

# Lenin - Great October Socialist Revolution

- *Madhu*

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The Great October Socialist Revolution was victorious in Russia 46 years after the 1871 Paris Commune.

Those who hail the October Socialist Revolution as great revolution today include the Communist Revolutionaries, those who embraced reformism and anarchism and those socialists of different varieties apart from the vast millions of working class, oppressed and toiling people in the world.

There are cynics, deserters and turn-coats of Communist Movement who seek to undermine, denigrate or negate the significance of October Socialist Revolution on the plea that, after all, this revolution had suffered a setback at the end.

Some say: Yes, we must hail whatever the Russian Communists, Bolsheviks guided by Lenin had done to lead the Russian Socialist Revolution to victory and to defend it from the internal and external enemies. This revolution was correct and needed in the conditions that existed in Russia at the time. But it is difficult and almost impossible to do in India as the Bolsheviks had done in Russia as the concrete conditions are totally different today. Of course, they do not say this in such clear words. The anarchists say: The seizure of power in Russia by revolutionary means and the defence of Socialist Revolution were indeed commendable. But they remain silent or avoid the answer to the question: Are the tactics and methods adopted by the Russian Bolsheviks to make the people conscious, steel, train and move in millions for revolutionary action are valid and applicable for our revolution?

The concrete conditions of Countries and historical contexts may differ. So no revolution can be a carbon copy of another revolution. No revolution can mechanically transplant the experiences of another country. This is what Lenin said. At the same time, learning from one another is a must. We must learn from the revolutions of other Countries as well as from our own past and present. It is necessary to avoid the recurrence of same mistakes and deepen our own understanding and ability to apply Marxism and revolutionary experiences to our practice.

Lenin was at the helm of revolution from the beginning to the victorious socialist revolution. He prepared the Russian proletariat for the most difficult and herculean responsibility of leading the Russian revolution. It was, indeed, a miracle. He trained, steeled and equipped the proletariat ideologically, politically, organisationally and in the course of class struggle, revolutionary upheavals along a thorny, bumpy, circuitous, and long road of revolution. It is a rich and inexhaustible treasure house of revolutionary experiences.

## **Early Period**

Before the revolution, the peasants in Russia were like serfs oppressed by feudalism and the tsarist autocracy. The capitalist development was weak and backward. The workers had no political rights. The tsarist Russia was a prison house for numerous small, non-Russian nations.

The working class movement, in the early days, championed the demands like wages, working hours, political rights and the redemptions, fines and various forms of repression. The Northern Union of Russian Workers (1878) even declared the “overthrow of the (then) existing economic and political system as its ultimate aim” and “winning the political liberty and political rights for the people as its immediate aim”. The tsarist regime sought to brutally crush the workers strikes. Yet, the workers waged many a heroic strikes and battles. But these struggles were unequal to face the mighty autocratic state. A political party was need of the hour.

Narodniks and Emancipation of Labour Group (ECG) were two kinds of political forces in the scene.

Narodniks were the petty bourgeoisie revolutionaries. They held the view that capitalism cannot develop in Russia and, if at all it develops, it will only be an ‘accidental’. Feudalism and the tsarist autocracy can be overthrown and Socialism can be brought in Russia only by the peasant revolts led by the intellectuals. It is not the classes and class struggles, but the “outstanding individuals and heroes” who create History and the “mobs” would blindly follow them. The development of proletariat in Russia will be a “historical misfortune” and proletarianism will be an “ulcer”. Narodniks went to villages in the guise of peasants and incited the

peasants to revolt. They assassinated tsar-Alexander-II. But they could achieve nothing. The experience of Narodniks had shown that the methods of individual terrorism, individual heroism and individual assassinations are futile and disastrous for revolution. The tsarist Govt. could easily crush the Narodniks. The remaining Narodniks abandoned the revolution, compromised with the tsarist regime and began supporting the kulaks in the later years. Yet, the influence of Narodism lasted for long among the revolutionary-minded intelligentsia. Marxism could spread only by defeating it.

The Emancipation of Labour Group (ELG) formed by Plekhanov was the first Marxist group in Russia. It had done a tremendous work to disseminate Marxist ideas in Russia. Plekhanov had done lot of ideological work to expose Narodism in the light of Marxism.

The Social Democrats in the early period were in the form of groups and circles. They had no or scant connections with the mass working class movement. As Lenin said, the Social Democratic Movement, at the time, was *“like an infant still unborn but already developing in its mother’s womb, the Social Democratic Movement was in the process of foetal development.”*

Plekhanov and ELG led by him were based on the ideology of Marxism. But they failed to realise that the proletariat must lead the peasants in revolution and it can lead the revolution against tsardom to victory only by developing a stable alliance with the peasants.

