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Russia, October 1917

WHEN WORKERS TOOK POWER

Hannah Sell
Socialist Party
deputy general secretary

With monotoneous predictability the centenary of the Russian revolution has led to an outpouring of bile - not aimed in the main at the 'acceptable' February revolution - but at October. A cacophony of slander is attempting to drown out the real history of the October revolution.

This is no accident. Worldwide the capitalists are losing their ability to rule. Events are increasingly spiralling out of their control as the pent-up anger of the masses begins to express itself.

When Mark Carney, governor of the Bank of England, starts to warn about coming revolts because the "frustrated and frightened" are "becoming disillusioned with capitalism," it shows that the most thinking sections of the ruling class are beginning to fear revolution.

October 1917, when the working class, led by the Bolshevik Party, successfully took power and began to establish real workers' democracy, is the greatest event in human history to date. For the capitalist class it is vital that the lessons of it are buried.

They scored an ideological victory when Stalinism collapsed a quarter of a century ago. American philosopher Francis Fukuyama put it bluntly in 1989: "What we are witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War [the post-1945 conflict between US imperialism and the Soviet Union] but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of man's ideological evolution and the universalisation of Western liberal democracy."

Now, decades later - amid war, economic crisis, and rising populist movements - Fukuyama has long since changed his tune.

At the time, however, it was seriously argued, and not just by him, that capitalism would guarantee a future of ever increasing democracy, stability and wealth for the majority.

Even then the capitalist commentators felt the need to bury the real history of the Russian revolution, endlessly peddling the lie that its degeneration into brutal dictatorship was inevitable.

Today, however, when capitalism so clearly means austerity for the majority, there is a growing interest in socialist ideas, and a growing fear among the capitalist elite that their rule could once again be threatened.

Opportunities

In the last 100 years there have been many opportunities for the working class to follow the path of the Russian workers in 1917.

Contrary to the ideologues of capitalism, these have not only taken place in economically underdeveloped societies.

In the revolutionary wave that swept Europe in the aftermath of 1917, it was the mighty German working class that had the greatest opportunity to take power.

In 1968, in France, there was a general strike of ten million workers, the greatest in history. They occupied the factories and moved in the direction of socialism but were blocked by the leaders of their own organisations.

In the Portuguese revolution of 1974, the capitalist state disintegrated.

In these and other cases, revolutionary movements developed in economically 'advanced' capitalist countries.

Why did the working class succeed in taking the opportunity which existed in Russia in October 1917, but not the many others that followed it? The biggest difference was the existence of a Bolshevik-type party.

Revolution cannot be called into being by any party, but unfolds when the masses can find no other way out and so burst onto the scene of history.

This happened in Russia in February 1917. Tsarism was overthrown by a heroic movement of the workers and soldiers. However, they were not yet conscious of their own power and so allowed the capitalist class to step into the political vacuum.

The revolution then developed through nine months of advance and retreat, during which the working class tested the capitalist elite that their rule could once again be threatened.

In 1989: "What we are witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War [the post-1945 conflict between US imperialism and the Soviet Union] but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of man's ideological evolution and the universalisation of Western liberal democracy."

But to secure its rule the Stalinist regime required a return to brutal dictatorship including the crushing of the provisional government. The government was suspended in mid-air as the masses themselves smashed Kornilov's coup, under the leadership of the Bolsheviks in the 'month of the great slander.'

United front

The counterrevolution came when the tsarist General Kornilov attempted, under the cover of the Kerensky government coalition, to drown the revolution in blood with a march on Petrograd. He was defeated by the most effective 'united front' in history to date.

A united front is when different workers' organisations - reformist and revolutionary - take part in a common struggle, but with full independence and the right to criticise.

Leon Trotsky, co-leader of the revolution with Lenin, summed it up as "march separately, strike together". In this instance Kerensky had collaborated with Kornilov's plans when he imagined that the revolting workers would be put down - but his provisional government, which had come to power on their backs, would remain in place.

To secure its rule the Stalinist regime required a return to brutal dictatorship including the crushing of the provisional government. The government was suspended in mid-air as the masses themselves smashed Kornilov's coup, under the leadership of the Bolsheviks, some of whom, including Trotsky, were released from jail to defend Petrograd.

This was a key moment in the growing and increasingly implacable support of the masses for the Bolshevik Party. Testing
October 1917: When workers took power

Revolutions are always a process, developing over months or years. Events in the Russian revolution were exceptionally compressed because of the urgency of ending the war. The Petrograd Soviet organised a Voluntary (Militarized) Revolutionary Committee to defend the gains of the revolution. Trotsky, however, on the ground in Petrograd, was more aware of the huge changes bring wrought in the soviet within the space of a few weeks. The Petrograd Soviet organised a Voluntary (Militarized) Revolutionary Committee to defend the gains of the revolution. The Petrograd Soviet organised a Voluntary (Militarized) Revolutionary Committee to defend the gains of the revolution. The Petrograd Soviet organised a Voluntary (Militarized) Revolutionary Committee to defend the gains of the revolution. The Petrograd Soviet organised a Voluntary (Militarized) Revolutionary Committee to defend the gains of the revolution. The Petrograd Soviet organised a Voluntary (Militarized) Revolutionary Committee to defend the gains of the revolution. The Petrograd Soviet organised a Voluntary (Militarized) Revolutionary Committee to defend the gains of the revolution. The Petrograd Soviet organised a Voluntary (Militarized) Revolutionary Committee to defend the gains of the revolution. The Petrograd Soviet organised a Voluntary (Militarized) Revolutionary Committee to defend the gains of the revolution. The Petrograd Soviet organised a Voluntary (Militarized) Revolutionary Committee to defend the gains of the revolution.
Leon Trotsky said John Reed “did not miss one of the dramatic episodes of the revolution.” He was someone who “knew how to see and how to write.” Early in 1917, Trotsky wrote: “John Reed, whom they call the American War correspondent, is in a position to give us an account of the revolution from inside, and an account of the revolutionaries from the heart.”

When the Russian revolution started in Feb 1917 and the Tsar was overthrown by revolutionaries John Reed, one of Russia’s most radical journalists, decided to join the fighting. He later wrote, “What I saw in Russia was a small revolution: the revolution of the workers, soldiers and peasants.”

Radio 4’s ‘beautiful’ Ten Days That Shook the World Inspirational Platform for Revolution’s Nameless Voices

Debates include: WHAT IS THE LEGACY OF THE 1917 OCTOBER REVOLUTION?

Film: October

Revolutionary pointer to the future of cinema and society

Countdown to ‘Bread and Roses’

BBC 2’s documentary on Russian revolution. Right-wing events. No mention of war or any reference to the millions of workers, soldiers, and peasants who took charge of their own destiny and inspired millions with their actions.

I only last read Trotsky’s and his ideas for a world revolution and never really understood them. Countless, we cannot carry them to Moscow. We are neutral. We do not carry copies for either side. We cannot take you to Moskow, where there are millions of revolutionary people. We do not say that we are going to help you, the soldiers, the sailors, to seige for Russia. Suddenly another door was flung wide; in it stood two or three brakemen, a fireman or so. This way, comrades!” cried one. “We will take you to Moscow, where heaven had to offer. On earth they were building the world to report on the unfolding revolution. The October revolution showed countless millions that workers have the power to stop exploitation and oppression. It’s no surprise these events inspired manydocumentary and artistic works. The Socialist variants some of the key documents of 1917 - and comments on some mire recent efforts to renew it...

Film: Reds

FLAWED BUT INFORMATIVE BIOIC OF REVOLUTIONARY JOURNALIST REED

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