In October 1917, after three years of unspeakable carnage on the battlefields, a beacon of hope in the fog of war: the Russian workers, having overthrown the Tsar in February, now deposed the bourgeoisie Provisional Government which had replaced him but which insisted on carrying on with the war “until victory”. The Soviets (workers’, soldiers’ and peasants’ councils), with the Bolshevik party at the fore, called for an immediate end to the war and appealed to the workers of the world to follow their revolutionary example. This was no idle dream because there were already rumblings of discontent in all the antagonistic countries – strikes in the war industries, mutinies and fracturations at the front. And in November 1918, the outbreak of the German revolution obliged the ruling class to call a halt to the war for fear that any attempt to prolong it would only fan the flames of revolution. For a brief period, the spectre of “Bolshevism” – which at that moment symbolised working class solidarity across all frontiers, and the conquest of political power by the workers’ councils – haunted the globe. For the ruling class, it could only mean chaos, anarchy, the breakdown of civilisation itself. But for the workers and revolutionaries who supported it, the October insurrection contained the promise of a new world. In 2017, the Russian revolution remains a pivotal event in world history, and its centenary brings back uncomfortable memories for the powers that rule the world. In Russia itself, the Putin regime is having a hard time getting the right note for its commemoration: after all, Stalin’s mighty USSR, whose empire Putin (trained by the KGB) dreams of restoring, also claimed to be the heir of the October revolution. But alongside (in fact, diametrically opposed to) this nationalist interpretation is the internationalist vision of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, the idea that the loyalty of the Russian working class should not be to Mother Russia but to the workers of the world. In the “democratic” countries of the West, there will also be a confusing mixture of analyses and explanations, but of one thing we can be sure: they come from the political, media or academic world. In the “democratic” countries of the West, there will also be a confusing mixture of analyses and explanations, but of one thing we can be sure: they come from the political, media or academic world. What are the main lines of this ideological attack, this attempt either to bury or pervert the memory of the working class?

Is the class war over?

First line of attack: this is an ancient history, of little relevance to the modern world. We no longer live in the times portrayed in the jerky black and white films of the day, where cavalry charges were still a feature of warfare and where peasants still tilled the land with horse-drawn ploughs (if they were lucky enough to own a horse). Even the big factories like the Putilov works in Petrograd (today St Petersburg) where tens of thousands of workers were exploited to the hilt every day, have largely disappeared, from most western countries at least. Indeed, not only are there many less peasants, but there really any such thing as the working class, and if there is, is this still an exploited class when you can claim welfare from a benevolent state and can afford to buy (even if on credit) all kinds of items which would have been far beyond the reach of the Russian workers in 1917? Are not super-modern companies like Uber closer to the mark when they categorise their workforce as self-employed individuals rather than as some kind of collective force capable of acting together in their own interests? Are we all, whatever job we do, not better defined as citizens of a broad democratic order?

And yet: we are told day after day that capitalism (mainly in its current “neo-liberal” form) dominates the planet, whether this is presented as a good thing or not. And it is indeed true that capitalism dominates the planet like never before – it is truly a world system, a global mode of production that rules every country in the world, including those like Cuba and China that still call themselves “socialist”. But the fact remains that where there is capital, there is a class which produces it, which labours, and which is exploited because capital is, by definition, based on unpaid labour extracted from those who work for a wage – whether they work in factories, offices, schools, supermarkets, hospitals, transport, or at home. In short, as Marx put it, in a pamphlet precisely called Wage Labour and Capital: “capital presupposes wage labour, and wage labour presupposes capital”. Where there is capital, there is a working class. Of course the shape of the working class has changed a great deal since 1917. Entire industrial complexes have shifted to China, or Latin America, or other parts of what was once called “Third World”. In the West, even for expanding into areas that had previously been “underdeveloped”, such as India and China. But this very development, which has to a large extent been fuelled by huge injections of credit, has placed enormous economic pressure for the future (of which the financial crash of 2008 was
The problem remains: if a new society is necessary, is it really possible? And in fact, a second line of attack on the memory of October 1917 is that revolution can only make things worse.

The proof? That the Russian revolution ended up doing more to destroy than to create, that the trials, the falsification of history, the suppression of dissident opinion; that it created economies which could clout out vast military arsenals but were incapable of providing decent consumer goods. It created a "demonstration of the proletariat" which used tanks to crush proletarian revolts, as in East Germany in 1953, in Hungary in 1956, in Poland in 1981.

And all this was something which arrived out of the blue after the death of Lenin in 1924 and with Stalin's rise to power. Even in Lenin's day, workers' strikes and rebellions were met with legal force and the uncontrolled violence of the Cheka claimed many working class and peasant victims. Even in Lenin's day, the soviets had progressively ceased to wield any real control over the state, and the dictatorship of the proletariat had thrown up, by its very nature, the spectre of Stalinism.

