workers' control of production and exchange was recognised through the means of the factory and shop committees. Every large city, province or industrial area was to organise a soviet of Workers' Control. Commercial secrecy was abolished and managements were obliged to 'open all their books and records to the organs of workers' control'.

## Internationalism

In all the declarations of the first Soviet government Lenin made it clear that the task of the new regime was to link up with victorious proletarian revolutions across Europe. Ten days after the seizure of power he stated:

"We shall march firmly and unswervingly to the victory of socialism which will be sealed by the leading workers of the most civilised countries and give to the peoples solid peace and deliverance from all oppression and all exploitation."

This reliance on and commitment to the international proletarian revolution was an absolute bedrock of Lenin's, Trotsky's and the Bolshevik's strategy in October. However, the divisions which had marked the history of the party between February and October did not disappear after 25 October. The right wing of the party of Kamenev, Rykov, Lunacharsky, Zinoviev and many others, still bitterly opposed Lenin's strategy.

They kept up their insistence that a 'socialist coalition' be formed to include the Mensheviks and SRs. They maintained that the present government was merely provisional until the Constituent Assembly was summoned. Above all they opposed Lenin's repeated references to the socialist nature of the government and to the socialist nature of the tasks that lay ahead of it.

The question of the summoning and election of the Constituent Assembly was to prove the last and most decisive battle over the

*nature of the power established in the October Revolution. If the revolution was merely the fulfillment of a bourgeois-democratic revolution then the Constituent Assembly's sovereignty could not be in question. Alter all, the right-wing argued, had not the Bolsheviks throughout 1917 demanded its speedy convocation? Did not this tie them to accepting its decisions as final?*

One of the last acts of the Provisional Government, terrified by the impending Bolshevik uprising, had been to fix the date of the elections to the Constituent Assembly for 12 November. This sudden about face after nine months of delay is instructive. Whilst the bourgeoisie and its 'democratic' hangers on had hoped to hold onto power and indeed disarm the revolutionary workers and soldiers, there had been no question of democratic elections to an all-Russian assembly. Here the awkward questions of the land, the continuing imperialist war and the very nature of the constitutional order would have to be faced.

## Constituent Assembly

The Russian bourgeoisie, tied inextricably to the landowners, had no wish to see their land seized. At best constitutional-monarchist, it had no wish for a democratic republic. Desperate to strike the jackpot of annexations and reparations when the Allied western powers finally crushed Austria, Germany and Turkey, they loathed the thought either of a general peace or a separate one which would 'rob' them of their plunder. For all these reasons they and their politicians postponed and delayed for all they were worth. This, and the fact that the demand had been the pinnacle of the party's democratic demands since the second congress of the RSDLP - the Bolsheviks demanded the immediate convocation of a Constituent Assembly. To this slogan they linked their demands for an immediate peace and for the expropriation of the big landowners. They also demanded democratic rights in the villages and a freely available press - especially the working class press. This was vital because if the peasants were deceived and coerced the Assembly would be a tool in the hands of the bourgeoisie.

Thus after the seizure of power-whilst Lenin himself had serious misgivings the Council of People's Commissars allowed the Electoral Commission to go ahead with the elections. There would of course be serious problems with the elections. The electoral registers were out of date and discriminated against the illiterate rural poor. The backwardness and isolation of hundreds of thousands of Russia's villages meant that the events in the cities were less well known there. For example, the split during the Autumn between the pro-bourgeois right-wing Socialist Revolutionaries and the Left SRs was hardly known about. Local dignitaries of the old party were returned and turned out to be fierce reactionaries. The effects of the decrees on peace and land had no time to be felt. The returning troops had only just begun to make the Bolshevik's programme known in the remote areas of the countryside.

Lenin sensed that elections in these conditions would not favour a pro-Soviet power majority. He was keen to amend the electoral law to give the vote to the young by lowering the voting age to 18 years, to legalise the recall of candidates and delegates and to bar the open counter-revolutionaries like the Cadet Party from standing or voting. Above all he wanted to postpone the elections till the effects of the October decrees could be felt. But the overwhelming majority of the leadership in the Party felt that the elections could not now be delayed. Lenin considered this an error but vowed "this error shall not cost us the revolution."

