

# The Sixtieth Anniversary of the October Revolution

Bert Ramelson

*(The author is the Industrial Organiser of the Communist Party.)*

1977 marks the Diamond Jubilee of the October Revolution.

No other event in the history of civilisation has ever been commemorated by as many and varied peoples in all parts of the globe as will be this anniversary of October 1917.

And rightly so. For that great revolution was a major watershed in the history of humanity. It marked the beginning of a new epoch in the history of humankind.

October 1917 most certainly has specific significance for the peoples of the Soviet Union. It marked the smashing down of the prison bars of the "Prisonhouse of Nations"—the old Czarist Empire—and laid the foundations for new forms of co-operative relationships between its many nationalities and peoples.

It made possible the transformation of a vast semi-feudal, semi-capitalist country peopled in the main by an impoverished, illiterate population, into one of the most advanced industrial countries, with the highest rate of literacy, one of the highest proportions of graduates per head of the population, and the total abolition of poverty: above all, it made possible the rational planning of all its resources, thus enabling as a consequence of socialist planning, continuous expansion of its economy for over half-a-century once the post-civil war effects were overcome. As a consequence it ensured a continual improvement in the living standards of its people.

But it would be fundamentally wrong to see the events of October 1917 as being of importance only, or even mainly, to the peoples of the former Russian Empire.

Above all, the significance of October 1917 for the mass of the world's population lies in the fact that the October Revolution was the starting-point of an irreversible process whose culmination must and will lead to a qualitatively different world than has existed hitherto.

It unleashed forces which will not come to rest until the realisation of humankind's dream of a world free from "man's exploitation by man"; of the weaker nations dominated by the more powerful ones; of the creation of divisions amongst the people on the basis of religion, colour, sex, or age,

facilitating the domination of the minority over the majority; above all, with the emergence of a classless society on a world scale, the root causes of war will have been eliminated.

If hundreds of millions on every continent will be celebrating the 60th anniversary of the 1917 Revolution—as undoubtedly is and will be the case—it is precisely because millions of non-communists and also millions who may at the present stage of their development not have a socialist objective, nevertheless realise the tremendous beneficial impact that that great historic event had on their lives.

## Colonialism

Tens of millions of men and women of all colours and inhabiting all points of the compass, who have succeeded in their struggle to shed the yoke of colonialism and gained their national independence, are well aware that their success in their liberation struggles is closely related to the successful revolution 60 years ago.

The emergence of the USSR following October 1917—the first break in world imperialist hegemony—not only weakened imperialism's ability to withstand the various liberation struggles, but the USSR, by its principled moral and material aid to those fighting imperialism for their independence, ensured their victory.

That is why the liberated millions who may not as yet be committed to construct socialism, nevertheless see a direct link between their successful ending of their colonial status and the October Revolution.

The ending of colonialism does not, of course, automatically end the exploitation of the previously enslaved peoples by their previous imperialist overlords.

Imperialism doesn't give up so easily. Having been compelled to grant political independence to most of their previous colonial possessions, imperialism has and is striving to perpetuate its economic exploitation. "Colonialism is dead! Long live neo-colonialism!" became its slogan.

The struggle against neo-colonialism is in many ways even more difficult than that against colonialism—because the issues are often blurred, and

alliances between imperialism and sections of the indigenous, emergent bourgeoisie are forged.

And in this hard struggle against rapacious imperialism's determination to prolong neo-colonialism, the material, moral and political help of the USSR and other socialist countries is of inestimable value.

The existence of favourable markets for their products, the provision of technically skilled personnel and advisors, as well as the advanced machinery and equipment, so essential for laying the basis of genuine independence, economic as well as political, these facilities provided by the socialist world without strings, is a powerful weapon in the fight against neo-colonialism.

That is why the countless millions who have been liberated already from the imperialists' grip, and the many who are still today bitterly fighting to end oppression and neo-colonialism, knowing that their reliable friends in their struggle are the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries, will be celebrating the 60th anniversary of October 1917 as if it was, and as in a sense indeed it was, their Revolution too.

We are justifiably rejoicing today at the fact that the last fascist bastion in Europe has now fallen.

But in our rejoicing it is important to recall the role and sacrifices of the Soviet Union, in the life and death struggle against nazism and fascism, that prevented fascism from over-running our continent and from becoming a dominant, oppressive force for a considerable period in the history of our times.

