

This week in the Russian Revolution

July 10–July 16: The beginning of the “July Days” in Petrograd

10 July 2017

Tensions in Petrograd have reached the breaking point. As Kerensky’s military offensive collapses, Petrograd erupts. Despite the warnings by Bolshevik leaders that a premature insurrection would be isolated and defeated, hundreds of thousands of workers decide to take matters into their own hands. When the forces of reaction mobilize to crush the insurgent workers, the Bolsheviks are compelled to assume the leadership of the rebellion. This is the beginning of the “July Days.”

“The Bolshevik leadership saw clearly that the heavy reserves—the front and the provinces—needed time to make their own inferences from the adventure of the offensive,” Trotsky later wrote. “But the advanced ranks were rushing into the street under the influence of that same adventure. They combined a most radical understanding of the task with illusions as to its methods. The warnings of the Bolsheviks were ineffective. The Petrograd workers and soldiers had to test the situation with their own experience. And their armed demonstration was such a test. But the test might, against the will of the masses, have turned into a general battle and by the same token into a decisive defeat. In such a situation the party dared not stand aside. To wash one’s hands in the water of strategic morals would have meant simply to betray the workers and soldiers to their enemies. The party of the masses was compelled to stand on the same ground on which the masses stood, in order, while not in the least sharing their illusions, to help them make the necessary inferences with the least possible loss.”

Kerensky’s offensive smashed, Russian troops abandon the Austrian front

After slaughtering the advancing Russian soldiers en masse, inflicting an estimated 60,000 casualties, the German and Austro-Hungarian armies launch decisive counterattacks in Galicia. Mass mutinies break out in the Russian army. Desperate to restore order, the commanding officers brutally execute hundreds of soldiers, but they are unable to regain control. Independent of the generals, the Russian armies are disengaging from the front, retreating far back into the Ukraine. The advance of the opposing army now meets virtually no resistance.

The catastrophe of the military offensive profoundly discredits not only the Provisional Government, but also the Mensheviks and populists that had offered it their full-throated support. When the offensive was launched, the “socialist” Minister of War Alexander Kerensky had reported to the Provisional Government: “Today is the great triumph of the revolution. ... the Russian revolutionary army with colossal enthusiasm assumed the offensive.” Plekhanov had given a similar speech to a patriotic rally marking the opening of the offensive: “Today is

resurrection day. Resurrection of our country and of the whole world. Russia, having thrown off the yoke of czarism, has decided to throw off the yokes of the enemy.” Trotsky later writes:

The soldiers felt themselves again deceived. The offensive had not led to peace but war. The soldiers did not want war. And they were right. Patriots hiding in the rear were branding the soldiers as slackers and baiting them. But the soldiers were right. They were guided by a true national instinct, refracted through the consciousness of men oppressed, deceived, tortured, raised up by a revolutionary hope and again thrown back into the bloody mash. The soldiers were right. A prolongation of the war could give the Russian people nothing but new victims, humiliation, disasters—nothing but an increase of domestic and foreign slavery.

Petrograd, July 15 (July 2, O.S.) Cabinet crisis escalates over agreement with the Ukrainian Rada

A delegation of the Provisional Government returns from Kiev to Petrograd to report on its compromise agreement with the Ukrainian Rada (Central Council). The delegation included the Menshevik Irakli Tsereteli, Mikhail Tereshchenko, himself a major landowner in Ukraine, and Kerensky. On June 23 (June 10, O.S.), the Rada had adopted the Pervyi Universal (First Universal), which proclaimed independence from the Provisional Government, openly challenging the latter’s authority.

Afraid of alienating the 30 million-strong Ukrainian population, and of provoking a political crisis in the southwestern army, the SR-Menshevik delegation decided to make concessions to the Rada. In the agreement reached after three days of heated negotiations, the delegation recognizes de facto the claim of the Rada to speak for the Ukrainian people. A General Secretariat is to be appointed by the Provisional Government in consultation with the Rada. Moreover, the Rada is allowed to prepare its own proposals to solve the land question—the most urgent concern of tens of millions of Ukrainian peasants—and present it to a Constituent Assembly. In exchange, the Rada pledges its loyalty to Russia and gives up its demands for a separate Ukrainian army.

However, in the cabinet session in Petrograd, the bourgeois Constitutional Democrats (Kadets) bitterly oppose any concession whatsoever to the nationalist and separatist sentiments in Kiev. The Kadets renounce the agreement, and, upon instructions of their Central Committee, withdraw from the government. To the pro-war, pro-capitalist Kadet ministers, the threat to Russia’s territorial integrity was the

“supreme evil arising from the Pandora’s box of revolution” (Oliver H. Radkey).