*Lenin began a relentless struggle against 'parliamentary illusions', against any attempt to fetishise the Constituent Assembly and against any tendency to elevate the sovereignty of the Assembly above that of the soviets.*

One of the last acts of the Provisional Government, terrified by the impending Bolshevik uprising, had been to fix the date of the elections to the Constituent Assembly

What Lenin was arguing can be seen most clearly in his *Theses on the Constituent Assembly* written on 11/12 December and published in Pravda at the end of the month. He shows that the Constituent Assembly was long a part of the Russian Marxist's programme, 'because in a bourgeois republic the Constituent Assembly represents the highest form of democracy'. But whilst continuing to call for its convocation against Kerensky and company's various rigged pre-parliaments and councils the Bolsheviks had, since the Spring, 'repeatedly emphasised that a Republic of Soviets is a higher form of democracy than the usual bourgeois republic with a constituent assembly.' Not only that but since October the Russian proletariat had set itself a new task. Lenin emphasises this:

'For the transition from the bourgeois to the socialist system, for the dictatorship of the proletariat, the Republic of Soviets is not only a higher type of democratic institution but is the only form capable of securing the most painless transition to socialism.'

Compared with this the Constituent Assembly is infinitely less democratic in the sense of being less responsive to the wishes of the workers, the poorer peasants and the rank and file soldiers. Lenin concluded that the change of class forces meant that now the slogan 'All power to the Constituent Assembly' - 'which disregards soviet power' - has changed its nature and 'is becoming the slogan of the Cadets.'

He concluded that if the Constituent Assembly parted ways with Soviet power it would inevitably be doomed to political extinction.

## Anti-Soviet majority

By the end of November the elections were over, though it took a month to collect all the results in. On 30 December the official announcement confirmed Lenin's forebodings. Of the 707 deputies elected, 175 were Bolsheviks, 410 SRs, 17 Cadets and 16 Mensheviks.

The national minorities were represented by 86 deputies. Of the SRs only 40 belonged to the Left. It was clear that the Assembly would have a large majority against soviet power. This majority represented the revolution's pre-October past and not its present or its socialist future. What were the Bolsheviks to do faced

with this manifestation of the counter-revolution?

The right-wing Socialist Revolutionaries saw the Assembly as the means of ousting the Bolshevik 'usurpers'. They legally and openly set up a committee for the defence of the Constituent Assembly. Their party's military organisation had the support of two regiments in the Petrograd garrison plus an armoured car division.

They were prepared for an armed assault on Smolny. But so obsessed with parliamentary legalism were their leaders, Chernov and others of his ilk, that they actually did very little to co-ordinate and mobilise this force. Their constant theme was 'the Bolsheviks will not dare'. Lenin and the Bolsheviks however were preparing.

'The Constituent Assembly is dissolved. The Soviet revolutionary republic will triumph no matter what the cost.'
- Lenin, 6 January 1918

The most that the Menshevik and SR leaders would do was to organise a demonstration on 5 January. It was made up mainly of petit-bourgeois elements and a few rifle shots from over-enthusiastic sailors scattered them like sheep.

Politically the Bolsheviks had prepared for the Assembly by issuing a *Declaration of the Rights of the Toiling and Exploited People*. This pointedly declared Russia to be a Republic of Soviets and maintained that all power belonged to the Soviets. It repeated all the key proposals of the Soviet government and clearly subordinated the Constituent Assembly to the Soviet power. The Bolsheviks thus presented the assembly of parliamentarians with an ultimatum: recognise the measures and authority of the October Revolution or get out!

And they were right to do so, for the soviets were not merely more representative of the masses, by virtue of the directness of their elections, they were also made up of accountable delegates. Compared with this the 'democracy' of the Constituent Assembly was indirect and not at all based on the principles of accountability and recallability. Most important it was, like all parliamentary forms of democracy, bourgeois in its class content Soviet democracy, on the other hand, was the democracy of the toiling masses.

Sverdlov for the Bolsheviks mounted the rostrum at the opening session and demanded that the Assembly pass the Declaration, endorsed as it was by the All-Russian Soviet Executive. The Assembly noisily dissented and insisted on elections for the chair. The Bolsheviks and Left SRs proposed Maria Spriridonova - the leader of the latter party.

The majority proposed Chernov who was easily elected by 244 votes to 153. Then the speech making began. It went on until four in the morning.

The bourgeois windbags were fearful that if the sitting were abandoned the Bolsheviks would no allow it to reassemble. Chernov was still in full flow reading the draft agrarian law when an anarchist sailor, in charge of the guard, leapt onto the platform and announced to Chernov, 'The guards are tired, please leave the hall!' To make the point more forcefully the lights in the Tauride Palace were unceremoniously switched off.

