Josep Gardenyes
One Hundred Years after the Bolshevik Counterrevolution
A Timeline Charting the Repression of Revolutionary Movements
7th November 2017

Retrieved on 9th September 2020 from
https://crimethinc.com/2017/11/07/
one-hundred-years-after-the-bolshevik-counterrevolution-a-
timeline-charting-the-destruction-of-popular-movements
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possible to distinguish between the naïve and enthusiastic and the opportunists who are trying to climb the rungs of power.

A worrisome pattern exists on the Left. They sell off the future of the revolution by signing deals with the devil. Time after time, the authoritarian Left obstructs revolutionary movements by implementing strategies that are predictable failures. The advantage of these strategies is that they permit those who use them to monopolize the struggle. If they win a partial victory, they impose their monopoly by capturing state institutions that can serve to buy out or repress all the other sectors of the struggle. And if they fail, by having created a spectacular struggle in which they are the tragic protagonists, they can turn everyone else into spectators watching a mediatized combat between two hierarchical poles.

Liberation must be carried out by the oppressed. Revolution, by definition, must be self-organized, and above all the popular classes need to maintain the autonomy of their struggles with respect to the institutions of power.

We hold close all the revolutionaries and fighters who sacrificed everything in the struggles that came before us. We spit on the memory of those who took advantage of those struggles to rise to power, and those who tried to impose their unquestionable truth on everyone else, obstructing the self-activity of the very class that, hypocritically, they pretended to liberate.

Long live the Revolution of 1917! Down with all dictators, representatives, and politicians!

Further Reading

Volín, *The Unknown Revolution*

Alexander Berkman, *The Bolshevik Myth (diary 1920–1922)*

Emma Goldman, *My Disillusionment in Russia*

Ngo Van, *In the Crossfire: Adventures of a Vietnamese Revolutionary*

Foreword by CrimethInc.

A century ago, on November 7, 1917, the Bolshevik seizure of power got underway in revolutionary Russia. Following up our compilation of voices who spoke out against the rise of Soviet totalitarianism, "Restless Specters of the Anarchist Dead," we present this translation of a text that appeared today in Catalan.[1] It offers a detailed timeline of the Bolshevik crackdown on revolutionary currents in Russia, starting before the so-called October Revolution and running up to the treaty between Stalin and Hitler.

The current text is no more than a summary, a small reminder of a historical disaster that still resonates in our struggles today. This October 2017, a hundred years later, it falls on us to remember the Bolshevik appropriation of the Russian Revolution, which constituted a disaster for the working class, a disaster for the Russian people and all the peoples subject to the Russian Empire, a disaster for anti-capitalist movements on a world scale, a disaster for everyone seeking freedom, a disaster for humanity.

A Predictable Disaster

The counterrevolutionary drift of the USSR was predictable. Bakunin foresaw just how a "dictatorship of the proletariat" would quickly turn into yet another dictatorship over the proletariat, 50 years before it occurred. In the following years, many other anti-capitalists arrived at the same conclusion. It was a pretty safe bet, considering how the leaders of the new dictatorship found their inspiration in another counterrevolutionary figure, Karl Marx.

[1] *A cent anys de la contrarevolució bolxevic: memòria històrica a prop de la destrucció de les nostres lluites."* ⊠

We don't make this assertion lightly, denouncing as "counter-revolutionary" a person who, beyond any doubt, was so important to anti-capitalist struggles. We wouldn't ever take such a step over simple disagreements in theoretical matters. It is only after a painstaking survey of the consequences of Marx's *actions* that we arrive at this conclusion.

Marx implanted colonial and white supremacist attitudes in the heart of the anti-capitalist movement, and he broke the autonomy of this movement so completely that 150 years later we still haven't recovered.

To name a single example, Marx celebrated the US conquest of Mexico, using openly racist terms to contrast the "energetic" Yankees with the lazy and "primitive" Mexicans. His idea of dialectical progress shared the element of white supremacy with the liberalism of the day. He was convinced that the Western nations were the most advanced in the world and that all the other peoples would have to emulate Europe and follow the same path to liberate themselves. As such, he was an unapologetic defender of colonialism, which he recognized as an exercise of capitalist violence, but which he also believed was vital to the progress of "primitive" peoples.

Apart from his racism, Marx was an authoritarian complicit with bourgeois institutions. One of the strongest features of the workers' movement in the 19th century was its autonomy. It was a movement built by the workers themselves and within it the institutions of the class enemy had no place. Marx ruined all that with his obstinate insistence that in order to win, according to his theory—a theory which history has torn to shreds, a theory that predicted the anti-capitalist revolutions would occur in Germany and the UK, definitely not in Russia or Spain—the working class had to adopt the political forms of its enemy, organizing itself in political parties and entering the bourgeois institutions, the parliaments where monarchists and capitalists struggled for control of a power based solely in the subordination of the peasants and

1937, they began drawing down their military assistance to the Republic. The tragic truth is that Stalin didn't want the Republic to win the war. On the one hand, he didn't want to trouble relations with France and Britain, who promoted a "non-intervention" policy designed to favor the fascists. And on the other hand, he wanted to prolong the conflict in order to convince Hitler of the need for a non-aggression pact.