Lenin was just 20 years old when he entered the political scene as a Marxist. He encountered the arrests, exiles and other forms of repression at his tender age. Through his work, he became popular as a Marxist intellectual, organiser and leader. The need of the time was to lay a basis for a Proletarian Party.

### **Lenin’s Struggle for the Proletarian Party**

For Lenin, it was a three-pronged struggle. i) carry on the struggle against the petty bourgeois ideology and politics as well as against all wrong and incorrect ideas paraded in the name of Marxism; ii) Study the concrete conditions as well as revolutionary experiences and develop the strategy, tactics for revolution and iii) Build the party of Proletariat capable of leading the democratic and socialist revolutions to victory. Lenin’s struggle in these spheres was inter-related, inseparable and influenced each other.

In 1895, Lenin amalgamated 20 Marxist circles and formed a League of Struggle for the Emancipation of Working Class. This brought a serious turn in the working class movement. Lenin guided the League not to confine to a few intellectuals but to go extensively among the workers and move them into class and political struggles. The League had, in reality, moved the millions into struggles. In no time, the League had emerged as an important force in the Russian political life. It combined the economic and political struggles against tsardom. The League became a first body that brought a fusion between socialism and working class movement. It made an extensive socialist propaganda. Inspired by the work of the League, many organisations had come up in different places and under various names. Lenin said, the League of Struggle was *“the first real rudiment of a revolutionary party which was backed by the working class-movement”*.

The legal Marxists advocated the subordination of working class movement to the interests of bourgeoisie on an absurd plea that the working class was not “cultured enough”. Lenin had rejected it. He asserted: i) all the Marxists must unite into a single party; ii) the proletariat must unite with the peasantry and rally other toiling people and the world proletariat to advance the struggle for Socialism and Communism.

Some in Russia argued that the bourgeois must lead the democratic revolution as, in essence, it was a Bourgeois Revolution. Lenin had strongly opposed this view. He criticised this view basing on Marxism, concrete analysis of concrete conditions of Russia; the experiences of revolutions, including the French Revolution of 1871. He proved that the Bourgeois had lost the interest and capacity to lead a Democratic Revolution and it betrays its own self. Therefore, it is suicidal to leave the leadership of democratic revolution to bourgeois. It only results in the failure of this revolution. Lenin asserted that the proletariat must and can lead this revolution consistently, thoroughly and to victory and firmly advance it to a Socialist Revolution.

Likewise, what sort of party was needed in Russia was an exceptionally serious question. Should it be a loose, hotchpotch, free lancing, debating and friendship society like party that works, at best, for some reforms and so weak to collapse at the knock by the enemy and bend before the sops or tantrums thrown by the enemy; OR a party based on Marxism, a well knit, well disciplined party based the principles of Democratic Centralism, a party which is fully dedicated to the task of forging a stable alliance with the peasants and

uniting with other revolutionary classes; a party which is prepared to and capable enough to utilise all the opportunities, swims against all difficulties and adapts itself to all situations and keeping itself always linked with the masses of people. Lenin has done a stupendous ideological and political work to clarify the issues, fight wrong ideas and remove ideological confusions in the working class movement.

During 1901-04, Russia was in the thick of a revolutionary turmoil. In the face of severe economic crisis, closures of thousands of factories threw lakhs of workers out of jobs. The slogan “down with tsarism” reverberated everywhere. On May Day in 1901, the workers fought pitched battles in the streets with the tsarist army with stones and iron rods. The tsarist repression against workers evoked not fear but widest sympathy for the striking workers among the people. The workers and peasants moved into action in several places. Railway workers plunged into strikes in thousands. Several workers died in firings. Yet, several thousands of workers had participated in the funeral processions and meetings of striking workers. By 1903, the strikes became wide spread and gained a greater momentum. The Social Democrats, guided by Lenin, were fully active in the strikes as activists, organisers and leaders. They worked tirelessly to lend a political and revolutionary character to the struggle.

A powerful peasant movement had erupted in Ukraine and Volga region. The peasants had burnt down several mansions of landlords and seized their crops. They punished the most atrocious landlords and their Officials. The Army had stepped into the scene, shot down many. Yet, the peasant revolutionary movement did not stop. The students too moved into struggle in a massive way. The Army’s brutal actions and jails failed to deter them. The students of all the Universities too began a general strike to protest against the Govt’s repressive policy.

Even the liberal bourgeois-landlord classes came into action. They pretended to criticise the police “excesses” on students only to win the students to their side and divert them from the path of struggle.

