The road to Red October



The Bolsheviks and working class power

a workers power pamphlet

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Introduction

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 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 their's was but the first act in the overthrow of capitalism worldwide. Their's 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 internationalisation 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 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

When women set Russia ablaze

In February 1917 (old style calendar) women workers from the proletarian Vyborg district of Petrograd marched out of their factories demanding 'Bread!'. Five days later the workers and soldiers had led an insurrection which forced the Tsar to abdicate. The Petrograd women workers' celebration of International Womens' Day had unleashed the February Revolution.

International Womens' Day was first adopted as a holiday for proletarian women by the leaders of the Second International's Socialist Women's Movement. Clara Zetkin proposed to the International Womens' meeting in 1910 that a day be declared for proletarian women, similar to the May Day workers' holiday. The date eventually agreed was 8 March (new style calendar)—commemorating a day on which thousands of women workers in New York had demonstrated against appalling conditions women workers endured in the needle industry.

The holiday was taken up in Russia from 1913 onwards. Because of the old calendar in pre-revolutionary Russia the equivalent date was 23 February. In 1913 planned demonstrations were cracked down on by the police and only leaflets and papers were issued in the end. The Bolsheviks, under the instigation of Konkordiya Samoilova and Inessa Armand, produced several articles in their paper *Pravda* in the weeks before 23 February culminating in a special issue to celebrate the day itself. The articles outlined the reality of life for working women in Russia and argued the need for them to be organised alongside men in fighting organisations of the class.

The response from working women to these *Pravda* articles was so overwhelming that there was not enough room in the paper for all the letters received. This prompted Samoilova to urge the exiled Lenin and Krupskaya to produce a special paper directed at working class women. Inessa Armand, who herself had been arrested and had fled to exile, was instrumental in persuading them to agree to this idea. Krupskaya raised it on the exiled Bolshevik Central Committee which agreed to the production *Rabotnitsa* (Woman Worker) with the launch to be around International Womens' Day 1914.

These developments within the Bolshevik party occurred in response to a renewed wave of militant class struggle in Russia between 1912 and 1914. Women workers were an increasingly important force in the Russian working class. After the 1905 Revolution the employers deliberately recruited women in preference to men in many industries. As the bosses' own factory inspectorate noted in 1907:

'The reasons for this [recruitment of women] are as before: their greater industry, attentiveness and abstinence (they do not drink or smoke), their compliance and greater reasonableness in respect of pay.'

By 1914 women made up 25.7% of the industrial workforce in Russia and were becoming increasingly militant, making all political groups take notice of them. The bourgeois feminists, the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks all made special efforts to organise working women in this period.

Foundations for the future

Despite all but one woman on the Editorial Board in Russia being arrested, *Rabotnitsa* was produced for 23 February. It quickly sold out as did the other five issues which were distributed. It was widely read in the factories and groups of women organised around it, many joining the Party as a result. The outbreak of war in August halted the production of *Rabotnitsa* but the foundations laid then made future work by the Bolsheviks among women workers much easier to establish. 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. The specific role of women workers in the February revolution occurred because of the very acute way the war had affected them. Between 1914 and 1917 the number of women employed in the factories increased still further because of the conscription of men to the front line. In the country as a whole the percentage of women increased from 26.6% to 43.2%. These women workers were on the whole, new to the cities and the working class.

In Petrograd itself the number of women working in factories doubled, rising by 68,000 during the war to 129,800. There were thousands of women workers concentrated in large factories—up to 10,000 women in one plant—with less than three years experience by 1917. Often their husbands, sons and brothers had been conscripted for the war. Minimal food rations were available only by queuing for up to four hours a day—sometimes even then the food ran out. 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. In general the strikes involving predominantly women workers had economic aims, whereas by late 1916 more of the strikes in the male dominated engineering and metalworking industries were for political ends. This reflected the longer tradition of organisation of the male workers, some with Bolshevik and Menshevik organisers long established within their ranks.

Women's Day celebrations

By February 1917 the class struggle was intensifying. But 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 the Women's Day celebrations Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and the *Mezhraiontsy* group (an inter-district group of socialists committed to neither the Bolsheviks or 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 the socialist organisations argued that the class was not ready for a mass strike because of inadequate political preparation or contact with the soldiers. V Kayurav, a local Bolshevik leader, met representatives from women workers on the eve of Womens' Day and urged them to '. . . Act exclusively according to the instruction of the party committee.'

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. However the lack of control by the political leaders over these women did not mean that the action was totally unprepared as some Bolsheviks seemed to think. One account of the lead up to the strikes records that:

'The largely female staff of the Vasilesky Island trolley-park, sensing general unrest a few days before February 23rd, 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 a.m. 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% of all the 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:

'. . . 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 that day were less extensive, but no less militant. Over the whole city between 20 and 30% 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 still managed to contain them, albeit with difficulty. A police report of the day explained:

'At 4.40 p.m. 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 the action. 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, reflecting the anger and desperation, mainly of women and youths. 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 mighty Romanov dynasty could not last a minute. The Tsar's wife expressed the arrogant shortsightedness 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 actions of the masses, 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 and their families. The combination of a land starved peasantry and a highly concentrated urban working class (some four million strong) obliged the autocracy to maintain a vicious political dictatorship. Only thus could the rule of the landlords and the interests of capital be guaranteed. But the existence of the autocracy merely intensified the contradictions of Russia's combined and profoundly uneven social development. The war exacerbated those contradictions to the limit. When they exploded the seemingly all-powerful Tsarist regime fell in only 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 Provisional Government that emerged from the February Fevolution was staffed by bourgeois politicians and in an unstable position, balanced as it was alongside the organs of a different kind of power, the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. Within the factories workers were emboldened—the factory committees sprang up, control was demanded 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 suffrage. Indeed the first major strike against the Provisional Government was of 3,000 women laundry workers who struck for the eight-hour day, lining wages and municipalisation of the laundries. The strike, in May 1917, lasted six weeks and Kollontai was sent in by the Bolsheviks to work alongside the women. The Bolsheviks had quickly responded to the militancy of women in 1917 and set up a Womens' Bureau led by Vera Slutskaya. This relaunched *Rabotnitsa* 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 the oppression, but this also reflected their lack of organisation, 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 obstruction by male leaders.