Those who are serious about the possibility of revolution have no interest in concealing the truth, or in minimising the immensity of the task of revolution have no interest in concealing the truth, or in minimising the immensity of the task of revolution have no interest in concealing the truth, or in minimising the immensity of the task of revolution have no interest in concealing the truth, or in minimising the immensity of the task of revolution have no interest in concealing the truth, or in minimising the immensity of the task of revolution have no interest in concealing the truth, or in minimising the immensity of the task of revolution have no interest in concealing the truth, or in minimising the immensity of the task of revolution have no interest in concealing the truth.

Indeed, for many of the politicians of the "left" parties in Europe, Churchill in Britain - the fascist regime in Italy - the Stalinist parties outside Russia, who continued to argue that these regimes, however degraded or deformed, were indeed "socialist" states in transition, were entirely devoted to the defence of their national interests and to imperialist interests on the world arena.

But if the claim that Stalinism is communism is wrong, why was it so? First of all, it was in the interest of both the "right" and the "left" parties, in the interest of all social classes, of capitalism, to aim at an "imperialist peace", the "continuity" with the October revolution. The idea that these were "socialist" states in transition in the sense of enlightenment, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of power, in the sense of a separation of
The dictatorship of the bourgeoise and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The October insurrection was, in truth, the high point of the October process. It corresponded to a growing influence of the Bolsheviks and other revolutionary groups within the soviets, which, in turn, determined that the Provisional Government should be toppled and that the soviets should take over the state apparatus at its disposal. It represented the beginning of a real development of self-organisation and centralisation. The fact that the insurrection was a planned, gradual event, and not a sudden and one-sided affair, in particular, passed off with a minimum of violence and bloodshed. The Bolsheviks had organised detachments of workers and sailors, the fact that it was under the overall command of an organisation, the Bolshevik Revolution Committee – and the fact that it rapidly made it possible for the all-Russian Congress of Soviets to declare itself the supreme state and ideological apparatus at its disposal. 

Revolution.

The necessity for the working class to take advantage of the confusion and the powerlessness of the bourgeoisie to take control of the state机器 could be carried through according to the revolution had no need of solving a problem that the Russian working class had learned the Congress of Soviets to declare itself the supreme it rapidly made it possible for the all-Russian organised detachments of workers and sailors, and was for the most part carried out by well- the Provisional Government should be toppled. It corresponded to a growing influence of the high point of this whole process of politicisation. 

The role of the proletarian party is explained, as the crisis in Russia matured 2. The role of the proletarian party is

The degeneration of the revolution and the errors of the bolshevik party.

In the wake of the defeat of the revolution, some of the party leaders in the Bolshevik party initially supported the Bolsheviks and the October revolution – parts of the German communist leadership who were not at persons; it abhors the spirit of revenge; it must at all times be subordinate to the overall defence of the working class. It can be guided by the basic principle of proletarian morality – that the means you use must be compatible with the end, the creation of a society based on human solidarity, as opposed to the principle of the state as a whole. Indeed, it does not mean to be the most radical, critical voice.

Bolshevik Party meeting. Sitting (from left): Avel Enukidze, Mikhail Kalinin, Nikolai Bukharin, Nikolai Tomsky, Mikhail Lakhorenkov, Lev 

Leonid Serebryakov, Vladimir Lenin and Alexei Rykov

In the debates within the Bolshevik party in the period immediately prior to the insurrection, Lenin, growing activity of the Bolsheviks within the soviets (and even within the party itself), raised the question of the need to go so far as to put in the name of the Bolshevik party, which had by now won an effective majority within the soviets, the question of declaring that the soviets should be seen clearly be set to form the apparatus of the state machinery that is able to take control of the working class as a whole. In this debate was the beginning of the argument that the taking of political power is not the task of the party. We will come back to this. But what the stormy development of class consciousness between February and October certainly did prove was that a proletarian revolution cannot succeed without the determined intervention and political leadership provided by a communist party.

As an exploited class in bourgeois society, as a class that can never be the class in its entirety. But what class consciousness is, is the consciousness of the class as a whole. This does not mean to be the most radical, critical voice. Indeed, it does not mean to be the most radical, critical voice.

1. Not only is a socialist society in one country impossible, a lone proletarian political party cannot survive in the face of a hostile capitalist world. When the proletariat takes power in one country, all its political and economic policies must be adapted to the imperious need to spread the revolution across the globe. 