The tsarist govt., on its part, thought that the methods of repression alone are not enough. It added the methods of allurement and diversion in its armoury. It encouraged the formation of bogus workers unions under the shadow of police intelligence to make the suppression of workers easy.

At this time, the absence of centralised and united party of the proletariat was very much felt. The local party organisations, groups and circles were badly divided. Those who were preaching against the need of a party were no less in number. The tsarist govt. exploited this situation to intensify the repression. It arrested and sent many top leaders into exile to frustrate the emergence of a proletarian party. How to clear the ground for the Party was most important and urgent question before Lenin at the time.

Lenin said: “*Before we can unite and in order that we may unite, we must first of all draw firm and definite line of demarcation.*” He spelt out his concrete plan in his renowned write-up “**Where to Begin?**” He further elaborated it in his celebrated work, **What is To Be Done?**” Explaining the nature of the Party, he said that the Party must consist of a) a close circle of regular cadres of leading party workers, chiefly professional revolutionaries who are free from all occupations except party work and possessing the necessary minimum of theoretical knowledge, practical experience, organisational practice and the art of combating and eluding the tsarist police; b) a broad network of local party organisations and large number of party members enjoying the sympathy and support of hundreds and thousands of working people. He further said that “*no revolutionary movement can endure without a stable organisation of leaders that maintain continuity.*”

The economists were on their toes to criticise Lenin. They preached that we must strive for a better law, confine to the economic struggles and must not break our heads to lead the political struggles and to prepare the proletariat for a revolution. It was thoroughly a reformist concept.

Here, how to build a Party is directly and inseparably linked to the question whether one wants to bring a fundamental change in the society or seek to reform it. The concrete conditions, the paths of achieving the revolution may differ from Country to Country. But the essential and inescapable question remains the same for all the Communists in the world: *What sort of Party is needed?*

Lenin proposed that the proletariat must lead the revolution in Russia. It must unite all the revolutionary classes basing on the firm worker-peasant alliance and lead them first to overthrow the feudal classes and tsarist autocracy from power and then go for a Socialist Revolution by revolutionary means. So, he wanted that the Proletarian Party must be a revolutionary party fully dedicated to the cause of people and revolution.

Lenin had put best of his energies-mental and physical and successfully too to develop a party with such qualities.

However, he encountered the forces which opposed and sought to weaken the proletarian leadership of revolution; those who underplayed the peasant question and the need of a united front, and those who saw the party as a conglomeration of loose and free lancing elements and care little about the interests of party, people and revolution. Lenin also came across those who indulged in factionalism, groupism, conspiracies and some even going to the extent of acting as enemy's direct or camouflaged agents.

### **1905 Revolution**

When the people's upsurge was on a high tide, the tsarist govt. had released a Manifesto on October 17, 1917 promising to convene a Bulgarian Duma. But this was a fraud and trick against the people to gain some sort of respite, win time to rally his forces and more furiously strike at the revolution. The Bolsheviks guided the people not to fall in the trap, boycott the Duma and prepare for an armed uprising to overthrow the tsarist autocracy. The Bulgarian Duma, in reality, was swept away by the revolutionary tide even before it was convened. The revolutionary struggle grew during Oct - Nov' 1905. The struggle of peasants had acquired a wider dimension in autumn 1905. The unrest and revolt had increased among the soldiers and sailors. On December 9, 1905, the workers had built up the first barricade in Moscow. Many more barricades had come up in the City. The oppressed nations rose in armed revolt against the tsarist autocracy.

The tsarist govt. at the time was in a war to annex the new territories. It hoped to win the war and grow stronger to stifle the rising tide of revolution. But Russia's defeat in the Russo – Japanese war had seriously weakened the tsardom.