The negotiations for the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact began in April of 1939, just at the end of the Spanish Civil War. It was what Stalin needed to protect the USSR from a Nazi attack, and what Hitler needed to be able to attack France and avoid a two-front war. The Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact was an important prerequisite for World War II and another example of Nazi-Stalinist collaboration.

The Relevance Today of the Communist Counterrevolution

Recovering this historical memory is important for a variety of reasons. To begin with, it is important to remember our dead, to carry them with us, and to cast down the thrones their murderers have built atop their graves—to stop honoring as heroes those who betrayed revolutions and served as executioner to the oppressed.

This is important because historical memory is our library of revolutionary lessons, the communal apprenticeship that brings us closer to freedom. And if we store falsified volumes within this library, histories of lies, victories that never occurred, we will repeat the same mistakes time after time. By turning the people and the parties who strangled revolutions into heroes, we preserve completely unrealistic ideas about what revolution is and how to achieve it. If we think the state could be—or has ever been—a tool of the people capable of defeating capitalism, we create the perfect recipe for defeat: a revolutionary movement in which it is im-

legends, the International Brigades were in large part a machine for attracting these dissidents and killing them in the most discreet context possible: on the battlefield. The Brigades were also used to repress peasant collectives in Aragón.

What's more, the Communists directly sabotaged anarchist and Trotskyist militias with the purpose of reducing their influence and feeding their propaganda campaigns in favor of "militarization": the imposition of elitist and counterrevolutionary hierarchies in one of the most important spheres of the social revolution. The obstruction and withholding of weapons carried out by all the forces on the Left were responsible for the militias getting bogged down on the Huesca and Teruel fronts. If those cities had been taken—a reasonable accomplishment given sufficient weapons—then Zaragoza probably also would have fallen to the antifascists, potentially turning the tide of the war. Dirty tricks and lack of solidarity on the part of the Communists also played a part in the fall of Mallorca, another decisive moment in the Republican defeat.

We can also add to the list the Communists' arrest of Maroto, an effective guerrilla leader operating around Granada, and the Communists' blocking of the anarchist proposals to launch a large scale guerrilla war in the fascists' rear and to create an alliance with the anticolonial resistance in the Rif (Morocco), which would have undermined Franco's most important base. The Communists rejected the first proposal because they knew they couldn't control a guerrilla war and such a conflict would have given the anarchists an important advantage, and they blocked the second to avoid upsetting the French government, which also had interests in Northern Africa. In both cases, Communist interests were not defeating fascism nor carrying out the revolution, but maintaining power and sabotaging their adversaries.

After winning the counterrevolution and installing a leader who would be faithful to them, Negrín, in May 1937, the USSR no longer had significant interests in Spain. For that reason, starting in June

workers, a power that could not even exist without the continued domination of these classes.

Marx was accustomed to being surrounded by lackeys. When he realized that there were independent minds and contrary opinions within the International Workingmen's Association, that it was no longer his personal fan club, he conspired and made use of all the dirty tricks that have since become well-known methods of manipulating assemblies in order to kick out all those who differed with him and who opposed the obviously erroneous tactic of creating political parties. This was not merely a conflict between two positions, Marxist and anarchist, nor was it a duel between Marx and Bakunin. Marx excluded not only anarchists but anyone who disagreed with him, including feminists like André Leó, participant in the Paris Commune (a movement which Marx initially denounced).

As a result of the split, the majority of the International broke with the Marxist faction. Many people who are only familiar with oversimplified accounts centered on Marx assume that as soon as the headquarters of the International were moved to New York, the organization was effectively finished, but in fact it was only the smaller Marxist splinter group that immediately became moribund. The majority of the International continued organizing together according to anarchist principles for half a decade more, as the Marxist historian Steklov was forced to recount in his history of the International. It took five more years of continuous state repression to destroy the organization, and that only succeeded because Marxists and other statist elements of the labor movement refused to act in solidarity with revolutionary labor organizing.

Marx's controversial strategy—to convert the International into a tool for entry into bourgeois institutions via social-democratic parties—was an embarrassing failure, just as his critics predicted. The new parties wasted no time in selling out the working class to their new professional colleagues, the bourgeoisie. What's more, Marx's main heirs, such as the Socialist Workers' Party of

Germany, sent the working class off to the counterrevolutionary slaughterhouse that was World War I.

Lenin: From German Agent to Butcher of the Working Class

From early on, Lenin was a leader of the Bolshevik ("majority") faction of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party, which would later become the Communist Party.

