



On Guard

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100 YEARS SINCE THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION WORKERS CAN WIN POWER

In October 1917 the working class took power in Russia. Although this is often described as an undemocratic coup, On Guard believes that democracy was at the heart of the events that brought the working class to power in 1917. How did they do it?

In 1917 Russia was still an autocracy ruled over by a monarch, the Tsar. In contrast, the capitalist class and the ruling regime were weak. The Tsar was unpopular. The peasants wanted land. The people were war-weary. Russia's participation in World War One had cost around 3.6 million soldiers' lives by late 1916.

The February Revolution

In late February 1917, women in the capital, Petrograd, protested against food queues and sparked strikes that demanded, "down with autocracy" and "down with the war".

These grew into a general strike. Thousands of workers demonstrated in the streets. When asked to shoot the demonstrators, the troops rebelled and shot their officers. With the state forces refusing to cooperate the Tsar was vulnerable. He resigned on 2 March.

The soviets and workers' democracy

During the last days of the February revolution, socialists put a call out for a soviet to be formed in Petrograd. Soviets were councils, elected by workers, soldiers and peasants.

Soviets were places of debate and democratic decision-making and, ultimately, of power. By the end of March 1917 the Petrograd soviet had almost 3,000 delegates. By October 1917 there were 1,429 across Russia.

In 1917, workplace democracy flourished. Workers set up factory committees that organised to "democratise factory life". Workers agitated for control over production. They challenged the dictator-like power that bosses wield in capitalist workplaces: in some places workers took decisions, such as hiring and firing, nor-

mally made exclusively by management. Participation in strikes soared; 2.4 million workers struck between March and October.

The Provisional Government

The February revolution handed political power to a Provisional Government, which in many ways continued the old regime.

It was never elected. It maintained Russia's participation in World War One. In reality, the Petrograd soviet held power in the capital because it controlled the barracks and the troops.

In the summer, the government asked General Kornilov, military commander in chief, to enforce stability by introducing martial law in Petrograd. However, in late August, Kornilov himself launched a military coup against the government with the aim of undoing the February Revolution. Armed workers and soldiers defeated Kornilov's attempted coup. Telegraph workers prevented leaders in Petrograd from communicating with the advancing troops. Rail workers stopped trains, and ripped up tracks to block communication.

The Bolsheviks

The Bolsheviks were one of many factions/parties who participated in political debate and activity. They stood in elections to be delegates in the soviets. They published newspapers and industrial bulletins (like Tubeworker!) and submitted motions to the soviets so that their ideas could be debated.

The October Revolution

The Bolsheviks had gained popularity by playing a prominent role in defeating Kornilov. Their call for a revolution was winning support. In late September the Bolsheviks won leadership of the Petrograd Soviet. By October, the Bolsheviks were elected leaders in the majority of workers' soviets of most industrial cities and in most soldiers' soviets in garrison towns. On 24 October pro-soviet soldiers took control of Petrograd's key roads and bridges. The capital effectively passed

into the hands of the soldiers who were defending their soviets. The government could only find a handful of troops willing to serve it. On 25 October government leader, Kerensky, fled and the October insurrection defeated the Provisional Government. The workers' government that came out of the October revolution had a Bolshevik majority. In its first days it delivered what the Provisional Government had avoided for eight months: land to the peasants and an end to the war. Further decrees on workers' rights, women's rights, and the rights of oppressed nationalities followed. The working class, led by the Bolsheviks, was in charge.

What went wrong?

On Guard believes that Stalinism, the barbaric social system that arose as the Revolution was battered by war and social backwardness, represented the overthrow of the Russian Revolution, rather than its continuation. It was not an inevitable outcome of 1917, and does not invalidate the democratic character of October 1917 and the government it installed.

WHY THE REVOLUTION IS RELEVANT TODAY

Capitalism couldn't fix the crisis it had caused in 1917.