### **Bloody Sunday**

When the people in other parts of Russia were in the thick of revolutionary struggle, a priest and agent – provocateur was busy in organising a massive workers procession on January 9, 1905 in St. Petersburg. His plan was to take a peaceful procession to the Winter Palace, submit an appeal and beg for tsar's mercy. Here his plan was to create an alibi for the tsar to fire on the workers. The Bolsheviks understood the conspiracy. They explained to the workers by remaining in their midst not to fall in Gapon's trap. But, the workers did not listen to them as the large sections of workers there were still having illusions in the tsar. So the Bolsheviks thought it proper to allow the workers to learn from their own practice. At the same time, the Bolsheviks did not leave the workers to their own fate. They took part in every aspect of the preparation for the procession – organisation, formulation of workers demands and preparation of the Appeal. They used every moment of their relation with the workers to expose the tsarist autocracy and to explain the need for a revolutionary overthrow of it. On Jan 9, 1905, 1,40,000 workers, together with their families- children and old folk, holding the Church symbols and the portraits of the tsar, marched in a peaceful procession on the streets. But before they reached the Winter Palace, instead of tsar Nicholas- II, his armed police was present to rain the bullets indiscriminately and mercilessly on the unarmed workers. As a consequence, 1000 workers had died on the spot. More than 2000 workers were wounded. The Bolsheviks were in the procession. Many of them were killed or arrested. There, in the streets running with the workers blood, the Bolsheviks explained to the workers how the tsar had committed a monumental crime and why the tsardom must be fought and routed. The Jan' 9, 1905 came to be known as a "Bloody Sunday". The workers were taught a bloody lesson: They can win the rights only by struggle. The workers had declared then and there: "*The tsar gave it to us; we will now give it to him*".

Here we must understand how Lenin and Bolsheviks guided the workers in the whole Jan 9<sup>th</sup> programme. The Bolsheviks remained with the workers even in their low level of consciousness to raise their consciousness to a higher level with the help of their own practice. The important lesson for the Communists is: Leaving the people to their own fate when they are found low in consciousness, or submerging ourselves and wading along with it or abandoning the people and resorting to individual terrorist and adventurist actions in the name of adopting the higher form of struggle cannot be a Leninist method of providing the leadership to the people.

The news of tsarist crime on January 9<sup>th</sup> had spread far and wide in Russia. The whole country was stirred of profound indignation and abhorrence. The workers in every town rose in protest against the villainous tsardom. The working class movement rose to an unprecedented height.

The strikes had spread like a wild fire to all major cities. The Putilov workers strike in St. Petersburg on Jan 3, 1905 was the biggest. After Jan 9, 1905 massacre, the strikes grew more acute. The workers clashed with police. In Warsaw, the armed police massacred several hundreds of workers. Yet, the strikes and demonstrations did not cease. In Lodz, the workers erected barricades in the streets and battled with the armed police from behind for 3 days. As Lenin said, these battles were the first armed actions of the workers in Russia. Here the armed actions of the workers had merged with the General Strike of the workers. In August 1905, the Bolsheviks led 70000 workers – many of them women—into the strike at Ivavovo-Voznesenk. Thousands of workers gathered on the banks of the river Tilka and were daily addressed by the Bolsheviks. During this strike, the workers had set up a Council of the Representatives. They were, in reality, one of the first Soviets of Workers Deputies in Russia.

The peasants' unrest broke out in the spring. The peasants' enmasse raided the estates, sugar-refineries and distilleries of the landlords. They had set fire to their Palaces and Manors. In many areas, the peasants had seized the lands, resorted to the whole sale cutting down of forests. They demanded to turn the landed estates over to the people. They seized the granaries and other products of landlords and distributed them among the starving. The landlords fled to the towns in panic. The tsarist govt. had deployed the armed forces heavily in the villages and sought to crush the peasant revolt. The firings, arrests of the "ring leaders", floggings and torturing went on unabated. But the peasants did not cease their struggle. The peasant movement had spread widely in the central parts of Russia, Volga region and in Georgia. The Bolsheviks were fully active in the Country side.

But the 1905 Uprising faced a defeat. Utilising all the weaknesses in the movement, the tsarist govt. had succeeded in crushing down the upsurge.

The Bolsheviks and Mensheviks seriously differed on the appraisal of this defeat. The Mensheviks were overwhelmed by the tendency of defeatism. They repented and declared that the workers should not have taken to arms. A peaceful method of struggle should have been adopted. But Lenin had emphatically asserted: "On the contrary, we should have been more resolute, energetic and aggressive in our armed struggle and prepare the people for it".

Lenin had drawn most valuable lessons from the 1905 Revolution. He said: i) The 1905 revolution had *"deeply ploughed the soil, uprooted the age - old prejudices, awakened millions of workers, tens of millions of peasants to political life and political struggle and revealed to each other – and to the world – all classes (all the principal parties) of Russian Society in their true character and in the true alignment of their interests, their forces, their modes of action, and their immediate and ultimate aims"*; ii) *"Without the dress rehearsal of 1905, the victory of October Revolution was not possible"*; iii) The peasantry was still harbouring bourgeois illusions. Neither a stable worker – peasant alliance was forged nor was the hegemony of the Proletariat established over the revolution. As a result, a concerted and decisive blow could not be inflicted on the feudal classes and the tsarist autocracy; iv) The 1905 revolution had taught that *"'no sympathy' for the workers on the part of the educated people, no struggle of lone terrorists, however heroic, could do anything to undermine the tsarist autocracy and the omnipotence of the capitalists. This could be achieved only by the struggle of the workers themselves, only by the combined struggle of the millions....."*

With the suppression of 1905 upsurge, the revolutionary tide began to recede and gradually subside.

