

This week in the Russian Revolution

July 17–23: The “July Days,” Insurrection and counterrevolution in Petrograd

17 July 2017

The insurrection in Petrograd known as the “July Days” reaches high tide and then recedes before the combined efforts of the Provisional Government and the parties that currently lead the Soviet. From the old tsarist reactionaries and the Constitutional Democrats, to the petty-bourgeois Mensheviks, Trudoviks, and Socialist Revolutionaries—virtually the entire political spectrum is united in a “counterrevolutionary orgy” against the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks are slandered as the traitorous cause of the catastrophic defeats of the Russian armies in the field, and Lenin is declared to be a German agent.

A vicious crackdown results in sporadic clashes in Petrograd, workers and soldiers fight back, and the reactionaries accumulate pretexts for further repression. Bolshevik offices and printing plants are ransacked, and leaders of the revolution—including Trotsky—are thrown into prison. Lenin goes into hiding. The fascist Black Hundred gangs run amok, beating Bolshevik workers and soldiers with impunity. There are an estimated 700 injuries and 160 deaths.

As Trotsky later recalls:

The struggle of the other parties among themselves was almost like a family spat in comparison with their common baiting of the Bolsheviks. In conflict with one another they were, so to speak, only getting in training for a further conflict, a decisive one. Even in employing against each other the sharpened accusation of German connections, they never carried the thing through to the limit. July presents a different picture. In the assault upon the Bolsheviks all the ruling forces, the government, the courts, the Intelligence Service, the staffs, the officialdom, the municipalities, the parties of the soviet majority, their press, their orators, constituted one colossal unit. The very disagreements among them, like the different tone qualities of the instruments in an orchestra, only strengthened the general effect. An inept invention of two contemptible creatures was elevated to the height of a factor in history. The slanders poured down like Niagara. If you take into consideration the setting—the war and the revolution—and the character of the accused—revolutionary leaders of millions who were conducting their party to the sovereign power—you can say without exaggeration that July 1917 was the month of the most gigantic slander in world history.

Petrograd, July 17: (July 4, O.S.): Workers and soldiers besiege the Soviet Executive Committee

At 6:00 am, the emissary of the Bolshevik Central Committee, Saveliev, reaches Lenin, who immediately hurries back from his vacation to Petrograd in the train at 6.45 am. Also at 6:00, in Kronstadt, between 10,000 and 12,000 sailors and soldiers, armed with rifles, assemble in Anchor Square where they receive five to ten bullets each. They are joined by a medical platoon and a contingent of armed workers. The Central Committee of the Social Revolutionaries, whose left faction enjoys substantial support among the Kronstadt sailors, issues a ban at 6:30 am prohibiting the demonstration. The Soviet Executive Committee follows suit, but all to no avail. Between 10:00 and 11:00 am, the troops from Kronstadt arrive in Petrograd, where life has virtually come to a halt. The only institutions still running are the hospitals, which are busy treating the many wounded. The better-off residents of Petrograd flee the city.

The leaders of the Kronstadt demonstration from the Bolshevik Military Organization direct it to the Bolshevik headquarters at the Kshesinskaia mansion, where Lenin has just arrived. The Kronstadt Bolshevik Flerovsky would later describe the demonstration as follows:

Seriousness was written on the faces of the black columns of sailors... To force the compromisers to submit to the will of the people [was the goal], but nobody quite knew how this was to be achieved and the uncertainty created an air of uneasiness. (quoted in Alexander Rabinowitch, *Prelude to Revolution*, Indiana University Press 1991, p. 183)

One Kronstadt sailor reportedly tells a bystander who asks him what they were doing in Petrograd: “We have been called and come to restore order because the bourgeoisie has gotten too far out of line here.”

The crowd is first greeted by Yakov Sverdlov, a Central Committee member and chief organizer of the Bolshevik Party. Lenin first refuses to speak to the crowd, hoping to thus show that he is opposed to the demonstration. Eventually he yields, steps out on the balcony and is greeted by thunderous applause. In what would be his last public speech until after the October Revolution, Lenin greets the Kronstadt sailors as the vanguard of the revolution, but concludes by appealing for self-restraint, and emphasizing the necessity of a peaceful demonstration. For many of the sailors, this comes as an unpleasant surprise.