This lack of traditional organisation has contradictory results—on the one hand women can be, as the February Revolution shows, 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 propaganda which may be anti-working class. In the weeks after the February Revolution thousands of working class women were mobilised by liberal bourgeois feminists to demonstrate for womens' 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 the women. Revolutionaries must never underestimate the centrality of relating to women workers. 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 proletarian anger that swept aside the regime of Nicholas the Last led to a profoundly contradictory situation at the level of state power. Although they had not participated in, let alone led the uprising, conservative and liberal bourgeois politicians constituted themselves as a Provisional Government. They were deeply fearful of where the mass mobilisations and the workers' and soldiers' councils—the soviets—that had multiplied since February would lead.

In turn, those who formed the executive of the Petrograd Soviet were desperate for a return to order. The Menshevik (reformist) leadership of the executive—Chkheidze and Skobelev—together with the right wing Social Revolutionaries (SRs) and Kerensky were all convinced that the Russian Revolution, as a bourgeois revolution, would logically find its expression in a bourgeois government. The executive actually urged the bourgeois parties to take power and pledged support to the Provisional Government.

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

'We consider the most essential issue of the current moment to be the establishment of strict control over the ministers who are appointed by the State Duma and 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 to the Provisional Government. What had emerged in Russia was a dual power situation. Power was divided between the representatives of two irreconcilable forces. The working masses saw the Soviet as the voice of their struggles. The bourgeoisie saw the Provisional Government as their bastion against those struggles. The arrangement within which the Soviet supported, yet watched over the Provisional Government, showed all too clearly that sovereignty in the state, was in reality, split. Yet the willingness of the majority of Soviet delegates to consciously endorse such an arrangement reflected pro found illusions on the part of the majority of workers in the feasibility of a partnership with the bourgeoisie. The leaders of the Soviet did not see dual power as an unstable moment in struggle, the outcome of which would be resolved on behalf of one or other of the contending classes. They saw it as a permanent agreement struck between partners. As Trotsky put it later:

'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.'

In reality the dual power could only have been a prelude to either the bourgeoisie or the proletariat breaking the stalemate to their own final advantage. 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

The momentous events of the Russian Revolution found the Bolshevik Party both organisationally and programmatically unprepared. Prior to Lenin's return to Russia in April and the subsequent party conference the Party was both confused and divided. In Petrograd the Party took four distinctly different positions on the dual power situation. The Vyborg District Committee held to a programme of demands that combined both profound mistrust of the Provisional Government with a belief that the terms of the revolution were strictly democratic. On 1 March they called for the soviets to form a Provisional

Revolutionary Government in line with the Bolshevik demands of 1905. However the task of that government was to prepare the way for the convention of a democratic constituent assembly.

The Petersburg Committee was composed primarily of former political detainees, released by the February Revolution. They took a more conservative stance in line with the view that the tasks of the day were 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 masses of the people.'

This position implied no immediate challenge to the dominant line within the Soviet executive. It was evasive as to how 'far' the Provisional Government was actually serving the interests of the masses.

The 'three whales'

The Russian Bureau of the exiled Central Committee—comprising Shlyapnikov, Molotov and Zalutsky—veered in several directions. At first they called for a Provisional Revolutionary Government to be formed, from above, by the parties represented on the Soviet executive. Its programmatic agenda was to be confined to implementing the 'three whales' of the Social Democratic 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 perspective led them to ban leaflets issued by the more 'left' Vyborg district which were calling for the formation of a soviet based government from below. However this perspective of a pact with the other Soviet parties hit the snag that the Mensheviks and SRs did not want to share in a government with the Bolsheviks. The rapid realisation of this actually pushed the Russian Bureau left and by 22 March it was calling the soviets embryos of a new state power.

It was the editorial board of *Pravda* that occupied the most right-wing stance within Bolshevism. Edited by Stalin, Muranov and 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 followed this up with the reasoning that:

'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.'

Kamanev's conditional support

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 reflected the inherent weaknesses and contradictions of Bolshevism's previously held programme for a thoroughgoing democratic revolution. It was to be made by the workers in alliance with the peasantry, yet it was to constitute a distinct and separate stage from the socialist revolution. February 1917 saw the logic of the mobilised masses' demands going beyond the minimum programme of the democratic republic. The soviets, militia and factory committees were the embryo of a state of an entirely new sort whose proletarian democratic content transcended the forms and limits of bourgeois democracy.

In their own particular ways the contending factions were either attempting to limit the struggle to the terrain of democratic demands or they were striving to, but as yet programmatically incapable of consistently going beyond it.

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 historically constituted Bolshevik cadre, that open debate in the party led to its programmatic re-armament at the crucial hour.

Lenin's writings during the war, especially *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, led him to see that Russia was one, albeit exceptionally weak, link in the chain of world imperialism. Of necessity therefore the programme of the coming Russian Revolution could no longer be conceived in the terms of a 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 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.