The necessary economic strength and will to fight is inconceivable if the USSR had not, as a consequence of the October Revolution, proceeded to convert a backward agrarian, semi-industrial, semi-feudal state into a mighty industrial socialist nation with a population determined at whatever price to prevent the destruction of the new social order they have created.

Thus it can be said that today we are marking the 60th anniversary of an event which played a major role in preventing the emergence and consolidation of fascism as the dominant force and major form of capitalist rule over a wide part of the world.

And for this reason, too, the 60th anniversary of the birth of the first socialist state is an occasion for celebration by all those who abhor fascism in whatever guise or form it may appear.

### **Detente**

And if today there are good grounds for believing that the threat of global war is no longer as great as it seemed a couple of decades or even a decade ago, it too can be traced to the consequences of 1917.

The passionate desire for peace played a big part in making 1917 possible. The first decree of the fledgling Soviet government was a call for a just peace.

Since then, successive Soviet governments have made peace the cornerstone of their foreign policy.

And today the continuous initiative by the Soviet Union and the socialist countries, on the basis of their tremendous economic development, have so changed the balance of world forces that world imperialism can no longer disregard such initiatives, enabling the first shoots of detente to surface and grow.

Thus, as a direct result of 1917, for the first time the peoples of the world can, with some justification—given vigilance and a readiness to fight against efforts to sabotage detente through anti-Sovietism—look forward hopefully to a future without world war and the annihilation of generations of men and women.

This assumes particular significance at a time of the deepening general crisis of capitalism. For it is precisely when the general crisis deepens that capitalism seeks, as one of the ways of resolving it, the mass destruction of surplus capacity in large-scale war. Detente makes such a "solution" much more difficult than in the past.

And as we have pointed out earlier, the change in the balance of forces flowing from the October Revolution, facilitating the phasing out of colonialism and the development of the struggle against neo-colonialism, has put obstacles in the way of capitalism's other traditional way of finding a "solution" to its crisis, namely the stepping-up of the exploitation of the former colonial world.

The stubbornness of the attack on the living standards and the fighting organisation of the working class—the trade unions—in the industrial capitalist countries, in their desperation to combat the present crisis of capitalism, risking sharp confrontations with the working class, can only be understood fully if we take cognizance of the changes in the world, making other traditional ways to overcome crises—wars and intensification of exploitation of the Third World through a variety of mechanisms including gerrymandering the terms of trade—if not completely ruled out, at least considerably more difficult.

But the only way out left and therefore pursued by the industrial countries—prolonged periods of stagnation, inflation and lowering of living standards—is also finding increased resistance. The "long boom" of the post-Second World War period, which marked a "hiatus" in the general crisis of capitalism and enabled a considerable advance in the living standards of the working class in the advanced capitalist countries, was also

to a considerable extent a consequence of the October Revolution.

A major factor in the "long boom" was the pumping in of billions of dollars through "Marshall Aid" and other means to restabilise capitalism for fear of the spread of socialism from the east in the post-war era. And the existence of the socialist world, with its economic stability and growth, was undoubtedly a factor during this period of the "long boom" in the relative ease with which the ruling class made concessions to the working class struggling for security of employment, higher real wages and better working conditions.

### Crisis

But by the very nature of capitalism the general crises could only be abated, not resolved for good.

With the re-emergence in full force of the general crisis today the ruling class are seeking to filch back the concessions made in easier times.

But the calculations made by the ruling class which inclined them to yield under pressure for fear of the example of a crisis-free socialist world on the work force, were based on a realistic analysis; the days when capitalism dominated the world and therefore unemployment and periodic cuts in living standards were universal and were more easily accepted by the working class as a way of life and hence had to be accepted as such, is no longer true. The working people, seeing that the socialist world is free of the rampant inflation, stagnation, mounting unemployment and erosion of living standards, will not readily accept crisis as a natural catastrophe which must be accepted and borne patiently, even though they may be critical of other aspects of life in the socialist countries.

Hence the developments on a world scale, flowing from 1917, are of tremendous help to the working people of the world in their struggle to achieve socialism.

Socialism, as with any social form of society, is not static but is constantly changing and developing.

In this jubilee anniversary year the Soviet Union is adopting a new Constitution reflecting the great changes that have taken place in that society, making possible the development of those aspects of democracy which only socialism enables. And here I want to touch only on one but important aspect of the Constitution.