He was an intellectual from a bourgeois family who never stopped playing the role of manager. We can't deny that a person doesn't choose where they are born, and can decide to renounce their privilege and fight alongside the oppressed. But Lenin was the architect of a pseudo-revolutionary state that would be directed by his class. From the beginning, the USSR was a dictatorship of intellectuals and bureaucrats oppressing the exploited classes. Lenin never abandoned his class interests. He called on the workers and peasants to rise up for the same reason that during the Revolution he appropriated anarchist discourses (in *The State and Revolution,* which scandalized the members of his own party who didn't understand that the text was simply a manipulative attempt to win the support of the masses and an alliance with the anarchists, who constituted a key force in the October insurrection). All of this was calculated to motivate the masses to serve as cannon fodder for his ambitions.

Lenin was even more authoritarian than Marx. As the leader of the Bolsheviks, he maneuvered to expel the Mensheviks, Bogdanovists, and other currents from the Party. He differed with the former because they favored freedom of opinion whereas he believed that the entire Party must adhere to their leaders' dogmas and decisions. He differed with the latter simply because they represented a threat to his control of the Party. He alleged that Bogdanov wasn't an orthodox Marxist, but neither was Lenin; for

were the most advanced in the world, with the possible exception of the British intelligence agencies. But these used techniques that were much too soft for Nazi needs. Many times, the Nazis arrested and tortured Soviet agents in order to learn how their counterespionage apparatus functioned, with the purpose of copying the model.

In 1935, when the KPD had been almost completely destroyed, suffering thousands of arrests and executions, the Comintern inaugurated their next strategy without ever accepting responsibility for the Nazis' rise to power. The new strategy was the "Popular Front." But this was just as disastrous for revolutionary movements.

The prime example would be the Soviet intervention in the Spanish Civil War. The USSR was slow to begin sending aid to the antifascist side. This was due in part to the fact that the Communist Party in Spain was tiny, even smaller than the non-Stalinist Workers' Party for Marxist Unification, or POUM.2 They weren't attentive to the fascist threat in Spain because they had few interests in Spain. Before sending aid, they wanted to make sure they could control the situation and profit from it in some way. To be precise, they didn't give military aid to the Republic; rather, they sold it, appropriating the entirety of the Spanish gold reserves, the fourth largest in the world at the time. And to a large extent, they sabotaged the war efforts. For the Stalinists, the Spanish Civil War was an opportunity to destroy what was then the strongest anarchist movement in the world (they and the Japanese imperialists had already destroyed the movement in Korea), and also to liquidate dissident communist currents, above all the Trotskyists. Given that fascism had already arrived in Germany and Italy, Spain was an important refuge and a field of action for communists who had fled those countries.

For that reason, the NKVD—the Soviet secret police—began a feverish activity in Spain, liquidating thousands of Trotskyists, other dissident communists, and anarchists. Far from the romantic

cism, but that communists had to ignore fascism in order to dedicate all their efforts to combating other left-wing currents. The KPD followed this line with enthusiasm. On many occasions, Communist militants joined with Nazi stormtroopers to smash up the events of Socialists.

It is true that the Socialists used state power wherever they were in the government to repress the Communists, just as the SRs in the Russian Revolution also maneuvered to try and gain power, just as leftist statists across the planet seek to dominate others. Because the state is a tool of domination and repression. But, on the one hand, collaboration with the Nazis represented an extreme of reprehensible practices, surpassing the dirty tricks used by the Socialists. And on the other hand, the currents that didn't seek to conquer state power—anarchists and others—rejected such tactics.

In Prussia, the largest state in Germany, the Communists openly collaborated with the Nazis in 1931 to try to revoke the Socialist government. They said the Nazis were "working class comrades." In 1933, the year the Nazis rose to power, the Communists effectively let them win. If they had joined forces with other left-wing forces, the Nazis would not have achieved a majority. But they were obsessed with destroying the Left in order to monopolize it, believing that they would rise to power after a Nazi government. Thälmann, leader of the KPD, coined the slogan, "After Hitler, it's our turn!"

Contrary to the slogan denouncing "social fascism," it wasn't the Socialists who had much in common with the Nazis, but the Communists themselves. The Nazis' racial ideology was an import from the US, as is widely known. But not so many people remember that the organizational model of the Nazi dictatorship came from the Soviet Union itself. In order to set up their Gestapo—the secret police charged with political repression and counterespionage—the Nazis studied the Cheka and the NKVD (successor to the Cheka established by Stalin). The Soviet secret police, which inherited many techniques from the tsarist Okhrana,

years, he had appropriated the idea of the anarchists and the *esery* (Socialist Revolutionaries or SRs) that a revolution could be made in Russia without passing through a constitutional period.

On the eve of the Russian Revolution, Lenin was in contact with the secret police of the German Empire. It was only thanks to them that he was able to return to Russia amid the tumult of the World War. They also gave financial aid to his Party. In exchange for the aid, they expected Lenin to pull Russia out of the war, freeing up the Germans' eastern front.

