

100 Years of the Bolshevik Revolution

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100 years ago on this day the Russian proletariat, allied with advanced sections of the peasantry and led by the Bolshevik party, seized state power. This began a civil war which consolidated the first proletarian dictatorship in history to exercise control over a whole country, an event of world-historic importance for the proletarian struggle. The proletarian dictatorship in the USSR was eventually overturned, and the century since October has seen many revolutionary high points and also many defeats. The Bolshevik revolution, however, has an enduring relevance to us, to our current efforts here in the US, and to the efforts of the international communist movement overall. The victory of this revolution galvanized the masses the world over and showed that proletarian politics could overcome the forces of reaction. The Bolshevik Revolution must not be confined to the history books, it is a living example of what is possible, and what will be achieved again.

The Significance of October

The Bolshevik revolution was the first time in history that workers and peasants seized and held power country-wide. This was possible because of the strength of the worker-peasant alliance, the depth of the contradictions in the provisional government, and also the political awareness that the masses had gained through years of political activity. A materialist summation of the successes and failures of the Paris Commune was also an essential theoretical foundation on which the October Revolution was built. Lessons from the Commune, at the time a high water-mark of revolutionary advance, were distilled by Marx and Engels in *Civil War in France* and continued by Lenin in texts such as *What is to Be Done?* and *State and Revolution*. Understanding the Paris Commune highlighted for these revolutionary thinkers the need to suppress counter-revolutionaries, the need for seizure of state power and for breaking-up the bourgeois state, the likelihood of attack by an international alliance of reactionary forces, the need for a disciplined and strong party, and the importance of sharing broadly the political ideas of the advanced sections of all classes that can be drawn into revolutionary struggle. The Bolshevik revolution, and the subsequent establishment of the USSR, developed our understanding of these lessons and also opened up

new questions, which the proletariat will have to grapple with going forward to clear the way for revolutionary advances.

One key idea that Lenin put forward was the need for a new kind of political party, one composed of professional revolutionaries, having an all-country perspective, and able to unite and interrelate all of the different progressive and revolutionary struggles in Russia. Our work in the US today is to build such a party, drawing on Lenin's understanding, on the subsequent experience in China and especially in the GPCR, and on the experience of contemporary revolutionary parties like the CPI(Maoist).

As in the Paris Commune, the imperialist countries of the world were quick to organize a counter-revolutionary 'internationalism' of their own to put down the revolutionary movement. 18 countries contributed troops, funds, and arms to the white army. The civil war in Russia was enormously costly, but it was decisively defeated by the fledgling revolutionary state, showing once and for all that there is a basis not only for struggling against reactionary forces but for defeating them. Lenin was reportedly so overcome with emotion when the proletarian dictatorship lasted longer than the 71 days of the Paris Commune that he danced outside in the snow, celebrating the major advance that they had made. Today we still celebrate and uphold the Bolshevik revolution because, like Lenin, we recognize that the Bolshevik revolution belongs to the oppressed and exploited people of the world. It is something that the reactionaries cannot take away: the knowledge that their days are numbered, and that we *know* we can defeat them because *it has happened before!*

However, euphoria about the Russian Revolution has opened the door for the misconception that history progresses in a linear fashion, and that the victory of the proletariat is guaranteed. At times this has led revolutionaries to look to formulaically apply a set model or path, deferring to supposed masters abroad instead of creatively developing a revolutionary path. The universal lessons of revolutionary history have a dialectical relationship to the particular conditions of a specific country and stage of historical development. We do need principled internationalism, and to uphold revolutionary developments elsewhere, but we must relentlessly struggle against a bourgeois tendency towards complacency, as opposed to the proletarian outlook of struggle until victory.

Maoism – a break with Leninism?

The lessons of the Russian Revolution were not simply supplanted by the Chinese Revolution. Some have put forward that Maoism represents a break or total rupture with Leninism – missing the fact that many of the Bolsheviks' key breakthroughs were instrumental to the successes of the Chinese revolutionaries. Negating this aspect of the Chinese revolution has led some to claim that cadre organization or appropriate platforms of democratic centralism are outdated concepts that stifle mass initiative. Against this, we must uphold and

defend the need for organization to serve the masses as they struggle through key contradictions, and as something which can play a key role in growing and sustaining mass initiative.