What a contrast between the realities in the two world systems today this aspect of the draft Constitution illustrates.

At a time when over 300 million men and women in the capitalist world and over 16 million in the industrialised so-called advanced capitalist

countries are unemployed, the new socialist Constitution institutionalises the reality of the right to work.

When in the most advanced countries in the capitalist world, tens of millions are condemned to homelessness, the socialist Constitution provides the citizens in the socialist countries with the right to a home.

Overcrowded schools and the almost total absence of nurseries and kindergartens goes hand in hand with unemployed teachers and the closure of teachers' training colleges in our country. The new Socialist Constitution in contrast guarantees the constant development and enrichment of education, culture and leisure for all.

### Socialist democracy

These aspects of democracy—such a vital and important element in working class democracy—are incompatible with capitalism, but are an integral part of socialist democracy and not surprisingly, therefore, find a place in the Constitution of the USSR.

But it would be wrong to assume that those aspects of democracy, broadly described as civil rights, which exist to a greater or lesser degree in various advanced capitalist countries, are not as important and vital to socialist democracy.

These rights, and the extent to which they exist, have been won in the course of long and bitter struggles by the working class, often in alliance with other strata of the population.

In a socialist society, it is not only essential to retain them, but to extend them and deepen their meaning, and above all ensure, through the participation of the people, that they are implemented to the full and not merely "rights on paper" and largely ignored.

As Comrade Brezhnev said at the 25th Congress of the CPSU, "genuine democracy is impossible without socialism and socialism is impossible without a steady deepening of democracy".

This affirmation of the need for a steady deepening of democracy is of the utmost importance in grasping that the process of developing democracy in the Soviet Union is far from having been completed.

Indeed the disclosures at the 20th Congress of the great distortions and criminal murder of the tender shoots of democracy following the October Revolution, in a country that had no democratic traditions, did untold harm, not only in the crimes against countless Soviet citizens, but also in the slowing down and distortions of the development of both the economic socialist base, as well as the cultural and social superstructure.

Nor can it be said that all the consequences of that period, which in shorthand generally goes

under the name of the 'Stalin era' or 'Stalinism', have not left their mark on the present.

Especially is this the case in the degree of intolerance towards and treatment of those who challenge the accepted views and policies of the state and party.

Undoubtedly the Stalinist era and some of the present attitudes and handling of individuals and ideas challenging the policies and cultural concepts of the socialist society detract from what would otherwise be unqualified admiration of the achievements of the socialist societies, and to that extent an accelerated growth of the forces fighting for socialism.

However, it would be wrong to argue that the "Stalin phenomenon" or the present shortcomings in the application of the principles of civil rights were and are the direct and necessary consequences of the October Revolution.

On the contrary, as the CPSU itself argued in the analysis made at the 20th and 22nd Congresses, that far from it having been the inevitable consequence of October 1917, it was a distortion of and in contradiction to the laws laid down by the Bolshevik Party—the leading force that made the October Revolution possible.

### National strategies

Marxism-Leninism has always based itself on the assumption that the realisation of socialism, the form which socialism will assume, will vary in accordance with the historic conditions, working class traditions and institutional developments in each country.

But it is a fact that if today a growing number of developed industrial countries in the capitalist world are evolving strategies for socialist revolution not based on civil war but on a combination of extra-parliamentary struggle and constitutional elections; if today such countries can envisage working class power being consolidated and socialism being built in a multi-party socialist democracy—that too is in no small measure due to the changes in the balance of world forces.

The existence of the powerful Soviet Union and the development of the socialist world has ended an era when imperialism was the dominant world force, able and determined to crush by outside intervention the threat to capitalism in any country.

It is this change in the world situation which is an important factor extending the areas where the strategy of non-civil war, non-insurrectionary transformation of society will become possible.

Thus, in this respect too, the constantly changing balance of forces is facilitating the struggle for socialism.

October 1917, which opened up the way to the ending of imperialist and capitalist hegemony and started the process which today has reached the stage of the existence of two world systems, including a socialist system on a world scale in over a dozen countries and spread over three continents, is also a powerful help to workers all over the world in their struggle to achieve socialism in their own way in their own country, wherever it may be.

Of particular significance in this respect today is the visible contrast of the economic superiority of socialism.