## Incompatible

So ended the Constituent Assembly. The Central Executive Committee of the Soviets declared that since it would not recognise the Soviet Congress' decrees or indeed the power of the Soviets, it was dissolved forthwith.

Its decree drew a vital lesson from the whole experience of the Russian Revolution:

"The toiling masses have become convinced by their experience that bourgeois parliamentarism is outdated; that it is completely incompatible with the construction of socialism; for only class institutions, not national institutions, can break the resistance of the propertied classes and lay the foundations for the socialist society"

The anarchist Victor Serge was later to comment: 'The dissolution of the Constituent Assembly made a great sensation abroad. In Russia, it passed almost unnoticed.'

It passed unnoticed because the issue of the day was peace. Attention shifted to Brest-Litovsk where the Soviet delegates led by Trotsky were opening negotiations with the Germans. Attention shifted to the armed forces of counter-revolution massing in the most backward regions of the country. Civil war was about to begin. In this civil war the Constituent Assembly and its professional parliamentary cretins counted for less than nothing. The Whites were out to restore the land to landowners and the factories to the capitalists. They would do this under the banner not of 'pure democracy' but of Black Hundred Tsarism or a military dictatorship.

The task now facing Russia's workers was to defend their own dictatorship against counter-revolution. Lenin expressed the Bolshevik's determination when he addressed the Central Executive Committee on 6 January:

"The Constituent Assembly is dissolved. The Soviet revolutionary republic will triumph no matter what the cost."

# Conclusion: party, programme and class

No one would deny the Russian Revolution changed human history. But did the chapter it opened close with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991? Even if Lenin was right and the imperialist epoch was one of wars and revolutions, has a new period of capitalist stability - popularly termed globalisation - superceded it? In short, is the idea of working class power and socialist revolution, simply not of our time?

We are unashamedly partisan in our answer. Capital may have near unprecedented freedom to exploit globalised market places, and governments, pursuing the doctrine of neoliberalism, are more than ever responsive to its needs - but these very policies have intensified the class struggle. Workers and poor fight to defend their rights and interests against the bosses' offensive, which, at the same time, has increased the rivalry between the capitalist powers.

Nevertheless, it remains remarkable that just seven years after capitalism was restored in Russia and China, young protesters on the streets of Seattle, besieging the World Trade Organisation, once again named capitalism as the enemy. Since then the great struggles that have emerged on each continent, have been transmitted on to the international arena through the activity of the movement with many names - global justice, anticapitalist, altermondialist, et al.

In the forums of this movement, where tens of thousands have gathered, the question of how to radically change the world system is once again the subject of discussion. The debate has included; must the movement become a party and fight for power? Can the existing system be reformed out of existence, or do we need a revolution? Does the working class remain the key, leading force in radical change, or has it given way to the more diffuse, heterogeneous, social movements or multitude? How can we go from the defensive, to the offensive? How does the struggle for democracy, relate to the socialist struggle? What is the role of popular assemblies in the struggle for revolutionary change?

It is in these questions that the experience of the Russian Revolution has a unique and enduring contribution to make, which may be summarised as: party, programme and class. Up until 1917, it was Trotsky's great error (corrected in his article *From Words to Deeds*) that he failed to appreciate the centrality of building an independent, proletarian party, as the Bolsheviks were in 1917. As a mass cadre party, built up in the great struggles of the early 20th century, the Bolsheviks were uniquely placed to give the Russian masses the revolutionary leadership they needed in 1917. As we also show in *The Road to Red October*, the caricature of the Bolsheviks as being highly homogenous and undemocratic is just that, a caricature. Throughout 1917, in April, in July, in October, they had a hard hitting internal (and democratic) political struggle over what their strategy and tactics should be.

Just seven years after capitalism was restored in Russia, young protesters on the streets of Seattle, besieging the World Trade Organisation, once again named capitalism as the enemy

The uneven and combined development of Russian capitalism - which created a proletariat working in huge modern factories in a country still dominated by a semi-feudal agriculture with an autocracy - plus the systematic intervention of the Russian Social Democracy, by the early 20th century had turned the workers into a revolutionary class. It created the paradox of the formation of soviets - the most advanced form of democracy the world had ever seen - in a state in other ways much more backward than the rest of Europe. When the soviets reformed after the February Revolution, they created a situation of dual power, which was intrinsically unstable. Despite being led by pro-government forces, the very existence of the soviets, created another pole of power that challenged the right of the provisional government to rule. And, ultimately, laid the basis for a proletarian state to replace the old order.