In a press interview one day later, the Provisional Government’s prime minister, Prince Lvov, argues that basic differences of opinion between the “socialist ministers” (i.e., the Mensheviks and SRs) and the Kadets, rather than the Ukrainian problem itself, had provoked the cabinet’s collapse. Indeed, it is only the latest in a series of disagreements in which the Kadets find themselves in a minority position in the government. In particular, the Kadets oppose the agricultural and economic policies of Chernov, the SR minister of agriculture.

With the resignation of the Kadet ministers, there are only six “socialist” (populist and Menshevik) ministers and five bourgeois ministers left in the cabinet—as the masses in Petrograd and Kronstadt move toward an insurrection against the Provisional Government.

Petrograd, July 16: (July 3, O.S.): First Machine Gun Regiment initiates the July Insurrection

At a mass meeting of the First Machine Gun Regiment, thousands of soldiers call for the immediate overthrow of the Provisional Government and demand that all power be transferred to the Soviets. One of the main speakers is the Anarcho-Communist Iosif Bleikhsman, whose radical demands for the immediate overthrow of the Provisional Government and the seizure of power find enthusiastic support among the angry soldiers.

A resolution is passed that declares that the insurrection will begin at 5 p.m. this afternoon. Immediately, delegations are sent to other regiments and the Putilov workers to gather support for the overthrow of the government. Not all regiments follow their call. Some pledge neutrality, others voice support for the government, but many factories and garrison units support the movement almost instantly.

At a meeting in the Putilov factory, Bolshevik workers are split. While the secretary of the factory committee calls for immediate action, the Bolsheviks Anton Vasiliev and Sergei Ordzhonikidze urge restraint.

In Kronstadt, three emissaries from the First Machine Gun Regiment—Kazakov and Koshelev from the Bolshevik Military Organization and the Anarchist Pavel Pavlov—arrive in the afternoon to win the Kronstadt sailors for the armed insurrection.

At 4 p.m., the Bolshevik Central Committee convenes to discuss the party’s position. With the support of Trotsky’s *Mezhraiontsy* (Interdistrict Group), it decides to not participate in the demonstration.

Yet in Kronstadt and many other garrisons, Bolsheviks already assume a leading role in the movement. In Kronstadt, Fyodor Raskolnikov reports to Kamenev on the phone that the excitement of the gathering crowds is “alarming.” While Kamenev urges him to do whatever he can to calm the masses down, he and other Bolsheviks quickly conclude that there is no stopping the demonstration and that they must place themselves at the forefront of the movement. Bolshevik machine gunners are refusing to obey the Bolshevik Central Committee, declaring that leaving the party is preferable to opposing a decision of their regiment.

The news of the insurrectionary movement soon reaches the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet, which holds a session at the Tauride Palace to discuss the ongoing government crisis. By 7 p.m., a statement by the Executive Committee is being distributed that condemns the movement as traitorous and warns that “all available means” would be employed against it.

At this point, the city has, in the words of historian Alexander Rabinowitch, “taken on the appearance of a battlefield.” Armed machine gunners have occupied the Finland Station, and are positioned along the tracks at nearby stations. The bridges over the river Neva are likewise

taken over for the most part by armed soldiers and workers. The first clashes occur in what Rabinowitch calls a “chaotic” night. Some 60-70,000 people march on the Tauride Palace, where the Soviet Executive Committee meets in a frenzy.

The Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party only decides at the last minute to support the movement, realizing that there is no way to restrain it and that the reactionaries are mobilizing to crush it. It also sends an emissary for Lenin, who had unfortunately chosen this moment to take a brief vacation at a hiding place in nearby Finland.

At an emergency meeting of the Workers’ Section of the Petrograd Soviet in the Tauride Palace that same evening, the Bolsheviks for the first time win a majority. They help create a special commission that is tasked with both ensuring that the demonstration remains peaceful, and that the Soviet is pressured to take power. When Zinoviev, Kamenev and Trotsky at the meeting learn about the decision of the Bolshevik leadership, they convince the Workers’ Section to adopt its line. The Section elects a commission to contact the Petrograd and All-Russian Soviet Executive Committee. The other participants of the meeting leave for the city’s working-class districts and garrisons to inform them of their decision and try to give the movement a peaceful character.