From the Bolshevik headquarters, the soldiers and armed workers—some 60,000 men—march toward the Tauride Palace, where the Executive Committee of the Soviet is convening. When they reach the corner of Sadovaya and Apraksina streets in the mid-afternoon, they are met by a hail of bullets. Panicked, the Kronstadt sailors shoot back, some wildly firing in all directions. The Bolsheviks Raskolnikov, Roshal, Flerovsky, Bregman and Victor Deshevoi have to make supreme efforts to calm the

panicked demonstrators down.

Infuriated, the sailors march on to the Tauride Palace. Iarchuk, an Anarcho-Communist leader of the sailors, later recalls, "When we reached the Tauride Palace everybody was so stirred up that I expected the sailors to storm the palace." (quoted in Rabinowitch, *Ibid.*, p. 186)

Tens of thousands gather before the Tauride Palace. When the SR agricultural minister Chernov, who has become the target of growing political frustration for his failure to implement the land reform the SRs had long promised, comes out, he is physically confronted by angry sailors. One sailor shouts at him, "Take the power, you son-of-a-bitch, when it is given to you!" Only narrowly does Trotsky manage to save his life in an incident that has since become legendary. The Menshevik Nikolai Sukhanov will describe it as follows:

The mob was in turmoil as far as the eye could reach...All Kronstadt knew Trotsky and, one would have thought, trusted him. But he began to speak and the crowd did not subside. If a shot had been fired nearby at that moment by way of provocation, a tremendous slaughter might have occurred and all of us, including perhaps Trotsky, might have been torn to shreds. Trotsky, excited and not finding words in this savage atmosphere, could barely make the nearest rows listen to him. When he tried to pass on to Chernov himself, the ranks around the car began raging. 'You've come to declare your will and show the Soviet that the working class no longer wants to see the bourgeoisie in power [declared Trotsky]. But why hurt your own cause by petty acts of violence against casual individuals?' Trotsky stretched his hand down to a sailor who was protesting with especial violence... It seemed to me that the sailor, who must have heard Trotsky in Kronstadt more than once, now had a real feeling that he was a traitor: he remembered his previous speeches and was confused...Not knowing what to do, the Kronstadters released Chernov.

At the joint session of the Executive Committees, delegates from the workers' section, who represent some 54 shops and factories, are given the floor. One of them declares:

In the factories we are menaced by hunger. We demand the departure of the ten capitalist ministers. We trust the Soviet, but not those whom the Soviet trusts. The socialist ministers have entered into agreements with the capitalists—but these capitalists are our mortal enemies. We demand that the land be seized immediately and that [worker] control over industry be established at once, and we insist on a struggle against the starvation threatening us! (quoted in Rabinowitch, *Ibid.*, p. 194)

Yet the Soviet Executive Committee has no intention of giving in to these demands. The meeting is continuously interrupted by the angry demonstrators. Putilov workers demand to see Irakli Tsereteli, the head of the Executive Committee of the Soviet, but the terrified Tsereteli refuses to come out. Instead, the Soviet delegates send the Bolshevik Zinoviev, in Trotsky's words "an orator of extraordinary power." Zinoviev finishes his speech by thanking the demonstrators and asking them to disperse peacefully. The crowd starts to disperse.

While he is still speaking, delegates from the Putilov works, some of them armed with rifles, storm into the palace. One of them steps on the speaker's tribune and says: "Comrades! How long are we workers going to stand for this treachery? You are making bargains with the bourgeoisie

and the landlords ... Here we are, thirty thousand Putilovtsi ... We are going to have our will!" The Mensheviks respond that the workers should go home and that they would otherwise be traitors to the revolution.

Throughout the evening, skirmishes take place in the city center, but they acquire an ever more disorganized and confused character. As Trotsky later puts it, "Skirmishes, victims, fruitlessness of the struggle, and indefiniteness of practical aim—that describes the [July] movement."