In the end, Lenin was more faithful to the German imperialists than to the workers and peasants. Even though many other Bolsheviks were horrified by his proposed collaboration with Germany, the dictatorship that Lenin had already established within his Party prevailed. Without consulting the Polish and Ukrainian peoples, historically occupied by Tsarist Russia, Lenin ceded those territories to the German imperialists along with a huge bounty in money and raw materials that contributed to the slaughter of the working class on the western front.

Contrary to the Leninist or Trotskyist version, which attributes all the brutality of the USSR to Joseph Stalin, the bloody repression of the worker and peasant classes and the effort to rebuild capitalism began in the first year of the dictatorship when Lenin was still in charge.

A Revolution Derailed

The February Revolution of 1917 resulted in a parliamentary government immobilized by the unrealistic attempt to reform the old regime while protecting dominant interests. The October Revolution (which began on November 7, according to the modern calendar), was supposed to put an end to the power of the bourgeoisie and aristocrats and allow the self-organization of society via the *soviets,* assemblies of workers, peasants, and soldiers, which had ap-

peared spontaneously in the 1905 Revolution and reemerged with the February Revolution.

On November 7, the Bolsheviks and their allies rose up in Petrograd, beginning the second revolution. On November 8, a detachment of anarchist sailors from Kronstadt, led by the anarchist Zhelezniakov and in coordination with the Bolsheviks, captured the Winter Palace, abolishing the Provisional Government.

The same Zhelezniakov was also chosen to lead a detachment that seized and abolished the Constituent Assembly in January of the following year. He led a flotilla and then an armored train battalion against the White Army during the Civil War. Although he protested the Bolsheviks' imposition of hierarchical measures and the restoration of tsarist officers within the Red Army, he was too valuable as a military strategist to cast aside. The Bolsheviks invited him to rejoin them—he had gone to Crimea to fight against the Whites in an autonomous formation—and they assigned him the command of the armored train campaign to halt the advance of the White General, Denikin. He died in combat in 1919.

Subsequently, it became clear that the Bolsheviks did not coordinate with anarchists out of a spirit of solidarity. On the contrary, they systematically assigned anarchists the most dangerous roles so that they would assume the physical and political consequences if things went poorly.

In November 1917, the Bolsheviks took advantage of a temporary majority they had in the Second Pan-Russian Congress of Soviets, thanks to the disorganization of the other parties after the coup against the Provisional Government, the Bolsheviks' able propaganda, and their political and intellectual profile (they didn't represent a majority within the working class but they did get a majority of chosen delegates). At the Congress, they converted the Central Executive Committee into a largely independent government organ standing over the soviets. Previously, the Committee had been an organ devoid of state power that was only supposed to give continuity to the tasks of the Congress of Soviets. The Bol-

initiated only in one district of Hamburg. The failed attempt unleashed a strong repression and worsened relations between Communists and Socialists in Germany.

There's also the example of the failed revolution in Indonesia. In 1925, the Comintern ordered the Indonesian Communist Party to join with anti-colonial but not anti-capitalist forces (they imposed the same strategy in China and elsewhere). In 1926, the Communist unions were ordered to spark a revolution, but the plan was green and the coordination with other sectors of the united front failed. The repression claimed many lives.

Of the second phase, we have the example of the mutiny on the Dutch warship, *Die Zeven Provinciën,* provoked by a Communist cell, while the ship was sailing near the Indonesian colonies. The intention was to destabilize the colonial power. There is also the similar example of the mutiny and failed revolution in Chile in 1931.

A German Comintern agent described how his bosses ordered him to organize a dockworkers' and sailors' strike in the major German port cities like Bremen and Hamburg. Once all the port workers were on strike, the Comintern instructed trusted agents to scab, sabotaging the strike. Many workers who demonstrated solidarity lost their jobs, but the Comintern got their agents in key positions on many boats and ports, increasing the efficiency of their smuggling network (which they used to supply the USSR, transport agents, and smuggle materials to countries across the world). Maneuvers like that increased the cynicism of the German working class, cost the Communist Party a good deal of support, and gave more legitimacy to the Nazi argument that all the "reds" were agents of Moscow.

The German Communist Party aided the Nazi Party in much more direct ways, as well. Between 1928 and 1935—the critical era in the rise of the Nazi movement, when it grew from a small party into one capable of taking power—the Comintern, following Stalin's directives, declared that social democracy was equal to fas-

over all worker and anti-colonial organizations. They did this with funding, "entryism" (implanting charismatic agents who climbed the ranks in a particular organization without revealing their affiliation with the Communist Party), attacks against non-Bolshevik currents, and other tactics. One preferred method was to organize apparently neutral international conferences, with fake delegates (they sometimes paid people to act as delegates from supposedly massive organizations that didn't actually exist), a script and a choreography in order to approve decisions that had already been made.