A Bolshevik appeal for restraint, which had already been drafted for tomorrow’s edition of *Pravda* by Zinoviev and Kamenev, is withdrawn. Instead, a new leaflet is hastily put together and issued by 4 a.m., which reads:

Yesterday the revolutionary garrison and workers of Petrograd demonstrated and proclaimed this slogan: All power to the Soviets! We call upon this movement that arose in the regiments and factories to become a peaceful, organized expression of the will of the workers, soldiers, and peasants of Petrograd.

On the night from July 16-17 (July 3-4, O. S.) the leadership of the rebellion passes into the hands of the Bolsheviks. Within hours, the leaders of the Bolshevik Military Organization, Podvoisky, Nevsky and Mekhonoshin, create a special operational staff that assumes responsibility for the organization of the demonstration on July 17 (July 4, O.S.). Meanwhile, in Kronstadt, Raskolnikov organizes the mobilization, equipment and transportation of an armed expedition to Petrograd in a meeting that lasts until 3 in the morning.

Berlin, July 10: Rosa Luxemburg continues to be held in “protective custody”

On July 10, a report is published in the Social Democratic *Vorwärts* concerning a request made by representative Otto Rühle in the Reichstag the previous day in which he called for the release of Rosa Luxemburg from prison. Rühle uses the appointment of Luxemburg as a delegate to the Stockholm peace conference as a basis for his demand.

To do nothing, Rühle states, could create the impression abroad that “a political opponent of the government” is being “prevented from working for peace in Stockholm.” Three months later, one month after the conference, the government will answer the inquiry: No, Rosa Luxemburg will remain in custody “because she has developed an extremely lively and inflammatory activity within the radical socialist movement and has threatened the security of the Reich ...”

Rosa Luxemburg herself has not the slightest intention of travelling to Stockholm. Like Lenin, she firmly rejects meeting with the Social

Democratic leaders of Germany, France, Great Britain, etc., all of whom support their own governments in the imperialist war.

Because of her courageous and principled opposition to war, Luxemburg has been imprisoned since February 18, 1915. Because she repeatedly explains in her speeches to workers that the war and the crisis of capitalism will inevitably lead the working class to political mass strikes; and because she predicts the working class will end the world war as soon as the entire class realizes that it is obscene to shoot at their class brothers from other countries; and finally because as a Marxist she fights in her speeches and writings to make the workers conscious of these historic tasks—she is considered a treasonous “threat to the security of the Reich.”

Her place of detention has changed frequently. After the women’s prison in Berlin, she was taken into police custody and locked in a dark, dirty cell with prostitutes. Then she was moved to Wronki near Poznan, Poland and after that to the prison in Breslau. As long as her health permits it, she writes articles, including the famous “Spartacus Letters” which are smuggled out by various means.

Because she is next to Karl Liebknecht the most important leader, the Spartacus Group several times tried in vain to secure Luxemburg’s release. During her imprisonment, all the work of political leadership rests on the shoulders of the aged Franz Mehring and Leo Jogiches, working underground. The other more experienced members are either in prison or drafted into the military.

East Clare, Ireland, July 10: Sinn Fein defeats constitutional nationalists in by-election

Eamon de Valera, who served as a commander in the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin, defeats the Irish Parliamentary Party candidate in the East Clare by-election. This is Sinn Fein’s third by-election victory this year, the first coming in North Roscommon in February and the second in South Longford in May. Sinn Fein’s victory reflects strengthening nationalist tendencies within sections of the Irish middle class.

Although Sinn Fein was not involved in the Easter Rising directly and has only recently shifted to calling for an Irish republic, it is able to capitalize on deep opposition to British colonial rule above all due to the absence of any political challenge from the left. The Irish Labour Party—set up prior to the war by socialist James Connolly, who was executed following the Rising, and trade union leader Jim Larkin—decides to abstain from politically challenging Sinn Fein. This is despite the development of a mass strike movement in the working class and growing radicalization driven by mounting Irish casualties in the war.

Ramadi, July 12: British suffer heavy casualties in failed attack on Ottoman garrison

British troops are forced to withdraw after attempting since July 8 to capture the important Ottoman garrison at Ramadi, located strategically between Aleppo and Baghdad, Iraq.

The advancing British forces have encountered significant Ottoman resistance and also came under attack from pro-Ottoman Arab forces. However, the cause of more than half of the 566 casualties is the hot weather, with 321 soldiers dying of heat stroke or thirst.

The defeat demonstrates the complete indifference among the political and military elite to the soldiers fighting to consolidate British imperialist interests in the Middle East. Coming just over two weeks after the

publication of the Mesopotamia Commission’s report, the debacle at Ramadi coincides with the resignation today of Secretary for India Austen Chamberlain, who is held responsible for the lack of supplies, miserable conditions, poor military planning and poor communications that have plagued the British and Indian Army campaign in Mesopotamia.