But how was the workers state to be won? As the history of 1917 shows, it was a struggle between revolution and counter-revolution, which proved the maxim no ruling class would ever give up their power peacefully. This fact is further reinforced by the terrible two years of civil war that followed the Revolution, as the bourgeois white army sought to dislodge the revolutionary government. Too often in the 20th century, great workers parties and struggles have been put down by force of arms. In the days of shock and awe, regime change and the war on terror only the most hopelessly naïve would surely believe the ruling class will be overthrown peacefully.

Above all else, the October events proved beyond doubt the viability of proletarian power. Against today's Kerenskys - the Browns, Merkels and Sarkozy's of this world - we assert the absolute right and necessity of all the exploited in Britain and worldwide, to heed the example of the Russian workers. Do not try to tinker with the bosses' system. Do away with it. And in so doing we will open up new horizons for humankind.

As John Reed, a chronicler of the revolution, noted after a huge demonstration of Russian workers in Moscow in the days following victory: "Slowly from the Red Square ebbed the proletarian tide I suddenly realised that the devout Russian people no longer needed priests to pray them into heaven. On earth they were building a kingdom more bright than any heaven had to offer and for which it was a glory to die..."

Ninety years on that kingdom has yet to be built. But October 1917 has, more than any other event in history, placed it within our grasp. We must learn its heroic lessons, and act on them.

Appendix A

# From Words to Deeds

## Trotsky and the Bolshevik Party

Below appears the English translation of Trotsky's article 'From words to deeds' first published in the Workers Power theoretical journal Permanent Revolution 6. Seventy years after its appearance in the paper Vpered (Forward) on 28 June 1917 it remains a key document in the history of Trotsky's convergence with Lenin's party. Vpered was the paper of the Inter-District Organisation of United Social Democrats, the so-called Mezhraiontsy. This had been founded in 1913 by Yurenev and other members of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) who rejected the discipline of both Bolshevik and Menshevik wings of the Party. As Yurenev wrote later:

'In particular we refused to recognise the Bolshevik conference of 1912 as a conference of the entire RSDLP.'

Their initial project was to unify the Bolsheviks and the Left Mensheviks in a party of 'United Internationalists'. This project corresponded in many ways with that of Trotsky between 1907 and 1916. From the moment of the 1903 split Trotsky had taken up a position on the extreme left of Menshevism, hoping that the objective pressure of revolutionary events would propel Menshevism in a revolutionary direction (as it had briefly done during 1905). After 1914 Trotsky's 'Menshevik conciliationism' was extended to the international arena, placing him in an intermediate and conciliatory position between the social-pacifist 'centre' and the revolutionary defeatist left at the Zimmerwald anti-war conference of 1915.

But the war and the Russian revolutionary upsurge revealed ever more clearly in practice Menshevism's inability to evolve in a revolutionary direction. By May 1917, on Trotsky's return to Russia, the Mensheviks had entered the coalition government alongside the capitalist and petit bourgeois parties, immediately devoting their energies to whipping up the workers' flagging support for the capitalist war effort.

On his return Trotsky immediately joined the Mezhraiontsy. In 1914 they had numbered 350. In early 1917 they started off with only 150 members. Now, although individual Left Mensheviks and some ex-Bolsheviks joined - they included Lunacharsky, Joffe, Uritsky, Riazanov and Volodarsky - the Mezhraiontsy did not experience the spectacular growth of the Bolshevik Party. In April 1917, whilst Stalin and Kamenev had led the Bolsheviks in support for the bourgeois Provisional Government and the war, the Mezhraiontsy had argued for a new insurrection and for soviet power. By the time Trotsky arrived in Petrograd, however, Lenin had completed the fight against the 'old Bolshevik' line of Kamenev and Stalin elaborating the slogan 'All power to the Soviets' in his famous April Theses. There was now no political difference between the Mezhraiontsy and the Bolsheviks. As Deutscher writes:

'At public meetings the Mezhraiontsy's agitators were insistently asked in what they differed from the Bolsheviks and why they did not join hands with them. To this question they had in truth no satisfactory answer.'