In the case of organizations that refused to accept Communist domination, Comintern agents were dedicated to neutralizing them via false rumors, the provocation of internal conflicts, turning the authorities against them through snitching, and even murder. In this way they destroyed a number of workers' movements.

In the second phase, representing the triumph of the line promoted by Stalin and Bukharin, the Communist Party abandoned the pretense of exporting revolution and adopted the watchword "Socialism in One Country." Subsequently, all anticapitalist movements worldwide served only to protect the geopolitical interests of the Soviet Union.

In effect, there wasn't that much difference between the two phases. Both of them resulted in failed insurrections and revolutions—in the first phase, because the Communists' lack of solidarity and obsession with power obstructed revolutionary processes in other countries, and in the second, because the USSR continued encouraging unviable insurrections in other countries when it might weaken an enemy power.

For the first phase, we have the example of the Hamburg Uprising of 1923. Soviet leaders like Trotsky were pressuring the KPD—the German Communist Party, the strongest in the world outside of the USSR—to stage an insurrection, but the German leaders thought it was too early. Due to poor organization, the plan was

sheviks' maneuver turned it into the executive power of a new state. And this Committee, formed by delegates elected by delegates elected by delegates (the three layers of representation were the local soviets, the Congress of Soviets, and the Central Executive Committee) was controlled—inevitably—not by the people but by the most Machiavellian and opportunistic bureaucrats, which is to say: the Bolsheviks. Subsequently, the Party under Lenin's intransigent dictatorship had the new Central Executive Committee form the Council of People's Commissars, or Sovnarkom, which quickly became the supreme authority of the new state, in charge of reorganizing the economy and administering state affairs. And its chairman was—what a surprise—Lenin!

The Bolsheviks did not honor any of the other decisions of the Second Pan-Russian Congress of Soviets. They abandoned the entire opportunistic program they had used to attain a majority of delegates—the agrarian program, the proposal for seeking a dignified withdrawal from the war, the decision to create a Constituent Assembly. Now that they had created the bureaucratic layers capable of legitimating their dictatorship, they no longer had to fight for the interests of the workers and peasants. Subsequently, the Congress of Soviets would do little more than rubber stamp the decisions of the Sovnarkom.

On December 5, 1917, the Bolsheviks established the Cheka, the secret police, who directed their activity against other revolutionary currents from the very beginning. The Cheka were led by Dzerzhinsky, a Polish aristocrat.

On December 22, 1917, the Bolsheviks began to negotiate with Germany and the other Central Powers, arrogating the authority to speak in the name of the whole of Russian society, as well as the peoples occupied by the Russian Empire.

On December 30, 1917, the Bolsheviks carried out their first operation of political repression. The Cheka arrested a small group of SRs, ostensible allies, including a delegate of the Constituent Assembly, who formed a part of the opposition.

In January 1918, the Bolsheviks abandoned the Constituent Assembly and orchestrated its suppression, together with the anarchists. Whereas the anarchists opposed the Assembly as a bourgeois organ that counteracted the power of the soviets, the Bolsheviks had demanded the creation of the Assembly after the February Revolution and they had stood in the elections. They only turned against the Assembly once they were unable to win a majority.

In March 1918, the Bolsheviks signed a humiliating peace treaty with Germany that went against all the working class proposals for ending the war. They paid a huge war compensation and ceded control over various nations previously under tsarist domination (in effect, the Baltic countries, Poland, and Ukraine). In Ukraine, the peasants organized a guerrilla war and won many battles against the German imperialists, proving the viability of the proposal of anarchists and others for "neither war nor peace," by which they meant ending the imperialist war but resisting any military occupation through revolutionary guerrilla tactics. Lenin imposed his rejection of this option, probably because he knew his elitist Party would be incapable of controlling a decentralized guerrilla campaign. He preferred the defeat and occupation of Ukraine over an uncontrolled revolution.

As a consequence, the SRs, an important ally of the Bolsheviks, declared that the latter were German proxies and left the government.

In April 1918, the Cheka began its first extrajudicial executions in an operation against anarchists in Petrograd and Moscow. By the end of the operation, they had executed 800 without trials. Their rhetoric was to attack "class enemies," but their secret orders were to liquidate all anarchist organizations in the two principal cities.

On April 12, 1918, the Bolsheviks attacked 26 anarchist centers in Moscow, killing dozens and arresting 500. Threatened by the dramatic growth of the anarchist movement in Moscow, Trotsky and the Bolshevik press had carried out a media campaign in collabora-

The USSR: Force for Global Counterrevolution and Accomplice of Fascism

The outcome of other putatively communist states demonstrates that, while Lenin's party was especially bloodthirsty, the problem was the model itself. Far from achieving communism through state power, each attempt at authoritarian communism managed to implant capitalism in a country where the bourgeoisie hadn't been able to. China, today, is the largest capitalist market in the world and may soon be the leading capitalist economy on the planet, an evolution aided in large part thanks to the industrialization and bureaucratization carried out under Mao's leadership. Vietnam is following the same path on a smaller scale. As for Cuba, in the first years of the revolution (after executing the anarcho-syndicalists and dissident socialists), Che and Fidel abandoned the plan of creating true communism in order to construct a sort of export colony with a more equitable distribution of resources (like a Costa Rica with a Swedish government). They maintained the island's old role as a producer and exporter of sugar for the international market.

