

# RUSSIAN REVOLUTION – OCTOBER 1917

## 100 YEARS LATER, WHAT ARE THE LESSONS FOR SOCIALISTS TODAY?



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**C**APITALISM IS IN CRISIS. The enormous wealth it has created is concentrated in the hands of a few. Such is the huge gulf between rich and poor that just eight people own as much wealth as the poorest 50% of the world's population.

Meanwhile, even in a rich capitalist country like Britain, growing numbers cannot afford the basic necessities of secure housing and enough to eat. More than 40% of young women's wages do not last until the end of the month. Growing numbers of people are drawing socialist conclusions as indicated by the surge of support for Jeremy Corbyn in Britain and the popularity of Bernie Sanders call for 'political revolution' in the US.

Millions are angry about what capitalism has to offer; but feel powerless to change things. This year is the centenary of the Russian revolution, a powerful example of how it is possible for the working class and poor to take their destiny into their own hands and transform the world. That is why, even one hundred years on, the capitalist elite are so determined to bury the real history of the Russian revolution under an avalanche of lies and slander.

The Russian revolution began in February 1917. In October the working class successfully took power into their own hands. The revolution led to the ending of the carnage of the first world war, and opened the possibility of a democratic socialist world.

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## **ACTION BY THE MASSES**

Leon Trotsky, one of the leaders of the Russian Revolution, summed up a revolution as being: **“the direct interference of the masses in historical events. In ordinary times, the state, be it monarchical or democratic, elevates itself above the nation, and history is made by specialists in that line of business--kings, ministers, bureaucrats, parliamentarians, journalists.**

**“But at those crucial moments when the old order becomes no longer endurable to the masses, they break over the barriers excluding them from the political arena, sweep aside their traditional representatives, and create by their own interference the initial groundwork for a new regime...The history of a revolution is for us, first of all, a history of the forcible entrance of the masses into the realm of rulership over their own destiny.”**

This is what happened in early 1917. On 23 February, the women textile workers, without prior agreement from any party, went on strike in several factories, which led to mass demonstrations in the city. This opened the floodgates of revolution, which unfolded over the next five days.

The February revolution was in reality the beginning of a socialist revolution in Russia and worldwide. However, it did not lead directly to the working class taking power. Power initially passed to a government dominated by the capitalist class



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- a coalition of capitalist liberals, Mensheviks (the right of the Russian workers' movement) and the Social Revolutionaries, a party of the middle class of the towns and the rural areas.

In the aftermath of February it was only the leaders of the Bolshevik party which saw that the only way to win the slogans of the revolution 'bread, peace and land' would be to break with capitalism – in a political but also economic and social revolution - and to begin to build a democratic socialist society. They understood that this could not be achieved in Russia alone, but saw the revolution there as a prelude to fighting for worldwide socialism. In October, they led the Russian working class and poor in

breaking with capitalism and beginning to build a new society.

The Russian revolution brought into existence the first workers'-led government to hold power for any length of time. It was the most democratic form of government every embarked on. All major decision-making was to be exercised through a system of elected councils ('soviets') – of workers', soldiers' and peasants' delegates - at a local, regional and national level. Any paid representatives were to stand regularly for re-election and receive no more than the average wage of a worker.

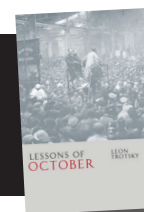
The new Soviet government decreed land to the peasants and took Russia out of the imperialist First World War. It recognised the right to self-determination of all non-Russian nations oppressed under Tsarist and capitalist rule. The October revolution also gave a mighty impetus to the processes of world socialist revolution.

But the young Soviet government faced huge obstacles. Twenty one capitalist armies, led by Britain, France, Japan and the US, invaded Russia to try and crush the revolution. Despite enormous difficulties the nationalised planned economy established by the October Revolution succeeded in transforming a backward economy into one of the most powerful nations on earth. However, isolated and alone, the workers' state degenerated into brutal dictatorship, albeit still based on a distorted planned economy.

On the centenary of the Russian revolution the capitalist class and their hirelings in the universities, the superficial professors of 'history', will slander this great event or seek to prove that February was the 'real' Russian revolution which 'went off the rails' and ended in the 'putsch' of October 1917.

For socialists it is vital to learn the real lessons of 1917. Come to our public meeting to discuss what really happened in October 1917. We will also be discussing why the Soviet Union degenerated into dictatorship and what the lessons are for socialists in 2017.

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