Break with 'old Bolshevism'

Lenin's initial responses to the Russian Revolution were expressed in a series of articles submitted to *Pravda*, his *Letters from Afar*. Their political content was such a break with the 'old Bolshevism' beloved of Stalin that only a curtailed version of one of them was published by the editors.

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

In these writings Lenin is now concretely posing the Soviet as an embryo of a workers' government and not of a Provisional Revolutionary Government, as he had done in 1905 and 1906. While the Provisional Revolutionary Government had been ascribed the task of convening a constituent assembly the call for the latter does not appear in the *Letters* or in the codified *April Theses*. Lenin realised that what was now at stake was the smashing of the state machine of the exploiting classes and replacing it with a state of a new sort based on the workers' councils.

Lenin opposed the Petrograd Soviet's endorsement of the Provisional Government but saw real potential in the formation of the 'observation committee'. As he put it:

'Now, that's something real! It is worthy of the workers who have shed their blood for freedom, peace, bread for the people.'

It was, however, only 'a step along the [illegible] must lead to the creation [illegible]

in turn make it possible to take the road to the 'Socialist Republics of all Countries'.

In the formation of the militia and the soviets the Russian workers had undertaken 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. There could be no purely democratic stage of the Russian Revolution.

Lenin's return from exile to the Finland Station allowed him to both intervene directly in the Bolshevik Party and further sharpen his programmatic armoury. At the head of the Soviet's official welcoming party the leading Menshevik Chkheidze urged Lenin to play his part in 'the closing of the democratic ranks'. Lenin promptly declined, declaring instead:

'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.'

Lenin's forthright declaration in favour of the socialist development of the revolution was a severe shock not only to Chkheidze and the Mensheviks. Many of the leading Bolsheviks, especially leading right wingers like Kamenev, thought he had taken leave of his senses. An eye witness account of his arrival in Russia captures the mood of initial bewilderment that greeted Lenin's new line:

'It had been expected that Vladimir Illyich would arrive and call to order the Russian Bureau of the Central Committee, and especially comrade Molotov, who occupied a particularly irreconcilable position in regard to the Provisional Government. It turned out, however, that it was Molotov who was nearest of all to Illyich.'

Forging an alliance

Now while it is necessary to avoid over-exaggerating Molotov's closeness to Lenin, what was revealed in a matter of days was that Lenin did have allies amongst a whole layer of the party. He was not faced with the task of starting all over again. Rather he had to forge an alliance within the party of its largely proletarian left wing. Lenin then led these forces into a struggle for the triumph of his political line.

It was in order to programmatically re-arm the Bolshevik Party for the struggle that Lenin presented his *April Theses—the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution.*

The task the theses set themselves was to advance from a stage of the revolution within which the insufficiently class conscious workers had needlessly ceded power to the bourgeoisie (that is, it was not a necessary, self-limiting bourgeois-democratic stage) to a second stage 'which must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants.'

The existing political regime in Russia made this possible not only because the masses were awakening to political life, but because the dual power regime, at least temporarily, was precluding repressive violence against the masses.

Of necessity this meant the Bolsheviks adopting a stance of no support for the Provisional Government and intransigent opposition to any talk of revolutionary defencism of the bourgeois government. But most importantly it meant recognising that the struggle had gone beyond the democratic programme, not because a democratic stage had been achieved and completed its useful life (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 benefit 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.

Just as Lenin had rejected his previously held idea of a relatively distinct democratic stage in the revolution he was also clear that his programme did not envisage the immediate 'introduction' of socialism. In reality the revolution was to initiate the transition to socialism, as part of the international revolution, 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 *April Theses* contain a programme of transition from dual power (a state of affairs Lenin repeatedly cursed) to the proletarian dictatorship, the goal of the Marxist programme.

Bitter resistance from schematism

Lenin's struggle to re-arm the Bolsheviks met with bitter resistance from many of his comrades, still stuck in the rut of schematically expecting a democratic stage for the Russian Revolution and convinced that the task was to achieve one. While *Pravda* published the *April Theses* Kamenev 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 an immediate transformation of this revolution into a socialist revolution.'

Over a process of three weeks of argument and debate Lenin won the Party to his programmatic line of advance. After wavering and vacillating the Party now set out to win the masses to a recognition of the potential power of the soviets and the fast-growing workers' militia, the Red Guards. After a period of confusion over the democratic character of the proletariat's tasks 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.'

The role of Lenin in formulating a new strategic line for the party and in winning the bulk of the party to that line, cannot be underestimated. However, the role of the indi-

vidual in history is conditioned by the circumstances he or she is obliged to work in and the instruments that he or she must work with. In Lenin's case the objective circumstances he confronted on his return—the dual power situation—had propelled millions into revolutionary struggle against their former masters. He gave a conscious expression to their heartfelt aspiration. And, in the Bolshevik Party Lenin had an instrument for revolution that had been tempered by years of struggle—both theoretical and practical. The Party was, despite the waverings of some leaders, a revolutionary party, receptive to the needs of the revolution. 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".'

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.

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 nine million members!

By virtue of representing the masses in struggle the soviet develops another characteristic. 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 1917—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 Soviet 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 consumated 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 representative 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 Miliukov 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 has-beens 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 Miliukov and the entry of Soviet representatives into the Provisional Government Tsereteli drew the logical conclusion from the Menshevik/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 instil into the mass of workers and peasants deference to the Provisional Government 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.

Despite the repression which closed the Bolshevik paper *Pravda* and sent many 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 fig-leaves'. 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'.