As the first of these capitalist revolutions, the USSR stands out for the harm it caused to anti-capitalist movements worldwide. It's true that they supported many revolutionary movements, but always prioritizing their interests above the interests of the revolution itself. It's a significant fact that most communist movements distanced themselves from the USSR the moment they no longer depended on Soviet aid, as was the case with China and in certain periods with Cuba. Soviet intervention in the Spanish Civil War demonstrates how badly Soviet "aid" could destroy a struggle.

The international policy of the Comintern can be divided into two phases. In the first phase, they aimed to export revolution, but only if they could monopolize it. Between 1919 and around 1926, Comintern agents were charged with imposing Bolshevik control

who enriched themselves thanks to the new conditions and at the expense of the working classes. It goes without saying that all of them were Communist Party bureaucrats. The NEP also resulted in treaties and trade relations with the main capitalist countries, starting with Great Britain (1921) followed by Germany (1922), and then the US and France.

The Communist Party at no point installed communism. Their first era constituted a bureaucratic monopoly based on the hyper-exploitation of workers and peasants, whereas the era of the NEP constituted a capitalist system with a higher degree of planning and centralization than the Western capitalist systems. That is, the Communists unleashed an insane level of repression against all the other revolutionary currents, drowning worker and peasant struggles in blood and lead, and in the end, all that sacrifice didn't serve for anything more than establishing capitalism. In a country where the capitalists themselves had been unable to implant capitalism, the Communists did, thanks to their obsession with holding power at any price.

And contrary to later leftist revisionism, all this brutality and exploitation wasn't the fault of Stalin; it started earlier, from their very first weeks in power and always under the direction of Lenin and Trotsky. From the beginning, the Bolsheviks operated as an intellectual vanguard independent of the soviets and the workers' and peasants' struggles. They used the soviets as a tool to conquer power, and when the soviets were no longer convenient, they suppressed them, just as they had repressed any expression of popular struggles. The Bolsheviks—a current of the Social Democratic Russian Workers' Party, who went on to become the Communist Party—were the principal incarnation of the counterrevolution within the Russian Revolution.

tion with the local bourgeoisie, accusing veteran revolutionaries of being "bandits" and "criminals" for expropriating bourgeois properties, even though these were put to the use of the revolution.

In June 1918, Trotsky abolished any kind of worker control over the Red Army, destroying the proletarian tradition that allowed soldiers to elect their officers and enjoy real equality. He restored the old hierarchies in the army—of aristocratic origin—and complemented them with a new ideological hierarchy upheld through the sinister presence of the Cheka at every level, destroying the capacity of the Red Army to function as a bastion of revolutionary ideas and turning it into a mere tool of the Party.

As before, officers received status and high pay while the common soldiers became thralls, and anyone—officer or soldier—who spoke out against the regime would be shot.

Simultaneously, Trotsky carried out a mass recruitment of officers from the old Tsarist army. Under Bolshevik dominion, the Red Army became an aristocratic army. As a result of this initiative, in 1918 75% of the officers were former tsarists, and by the end of the Civil War that figure had climbed to 83%. Rather than fomenting leadership among the masses, the Bolsheviks returned authority to an elite.

On the contrary, all the prominent leaders of the anarchist formations in the Civil War—Maria Nikiforova, Nestor Makhno, Fyodor Shchuss, Olga Taratuta, Anatoli Zhelezniakov, Novoselov, Lubkov—were chosen by their comrades according to their abilities, and they were workers or peasants, in contrast to the bourgeoisie, aristocrats, and intelligentsia who dominated in the Bolshevik camp. And they were among the most effective on the battlefield. While Trotsky suffered one defeat after another, Zhelezniakov and Makhno played decisive roles in the defeat of the White Army General Denikin. Subsequently, it was Makhno and his guerrillas who seized the Perekop Isthmus, the key stronghold of the Crimean Peninsula, the loss of which spelled defeat for White Army General Pyotr Wrangel. And in wide

swaths of Siberia, anarchist guerrilla detachments, like those of Lubkov and Novoselov, played a key role in stopping the advance of the White Army in 1918 and 1919, even though it was the Red Army that shot them in the end.