On 10 May Lenin, Kamenev and Zinoviev met Trotsky and the leaders of the Mezhraiontsy proposing immediate fusion with positions on the Bolshevik leading bodies and the editorial board of Pravda. Commenting that since the April Theses, he was in complete political agreement with Lenin, Trotsky however, prevaricated. But throughout May and Juneobserved that what he labelled the Bolshevik's sectarianism ('clannishness') was being eroded by the mass influx of revolutionary workers into the Party.

By the time of this article we see Trotsky preparing to fuse with the Bolsheviks and fighting against Yurenev's conciliationism. This process was foreshortened by the period of reaction that followed the July Days. Lenin fled into hiding, whilst Trotsky was imprisoned. It was during this period that Trotsky 'joined' the Bolsheviks, consenting, from his cell, to being elected to the Central Committee in August.

On 1 November 1917 Lenin remarked, during a Central Committee meeting of the Bolshevik Party, that since Trotsky had broken with his attempts to conciliate with Menshevism'... there has been no better Bolshevik'. This article represents the clearest moment of that break. Its title, From Words to Deeds, was not just an exhortation to the reluctant Mezhraiontsy. It was a symbol of Trotsky's own transformation from Left Menshevik publicist and orator to leader of a revolutionary combat party.

It is already one and a half months since the conference of the Petrograd Inter-District organisation but the issue of the unification of the internationalists has not advanced one step further. More than that: whoever was present at the conference and witnessed the prevailing mood there would say that we were closer to unity then than we are now. Then, in every sense, it appeared to be a practical task. Now it is too often turned into a pious phrase that doesn't bind us to any practical conclusions.

It was established at the conference that we do not have principled differences with the Bolsheviks. We have arrived at one and the same conclusions on all the fundamental questions posed by the war, the revolution and the international. But, a separate organisational existence can be justified only be deep programmatic or practical difference; in the absence of such differences the conclusion necessarily follows: *full organisational merger.* [emphasis in original]

True, at the conferences difficulties were pointed to flowing from the habits and methods of Bolshevik clannishness. Of course, it is impossible to deny these difficulties that not infrequently even now appear in a highly unattractive form in the organisational pol-

icy of the Central Committee and in the pages of Pravda. But at the same time, at the conference, comrade Lunacharsky showed absolutely correctly that in the conditions of the open existence of a mass workers' party this clannishness is meeting powerful counter-pressures. In any event, given the lack of principled differences, it is impossible to fight against clannish methods except through opposing them within the bounds of a common organisation-that is by more democratic methods of conducting party work. To artificially preserve a separate organisation for the purpose of a struggle against clannishness would be to create the conditions for our own clannishness on a smaller scale. Without a doubt the Inter-District Organisation faces this danger.

In Vpered No3 comrade Yurenev saw one of the benefits of delaying steps towards unification by referring to the Menshevik-Internationalists. 'Unity', he writes, 'for us is unacceptable in the form of a separate organisational merger with the comrade Bolsheviks. Despite the fact that we coincide with them on the central questions posed by the revolution, it would be mistaken not to exhaust all possibilities for the establishment of one single revolutionary social democracy, by merging immediately. On a Petersburg scale this would be a plus, on an all-Russian scale it would be a minus. We see the way out not in such a merger but in the joint preparation of a general all-Russian conference of internationalists.'

It is fundamentally wrong to pose the issue this way. The question is not of a separate merger with the Bolsheviks but precisely of unification with the Bolsheviks. This type of unification is already prepared by preceding developments. The principled basis for it is formulated in our resolutions. All our work in Petrograd is conducted in the form of separate cooperation with the Bolsheviks. The problem now is whether the organisational separation is distorting and disrupting this common political work. Comrade Yurenev himself recognises that for Petrograd such a unification would be a plus. He thinks, however, that it would be a minus for the provinces.

The Inter-District Organisation is above all a Petrograd organisation. Consequently without a doubt the unification of internationalist forces would be the biggest gain for the Petrograd movement. This can in no way be compared with any damage such a Petrograd unification would bring to the provinces. A plus for Petrograd in present conditions, when 'Petrograd' is experiencing furious persecution by all counter-revolutionary elements, cannot but have a decisive character for us. How could this present a danger to the provinces? It is the view of Comrade Yurenev that it would obviously do so. The provinces lag behind Petrograd. The political groups there are still mainly shapeless. Perhaps the provincial internationalists who want to break with the defencists cannot choose to side with the Bolsheviks but would rather side with united internationalists.