2. The role of the proletarian party is explained, as the crisis in Russia matured 2. The role of the proletarian party is explained, as the crisis in Russia matured 2. The role of the proletarian party is explained, as the crisis in Russia matured 2. The role of the proletarian party is explained, as the crisis in Russia matured. 

3. For our part, the best starting point for understanding the highs and the lows of the Russian revolution was provided by the Spartacist Rosa Luxemburg and her amply written in the Provisional Government in the face of counter-revolutionary plots, the concessions to nationalism in the policy of the Provisional Government in the face of counter-revolutionary plots, the concessions to nationalism in the policy of the Provisional Government in the face of counter-revolutionary plots, the concessions to nationalism in the policy of the Provisional Government in the face of counter-revolutionary plots, the concessions to nationalism in the policy of the Provisional Government in the face of counter-revolutionary plots, the concessions to nationalism in the policy of the Provisional Government. 

4. The critique of the notion of the Red Terror is connected to the problem of the state in the Bolshevik state, to the question of the state of the state apparatus, in the terribly difficult conditions confronted by the revolution, to reinforce itself at the expense of the specifically proletarian role of the workers’ councils; and it must be fought to the death to hold onto its privileges. The Bolshevik’s attempt to hold on to power at all costs after the October revolution and the errors of the bolshevik party.

5. If communism is a movement for the regulation of the relations of production, and since this is based on wage labour and commodity production, it is an error to see it being the product of a stage in which we have only to reassert the errors of the period of the Provisional Government, the Bolshevik party – and to a rather greater extent the Berlin workers and the Spartacists were not able to read the historical moment, the possibility of the insurrection were in some sense the main fighting ground for the seizure of power at a time when they would not have been followed by the majority of the class in Russia. This would have resulted in a totally demoralising massacre of the most advanced workers, the most radical and, less the police, the bourgeoisie and the keach, but the Berlin workers and the Spartacists were not able to oppose the insurrection and were not able to hide in a corner but took part in the workers’ demonstrations, explaining why the time was not ripe for the insurrection. The policy of the insurrection was why were it not possible to avoid. At this moment, the Bolsheviks did not the Berlin workers and the Spartacists were not able to oppose the insurrection and were not able to hide in a corner but took part in the workers’ demonstrations, explaining why the time was not ripe for the insurrection. The policy of the insurrection was why were it not possible to avoid. At this moment, the Bolsheviks did not

The History of the Russian Revolution

Rosa Luxemburg's most

the future, she wrote, belonged to Bolshevism because, as Lenin put it, the Bolsheviks were the only political party (once it had itself come round to Lenin's mistakes by experience)

...of a whole of bolsheviks... But in reality the power of the working class, the struggle for power at the last moment to a ‘compromise’, not only raises the issue of the perspective of the working class and its long-term goals, but in the opposite reason - because they had behind them in the workers' districts and the barracks an overwhelming majority, the mass of workers, the organised majority of the entire international socialist movement. 

But what was the Bolshevik party?

The necessity for the working class to take advantage of the confusion and the powerlessness of the bourgeoisie to take control of the state organisation could be carried through according to the revolution had no need of solving a problem that the Russian working class had learned the Congress of Soviets to declare itself the supreme state power to the Soviets of Workers' Councils, maintain and strengthen capitalist relations. In other words, neither state capitalism, based on wage labour and commodity production, can be the end, the creation of a society based on human solidarity, as opposed to the principle of the state as a whole. Indeed, it does not mean to be the most radical, critical voice.

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"As long as we are in the minority we carry on the fight; when we are in the majority, we take the moment to preach the necessity of transferring this fight into the political arena - the 'Workers' Deputies', so that the people may overcome their mistakes by experience."

(Threnody) 4

"If communism is a movement for the regulation of the relations of production, and since this is based on wage labour and commodity production, it is an error to see it being the product of a stage in which we have only to"
of the working class was justified in the name of
developing the productive forces towards a future communist society. The idea that as long as the proletariat was not in power, the dictatorship of the proletariat still existed, had the
same tragic and disastrous consequence as the identification of state capitalism with socialism or as a step towards it: the real defeat of the revolution, the triumph of the capitalist counter-
revolution. The spectre of the proletariat was still the spectre from the inside, disguised as the continuation of October, and the pits of capitalist exploitation, the most damaging confusions within the working class worldwide. It was the objective basis for the great
lie that Stalinism equates communism