Stalin was correct in defending the basis for socialism to exist in a single country. This led to the emergence of new questions about how to maintain a revolutionary road under such conditions. Serious mistakes in Stalin's politics were corrected and overcome in the high tide of revolutionary advance during the GPCR, which included practices of the mass line that were developed during the Civil War period in China. This experience can provide a way forward past the stalemate under Stalin's regime that eventually was seized by the Khrushchevite revisionists. The lessons of the GPCR have relevance for our work here and now, before the seizure of state power and before the formation of a revolutionary Party, but these lessons must be seen as extending and deepening Leninism, and not as a pure negation.

Bolshevism Today

CPI-Maoist recently completed a campaign to Bolshevize their party to increase revolutionary discipline and correct mistaken tendencies. In one of the most recent documents from their CC they said¹:

We took up Bolshevization campaign in all the States/Special Zones in the Central Region in 2013 in the leadership of CRB. CRB reviews that this campaign that went on for three and a half years showed good results. One third of the Party and PLGA were steeled in this campaign to overcome the difficult situation and the setback of the movement. Cadres developed more confidence on the Revolutionary Movement and the surrenders are lesser. Class struggle has intensified. There is an improvement in retaliation. The relations with the people have strengthened. There are better opportunities due to the development of theoretical and political understanding of the cadres. A new enthusiasm is seen to an extent all over the Party.

The situation for CPI(Maoist) is quite different than our own, but we in the US have a similar need to work with greater militancy, and adopt forms of organization which favor the development of greater conscious revolutionary activity among the masses. We face a favorable objective situation domestically, with sharpening contradictions among the ruling class (as indicated by the election of Trump and other issues such as inability to pass legislation), a deepening capitalist-economic crisis, decadence in many aspects of the US state, and sharpening inter-imperialist conflict internationally. We have also seen a growing number of relatively spontaneous mass movements and uprisings (Ferguson, Occupy, BLM, etc.), However, subjectively we face an unfavorable situation

¹From a recent edition of the journal *People's War*, available online here: [http://bannedthought.net/India/People'sWar-CPI\(Maoist\)/PW11-March2017-Eng-View.pdf](http://bannedthought.net/India/People'sWar-CPI(Maoist)/PW11-March2017-Eng-View.pdf)

overall. The existing political movements of oppressed and exploited people are led by the petite-bourgeoisie, labor aristocracy, and even outright bourgeois leadership (as in much of the so-called “Resistance” to Trump). As such, we must work to develop professional revolutionaries capable of playing a leading role in mass struggles. We must also deepen our links with the masses, and draw more of the masses into conscious struggle. As the objective contradictions of capitalist-imperialism deepen, many more spontaneous struggles will spring up, and we must be prepared to intervene in them so as to develop proletarian politics.

Russia’s nature as a semi-imperialist power also means that strategic elements of the Bolshevik Revolution are applicable in our context. Of course, the status of the US as imperialist super-power means that there is a particularity to the proletarian struggle here. Revolutionaries in the US and in other imperialist countries have a particular relationship to the much more advanced revolutionary movements elsewhere: it is essential that we build internationalist movements to support revolutionary parties elsewhere, but it is just as essential that we build revolutionary movements at home. We cannot reduce our activity to passive support for e.g. the revolution in India, but we also cannot miss the opportunities it provides us to expose people in the US to revolutionary ideas and to show them what is possible.

Dare to Struggle, Dare to Win!

The Bolshevik revolution shook the world, demonstrating to the oppressed and exploited people everywhere that it is possible to both fight and win. The Bolshevik revolution still has immense relevance to the international communist movement today, informing many aspects of how we seek to organize and work among the masses, how we orient our political practice, and how we aim to make revolution in this country. We must continue to draw key lessons from the revolutions in China, Russia, and the ongoing revolutions in India and around the world, building up the revolutionary movement and deepening the struggle against opportunist distortions of that history.

Celebrate 100 years of Bolshevism!