Tactics and slogans inadequate

Lenin's theses were the subject of fierce debate. Volodarsky, Nogin and Rykov attacked them and even Zinoviev sharing Lenin's exile sent word that he disagreed. Sverdlov and Stalin supported Lenin's views. The disputes centred on whether or not the counter-revolution was triumphant—that is whether the dual power had been resolved in favour of the bourgeoisie, whether the Mensheviks and SRs were definitely exposed as counter-revolutionaries, whether a peaceful evolution within the soviets could still take place which would allow a soviet government to come to power and whether an insurrection was indeed needed. Were the soviets no longer to be the centre of Bolshevik activity. Ordzhonikidze later remembered that Lenin had argued in this period that the factory committees, not the soviets, would become organs of insurrection.

In essence Lenin's position was strategically, i.e., programmatically correct. But in terms of an assessment of the situation and in terms of tactics and slogans it was inadequate. Party debate corrected these inadequacies and the Bolshevik tactics during August and September overcame the problems the Party was facing. Lenin overestimated the totality of the counter-revolution. In that it was a counter-revolution after July it remained a democratic counter-revolution and not the imposition of a military dictatorship. The army high command, the Cadets and the rival would-be Bonapartes (Kerensky and Kornilov) had not resolved the duality of power. Rather the reformist leaders led the workers', peasants' and soldiers' soviets into allowing 'emergency powers' against the proletarian vanguard. But to install a military dictatorship would necessitate the crushing of the soviets, the soldiers' committees and the complete disarming of the workers. To do this a further coup would be necessary. The tactical error of Lenin was the complete abandonment of the slogan 'All power to the Soviets' as necessarily tied to 'peaceful development'. Lenin at this time saw it solely as a slogan synonymous with 'Mensheviks and SRs take the power'.

The two errors were linked. Lenin clearly thought that there would be no further period of 'soviet legality' during which the Bolsheviks could continue to win ever more delegacies in the soviets and eventually a majority. But this was not the case and the Bolsheviks after only a few weeks continued their remorseless advance within the soviets. Certainly it was correct to withdraw the agitation for 'All power to the Soviets' in the form hitherto used when the majority parties had exposed their total complicity with the counter-revolutionaries. But it still had meaning as the expression of the need for a workers' state rather than bourgeois democracy, and when the Bolsheviks were in the process of becoming a majority it would take on a new concrete agitational meaning: 'All power to the (Bolshevik) Soviets'.

Struggle for Bolshevik leadership

Lenin was aware of the danger of separating the organisational form from its political leadership. Under a 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 soviets actually became in August 1917, the struggle for Bolshevik leadership. The existing soviets were renovated and cleansed of their reactionary leadership. In the debate at the Bolshevik Congress in July, Buhkarin had perceptively warned:

'... the baby is being thrown out with the bathwater ... We must not denounce the form of soviets because their composition has proved unsuitable.'

To a large extent, particularly in the local soviets, Bukharin's advice was heeded. By September, across Russia, the Bolsheviks began to win majority after majority in the soviets, leading Trotsky to comment:

'For this reason the slogan "Power to the Soviets" was not removed from the agenda a second time, but it was given a new meaning: all power to the Bolshevik soviets. In this formulation the slogan finally ceased to be a call for peaceful development. The Party approaches armed uprising through the soviets and in the name of the soviets.'

At the Party's Sixth Congress, starting on 26 July and continuing for eight days Lenin's position was developed and amended. The programmatically correct elements of Lenin's theses were retained—namely that the Mensheviks and SRs had definitively proved themselves

tools of the counter-revolution. In essence, and using terms developed later, these parties were not centrist but counter-revolutionary. No fusion or conciliation was permissible with them. July had proved this decisively. Only the Martovites, the Menshevik Internationalists and the left SRs were still vacillating elements (centrists). At this congress the *Mezhraiontsy* and Trotsky definitively fused with the Bolsheviks, so that all consistently revolutionary elements were now consolidated into one party. In addition the congress recognised that whilst winning a majority in the soviets and defending them against counter-revolution would continue to be central, the Provisional Government, Kerensky and the generals could not be removed by peaceful means. The correctness of this line of march was vindicated in the aftermath of the Kornilov oup attempt.

On 9 September a debate on the composition of the Praesidium of the Petrograd Soviet took place. Trotsky, now a Bolshevik, led the attack on the compromisers. He spoke for the majority of Petrograd's proletariat. The compromisers were defeated 519 votes to 414. Bolshevik majorities in other soviets throughout the country began to be recorded at the same time. On 25 September Trotsky once again became chairman of the Petrograd Soviet. In 1905 in that capacity, he had been obliged to order the breaking of weapons and submission to the Tsarist police. In 1917 there was no such need to submit. On 25 October at the Second All Russian Congress of Soviets, following the rising of the night before, the first soviet republic in the world was established.

Dual power in the factories

In February 1917 we have seen that at the level of state power, the Russian workers overthrew the Tsarist regime only to then accept a government of the bourgeoisie's parties. The workers ceded state power to the bourgeoisie while maintaining their soviets, their 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 in the factories. They insisted on imposing the eight-hour working day on the employers by leaving work once the eight hours were done. They demanded, and often secured, full pay for the work they had done of toppling the old regime. But most importantly they had accounts to settle with those who had bullied, exploited and humiliated them in the old days.