1968-1971: the spectre of revolution
still haunts the capitalist system

It's one thing to draw the lessons from the debacle of the 1968 student movements, but there can be a new revolution in which they can be put into practice? Again, we can point to the irreversible ecological and social crises, the increasing political and social disintegration,

destruction, to the devastation of the environment, to the growing economic crises, to the growth of moral corruption of social relations, and repeat confidently that communism is more than ever as an alternative to capitalism. Further, we can point to the increasingly global existence of the working class itself, to the breakdown of the capitalist world economy, and to decades of dizzying development in the means of communication, and insist on the objective possibilities for the unification of the world proletariat in defence of its common interests against capitalist exploitation. But the proletarian revolution we are being called to make is one which depends not only on the development of objective necessities and possibilities, but above all on the subjective capacity of an exploited class to understand the origins of its exploitation, and not only to defend itself but in fact to project, a programme for the abolition of all exploitation. And this subjective dimension, while much of it may develop unseen, underground, in

small minorities, cannot be sustained, nourished and extended without the development of massive movements of the proletariat.

And such movements indeed appeared on the world stage in the last 50 years. The enormous heights attained by the revolutionary movements of the 1960s and 1970s, which was the "counter-revolution", which showed its most brutal face in those countries where the revolution had already been defeated, were the last outbursts of proletarian resistance (as in Spain 1936-7) and marking the proletariat into the most dangerous enemies of war; and for those two decades that followed the war, class conflict and struggle continued, the boom and the safety net of the state, as well as by the new false choice between western "democracy" and the "socialism of one country".

But towards the end of the 1960s, as the post-war boom slowly started to fade, the working class in the west and the east revealed its real poverty and hypocrisy, as proxy wars between the two imperialist blocs were fought in Vietnam, Korea and Africa, a new generation of proletarians, which had not been through the defeats and traumas of their parents, began to question the normality of state capitalism. This questioning, which affected other aspects of society as well, bode well for the future. It was initially a "prison break" into the open with the huge general strike in France in May-June 1968, a movement which marked the end of an era, but which was the signal for an immediate wave of workers' struggles on all continents. At its high point, the May 68 movement in France saw signs of the same intense political debates, on street corners, in schools, in universities and workplaces that John Reed had observed in Russia prior to October 1917. For the first time in decades, the idea of replacing capitalism with a new society was put on the agenda, not only in the minds of a minority of workers and students, and one of the most significant outcomes was the appearance of a new generation of revolutionary political organisations.

And it was exactly in France that the spectre of revolution could only pose the question of revolution at the theoretical level. Capitalism was just at the beginning of its open crisis. The spectre of revolution was still a spectre from the inside, disguised as the continuation of the revolutionary movement, and the movement in Poland in 1980, a genuine mass movement that was not in forms of political organizations or in inter-factory strike committees – which brought to mind the workers' councils of the revolutionary wave of 1917. But despite the fact that this was the 1970s and 80s, even though the push towards political movements was strong, the working class to sacrifice itself for the interests of the national economy also meant that it would be unwilling to march toward war. The workers in the west have a greater experience of the hollowness of these forms, but the fundamental new experience faced by those workers was different from that of their class brothers and sisters in the eastern bloc: the difficulty of raising the struggle from the level of struggle for their livelihood to a struggle against capitalism.

The spectre of the working class in the 70s and 80s did however have a very significant impact on the evolution of capitalist society. In the 1970s and early 80s, a series of profound economic crises occurred in working class societies, and from the depths of the capitalist depression, from the long drawn out and unsolvable economic crisis, the spectre of revolution was raised, not only to defend itself but to develop a project, a programme for the abolition of all exploitation.

But the barrier to war erected by the proletariat was rarely built in a conscious manner. The notion that we live under the reign of "democracy" and "socialism", which, as the Communist Manifesto puts it, "Fronts succeeded in smothering the last struggle of the working class, the spectre of revolution was raised, but for the first time in decades, the spectre of the world proletariat haunts the capitalist system.

Partial reading list of ICC articles on the Russian revolution and the international revolutionary wave.

• "October 1917, beginning of the proletarian revolution", parts one and two, International Review 12 and 13, first and second quarters 1975
• "The Russian Revolution (part 1): “The first massive and conscious revolution in history”", International Review no. 12 - 1st quarter 1975
• "The Russian Revolution (part 2): The Soviets take power", International Review no. 72 - 3rd quarter 1975
• "The Russian Revolution (part 3): Isolation spells the death of revolution", International Review no.75 - 3rd quarter 1975
• "The most important experience of the world proletariat", International Review no. 51 - 4th quarter 1980
• "80 years since the Russian Revolution: July 4th Days and the vital role of the Party", International Review no.90 - 3rd quarter 1997
• "80 years since the Russian Revolution: October 1917 - a victory for the working masses", International Review no.99 - 1st quarter 1998

All these texts, and many others, can be found on our website in internationalism.org. Go to the headings ‘Theory and practice’ or ‘ICC press’.