Petrograd, July 17 (July 4, O.S.): Soviet Executive Committee and Provisional Government mobilize the military counterrevolution

Besieged by the angry crowds on Tauride Square, the leaders of the Petrograd Soviet begin to mobilize the counterrevolution in close collaboration with the Petrograd Military District. The Soviet leadership and the Provisional Government eventually agree on the immediate dispatch of frontline troops to the capital, a step that Kerensky rejected as unthinkable just a few weeks earlier during the crisis around the planned June 23 (June 10, O.S.) demonstration. Moreover, the Provisional Government and the Soviet Executive Committees authorize General Polovtsev, a notorious right-winger, to employ whatever means he deems necessary to rid Petrograd of the "mob," to disarm the First Machine Gun Regiment, and to "arrest the Bolsheviks occupying the house of Kshesinskaia, clear out the house, and occupy it with troops."

The Central Committee of the Kronstadt Fleet receives orders to send four destroyers to Petrograd to prevent the further landing of Kronstadt sailors, and to prevent the departure of ships from Helsingfors for Petrograd. The orders say that they should not hesitate sinking the ships in case of disobedience.

A central problem for the government and Soviet leadership is the fact that many troops that traditionally have been loyal to the government hesitate to come to the defense of the Provisional Government. To regain their support, Justice Minister Pereverzev manufactures material alleging that the Bolsheviks, and especially Lenin, are agents acting in the interests of Germany. The slander, which is based on the testimony of Ermolenko, a spy of the Russian secret service, is distributed and released to the press in the afternoon and early evening, initially without the sanction of the Soviet Executive Committee. These false rumors have been circulating in Petrograd ever since Lenin's return, but find little response among the masses, who are more interested in the continuation of the revolution and increasingly attracted to the Bolsheviks' struggle for peace and workers' power. Sukhanov will later write, "It goes without saying that not one person really connected with the revolution doubted for an instant that these rumors were all nonsense."

Meanwhile, the Machine Gunners have erected barricades throughout the city, and the right bank of the river Neva is in the hands of the insurrectionists.

At 1:00 am, as the meeting of the Soviet Executive Committees still proceeds, the delegates hear soldiers approaching. Initially, they are terrified, believing that the Kronstadters and Petrograd workers, now with more support, are descending upon them. But what they hear are the boots of the loyal regiments that arrive to defend the Soviet leadership. Once they realize it is the army that is coming to aid them, the Menshevik and SR delegates are greatly relieved. In an almost ecstatic state, they begin singing the Marseillaise. The Izmailovsky Guards Regiment, and then the Preobrazhensky and the Semenovskiy Regiments, in full battle dress and with marching bands, report for duty.

At 4:00 am, the Soviet adopts a resolution fully confirming the present government. With the Northern front now clearly supporting the Soviet and the government, the insurrectionary movement quickly collapses.

Kiev, July 17-18 (July 4-5, O.S.): Mass mutiny of garrison troops

Demands for national autonomy on the part of the Ukrainian population have prompted a crisis in the Provisional Government and the resignation of the Kadet ministers in Petrograd. Meanwhile, the ongoing disaster of Kerensky's offensive at the front, mass starvation and deprivation, together with the July Insurrection in Petrograd have contributed to an explosively rebellious mood among soldiers.

On July 17, in the Hrushky suburb of Kiev, tens of thousands of Ukrainian soldiers revolt, demanding the independence of the Ukraine. Centered around the Polubotok Military Club, the mutineers became known as the Polubotkivtsi. After shots are fired in several skirmishes, Ukrainian officials negotiate an end to the mutiny and the disarmament of the soldiers. The mutinous soldiers are punished with immediate deployment to the front.

London, July 17: King George V issues proclamation changing name of royal household to Windsor

In a proclamation issued at Buckingham Palace, King George V decrees that he and all of his male successors will adopt the name of Windsor, thereby relinquishing the name Saxe-Coburg-Gotha and all titles previously accorded to the royal household under the German crown. The British monarch and German Kaiser are first cousins, both being descended from Queen Victoria.