Such reawakening would have been more or less convincing were we a simple block of 'internationalists' siding neither with the Bolsheviks nor the Mensheviks. But this is not the case. We rallied round a definite platform which does not differ from the Bolsheviks. In such conditions the maintenance of our organisation separate from the Bolsheviks is capable only of setting back and confusing the provinces. This can never be counted as a plus. Generally it would have been naive to think, when all issues are posed so sharply, that political groups in the working class or its socialist vanguard can be based on secondary features of an inner party character.

'But the party of a social democratic internationalists', says comrade Yurenev, 'cannot conceive of itself as a sect organised complete without any Mensheviks. And even if the Menshevik Internationalists differ from us on the question of the organisation of power-there is the possibility of common work with them, and the possibility and necessity of unity.'

That the party should not be a sect is absolutely correct. But unfortunately this general idea does not answer the questions facing us. If someone had proposed a vote on unity with the Bolsheviks and the Menshevik Internationalists or only with the Bolsheviks and we should have chosen the latter option then we could talk of sectarianism. But in reality none of us proposed such a vote. The Menshevik Internationalists have nowhere indicated their preparedness for unity with us. On the contrary, they particularly distinguish themselves from the position held in common between us and the Bolsheviks on the fundamental question facing the revolution - the seizure of power. Not only do they not break with their defencists in order to fuse with us and the Bolsheviks, on the contrary, they emphasise in every way that which separated them from us. They restrict their tactics within the terms of the Menshevik defencist organisation, allowing themselves no independent political action.

If we, in our turn, were to base our work for unification on the evolution of relations between the Menshevik fractions this would mean turning our back on unified elements already of one mind, in the name of preferred elements who display no willingness to fuse with us. Any time the supporters of comrade Martov could have seen their way to unite with us and the Bolsheviks - and we would have welcomed this - both for us and the Mensheviks it would have made no difference whether we were separate from the Bolsheviks or in an united organisation, united on the basis of a platform of revolutionary activity. More important for us is the matter of the comparatively wide layers of workers who still look to the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries. We can presume that these more backward masses will be pushed to the side of revolutionary socialism through the logic of their position and putting the government's policies to the test - first of all the test of the offensive!

Each day the most oppressed layer of the peasantry and petit bourgeoisie will, starting in the army, put to the test their disappointment with the policies of the coalition government and seek a revolutionary outcome. These masses need clear, straight forward and simple political groups. The camp of petit bourgeois defencism must be answered by a united camp of revolutionary socialism. For the provinces - if we are talking of the provincial masses and not the provincial circles - the separate existence of the united internationalists and the Bolsheviks is not a plus but a minus.

On the question of unity it is time to pass from words to deeds. Along with the joint preparation of a general congress of internationalists it is now already necessary to secure the organisational unity of spoken and printed agitation and a fundamental unity of political action.

Comrade Yurenev says that unity must be created, not from above, but from below. This is correct when it is necessary to use pressure from below to speed unity at the top. I think that for the Petrograd workers, Bolshevik and Inter-District, now is the time to energetically come together.

Appendix B

# Introduction to the first edition

Seventy years ago the Russian workers overthrew first the hated Tsar and then the bourgeois government that replaced him. In doing so they changed the face of human history. For the first time state power was taken directly into the hands of working men and women.

The Russian workers showed the world the revolutionary power of the organised working class. Not only could it bring to a complete halt the wheels of industry and paralyse the workings of government, it was also an inherently socialist class. Its every act of resistance was expressed in strengthening the bonds of solidarity and collective organisation in its ranks.

The agent of socialism was and remains the working class itself. It was the workers, organised to emancipate themselves, who could smash the power of capital and forge an alternative. The 1917 revolution exposed the uselessness of those who had hoped that bourgeois parliaments or paternalistic municipal schemes would do that job. And it exposed the treachery of those leaders inside the workers' movement who refused to heed that lesson.

The Russian workers rose in conditions of extreme squalor, exploitation and oppression. The reformist socialist intelligentsia sneered at the dark rebelliousness of these 'benighted masses'. Yet out of these struggles a new world was being born. There was a new democracy, no longer beholden to the capitalists who had controlled the nation's wealth and its levers of power.