Large sections of Russian industry had been state run by government appointees. As the power of their chief patrons was broken so 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 workers' festival of 'carting out' hated bosses in wheel-barrows accompanied the return to work. The director of Putilov and his aide were dumped in a canal. At the Cartridge plant workers expelled 80% of the technical staff. In the Thornton textile mill the women workers chased out thirty factory police who had dared to show their faces once again. Mass meetings of the workforce discussed and decided on lists of undesirables. At the first power station, for example, 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. These factory committees should not be confused with shop stewards committees on the British model. They were elected by the entire workforce at general meetings. Where shop stewards did come into existence they only represented sections of shops within the workforce. 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. As at the state level the workers found themselves with power in their hands. In the factories just as at the state level they handed power back to bourgeois managers and directors. The parallels do not end there. While the factory committees in general reorganised the employers and managements' technical and economic responsibilities they reserved for themselves the right to oversee and observe these functions. This mirrored the soviets' insistence 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 times of rest and all hiring and firing. In a very 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 that the bosses had no alternative but to accept, albeit reluctantly, after the February upheaval.

In general the workers held back from taking actual responsibility for the administration of their plants. At the Patronnyi Works they did not constitute themselves as an alternative management. 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, a necessary but temporary concession, until they could establish their traditional prerogatives and unfettered rule.

Danger 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 mounting economic chaos to break the strength of the working class. 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 shut down. In Petrograd, the capital city and main centre of the revolutionary proletariat, this took an especially sharp form as the bosses prepared to 'unload' production by moving their factories out of the city and thus disperse the vanguard of the Russian working class. Dual power had to be resolved one way or another.

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's rights was being established throughout the major plants during May. As management gained in confidence it increasingly used the authority workers had ceded to it to shut down or run down the plants. The employers and managers were prepared to disorganise production in pursuit of their class goals. The struggle for control over production took on a sharper form.

Of the workers' parties only the Bolshevik Party was prepared to take up and lead the fight for workers' control. It did so because the party saw that 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* produced in September. Again he argued:

'There is no way of effectively combatting 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.' (Lenin's emphasis)

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 city wide 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 strength of the committees, as proletarian 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.

On 3 and 4 July the Soviet leadership did not lift a finger when troops loyal to the Provisional Government fired on workers and sailors opposing that government in Petrograd. In the aftermath Lenin temporarily dropped the slogan 'All power to the Soviets' and urged his fellow Bolshevik Ordzhonikidze:

'We must swing over the centre of gravity to the factory and shop committees. The factory and shop committees must become the organs of insurrection.'

Accomplices of the regime

Lenin argued that the soviets as then constituted and under the leadership of the right, had become organs of class collaboration and the accomplices of the regime and its savage repression. They were no longer organising the masses for struggle. In that context the call for all power to the soviets was wrong because military repression made a peaceful transfer of power to the soviets impossible. It was also wrong because, in Lenin's words:

'The revolution has in fact been completely betrayed by the SRs and Mensheviks.'

For Lenin it followed that:

'The slogan calling for the transfer of state power to the soviets would now sound quixotic or mocking.'

However, the Bolsheviks were to raise the call 'All power to the Soviets' again in September. But by then, with Bolshevik strength growing inside the soviets, it was raised as a call for insurrection. While Lenin may have turned his attention most sharply to the factory committees after July, he was also at pains to explain that this did not mean that the building of real soviets had ceased to be central to the Bolshevik programme. As Lenin put it in his article arguing for dropping the 'All power to the Soviets' slogan:

'Soviets may appear in this new revolution, and indeed are bound to, but not the present soviets, not organs collaborating with the bourgeoisie, but organs of revolutionary struggle with the bourgeoisie. It is true that even then we shall be in favour of building the whole state on the model of the soviets. It is not a question of soviets in general but combatting the present counter-revolution and the treachery of the present soviets.'

While factory committees kept proletarian democracy alive and maintained working class morale and combativity, they could not play the historical role of soviets as organisers of the mass of exploited and oppressed and as embryos of the proletarian state itself.

The employers stepped up their offensive amidst mounting economic chaos in the autumn. Their hopes for a military coup had been crushed when the Kornilov uprising was put down by the workers. Now they set out to stop factory committees meeting in work time, to stop their control of hiring and firing and also to ship plant out of Petrograd.

Under Bolshevik leadership the committees replied with determined resistance. Most committees 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 eighty 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 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. As well as drilling young workers in the military arts the committees often maintained their own 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 learnt 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. Under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party the Russian workers ensured that the old regime of the bosses in the factories, as well as in the state, was smashed.

The July Days

Events in the Spring of 1917 moved rapidly to expose the incapacity of the Provisional Government to meet any of Russia's crying needs—the urban population's cry for bread, the peasants acute land hunger and the war weary soldiers' yearning for peace. 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 cabinet of Prince Lvov—which linked liberal aristocrats and landowners to the manufacturers and merchants of the Cadet (Constitutional Democrat) Party headed by Miliukov and to the more conservative Octobrists led by Guchkov and whose most left wing member was Alexander Kerensky could not be expected even to begin to distribute land to the peasants. A government with men like Tereshenko, the Finance Minister, who possessed a private fortune of eighty million gold rubles, could not be expected to take the necessary measures to alleviate hunger when these would restrict the free market or hit the bourgeoisie's swollen war profits.

The workers from the outset looked at these people with distrust bordering on hatred. The soldiers and peasants soon learned to do likewise. But their leaders—Tsereteli of the Mensheviks, Victor Chernov of the SRs—had installed and supported these people in power and insisted again and again that it must be so.

But despite the constant pressure and advice of the SRs and the Mensheviks the peasants, the soldiers and the workers could not be prevented from pressing their demands and from repeatedly, if at first only sporadically, taking action.

Workers driven to action

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, to create factory committees which took action to preserve jobs. The bourgeoisie's reaction was summed up by the Cadet daily *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 'its' revolution, discovered that these gentlemen were not in the slightest bit grateful. 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 *moujiks* 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. They had military training. 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.