George's move is motivated by the anti-German hysteria whipped up by the British ruling class since the war's outbreak, which has included exaggerated and sometimes fictitious tales of German brutality. The nationalist campaign has even at times boiled over into violence, such as in 1915 when anti-German riots were incited in several cities, including London, Newcastle, Manchester and Liverpool. The *Times*, which has led the anti-German agitation, has been calling for the segregation of all military-aged men of German origin and the deportation of all other Germans.

The name change also reflects deepening concerns about social developments across Europe. Little more than four months have passed since another of George's cousins, Tsar Nicholas II, was overthrown by the February Revolution.

The British government make plans to offer political asylum to the Romanovs, but George V ultimately decides against it, fearing that the presence of the Tsar and his family could further radicalize already sharpening social tensions in Britain and even trigger revolution.

Petrograd, July 18: (July 5, O.S.): Government launches full-fledged crackdown

A government detachment, commanded by Polovtsev, arrives at *Pravda*'s publishing plant at 6:00 in the morning, just a little too late to catch Lenin who, following a decision of the Central Committee, immediately goes into hiding. Sensing the drastic shift in the situation, the Bolshevik Central Committee immediately calls upon the soldiers and workers to return to their barracks and factories. In its last appeal that comes out

before the seizure of the printing facility, *Pravda* announces a halt of the demonstration planned for today. The Military Organization is much slower to grasp the changed situation, and several of its leaders initially think that through a call for a renewed demonstration, the balance of power can again be shifted in the Bolsheviks' favor.

Around midday, Ilin-Zhenevsky and Iarchuk, who negotiate with the government on behalf of the insurgents, issue a de facto surrender after a vote taken among the machine gunners and sailors. By the evening, most Kronstadt sailors have left Petrograd. Troops loyal to the government and General Polovtsev's forces quickly reassert control over Russia's capital, with the exception of a few workers' districts. In the words of Rabinowitch, "feeling against the Bolsheviks was so high that much of the city was literally unsafe for them." The fascist gangs of the anti-Semitic Black Hundreds are roaming on the streets. Even the Menshevik Woytinsky would later speak of a "counterrevolutionary orgy" which made this one of the saddest days in his life. Throughout the day, armed trucks are confiscated and workers and soldiers disarmed and arrested.

At 3:00 am on July 19 (July 6, O.S.), numerous forces loyal to the government arrive at the Bolshevik headquarters, which are guarded by a detachment of Kronstadt sailors, commanded by Raskolnikov. At 7:00 am, the government issues an ultimatum. Not wishing to surrender their weapons, the Kronstadters leave for the Peter and Paul Fortress. When the government raids the Kshesinskaia mansion, they find only a handful of Bolsheviks, all of whom are arrested. Soon thereafter, the Bolsheviks also surrender the Peter and Paul Fortress.

The cabinet ministers issue appeals for the arrest of all organizers and leaders of the Bolsheviks. They are to be brought to trial as traitors to the nation and revolution.

Petrograd, July 18: (July 5, O.S.): Press begins campaign slandering Bolsheviks as "German agents"

Picking up the slander of revolutionists as "German agents," the press launches a ferocious campaign against the Bolsheviks. The opening shot is fired by the newspaper *Novoe Vremya* (New Times), which prints the alleged preliminary findings of a government investigation that has already been leaked to military units the day before. Trotsky would later call this,

the most incredible episode of a year rich in events: The leaders of a revolutionary party, whose lives for decades had been passed in a struggle against rulers, both crowned and uncrowned, found themselves portrayed before the country and the whole world as hired agents of the Hohenzollern. On a scale hitherto unheard of, this slander was sown in the thick of the popular masses, a vast majority of whom had heard of the Bolshevik leaders for the first time only after the February revolution. Mudslinging here became a political factor of primary importance.