However, the tsarist govt. knew that it had suppressed an upsurge but the revolution still haunts it. So in addition to repression it resorted to another 'soft' weapon. It proclaimed a law in Dec 1905 convening a 'legislative' duma. This Duma, however, had denied voting rights to over half of the population (women and mill workers), provided for an unequal and cumbersome electoral process to ensure that the Duma remains dominated by the classes that are subservient to the tsar and acts like a rubber stamp.

The Mensheviks, however, extolled it as a means to solve the problems of revolution and liberate the people from the tsardom. The Bolsheviks saw the Duma as "an impotent appendage of tsardom, a screen for the evils of tsardom, which later would be discarded as soon as it proved inconvenient".

The Bolsheviks had boycotted the elections for the (Witte) Duma of 1906. But later they concluded that it was "a mistake, although a small and easily remediable," as this Duma had come in the immediate after – math of the defeat of 1905 revolution. Then, the party was in dire need of utilising every forum and legal

opportunity to revive the revolutionary movement. The Bolsheviks knew that large sections of peasant masses still believed that the Duma may bestow them the right over the land. So the Bolsheviks needed to do a lot of work to educate and win them over.

How to act in the conditions after the defeat of 1905 revolution was an important question. Lenin said that the Bolsheviks must change their tactics from offensive to defensive. They must retreat. But this retreat must be proper and in an organised way, calmly and without panic and it must be to muster our forces and prepare for a new offensive against the enemy”.

This was the guideline for the Bolsheviks. They had to work under a thick dark shadow of repression. Yet, they used every slightest opportunity to restore and enlarge their links with the people. They used every forum, organisation and occasion to explain the causes of the defeat of 1905 upsurge and the need to prepare for a more determined, more powerful struggle under the leadership of Proletariat to overthrow the tsarist autocracy.

The Mensheviks hailed the Duma as a legislative body capable of bridling tsardom. They called for an electoral agreement with the pro -tsar Constitutional Democratic Party and support it. But the Bolsheviks were for utilising the Duma as a platform to unsparingly and relentlessly expose the bourgeoisie – the Constitutional- Democratic Party – win over the peasants from their influence and to the side of revolution. The way the Social Democratic (Bolsheviks) Deputies had participated in the Duma had set a best example for how the Communists and revolutionaries must utilise the bourgeois platforms in the interests of people and advancing the cause of revolution.

### **Stolyin Reaction**

The defeat of 1905 revolution had set in a period of reaction. The tsarist govt. had dispersed the Second Duma. The convict prisons, fortresses and the places of exiles were made to overflow with the revolutionaries. The revolutionaries were brutally beaten, tormented and tortured. Stolyin, a minister in the tsarist govt., had set up gallows everywhere in the Country. He saw thousands of revolutionaries executed. He brought a new agrarian law to enable the landlords and kulaks to rob the lands of poor peasants. Black Hundreds had let lose the terror in the country. The mill owners became more aggressive in their attacks against the workers. The gendarmerie, police, tsarist agent provocateurs and Black Hundred ruffians unleashed savage assaults against the workers. A process of disintegration and demoralisation had set in among the fellow travellers of revolution. It was more so among the intellectuals. Fearing the persecution, many of them either deserted or joined the camp of enemy. The tsarist govt. had taken a full advantage of this situation.

The counter revolutionary offensive had reflected in the ideological front also. Hordes of fashionable writers sought, to “dismantle” Marxism, mock and scoff at the idea of revolution. They extolled the treachery and lauded sexual depravity under the guise of the “cultural individuality”.

The Bolsheviks and Mensheviks seriously differed on how to face the reaction. Mensheviks lost all hope of a new tide in revolution. They renounced the revolutionary demands and embraced liquidationism.

Lenin said, in a situation such as this, the revolutionary parties must perfect their knowledge. They must not run away in panic from the battle field. True, the “*counter-revolution again threw us from the heights to which we had already climbed, down into the valley. The proletariat had to regroup its ranks and gather its forces anew surrounded by Stolyin’s gallows and the jeremiads of vekhi.*” We must retreat in a proper and orderly manner to prepare ourselves for a more powerful and more decisive onslaught on the enemy. He said that the Party “*will not lose heart at the failure of the first onslaught, it will not lose its head and will not be carried away by adventures.*” He said that a new revolutionary wave is a certainty. He proposed that the Bolsheviks must change from the offensive to defensive tactics and patiently work to utilise every legal opportunity to preserve and strengthen the party and multiply its links in countless ways with the millions of working people.