Miliukov's resignation

The historic party of the peasantry, the 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 a pacifistic appeal for a peace 'without annexations and indemnities' and had renounced imperialist war aims. Miliukov 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, Miliukov, 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 Miliukov'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.

The seven million soldiers at the front greeted the news of the proposed offensive with trepidation. The huge Petrograd garrison, some 215,000 strong heard it with outright 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 countersigned every officer's order that was 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 Podvoisky and Nevsky. Another key figure was the Kronstadt sailor 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 SR's 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 Trotsky and Lunacharsky, who had ten delegates.

Right wing majority

The right wing governmental parties clearly 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), addressed the congress Lenin made perhaps the most prophetic heckle in history:

Tsereteli: '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.'

Lenin: (from his seat) 'There is.'

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 its Cadets and Octobrists, and take power. Hence the Bolsheviks supplementary 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 disarmed. The Military Organisation insisted this was impossible. The central area of Petrograd around the famous boulevard the Nevskii Prospekt 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 Krupskaia. Nevertheless a joint conference of the Central Committee, the Petrograd Committee and the Military Organisation bureau voted for a demonstration on the 9th.

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.

Delighted at their 'triumph' the Mensheviks overreached 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 was 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 realized. But in the Military Organisation the tremendous success of the 18 June carried away what caution there was left. If April had seen the right of the Party nearly pull Bolshevism into the ditch of defencism and coalitionism July was to see the left almost pull the party into the ditch of adventurism and putschism. Lenin, Zinoviev, Sverdov 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' were to seal his final and irrevocable rallying to Bolshevism (see appendix).

Retreat and disintegration

By 19 July 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 demoralized Austrian troops in Galicia, many of whom belonged to the oppressed nations of the 'fossil monarchy'. Yet by 24 June the desperate Kerensky was reporting to the Provisional Government:

'After the first days, sometimes after the first hours of battle, there was a change of heart and spirits dropped—units participating in the battle began drawing up resolutions with demands for immediate leave to the rear.'

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 Miliatary Organisation conference on the 20th 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, answeringly 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. Not only were they dismayed, they 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:

'The time has come not to sleep but to act. Comrades! Chase the bourgeoisie from power—All power must pass into the hands of the workers, soldiers and peasants! Remove from power the bourgeoisie and all its sympathisers.'

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!'

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 firehoses. 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, 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.

70,000 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 Chernov. 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 eight tugboats, two barges, three trailers, three gun boats and several passenger ferries. 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 trashed for this!' he hissed as he stepped onto the balcony of the mansion to address the sailors.

Provocations and ugly scenes

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. Victor Chernov was rescued from a crowd by Trotsky. Angry fist-shaking workers screamed at the terrified SR leader: 'Take power, you son-of-a-bitch, when its given to you!'

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 asoviet 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 utilized 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 theParty 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, Miliukov 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 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 that 'Troops loyal to the 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 elements. The garrison commander seized the opportunity to disarm the Machine Gun Regiment and to send a force of cadets to smash *Pravda's* presses. 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 momentarily under the hammer blows of counter-revolution.

The Bolsheviks—mass party of the working class

The Russian workers, particularly those in Petrograd, had suffered a very real setback after the defeats of the July Days. The Bolshevik leadership was arrested or forced into exile. Circulation of the party press was halved after July with the central organ having a circulation of only 50,000 in August. The mood in the factories was often despondent.

Yet by September and October, the tide had turned decisively in favour of the Bolsheviks. After years in exile or underground, after months as the intransigent left minority in the soviets and after the persecution suffered in July the Bolsheviks at last proved themselves to be the party of the Russian working class. Their undisputed leadership enabled them to transform the spontaneous class consciousness of the working class into a conscious political force. Their methods of achieving that leadership, of defeating the reformist obstacles that stood in the way of victory, are a priceless legacy for revolutionaries today.

Under Kerensky's premiership the forces of the bourgeois counter-revolution continued to mobilise. The pressure from the High Command became intense. Brusilov the Commander-in-Chief curtly demanded of Kerensky:

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

He demanded the complete and total restoration of military discipline. 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 Kornilov. Kerensky made this balancing act incarnate by summoning a 'State Conference' in Moscow from 12 to 15 August. Here, appropriately in the Bolshoi Theatre, Kerensky pirouetted back and forth between the massed delegates of big business and the officer corps on his right and the Menshevik/SR soviet delegates on his left whose fear and hatred for each other burst forth repeatedly. Kerensky could only hysterically assert his own strength and authority and thereby fatally undermine it in the eyes of the bourgeoisie at least. And indeed it was an offensive by the counter-revolution that was to cut the ground from under its own feet. Looking at Kerensky, at Tsereteli and Chernov the counter-revolution made an enormous mistake. It thought it saw in these exhausted bankrupts the exhaustion and bankruptcy of the working class and the revolution. It was a mistake for which they were to pay dearly and at short notice.

Before July the Bolsheviks had established themselves as the leadership in several key fighting units of the working class. In the August city council elections in Petrograd they chalked up majorities in the proletarian districts of Peterhof, and Vyborg. 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. The Bolsheviks led a general strike in Moscow against the State Conference. That self same strike had been opposed by the conciliator leadership of the Moscow Soviet.

That the workers were not prepared to make their peace with the bourgeoisie or the Provisional Government was demonstrated by a resolution from the young workers of Putilov:

'We, the youths, 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 Tsereteli.'

Further battles lay ahead and this was patently clear to the most class conscious workers. But after July the workers had learnt the need for discipline and organisation, the need to avoid premature and sporadic struggles.