Today, the temporary post-war illusions of a constantly expanding and crisis-free capitalism, which unfortunately affected millions of workers throughout the capitalist world for a while, is smashed.

Crisis—economic, social and political—unprecedented and worldwide, is gripping the whole capitalist world.

Mass unemployment, stagnation of the economy, massive unused capacity, rampant inflation, are features of capitalism today.

Gains of social advance, democratic trade union rights, such as the right to free collective bargaining, are being undermined.

Nor is there any confidence, even amongst the apologists for capitalism, of finding a way to alleviate, let alone achieve an early end to this crisis.

By contrast, despite the fact that in today's world there is bound to be a measure of interdependence in the world economy and the global market, the USSR and the other socialist countries have been relatively unaffected by this crisis.

Continuous and consistent growth of their economies, the fulfilment of the right to work, relative stability of prices, continuous and consistent improvements in the living standards of their people and the extension of many aspects of democracy, including industrial democracy, is the characteristic of the socialist world.

This living contrast between the socialist and capitalist societies cannot but help those in the capitalist world fighting to transform their countries from class-divided exploitative societies to socialist forms of society.

The Communist Party of Great Britain, like many other Communist parties, was founded as a direct result of the experiences of its working class, the Great October Revolution, and springing from both, a deepening of the understanding of the indispensable role of a Marxist revolutionary party, which is one of the many profound contributions in the development of Marxist theory made by Lenin.

### Solidarity

We are proud of the role our Party and the British working class played in developing solidarity with the Soviet masses' struggle to consolidate the revolution against world imperialist aggressive efforts to strangle it at birth.

The British Communist Party was founded on August 1, 1920. On that very day it was faced with a major attempt by British capitalism to launch another offensive against the young Soviet Republic. Indeed the first circular that it sent out was concerned to stop a new British war of intervention.

All the militant sections of the British Labour movement, including the organisations that eventually merged into the Communist Party, had already taken their stand against the British Government's attempt to crush the Russian Revolution by armed intervention.<sup>1</sup>

The British Socialist Party (BSP), the Socialist Labour Party (SLP), the Workers' Socialist Federation (WSF) had all fought with great courage to bring that intervention to an end and to impel the British Government to give diplomatic recognition to the Soviet Union.

A London "Hands Off Russia" Committee was formed on the initiative of London shop stewards at a conference in January 1919. By mid-1919, a national "Hands Off Russia" committee had been established and by the end of the year there were a considerable number of local committees.

This was a truly united body of the British working class, without bans and proscriptions. Amongst the trade union leaders who served on its leadership were A. A. Purcell of the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC, a foundation member of the Communist Party, C. T. Cramp of the NUR, Alex Gossip, General Secretary of NAFTA, Fred Shaw and David Kirkwood of the ASE, John Hill, General Secretary of the Boilermakers. Amongst the vice-presidents there were three who were also foundation members of the CPGB—Tom Mann (General Secretary of the ASE), George Peet (Secretary of the National Shop Stewards' and Workers' Committee Movement), and William Gallacher of the Clyde Workers' Committee.

Harry Pollitt became its first National Organiser, and Arthur MacManus (later to become first Chairman of the CPGB) was amongst its leading propagandists.

At the end of April 1920 the Polish invasion of the Soviet Union opened. Again there was a strong militant and united struggle to halt the interven-

tion. And, in the stopping of the *Jolly George* carrying munitions on May 10, 1920, Harry Pollitt personally played an important role. The WSF in East London was particularly active.

At first the Polish armies had advanced rapidly into Soviet territory. But, by the end of June, they were in headlong retreat pursued by Budenny's cavalry, and forced to the very gates of Warsaw.

The British Government, which had not been concerned (on the contrary indeed) by the advance of Polish troops into Russia, was deeply disturbed by the Soviet advance into Poland. By early July 1920 the Prime Minister, Lloyd George, was speaking the language of war and by early August, the Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, was speaking in terms of ultimatum.

It was the British workers, with the newly-formed Communist Party in a leading role, that organised hundreds of "Hands Off Russia" meetings, formed the National Council of Action (with two Communists) and local Councils of Action all over the country and averted a war on the Soviet Union.

### Contact

Official contacts between the British and Soviet trade unions date back to the early 20s. And today it is no secret that the British Trades Union Congress played and plays a major role in dismantling the artificial barriers set up by reaction during the cold war to re-establish on-going relations between the trade unions of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries and our own and other western trade unions.