Especially vile is the role of the newspaper *Edinstvo* (Unity) of Georgi Plekhanov, the father of Russian Marxism who has degenerated into a Russian chauvinist. In response to a government telegram, arguing that German agents have taken in part in organizing the July disturbances, Plekhanov writes in *Edinstvo*:

If the government is convinced of this, the riots cannot be treated

as if they were merely the regrettable results of tactical confusion... Apparently, the disruptions ... were an integral part of a plan formulated by the foreign enemy to destroy Russia. Therefore stamping them out must be a constituent part of any plan for Russia's national defense... The revolution must crush everything in its way immediately, decisively, and mercilessly." (Quoted in Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power*, Haymarket Books 2006, p. 19)

Yet the slanders are so blatantly and transparently false that they evoke protests even from some Menshevik leaders. Justice Minister Pereverzev, who has played a key role in circulating them in the first place, mostly to ensure the support of wavering military regiments, feels compelled to resign the very day the accusations are published in the press. This does not hinder the enemies of Bolshevism from spreading the slander during the weeks and months to follow.

Explaining the dynamic and political motives for this campaign, Trotsky will later write:

The July slander against the Bolsheviks least of all fell down out of a clear sky. It was the natural fruit of panic and hate, the last link in a shameful chain, the transfer of a stereotyped slanderous formula to its new and final object, permitting a reconciliation of the accusers and the accused of yesterday. All the insults of the ruling group, all their fears, all their bitterness, were now directed against that party which stood at the extreme left and incarnated most completely the unconquerable force of the revolution. Was it in actual fact possible for the possessing classes to surrender their place to the Bolsheviks without having made a last desperate effort to trample them in the blood and filth? That tangle of slander, well snarled up from long usage, was inevitably fated to come down on the heads of the Bolsheviks. The revelations of the retired ensign from the Intelligence Service were only a materialization of the ravings of possessing classes who found themselves in a blind alley. For that reason the slander acquired such frightful force.

Petrograd, July 19: (July 6, O.S.): Lenin calls for abandoning the slogan "All Power to the Soviets"

This morning, as all workers are going back to work, soldiers from the front patrol in the streets. The insurrection has been defeated. In the evening, in a small apartment in the industrial Vyborg District, Lenin gathers a number of senior Bolsheviks, among them Zinoviev, Kamenev, Stalin and Podvoisky, to discuss the political situation.

Lenin harbors no illusions about the defeat of the insurrection. He stresses that the Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks have now unequivocally committed themselves to an alliance with the military counterrevolution, instead of taking power into their hands, as the workers and soldiers have hoped they would under the pressure from the streets. With the help of the SRs and the Mensheviks, the counterrevolution has taken over state power. A peaceful development of the revolution has become impossible. Therefore, the slogan of "All Power to the Soviets" has become obsolete, Lenin argues. Instead, the Bolsheviks need to agitate with the new slogan: "All power to the working class led by its revolutionary party—the Bolshevik-Communists." According to Alexander Rabinowitch, "this may have been Lenin's first open affirmation of the absolute necessity of a direct seizure of power by the Bolsheviks, to be

executed at the first suitable moment in the not-too-distant future."

In his article "On Slogans," published a few days later, Lenin elaborates:

Too often has it happened that, when history has taken a sharp turn, even progressive parties have for some time been unable to adapt themselves to the new situation and have repeated slogans which had formerly been correct but had now lost all meaning—lost it as 'suddenly' as the sharp turn in history was 'sudden.' Something of the sort seems likely to recur in connection with the slogan calling for the transfer of all state power to the Soviets... it was a slogan for peaceful progress of the revolution... This course would have been the least painful, and it was therefore necessary to fight for it most energetically. Now, however, this struggle, the struggle for the timely transfer of power to the Soviets, has ended. A peaceful course of development has become impossible. A non-peaceful and most painful course has begun. The turning point of July 4 was precisely a drastic change in the objective situation. The unstable condition of state power has come to an end. At the decisive point, power has passed into the hands of the counterrevolution. The development of the parties on the basis of the collaboration of the petty-bourgeois Socialist-Revolutionary and Menshevik parties and the counterrevolutionary Cadets has brought about a situation in which both these petty-bourgeois parties have virtually become participants in and abettors of counterrevolutionary butchery... The slogan calling for the transfer of state power to the Soviets would now sound quixotic or mocking. Objectively it would be deceiving the people; it would be fostering in them the delusion that even *now* it is enough for the Soviets to want to take power, or to pass such a decision, for power to be theirs, that there are still parties in the Soviets which have not been tainted by abetting the butchers, that it is possible to undo what has been done... The substance of the situation is that these new holders of state power can be defeated only by the revolutionary masses, who, to be brought into motion, must not only be led by the proletariat, but must also turn their backs on the Socialist-Revolutionary and Menshevik parties, which have betrayed the cause of the revolution... Now, after the experience of July 1917, it is the revolutionary proletariat that must independently take over state power. Without that the victory of the revolution is *impossible*. The only solution is for power to be in the hands of the proletariat, and for the latter to be supported by the poor peasants or semi-proletarians.

In light of this situation, Lenin insists that the agitational work of the Bolsheviks be reorganized. First, it needs to clearly point to "the real enemy of the people, the military clique, the Cadets and the Black Hundreds, and that it definitely unmasks the petty-bourgeois parties, the Socialist-Revolutionary and Menshevik parties, which played and are playing the part of butcher's aides." Second, the Bolshevik agitation must make clear "that it is absolutely hopeless to expect the peasants to obtain land as long as the power of the military clique has not been overthrown, and as long as the Socialist-Revolutionary and Menshevik parties have not been exposed and deprived of the people's trust."

Berlin, July 19: Reichstag passes meaningless "peace resolution"

The German government passes a resolution, supported by the Majority Social Democratic Party (MSPD), the Catholic Centre Party, and the Progressive People's Party, which in broad and unctuous turns of phrase speaks of a "peace of understanding and the lasting reconciliation of peoples."

When right-wing representative Mathias Erzberger (Centre Party) introduced the "peace resolution" in parliament on July 6, it unleashed a crisis within the government and ultimately led to the fall of Reich Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg. However, the military brass, led by generals Ludendorff and Hindenburg, immediately seize on the crisis to ensure the continuation of the war.

On the very day of Bethmann-Hollweg's resignation, the generals ordered party leaders of the Reichstag majority to their headquarters and called on them to abandon the planned peace resolution. But the SPD leaders are able to persuade the Supreme Army Command (OHL) that the purpose of the resolution is not to give up the goals of the war, but primarily to serve propaganda needs. If the SPD abandons the peace resolution, they would lose the last remnant of credibility that they urgently need to build support for the war policy in the working class.

Hearing this, the generals insist that they at least have a say in the contents of the "peace resolution." The SPD leaders obediently agree, with chairman Philipp Scheidemann assuring Ludendorff: "The resolution is written in such a way that necessary acquisition of lands and war indemnities are not at all excluded." Erzberger is more specific: "German interests in Belgium and in the East are not affected."

To dispel any lingering doubts that the resolution could somehow obstruct the pursuit of far-reaching war aims, when the new Reich chancellor Georg Michaelis accepts the resolution in the Reichstag, he adds the phrase "as I understand it." He triumphantly reports in a letter to Crown Prince Wilhelm of Prussia on July 25: "The infamous resolution is adopted with 212 votes in favor and 126 against, with 17 abstentions. By my interpretation of it, I have robbed it of its greatest threat. With this resolution, one can finally make any peace that one wants."

On July 20, the SPD follows through on their pro-war position by once again ushering through approval of new war credits in the Reichstag totaling 15 million marks.