In the same month, ***June 1918,*** the Party implemented their policy of "war communism." There was nothing communist about it; rather, it constituted the Party's monopolization of the entire economy. It wasn't workers and peasants who controlled the factories and the land, but bureaucrats ruling from faraway offices. This policy, aside from the nationalization of all industry, imposed a strict discipline on the workers, a worsening of labor conditions and a lengthening of the workday; it turned striking into an offense punishable by firing squad; it established state control over international commerce; it legalized the forcible appropriation of all the peasants' goods and properties, thus inaugurating an agrarian policy even harsher and more exploitative than that of tsarist serfdom. This, of course, led to millions of deaths among the peasants and provoked constant rural rebellions against Bolshevik power.

It would be the new aristocratic Red Army that would crush these revolts, just as during the tsarist dictatorship. Another important factor in the evolution of the bureaucratic dictatorship: starting in the same month, the Party arrogated to itself the right to veto the decisions of any soviet.

In July 1918, the left SRs initiated an insurrection against Bolshevik power. They were defeated, illegalized, and expelled from the soviet government. As a consequence, the Bolsheviks ended up with an absolute monopoly on state power and prohibited the participation of other parties in the soviets.

At some point in 1918, acting under orders from Lenin, the Bolsheviks established their first concentration camps, which would give rise to the gulag system that claimed millions of lives during Stalin's reign.

In August 1918, Lenin ordered the use of "mass terror" against a rebellion in the city of Nizhny Novgorod and against a peasant re-

In November 1920, the Bolsheviks initiated a major campaign against Makhno's Revolutionary Insurgent Army in Ukraine, mobilizing tens of thousands of troops, many of which deserted to join the anarchists. The campaign began as a surprise attack. The day after anarchist forces managed to seize the Perekop Isthmus, the fortified pass into the Crimean Peninsula where Wrangel was based, and which the Red Army had been unable to take, the Bolsheviks began arresting and executing their supposed allies, the anarchists. Their treachery began ten months of intense guerrilla warfare before the Communists finally crushed the insurgent peasants.

On February 28, 1921, delegates of the revolutionary sailors and workers from the Kronstadt naval base published a declaration in solidarity with the workers of Petrograd, recently repressed after going on strike against the starvation conditions. The Bolsheviks responded with more repression, provoking a rebellion on Kronstadt. The Kronstadt rebels, long recognized as the heart of the revolution, demanded free soviets, an end to the Bolshevik dictatorship, and the recovery of the Revolution's principles. Trotsky, "the butcher of Kronstadt," led a military expedition that ended with the total suppression of the soviet on the 19th of March, the day before the anniversary of the Paris Commune. The Red Army played the role of the Versailles troops, executing more than 2000 people. They sent several thousand more to the gulag, where the majority died. Afterwards, the Bolshevik repression only increased. At the Party congress in April of that same year, as Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman related in a letter, Lenin promoted the total liquidation of the anarchist movement, including those participating in the soviet government who had allied with the Bolsheviks.

In March 1921, the Bolsheviks adopted the "New Economic Policy," putting an end to "War Communism." As Lenin himself recognized, the NEP represented "state capitalism," a "free market and capitalism, both subject to state control". The NEP gave rise to a new social class, the *nepmani*—men of the NEP or *nouveaux riches*—

Denikin, the White leader, in the fall. The anarchist fighters played a key role in his defeat and afterwards the Bolsheviks didn't have as much need for an alliance with the anarchists… until Communist incompetence produced a new threat to the Soviet regime just one year later.

Between May 1 and 3, 1920, a peasant and anarchist insurrection broke out in the regions of Altai and Tomsk, with the eventual participation of 10,000 combatants. It was principally directed against the White Army, but their support for decentralized, local control ran them afoul of the Communists, who sought to crush the rebellion, illegalizing and destroying the Altai Anarchist Federation. The resistance continued until the end of 1921.

In June of 1920, women workers in Tula went on strike for the right to have a day off on Sundays. They were sent to the concentration camps.

On August 19, 1920, the Tambov peasant rebellion began when a "requisitioning" squad of the Red Army beat the old men of a small village to force the inhabitants to surrender more grain to the government. By October, the peasants had fielded 50,000 combatants to fight the Communist authority. They functioned as an autonomous, self-organized force fighting the Whites and the Bolsheviks. There were also several veteran revolutionaries from the left SRs who rose to leadership positions in the rebellion. By January 1921, the uprising had extended to include Samara, Astrakhan, Saratov, and parts of Siberia. With 70,000 combatants, they defended their territory from the Communists until victories on other fronts enabled the deployment of 100,000 Red Army soldiers. To crush the revolt, the Communists used chemical weapons for approximately three months in 1921, killing many civilians. They sent 50,000 peasants—mostly women and the elderly—to concentration camps as hostages. The majority died. Between the war, the concentration camps, and the executions, the region lost some 240,000 inhabitants, the great majority peasants and non-combatants.

volt in the Penza region. The rebellions were protests against the new policy of "war communism." Nonetheless, Lenin founded a long Communist tradition of accusing any critic or dissident of being a secret right-wing agent (rather hypocritical of him, considering he had worked as an agent of imperialist interests, and just that summer had personally apologized to the German government after revolutionaries had assassinated the German ambassador). He ordered mass executions of those suspected of disloyalty, the execution of prostitutes, whom he blamed for the lack of discipline in his army, and the execution of a hundred random peasants in order to send a message so that "all the people in many miles see it, understand, and tremble."