The Stolyin’s reaction could not rule long. The working people had learnt to live even in the conditions of savage repression. By 1911, they were again on the road of struggle. The strike of Lena gold mine workers in April 1912 marked a beginning of a new tide in the working class movement. The firing on a peaceful demonstration of Lena workers killed or wounded 500 workers. This had triggered a series of protests. Thousands of workers in St.Petersburg, Moscow and all industrial Centres came into demonstrations, strikes

and meetings to protest against the tsarist brutal act of massacre. The tsarist Minister arrogantly defended the Lena massacre in Duma saying “so it was, so it will be.” It had enraged the workers. 3,00,000 workers came into the streets in a political protest. As Stalin said, “the Lena events were like a hurricane which rent the whole atmosphere of “peace” created by the Stolypin regime”. The May Day demonstrations in 1912 were participated by 4,00,000 workers. ‘The workers, peasants and soldiers unite for a revolutionary onslaught against the tsarist autocracy’- was the crying slogan of workers.

Earlier, the Menshevik liquidators were telling that the revolution was doomed and there will be no new rise. But when the revolutionary wave had actually knocked their door they came out opposing it. They denigrated it as a “strike fever.” When the hundreds of thousands of workers were marching in a revolutionary action they were busy to divert the workers into a “petition campaign.” But they failed miserably.

From the beginning, Lenin was struggling hard to build a Proletarian Party by uniting all the proletarian forces on the basis of Marxism, revolutionary strategy and tactics and principles of democratic centralism. At times, he agreed to practical adjustments and compromises even with his adversaries and acted to honour the feelings and sentiments of working people for a single and united party. But he never diluted his struggle against the various manifestations of opportunism and fake claims of upholding Marxism. He never sacrificed his basic ideological and political positions. In all situations, he guided the Bolsheviks in practice along a revolutionary path and gave an overriding importance to the interests of revolution. By 1912, the struggle for the Proletarian Party had reached a point of culmination, a point of settling the accounts with the Menshevik liquidators, Otzovists and the so called August Bloc of Trotskyites. The Sixth All Russia Conference of RSDLP held in 1912 had expelled them from the Party and declared the emergence of a Bolshevik Party- the RSDLP(B). This political and organisational polarisation and consolidation had thrown up a much needed political leadership in the political horizon of Russia and it determined the future course of Russian revolution.

### **The Outbreak of Imperialist War**

On July 14, 1914, the German imperialists had declared war on Russia. Thus the First World War had begun. This was a part of a predatory war between the two groups of imperialist powers who were out to divide the world among themselves through war for plunder and oppression. The tsarist govt. had joined a group of imperialist powers called “Entente” because of its annexationist ambitions and with a view to use the war to crush the revolution in Russia. The tsarist govt. raised the slogan of “defend fatherland” and sought to move the people into the war.

The war had seriously interrupted the advance of revolution. How to view the war and advance the revolution stood as the most crucial and urgent questions before the revolutionaries in Russia. The Mensheviks and other petty bourgeois parties chose to echo the tsarist slogan. They preached to abandon the struggle and preserve the “social peace.” But Lenin and the Bolsheviks upheld the revolutionary internationalism. Lenin declared that it was a predatory and imperialist war and disastrous for the proletariat in the imperialist Countries locked in the war. Therefore, he called upon the proletariat to oppose the war and convert it into a civil war to overthrow the ruling classes of their own Countries and also in Russia, the tsarist autocracy. Lenin tried hard to rally the parties of the Second International around this line, but most of the parties were deep in the mire of opportunism and they sided with their ruling classes in the war waving the banner of defend the fatherland. The Russian opportunists- the Mensheviks and Socialist revolutionaries- had readily joined this bandwagon.

The Bolsheviks had boldly championed their policy towards the war and revolution. They called the workers to boycott the War Industry Committees and extensively propagated against the war and for peace and prepared the workers, peasants and the soldiers for a revolutionary overthrow of tsarist autocracy.

Millions died because of war and epidemics caused by the war. Drafting of 14 million able-bodied men into the army had created worst shortage of labour. While the population and the soldiers went hungry, barefoot and naked, the bourgeois and the landlords made big fortunes out of the war. While the tsarist army was suffering one defeat after the other, the bourgeois was engineering a palace coup to replace the Nicholas-II with his brother Michael Romanov to climb the seat of power, continue the war and prevent the revolution. Thus the tsardom was in a serious crisis.