## Revolutionary Class

Through the soviets the workers directly elected and controlled their workplace delegates and ensured their every change of mood was registered. In these soviets, together with the armed militia, the workers' Red Guard, the embryo of a state of a completely new sort was emerging. It was to be a state that was based on the organ of the exploited and oppressed, directly responsible to them within the terms of proletarian democracy. The task of that state was to eliminate all exploitation and oppression.

As the crisis of autumn 1917 deepened the privileged took flight and the intelligentsia cowered. But the working class rallied to its revolutionary banner the millions who suffered the yoke of oppression in the Russian Empire. To the women of the proletariat it held out the hope of emancipation. To the national minorities it offered the chance to destroy the Great Russian chauvinism that stifled and strangled their national cultures.

And most important of all, to the great majority of Russians at that time, to the peasant masses, it guaranteed the defence of their newly won lands against the landlords. For the soldiers - the peasants in uniform - it ensured that the barbaric and humiliating tyranny of the officers was smashed completely. Only under the leadership of the proletariat could the most downtrodden and oppressed have any prospect of liberation.

1917 shows us all the qualities that make our class the only revolutionary and liberatory class of the epoch. But it also shows that in and of themselves the spontaneous strengths of our class are not enough for victory. What guaranteed the victory of October 1917 was that in the Bolshevik Party the Russian workers had an organised a vanguard party, deeply rooted in every section of the masses, that could centralise and lead their struggles politically and organisationally. That lesson of 1917 must not be forgotten as we pay homage to the great Russian Revolution.

## The Revolution betrayed

Those who made the revolution did so convinced that it was but the first act in the overthrow of capitalism worldwide. It was the first blow of the world revolution. They were taking a sixth of the earth's surface out of the hands of the capitalists. They expected others to follow, and quickly. The workers of Europe did respond to the clarion call of the revolution. Risings throughout Central Europe occurred. But they were aborted and crushed by the reformist 'socialists' of the Second International at the behest of the capitalists and imperialist chiefs of staff. The intemationalisation of the 1917 Revolution remains our task today.

The very existence of the USSR is still an affront to world capitalism. It is a serious obstacle in its drive for markets and raw materials. It is even a source of occasional material assistance to those struggling against imperialism. Yet, isolated in backward Russia, the Revolution degenerated. A caste of bureaucrats, led by Joseph Stalin, usurped political power and strangled every

last vestige of genuine proletarian democracy in the USSR.

Under the slogan of 'socialism in one country' they treacherously turned their backs on the international revolution and, through the Stalinist Comintern, actively betrayed it. In the USSR they stood as a real obstacle to the transition to socialism. Mikhail Gorbachev is the latest helmsman of this caste of bureaucratic usurpers.

As the Soviet bureaucracy attempts a painful self-reform it is haunted by the year 1917. It celebrates it in sterile official speeches while quaking in its limousines at the prospect of proletarian action being unleashed once again in the USSR. The Russian workers must, and will, take the road of 1917 again. Only through new workers' councils and new mass struggles to overthrow the bureaucracy in a political revolution will the road to socialism be re-opened.

The present period - a period of crisis and upheaval - makes the contents of this pamphlet all the more relevant. For it is not just about socialism's past. It is about its future

The very existence of the USSR nevertheless represents a historic gain for the working class. Despite its degeneration into bureaucratic tyranny the historic task of overthrowing capitalism was pioneered there and has not been, to this day, undone. Against the imperialists we defend the USSR as a gain of October.

This pamphlet draws out many of the key lessons of the events of the 1917 Revolution. We have deliberately chosen to examine a number of key events and developments in the period between February and October in order to illustrate the way in which Bolshevism tested and corrected its policies as it steered a course towards victory. In that sense the pamphlet is not simply the story of the Russian Revolution, but an analysis of it.

This approach is vital since so many who will be celebrating the seventieth anniversary of the Revolution are guilty of systematically ignoring or distorting the lessons of October. For those who seek to use these lessons to guide the strategy of revolutionaries today this pamphlet will provide a vital weapon. It is based on a series of articles which have appeared in Workers Power over the last year. The present period - a period of crisis and upheaval - makes the contents of this pamphlet all the more relevant. For it is not just about socialism's past. It is about its future.