Bisbee, Arizona, July 12: Striking Phelps Dodge miners herded onto cattle cars, deported to desert

In the midst of a bitter Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) strike, some 1,300 copper miners are rounded up, crowded onto cattle cars, and deported to the middle of the southern New Mexico desert.

Carrying out the deportation is a posse of some 2,000 armed thugs and vigilantes, including officials from the rival International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers (IUMMSW), deputized by local law enforcement officials who work, in all but name, for Phelps Dodge. The company has provided the names of militant workers for targeting, but the dragnet draws in many others, including locals who sympathize with the strikers and even bystanders.

The workers are first marched into a local baseball stadium, patrolled by deputies with firearms, including a machine gun. They then endure the 16-hour trip in the overcrowded cars, some of which were covered in manure, with little water and no food. They are released near the Tres Hermanas mountains in southeastern New Mexico, with no food or housing. The governor of New Mexico eventually provides tents that have been initially gathered for use by refugees from the Mexican Revolution.

Only two deaths take place: a worker, acting in self-defense, shoots and kills a deputy. He is then gunned down in cold blood by two other deputies.

Phelps Dodge draws its workers from Mexico, the US, Cornwall, Italy, Finland, Slovenia, Croatia, Ireland, and elsewhere. The IWW and its Metal Mine Workers subsidiary have succeeded in organizing this workforce, where the conservative IUMMSW has failed. The IWW demands pay increases and improved safety. Phelps Dodge refuses all concessions. Over 3,000 workers responded to the IWW call to strike on June 26, shutting down copper production at Phelps Dodge and two smaller rivals in Bisbee.

From the beginning, Phelps Dodge attempts to brand the workers as “German agents.” Sheriff Wheeler, who has organized the massive posse, writes to Arizona Governor Edward Campbell that the “whole thing appears to be pro-German and anti-American.” Or, as the Arizona Chapter of the American Mining Congress concludes “after careful investigations,” the IWW strike is “FINANCED BY GERMAN MONEY.”

Money is indeed involved—namely, that of Phelps Dodge and its president Walter S. Douglas. Profits, announced earlier in the year, are increasing at breakneck speed, driven by the war in Europe and American “preparedness” and entry. In 1916 the mining concern pulled in over \$24 million in net profits, an increase of over 118 percent since 1915.

Berlin, July 12: Generals Ludendorff and Hindenburg call for the removal of Reich Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg

Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff, the two leading generals of the Supreme Army Command (OHL) of the German Reich, go to Kaiser Wilhelm II and threaten to submit their resignations if he does not remove

Reich Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg.

The generals know the Kaiser considers them indispensable for the military. They are therefore certain of the success of their blackmail, especially since they have the support of five Reich ministers who submit their resignations on the same day.

The day before, Bethmann-Hollweg had persuaded the Kaiser to order the drafting of a reform to electoral law introducing universal and equal suffrage in Prussia, something which had been demanded by the Majority Social Democratic Party (MSPD) for years. This concession to the social democratic MSPD, which collaborates with the government, is necessary because, as Hollweg says in the crown council, the radical forces in Social Democracy and in the trade unions are gaining the upper hand. According to minutes of the meeting, the Reich chancellor declares: "It is crucial to reinforce the right wing of Social Democracy. For what would happen if the government could no longer count on the help of the trade unions in controlling the strike movement?"

Indeed, two months after the April strikes, a large strike wave has begun anew. Between 20,000 and 30,000 metal workers, especially in the defence industry, have been on strike since July 6 in the Cologne area. The strike wave is only brought to an end at the beginning of August with the efforts of the trade union leadership and the help of a few concessions in wages and working hours. At the same time, thousands of miners in Upper Silesia go on strike from July through August, almost none of them organized by trade unions. Both strike movements are accompanied by food riots and looting, primarily carried out by women, youth and children in cities like Breslau and Cologne.

The OHL is determined to end these strikes and revolts through bloody military interventions. It is also determined to defend at any cost the political hegemony of the aristocracy and the Junkers in Prussia enshrined in feudal electoral law. It will not accept the "drive" of a "negotiated peace" and give up its conquering aims. In this it is supported by the executives of heavy industry and high finance. They have long wanted to get rid of the chancellor because of his concessions—most of them empty promises—to the MSPD and the leaders of the trade unions.

