



## Conclusion: party, programme and class

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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epoch was one of wars and revolutions, has a new period of capitalist stability - popularly termed globalisation - superseded it?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.

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.

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