Today's working class faces its own crisis, which our bosses and government won't fix: high rents, low wages, insecure work, benefit cuts. We need a government committed to the working class, not the capitalist class.

The analysis and approach to the state developed by Lenin and the Bolsheviks is also key. The February and October revolutions won when elements of the armed state (police and army) broke away and sided with the workers instead of the government. Police attacked picket lines in the 1984 miners' strike. Cleaning companies used the police to break up cleaners' demonstrations against the biometric booking on system. Cleaning companies have also used immigration police against cleaners during strikes.

We need to confront the state!

Rat Watch



Interim Lord High Rat Alan Chaplin has been looking for recruits to up the numbers of scabs ready to cover Guards on strike days. He's emailed out asking for "volunteers" to become "Contingency Conductors". He says it'll be "rewarding work" and great "experience" for non-operational staff. The "experience" of being a deplorable scab doesn't sound great to us and anyone who ended up as a permanent Guard off the back of doing this can look forward to a very lonely career. The company is resorting to these desperate measures because we are hurting them and they aren't coping. Sheffield Guards have been 100% solid.

Should we be tied to Northern standards?

Northern's new uniform standard includes a ban on ties and limits staff to one badge only. This is a poorly disguised attempt to put two fingers up to our unions and try to reduce their status in our workplaces. But many members of staff want to keep wearing their union ties. The company claim the unions have agreed to the new standard but this is untrue. They had been under the impression that the wearing of ties would not be possible with the new shirts. However, the shirts that are being issued work perfectly well with ties. The heavy-handed policing of this policy by some managers shows this attempt to ban ties and limit everyone to only one badge for what it is. - and this is precisely why it should be resisted!

Wear your union tie with pride!



Contingency Conductors or trained safety guards?

Some Drivers have been asking what ASLEF's view is on poorly trained scabs, particularly in the wake of the safety incidents at Greater Anglia and of the Northern "contingency conductor" recruitment drive. **ASLEF have issued a circular reminding Drivers to challenge anyone they believe does not hold the necessary competency to carry out a safety critical job and report any safety incidents immediately.**

Definition

According to the Cambridge Dictionary. Contingency: something that might possibly happen in the future, *usually causing problems* or making further arrangements necessary.

A Contingency Conductor is for *just in case there's a problem*. We don't need a 'just in case' plan. We do need to keep our preventative safety plan.

No "exceptional circumstances!"

On 19 October, drivers' union Aslef finally announced what weeks of secret talks have produced for their members in "parallel" disputes over pay and Driver Only Operation (DOO) on Southern rail. The deal sells out both drivers and guards. It ties the drivers' pay increase, which is only a small improvement on what was previously rejected by Aslef members, into a settlement of the DOO dispute. Aslef leaders argue that the deal is improved: the long list of "exceptional circumstances" where trains would be allowed to run without an "on board supervisor" has been shortened. But any concept of "exceptional circumstances" should not be accepted. In practice, the company will flout the agreements and claim these criteria have been met whenever they think they can get away with it and it will fall to workers themselves to police these agreements.

What is On Guard?

On Guard is a monthly socialist bulletin by and for rank and file workers at Northern. It is published by socialist group Workers' Liberty.

We will be featuring a lot of updates and articles on Driver Only Operation, but welcome content on any issue from Northern workers themselves.

Got a story for On Guard?

We welcome reports and comments from all rail workers.

Contact us:

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The festive season is approaching and this presents RMT with an opportunity to escalate the impact of one and two-day strikes. These short strikes do not represent a long term strategy for winning the dispute but this opportunity should be taken before it's too late! Sundays in December see big increases in passenger numbers - so much so that Northern put extra services on to ferry people to and from the big shopping areas/centres. By scheduling strikes for every Sunday in December, we can have a big impact without losing any basic pay. For even more impact, we could combine these with Saturday strikes, taking out whole weekends worth of increased revenue. We have to take our opportunities to twist the knife in the company's side. We don't strike just to protest, we do it to win!