## February Revolution: Fall of Tsardom

During Jan and February, 1917, the workers in Russia came into the streets in waves of strikes. They clashed with the armed police, and raised the slogans like: “down with the tsar”; “Down with War”; “We want bread”. They armed themselves. The troops refused to fire at the striking workers. By Feb 27 evening, 60000 soldiers had joined the ranks of struggling workers. The workers and soldiers went on arresting the tsarist Ministers and Generals. They freed the revolutionaries and the political prisoners from the jails. They had joined the revolutionary struggle.

The February Bourgeois Revolution had won. There arose the Soviets of Workers and Soldiers Deputies on the very first day of revolution.

While the Bolsheviks were leading the masses in the struggle, the Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks were busy in seizing the seats in the Soviets and building the majority there. The people believed that the Soviets would carry out all the revolutionary demands and conclude peace. But the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries secretly arrived at an agreement to form a Bourgeois Provisional Govt. Thus they had surrendered the power to the bourgeoisie.

### Dual Power

There emerged a state of “dual power” in Russia: i) The Provisional Govt. ii) The Soviets of Workers Deputies. But the millions of workers still stood undecided between the Bourgeois and proletariat. As a result, the majority of the Soviets were still in control of the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries who had surrendered the power to the bourgeoisie. The Bolsheviks, therefore, had to patiently explain the nature of Provisional Govt; expose the treachery of the compromising parties to the workers and prepare them for a decisive battle for a Soviet Govt. At this time, the people were destroying the Monarchy roots and branch, but the bourgeoisie wanted to transfer the power to the tsar Michael Romanov. The people wanted the immediate termination of war, but the Provisional Govt. wanted to continue it. The people hoped to have full democratic liberties, but the Govt. was intensifying its assault on the rights in the name of restoring the discipline and order. These conditions had provided a fertile soil for the Bolsheviks to explain their policy to the workers.

In his historic **April Thesis**, Lenin had set the guide lines for the transformation of bourgeois revolution to socialist revolution. Noting that the Bolsheviks were in minority in the Soviets of Workers Deputies, Lenin said: “*As long as we are in minority we carry on the work of criticising and exposing the errors and at the same time we preach the necessity of transferring the state to the Soviets of Workers Deputies.*” It only meant that the Bolsheviks were not aiming at immediate overthrow of the Provisional Govt., but to muster strength by winning a majority in the Soviets. The Bolsheviks called this as a “peaceful development of revolution.”

The Bolsheviks organised and led series of massive protest demonstrations of workers. Hundreds of thousands of workers had participated in them raising the slogans like ‘down with the war’, ‘publish all the secret treaties’, ‘all powers to the Soviets.’ The Provisional gov't. sought to brutally suppress them. But, on many occasions, the gov't. found its troops refusing to fire on the protesting workers. The crisis in the provisional gov't. had intensified. A Coalition gov't. was floated including the representatives of the bourgeoisie, Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries (Kerensky, etc.).

The Bolsheviks had decided to further intensify the struggle. The slogans came to the fore: -End the Dual Power; All Powers to the Soviets!; Confiscate all the landed estates of landlords !! ; The right of National Self determination to the Nations!!! The Bolsheviks had done an intensive and unrelenting work in the trade unions, army, navy and the soviets to strengthen themselves and prepare the working class for major and decisive battles in future.

On July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1917, the Mensheviks and Socialist revolutionaries called for a workers’ demonstration hoping to strengthen their hold on workers and turn the workers against the Bolsheviks. But, knowing this design well, the Bolsheviks had worked energetically to make the demonstration a big success. 400 thousands of workers had participated in the demonstration raising the slogans like ‘down with war,’ ‘down with 10 capitalist Ministers’, ‘all powers to the Soviets.’ The slogans of Mensheviks and socialist revolutionaries were simply lost in the sea of the revolutionary slogans of the Bolsheviks. At the end the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries found themselves in a great fiasco.



Yet, the majority of the Soviets remained with the Mensheviks and Socialist revolutionaries. The Bolsheviks needed to work more and wait more to win over the Soviets and to go in for a final revolutionary assault. As a result of tireless work of the Bolsheviks, the separate demonstrations of workers grew into general armed demonstrations. A few impetuous and left adventurist elements in the Bolshevik Party sought to provoke premature armed actions whom the leadership of the Party firmly admonished and averted. On another occasion, when a demonstration appeared to go out of control, the Bolshevik leaders had participated in it with a view to lend it a peaceful and orderly character. Hundreds of thousands of men and women marched to the Petrograd Head Quarters of the Soviets and raised their demands. The demonstration was peaceful and orderly despite heavy repression. The streets were full of workers and soldiers blood.