Berlin, July 13: Reich Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg resigns

To pre-empt his removal by Kaiser Wilhelm II, Bethmann-Hollweg submits his resignation. In doing so, he prevents Wilhelm II from appearing as a puppet of the military in the public eye for having removed him and losing his authority. The Kaiser immediately accepts the resignation. As the generals correctly calculated, the Kaiser does not dare bring them before a military tribunal for their insubordination and political blackmail in time of war.

For three years of the war, Hollweg had attempted to manoeuvre between the generals' camarilla, the various wings of the industrial and finance bourgeoisie, and the Social Democrats to suppress open class conflict. The support given by the chauvinistic MSPD to his war policies had made this possible. Fuelled by the February Revolution in Russia, the class struggle in Germany has now broken out into the open. Hollweg and his politics are finished.

His successor Georg Michaelis is an ultraconservative and more compliant bureaucrat whom the generals can easily control. The newly established Reichstag majority of the MSPD, the catholic Centre Party, the bourgeois Progressive People's Party and the National Liberals have provoked a serious governmental crisis with their demand presented by Mathias Erzberger in the Reichstag for a resolution favouring a "negotiated peace." In the end, the OHL of Ludendorff and Hindenburg have profited the most by this. They can now pursue unimpeded their

brutal war plans, despite all of the catastrophic reports from the front and the failure of the unrestrained U-Boat war.

Beijing, July 13: Monarchist restoration defeated in China

Monarchist forces, led by General Zhang Xun, a royalist warlord and general in the former Qing dynasty, call for a ceasefire after having been routed by an offensive of republican forces the day before.

Zhang, capitalizing on a protracted political crisis and unrest, had led monarchist troops into Beijing and proclaimed the restoration of the Qing dynasty on July 1. The Qing dynasty was overthrown in the revolution of 1912. Zhang placed the last Qing emperor, Puyi, then an 11-year-old boy, on the throne, publishing a series of imperial edicts proclaiming the establishment of a new regime.

Zhang's forces, who were widely believed to have financial backing from Germany, were confronted by troops led by Duan Qirui, another prominent warlord and politician. Republican forces rapidly surrounded Zhang's positions, forcing his flight and the effective surrender of the troops he commanded.

Zhang's attempted coup had been prompted by the crisis of the dominant republican authority. Duan had been removed as premier, after a public conflict with Li Yuanhong, the president of the government, in May 1917. Li opposed Duan's attempts to align China with the war effort of the Allied powers, favoring the maintenance of nominal Chinese neutrality. The clash accelerated the tendency towards the collapse of central political power, and the proliferation of competing warlords, controlling troops and territory.

London, July 11: Rudyard Kipling publishes his poem "Mesopotamia"

In response to the contents of last month's report by the Mesopotamia Commission, exposing the horrific conditions of life for British soldiers and a lack of military planning, writer Rudyard Kipling publishes a poem entitled "Mesopotamia" in today's editions of the *London Morning Post* and the *New York Times*. Kipling denounces the "idle-minded overlords who quibbled while they died," and expresses growing public outrage at the military authorities: "How softly but how swiftly they have sidled back to power / By the favour and contrivance of their kind."

Born in Bombay, British India, in 1865, Kipling is a product of London's 19th-century colonial system, which imposed rigid divisions between a population of British colonial administrators and the Indian population.

Kipling aligned himself early on with the British ruling class, all but endorsing empire-building in the now-notorious poem, "The White Man's Burden." In the late 1890s, he denounced German attempts to build a navy capable of competing with Britain's Royal Navy, and wrote in support of Britain's imperialist aggression in the Boer War. On the outbreak of the war, Kipling endorsed the propaganda used by British imperialism to justify its intervention: that Britain was seeking to defend Belgian sovereignty and safeguard democracy. He even wrote official propaganda for the British authorities for a time.

But by 1917, even Kipling, whose son John Kipling was killed in the war, is expressing anger and frustration at the incompetence and indifference to the mass slaughter on the part of the political and military elite.

Kipling's contradictory legacy is best expressed in his reception by his contemporaries and successors. Mark Twain, by no means a conservative figure, struck up a friendship with Kipling during the 1890s and said of the writer, "Between us we cover all knowledge; he knows all that can be known, and I know the rest." George Orwell, who condemned Kipling as a representative of "British imperialism," noted, "He identified himself with the ruling power and not with the opposition. In a gifted writer this seems to us strange and even disgusting, but it did have the advantage of giving Kipling a certain grip on reality. The ruling power is always faced with the question, in such and such circumstances, what would you *do*?"



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