It was in this context that the bourgeoisie launched its own counter-offensive against both the Provisional Gov-

ernment and the gains of the working class. The July Days had given them the confidence to press home the attack. On 22 July the right wing General Kornilov was appointed to the supreme command by Kerensky. He declared he would be answerable only to his 'own conscience and the whole people'. He very quickly assumed the mantle of the messiah of the counter-revolution. At the Moscow State Conference he was fawned on by Kerensky and the bourgeois ministers as the 'first soldier of the revolution'.

Kornilov's rise coincided with increasing clamour from the bosses for the complete restoration of their right to hire and fire which had been usurped by the factory committees. There were well hatched plans to establish a military dictatorship to establish the order that the Provisional Government had still evidently failed to achieve.

The weakness of Kerensky's government was sharply exposed. He was trying to crack down on the organised workers. On 24 August he closed down the Bolshevik press once again. Yet at the very same time the bourgeoisie were preparing to oust him and his government. Quite simply after July the bosses felt they had no further use for the Provisional Government. In co-ordinated fashion the bourgeois Cadets resigned from the government and General Kornilov announced a march to restore order in the capital on the 27 August. The long depressed stock market soared as the capitalists looked forward to the counter-revolution's victory.

Bolshevik predictions verified

Everything the Bolsheviks had been predicting about the role of the conciliator Mensheviks and Kerensky was being verified by the march of events. These traitors to the working class had been allowing the forces of counter-revolution the chance to re-gather their strength and strike back. The Party was now put to the test of fighting the counter-revolution.

Kornilov's march on Petrograd shattered the post-July order in the factories. Meetings vowed to defend the city and demanded arms to do so from the Soviet Executive. The old Baranovskii Machine Construction factory resolved:

'We demand that the Central Executive Committee [TsIK], 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 and will tear out the poisonous fangs from the snake that has dared to poison the great Russian Revolution with its lethal venom'.

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. 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 so as to defend the revolution!

Kerensky cowered behind the proletarian wall defending Red Petrograd. In the short term he had no alternative. Bolshevik leaders were released from jail and Bolshevik propaganda and agitation was in free flow again. 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 mass of the workers away from their trust in the Mensheviks and in the wretched Kerensky, how to intensify the contradictions between the rank and file Mensheviks and SRs and their compromised leaders?

For Lenin the key to this 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. Their demands were to include the arrest of the Cadet leader Miliukov and Duma President Rodzianko who were backing Kornilov. They included the legalisation of the transfer of the land to the peasants, and workers' control over grain distribution and the factories.

Revolutionary defence

The Bolsheviks also demanded the arming of the Petrograd workers and the summoning of the militant Kronstadt, Vyborg and Helsingfors garrisons to Petrograd. 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 the 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 political grave, and the graves of 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'.

Bridge to the masses

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. The political fortunes of the Bolshevik Party increased tremendously in the aftermath of Kornilov's defeat and Kerensky's humiliation. Its use of a united front, addressed to Kerensky and the Mensheviks, but carried into life by thousands of rank and file workers in the committees of struggle, was for the limited goal of defeating Kornilov. But by combining unity in action with a merciless critique of Kerensky and the conciliating leadership of the soviets the Bolsheviks proved to thousands of workers that they were the only consistent revolutionaries. 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. The ranks of the Red Guards had grown dramatically. 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. Resolution after resolution passed at mass meetings in early September

took up the Bolshevik call for all power to pass to the soviets and challenge the Soviet leadership's collaboration with the Kerensky government. The workers of Langezipen typically told those leaders:

'... we suppose that the Kornilov rebellion has washed your sleepy eyes clear and enabled you to see the situation in its true light.

'We declare that you have long spoken for us, but not our views, and we demand that you begin to speak the language of the proletariat or else we reserve for ourselves freedom of action.'

In fact the Kornilov coup attempt had not washed clear the sleepy eyes of the Menshevik and SR leaders of the TsIK. It had clouded them even further. While Kerensky tried to strengthen his power by establishing a five person directorate the TsIK still continued to support him in exchange for a promise to convene a Pre-Parliament. The tension between the aspirations of the proletarian mass and the intentions of those they had once delegated to represent them was increasing dramatically.

In September the Petrograd Soviet passed its first distinctively 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 in support of the Provisional Government! The Moscow Soviet passed a Bolshevik resolution four days later.

Menshevik splits and instability

The other contenders for proletarian leadership either withered and declined, as was the case with the Mensheviks, or they were gripped by splits and instability. The SR party split, with the Left SRs supporting the calls for soviet power against their ex-leaders. The bulk of the Petrograd SR organisation backed the Lefts reflecting the mood of Red Petrograd.

It was the growing identification of the most active workers with the Bolshevik Party that marked the most important change in the mood of the working class. Tireless agitation and propaganda to expose the treachery of the Soviet leadership was now beginning to bear fruit. By October Bolshevik Party membership stood at 250,000 compared to around 30,000 at the beginning of the year. In Petrograd the Bolsheviks could count 43,000, members in their ranks of whom 28,250 were workers and 5,800 soldiers. The overwhelming majority of the party was proletarian.

The bulk of the intelligentsia inevitably abandoned the banner of the proletariat as the hour of decision drew close. Those intellectuals—the finest intellects in Russia and much of Europe—that stuck by the working class were party intellectuals. Their talents were at the service of the proletarian party.