On September 5, 1918, the Cheka were assigned the policy of the "Red Terror." They claimed that this was directed against the Whites and counterrevolutionaries, but it was an immediate response to two assassination attempts (one successful) carried out by left-wing revolutionaries—Fanya Kaplan and Leonid Kannegisser—against Bolshevik leaders to avenge their repressive policies. The "Red Terror" was clearly a policy of liquidation aimed at any enemy or critic of Bolshevik power, as they themselves declared in their newspaper on September 3, "We must crush the counterrevolutionary hydra through mass terror […] anyone who dares spread the slightest rumor against the Soviet regime will be immediately arrested and sent to the concentration camps." In the first two months, they killed between 10,000 and 15,000, many of them members of other revolutionary currents. By 1922, they had killed as many as 1.5 million, some of them Whites and tsarists, but the great majority peasants, workers, dissidents, and revolutionaries.

It must be said that the White Army was the first to practice mass executions—against Red Army prisoners—but the Bolsheviks took advantage of the situation to organize an unprecedented repression against all the other currents of the Revolution.

In November 1918, throughout a large territory in south Ukraine comprising 7 million inhabitants, primarily peasants, locals founded the *Volnaya Territoriya* or "Free Territory," an anarchist society based on communes, free and decentralized militias, land collectivization without intermediaries and direct worker control of industry, universal education based on the modern pedagogy of Francesc Ferrer i Guardia, and soviets free from party control but open to participation from any current of the worker and peasant classes and federated in a decentralized way.

The movement was rooted in the anarchist militias that had fought against the German occupiers to whom Lenin had handed over the entire country. The peasant militias immediately began holding the line against General Denikin of the White Army, but Lenin and Trotsky kept them from receiving munitions and functioning weapons, effectively sabotaging the front and causing many deaths. In the rearguard, the peasants prevented the Bolsheviks from taking over the revolution.

Throughout the whole of 1919, the Cheka continued and expanded a policy initiated the year before to execute Red Army deserters. As an authoritarian, involuntary army, the Red Army was plagued with desertions, of which there were more than a million in a year. Many conscripted soldiers tried to go home, and many others joined up with "Green Armies" of peasants who were trying to defend their lands from plundering by the Whites or the Communists. In Ukraine, tens of thousands joined up with the Revolutionary Insurgent Army of the anarchists.

In cases of mass desertion, the Cheka fell back on the tactic of holding family members hostage and executing them one by one until the soldiers returned (and then executing an exemplary number of the deserters).

In February 1919, the Bolsheviks granted an amnesty to the SRs. The White Army was advancing on all fronts, and the Communists desperately needed allies (the previous November, they had

re-legalized the Mensheviks after these declared their support for the government). When the SRs came out of clandestinity and set up offices in Moscow, the Cheka began arresting successive waves of SR leadership, accusing them of conspiracy, in order to bring about the fracturing and then destruction of the Socialist Revolutionary Party.

Between March 12 and 14, 1919, in the city of Astrakhan, the Cheka executed between 2000 and 4000 striking workers and Red Army soldiers who had joined them. Many were thrown into the river with stones tied to their necks, while the rest were killed by firing squad. To give an idea of the primarily anti-worker and counterrevolutionary scope of the Communists' activities, during the same repressive campaign they killed a significantly smaller number of bourgeoisie, between 600 and 1000. The primary victims of the Bolsheviks were from the popular classes.

The 16th of March, 1919, in Petrograd, the Cheka assaulted the Putilov factory, where workers starving to death had begun a strike demanding larger food rations, freedom of the press, the end of the Red Terror, and the elimination of the privileges held by Communist Party members. 900 were arrested and 200 executed without trial.

The Cheka also repressed strikes in the cities of Orel, Tver, Tula, and Ivanovo. In the course of the repression, the Cheka developed methods of torture surpassing those of the Inquisition. They slowly fed prisoners into ovens or vats of boiling water, they flayed prisoners, they buried peasants alive, they put rats in metal tubes against prisoners' bodies and put flames under the tubes so that the rats would eat their way through the prisoners to escape.

In June 1919, the Bolsheviks began their first attempt to illegalize and liquidate the peasant anarchists of Ukraine fighting alongside Makhno. Already in May, they had made a failed attempt to assassinate Makhno. Trotsky stated that he preferred for all of Ukraine to fall to the White Army than to leave the anarchists to carry out their activity. The campaign intensified after the defeat of