When the fascists attacked the Soviet Union in 1941, the British working class's efforts in the production of arms and weapons to send to the heroic Red Army reached unprecedented levels of productivity as a sign of solidarity and admiration of the Soviet Union's role in the common fight. But the solidarity was not a one-way affair. The Soviet workers were in the forefront of expressing their solidarity with the British workers whenever they were involved in whatever form of struggle.

Despite the deprivations and shortages of the Soviet people in the aftermath of the Civil War, their massive support, not only moral but material, to the miners' struggle in the early 20s, culminating in the General Strike, played an important role in maintaining the fighting morale of the miners in their long and bitter struggle.

And that solidarity with the British working class, as with all workers in struggle, has been maintained throughout the past sixty years.

That is why we can confidently say that far wider sections of the masses of our country than the Communists will find ways of commemorating this most important event of our epoch.

<sup>1</sup> For a summary of this and the early struggle against intervention by the CPGB see James Klugmann—*History of the CPGB*, Vol. I, 1919-24, pp. 78-87.

# Students, Education and the State

Ken Spours

*(The author is the National Student Organiser of the Communist Party)*

## I. CRISIS OF EDUCATION

Post-school education is at present experiencing a considerable crisis. Cuts in expenditure have devastated the Teacher Education sector, the concept of the Liberal University has come under attack, and the nature of 16-19 year old education is under discussion. Amidst the crisis of the British economy, the blame for inadequate economic performance has been partially transferred onto the shoulders of school and post-school education.

The Great Education Debate has taken place to persuade educational and public opinion that our attitudes must change. No longer must education be seen as a right for all, but will be assessed in the ways it contributes to economic performance. The Government's strategy on education has sought not only to redefine the purposes of education, but to lead to an erosion of the democratic fabric of our institutions. The Great Education Debate and the attendant calls for greater centralisation and stricter control of academic life make it clear that the ruling class considers post-school education a site of struggle, and one to be transformed.

The left, however, have been far less clear in their approach towards the current condition of education. No one likes cuts in education, if only from the point of view of self-interest. But there is little recognition of the need for a strategy to preserve and transform education.

### **Crisis of Corporate Politics**

The left in the student movement are not exempt from criticism. With the exception of officials inside N.U.S., the student left has not in recent years seriously addressed itself to the conditions and future of post-school education.

This, however, is a reflection of a deeper malaise of the left in the student movement. There exists in addition to the crisis of education, what can be termed the crisis of 'corporate politics'<sup>1</sup>

There are, perhaps, five main characteristics of this crisis. The first and founding feature is

<sup>1</sup> This conception is derived from Gramsci's distinction between corporate and hegemonic politics.

*economism.* Many on the left have infinite faith in the 'bread and butter' issues of student politics. Grants, rents, housing, have been seen as issues around which the mass of students could become politicised, providing revolutionaries were in there doing the propaganda work on the need for socialism. The real problem with this approach is not that grants, rents, etc., were not issues around which the mass of students could become interested. Clearly, they have been involved, and in their thousands—but usually the left did not approach the issues in a way in which long-term ideological and political issues could be raised. There has remained a massive gap between students struggling around grants, and on the other hand, appreciating the need for socialism, and no amount of socialist propaganda can fill that gap. There is the need to see the issue of grants, not just as an issue of material self-interest, but as an ideological and political question of who has access to education. Though the issue of grants may begin at the level of material self-interest, it can quickly break through that logic to the wider question of the future of education. It is, perhaps, only at this more general level of struggle that the need for socialism is ultimately appreciated.

Economism is more deadly than ever these days because there is not a single domestic issue in student politics today which can be separated from the future of education. Grants, fees, overseas students, beg the question of the nature and future of our education system. Economistic analysis keeps them as separate questions and keeps socialism as a propagandist vision rather than being a result of building levels of struggle upon one another.

### **Self-Interest and Sectionalism**

The second feature of corporate politics is the politics of '*self-interest and sectionalism*'. Self-interest in the student movement is exercised by groups from the whole political spectrum, though they appear in essentially different forms. On the right, the Federation of Conservative Students champion "Welfare Student Unionism"—student unions existing to cater for the narrow interests of their members, as members of a club or society