The suppression continued and intensified. Many prominent Bolshevik leaders were arrested. An arrest warrant was issued in the name of Lenin. At the same time, the Dual Power came to an end by placing the bourgeois in power. The Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries together with the Soviets led by them became an appendage to the provisional govt. The peaceful period ended. Bayonet was placed on the agenda.

### **October Socialist Revolution**

The Sixth Congress of the Bolshevik Party held in July-August, 1917 had decided for an armed uprising. The Manifesto it adopted called upon the workers, soldiers and peasants to: *“Prepare, then, for new battles, Comrades-in-arms! Staunchly, manfully and calmly, without yielding to provocation, muster your forces and form your fighting columns! Rally under the banner of the Party, proletarians and soldiers! Rally under our banner, downtrodden of the villages!”*

Fearing the possibility of being swept away by the great revolutionary upsurge, the bourgeois, counter revolutionary and compromising parties and forces had acted, each in their own way, and in coordination to brutally suppress the masses, Bolshevik and other revolutionary organisations. But the revolutionary upsurge of workers, soldiers had grown irresistible. Surging tide of revolution had posed the question in clear and unmistakable words to every party, every leader and every individual: Will you join the stream of peoples’ revolution or stand against it and get swept away by it ? The parties, including the compromising parties like the Mensheviks and Socialist revolutionaries stood disintegrated, split and polarised. Many, including Kerensky, turned to the Bolsheviks for protection. Kornilov, who sought to revolt against the revolution, was crushed. General Krymov had committed suicide. Others were arrested. The September-October of 1917 saw a tremendous rise in the peasant revolts and the seizure of landlords landed estates. Most of the Soviets had come under the leadership of the Bolsheviks. It was a festival of revolution! The slogan, “All powers to the Soviets” became order of the day. The millions of armed workers, soldiers and sailors led by the proletariat and the Bolshevik party had inflicted a final and crushing blow on the old system. On October 25<sup>th</sup> (November 7), 1917, the bourgeois provisional govt. was proclaimed as “deposed” and the State power as passed into the hands of Soviets.

The Second Congress of Soviets had proclaimed the taking over of power. On the next day, it passed: *The Decree of peace: It called for an immediate end of war and armistice; the Decree on Land: It abolished the landlord ownership of the land forthwith without compensation; declared all the mineral resources like oil, coal, ores, etc., forests and waters as the property of the people and the First Soviet Government- The Council of Peoples’ Commissars- with Lenin as the Chairman, all Bolsheviks, Stalin included, was formed.*

### **Let us Learn from the Great October Socialist Revolution**

The Russian people led by Lenin and the Bolshevik Party made a History, turned the world ruled by the exploiting classes upside down and heralded earth shaking and revolutionary changes in the entire world.

Lenin agreed that Russia was a peasant country and *“one of the most backward of European Countries”*. But at the same time, *“not its special qualities, but rather the special conjuncture of historical circumstances that for a certain, perhaps very short time, has made the Proletariat of Russia the vanguard of the revolutionary proletariat of the whole world”*. The Russian Proletariat led by Lenin dared to perform this historic revolutionary role.

The History of the CPSU(B) has thus correctly summed up: *“ Only a party like the Bolshevik Party, courageous enough to lead the people in a decisive attack, cautious enough to steer clear all the submerged rocks in its path to the goal, could so skilfully merge into one common revolutionary torrent such diverse*

*revolutionary movements as the general democratic movement for the seizure of landed estates, the movement of oppressed nationalities for national liberation and national equality, and the socialist movement of the proletariat for the overthrow of the bourgeois and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat”.*

For the Communists, the revolution means a fundamental change in the social system. Marxism Leninism teaches us: i) “The key question of any revolution is undoubtedly the question of state power. Which class holds the power decides everything”; ii) People are the makers of History. Any deviation from this principle and any attempt to replace the revolutionary role of the people by any heroic and adventurist acts of a few or a magical act are bound to fail; iii) The Proletariat must assume the leadership of the revolution in order to make the revolution a thoroughgoing and culminate it in victory. So, the building of a Party of Bolshevik type is the essential pre-requisite for the success of revolution. These are fundamental for every revolution led by the Communist Party.

Let us hail the Great October Socialist Revolution to: Uphold and learn from it; Apply and translate the Leninist teachings into practice; Advance the New Democratic Revolution in India and march towards Socialist Revolution.

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