Bolshevik's meteoric rise

The party's proletarian core was chosen by the majority of the workers to be their representatives in the soviets and the factory committees. In the Red Guard in October, for example, 44% were Bolshevik Party members. The vanguard party of Lenin now comprised the mass vanguard of the Russian working class. The meteoric rise of the Party was consolidated in September and October. In Moscow district council (duma) elections in September the Bolsheviks secured 52% of the vote and virtually wiped out the Mensheviks. During September and October the Bolsheviks could count on 68% support in the Moscow Soviet while the Mensheviks and SRs were receiving 16% and 4% respectively. The Party was truly becoming the national party of the Russian working class. In Saratov in the Volga it took leadership of the Soviet in September. It was to do the same in the majority of soviets across Russia's far flung industrial centres as the month wore on. These facts, stubborn facts that bourgeois historians have never yet been able to refute, show as a lie and a slander the charge that when the Bolsheviks took power they were a minority and their action was a coup. On the contrary, as a majority they led a mass revolution. Once the Bolsheviks comprised that layer of workers that the majority of the Russian working class looked to to lead their struggles, the task was to use that position of leadership to mount a final offensive against both the Provisional Government and the conciliator leadership ensconced in the Soviet Executives.

For those workers who had entered the ranks of the Bolsheviks there was no question but that the deepening crisis could only be solved by the seizure of power by the soviets. Yet even after Kornilov the TsIK refused Lenin's offer of loyal opposition within the soviets if they were to take the power. The transfer of power to the soviets could now only take the form of a Bolshevik led and organised seizure of power. Surveying the developing peasant land seizures, the paralysis of Kerensky's government and the new mood in the soviets the third Petrograd city conference of the Bolsheviks resolved in early October that the moment for decisive action was nigh. The assembled representatives of the leadership of Red Petrograd's proletariat declared:

'All these circumstances say clearly that the moment of the last decisive battle which must decide the fate not only of the Russian but of the world revolution has arrived'.

Memories of July

One last difference existed between the Bolshevik vanguard and the majority of workers. The majority were for soviet power. In Petrograd only one factory mass meeting voted contrary to the call for the impending second All Russian Congress of Soviet Deputies to take the power. That argument had been clinched decisively. However, still only a minority of workers, mainly the younger ones, were prepared for an open 'coming out' (*vystuplenie* in Russian) to achieve that end. The memory of July lingered on. A red guard from the Petrograd Pipe Factory described his own foreboding as their detachment spent the last pre-October night in the factory:

'... But I did not feel like sleeping. Many thoughts raged through my head, much was still not understood that is so clear now. The July Days stood out too vividly before my eyes. The hissing of the philistine crowd shook my certainty.'

But there had been a dramatic change in the balance of class forces since July which should have quelled such nerves. The other industrial centres were far nearer to the mood of Petrograd. The peasantry was in motion, and recognising this the Bolsheviks were prepared to lead the struggle for power. All the conditions existed for the seizure of power by the working class.

In this situation only a decisive move by the vanguard could provide the masses with the final confrontation that the majority wished for even though many of them shrank from it. As the Vyborg district organiser Latsis expressed it so well:

'In the coming out the organised [illegible]

the fore, the masses will support. It is totally different from before.'

The Bolsheviks had learnt in July that the rising could not follow the pattern of the bourgeois revolution of 1789 in France in which the great mass of people rise as one against the old regime. In modern capitalist society the art of inusrrection involved meticulous planning. Technical preparation had to follow on from political preparation. With the conquest of the masses the Bolsheviks were obliged to begin the secret work necessary for the victory of a rising. The Party was obliged to fashion the instruments of insurrection. As Trotsky observed:

'Just as a blacksmith cannot seize the red hot iron in his naked hand, so the proletariat cannot directly seize the power; it has to have an organisation accommodated to this task. The co-ordination of the mass insurrection with the conspiracy to the insurrection, the organisation of the insurrection through the conspiracy, constitutes that complex and responsible department of revolutionary politics which Marx and Engels called "the art of insurrection". It pre-supposes a correct general leadership of the masses, a flexible orientation in changing conditions, a thought-out plan of attack, cautiousness in technical preparation, and a daring blow.'

Having won proletarian leadership the Bolsheviks prepared to strike that 'daring blow' and seize state power for the soviets. On 22 October the Petrograd workers were rallied in a series of meetings to celebrate the 'Day of the Petrograd Soviet'. Party workers spoke to indoor meetings organised to avoid provocation and confrontation. At the Central People's House 30,000 attended to hear Trotsky electrify his audience with a call to carry the revolution through to the very end. An SR described that at factory meetings at this time: 'our speeches seemed doomed to us'. The Menshevik commentator Sukhanov left the People's House with his head in a swim:

'With an unusually heavy heart I watched this truly majestic scene. And all over Petrograd it was the same thing. Everywhere final reviews and final oaths. Strictly speaking, this was already the insurrection. It had already begun.'

Those who were to seize the bridgeheads, the post office and railway stations, those who were to arrest the Provisional Government knew that the mass of the workers stood behind them. That fact gave the Bolsheviks the confidence and the courage to act and the certainty that victory would be theirs.

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.

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 slim 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.

Loval 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 accordingly. He struggled to make the subjective factor equal to the tasks of the objective situation.

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 violences 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 under-represented.

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 10-2. 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 National Congress of Soviets 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 Men-

sheviks 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 15-6. 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.

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 a rising. 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—Trotsky, Sverdlov, Antonov-Ovseenko, Bubnov and Sokolnikov—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:

'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 (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 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 journalist for the reactionary *Rech* newspaper recorded: '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 Kronstadt 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 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 10.00a.m. 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.

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 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.

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 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—they 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.

Revolution not reform

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. Against today's Kerenskys—the Kinnocks 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 . . .'

Seventy 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.

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 eleborating 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 June observed 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 policy 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 disorganising 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 reasoning would have been more or less convincing were we a simple bloc 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 completely 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 possiblitiy 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 particularily 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, straightforward 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.

Petrograd in 1917