We live at a time when Labourite cowards are searching for a new 'socialism' for the 1980s. The organised working class is being relegated to fourth fiddle in the permutations of the rainbow coalition brokers. Let them ponder the lessons of October. It is the working class, and only the working class, that has the ability and interest to destroy capitalism. It did so in 1917. Its struggles since then have proved this point again and again, the working class' future struggles are the hope of humanity. We exist to speed the day when the settling of accounts with capitalism, begun in October, is completed.

Long live the October Revolution!

Workers Power November 1987

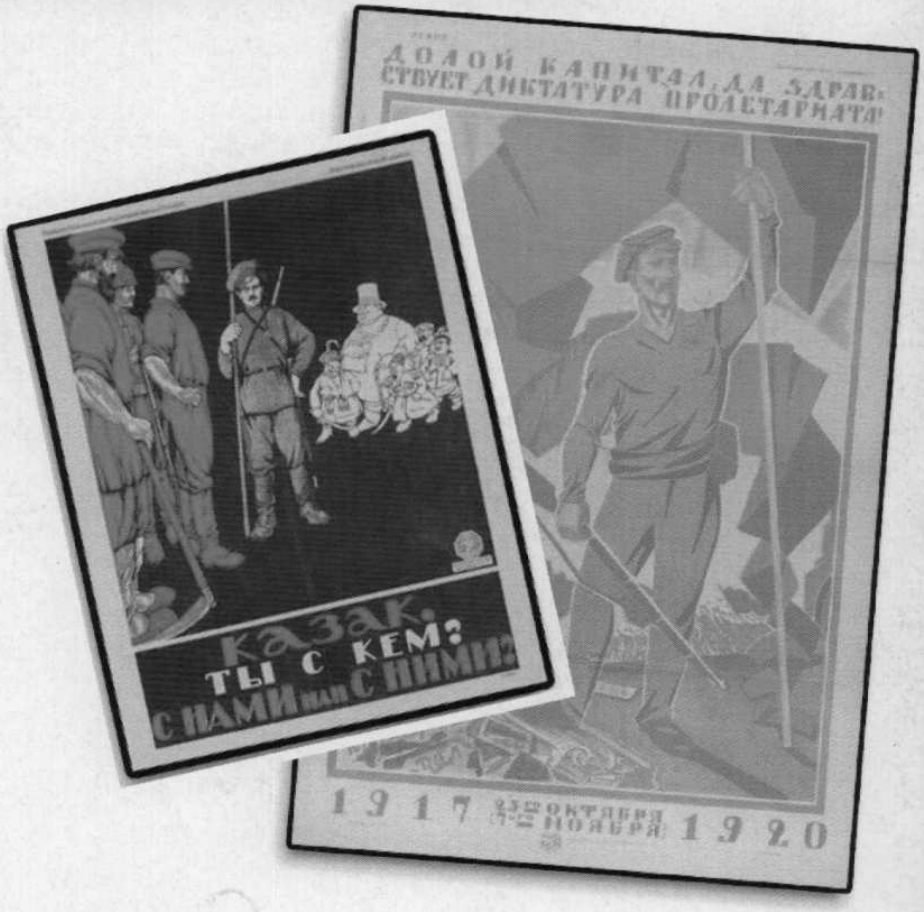
Ninety years ago workers in Russia took power into their own hands and declared it the first act of a world socialist revolution. In February the masses overthrew the hated Russian Tsar and eight months later they created the world's first workers' government. But left isolated and economically backward the workers state - and with it the world communist movement - was eventually to fall into the hands of Joseph Stalin's tyrannical bureaucracy. They not only strangled the revolution in Russia but led workers across the world to terrible defeats.



With the collapse of the Soviet Union world leaders claimed there was no alternative to the profit system. They hoped to extinguish the dreams of generations of workers and youth for freedom and equality. As we enter the 21st century great mass actions have openly defied these wishes of the rich and powerful. From the insurrectionary social movements in Latin America; resistance to war and occupation in the Middle East; and the struggles to defend social rights in Europe; the spectre of another century of revolution once again haunts our rulers.

How can today's revolts be turned into a socialist revolution? To answer this question we must look back at what happened in Russia 1917. In this spirit, *The Road to Red October* not only tells the gripping story of these events but also draws out the key lessons for today.

It is essential reading for all those who want to make "another world possible."




This is the second edition of *The Road to Red October* (first published 1987).

Its second publication celebrates the ninetieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution. It contains a new introduction, plus additional chapters on the fall of the Tsar and the controversy surrounding the soviets and constituent assembly after the October Revolution.

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