Petrograd, July 20: (July 7, O.S.): Leading Bolsheviks arrested

Leading Bolsheviks like Lev Kamenev, Moisei Kharitonov, Flavian Khaustov, and Eino Rakhia are arrested. The Bolshevik newspapers *Pravda*, *Soldatskaya Pravda* (The Soldiers' Truth), and *Golos Pravdy* (The Voice of Truth) are ordered closed, and several of the party's district and factory committee offices are raided. The general political atmosphere has grown intensely hostile to the Bolsheviks, and even previously pro-Bolshevik factories and committees pass resolutions rejecting the Bolshevik party and endorsing the Soviet. Thus, at the Vyborg District Metalist factory, the local Bolshevik cell passes a resolution pledging full support to the Soviet and placing the local party organization under its control. It demands that the Central and the Petersburg Committees of the Bolshevik party divest themselves of authority.

The Military Organization, which has played a key role in the insurrection, is most severely affected. Most of its leaders are imprisoned, its soldiers' club and newspapers are banned. Yet, overall, the force of the counterrevolution is more limited than the government has hoped and many Bolsheviks have feared. Many workers hide their weapons instead of turning them over to the government. In place of the banned *Pravda*, the Bolsheviks immediately manage to issue the paper *Listok Pravdy*. *Golos Pravdy* in Kronstadt is closed down on July 26 (July 13, O.S.), but

the next day *Proletarskoe Delo* appears in an edition of 12,000 copies. Until the end of July, it is to serve as the main organ of the Central Committee.

Flanders, July 20: Germans bombard British trenches with mustard gas shells

In an operation code-named *Todentanz* (Dance of death), German soldiers bombard British positions at Armentières with mustard gas shells. Around 6,400 troops are injured in the attack, which comes a week after the first use of mustard gas shells on a smaller scale near Ypres.

The shells burst with a dull plop and disperse their contents in a radius of between 7 and 10 meters. Soldiers who come into contact with the chemical develop blisters on their skin and severe conjunctivitis resulting in temporary blindness. Casualties must be led in files to medical stations because they can no longer see to find their way.

The mustard gas shells, marked with a yellow cross, are being used by the Germans to poison areas of ground where they anticipate British attacks will take place, since the chemical can remain in the soil for weeks or even months. Bombardments are occurring on almost a daily basis near Ypres, where the Germans suspect a coming offensive. In addition, they have this month introduced so-called blue cross shells, which are designed to penetrate gas masks by releasing fine arsenic dust. These shells are fired in conjunction with others carrying poison gas, so that when the soldiers remove their masks due to the sneezing caused by the dust, they will succumb to poison gas.

All parties in the war have made extensive use of gas, in violation of The Hague Treaty of 1889, which forbade the firing of asphyxiating or poison gas. France began using tear gas in 1914, while Germany launched major chlorine gas attacks in April and May 1915. Britain, which initially denounced Germany for using chemical weapons, quickly developed their own, and the Allies made extensive use of chlorine. The United States, when it entered the war in April, was already recruiting specialists to produce poison gas and will soon create a gas regiment.

On the Southern Front, the first gas attack launched by Austro-Hungarian forces on June 29, 1916, using a combination of phosgene and chlorine, caused thousands of Italian deaths.

By the end of the war, an estimated 100,000 deaths will have been caused by chemical weapons and the total number of casualties will be 1.3 million.

France, July 21: Military report declares mutinies in army to be over

A report prepared by France's Special Service Bureau declares that the mutinies in the army have been brought under control but cautions that sharp tensions remain. "The sense of discipline is returning," the report claims. "The average opinion among the troops is that at the point we have reached it would be absurd to give up. But the officers must not treat their men with haughtiness."

The reality is that the mutinies have been brutally suppressed. The French military has imposed strict censorship on the rebellions, meaning that it will only become clear after the war that an estimated 57 soldiers were executed for their involvement in the mutinies. Hundreds more were handed death sentences that were subsequently commuted. 1,381 men were sentenced to five years or more of hard labor, with 23 men receiving life sentences. Another 1,492 were imprisoned for a shorter period.

The mutiny affected 68 of the French army's 112 divisions, reaching its peak in late May and early June when soldiers, inspired by the February Revolution in Russia, elected representatives and held meetings to discuss their grievances and advance demands.

Petrograd, July 22-23 (July 9-10, O.S.): Soviet leadership proclaims "government to save the revolution"

The Executive Committees of the Petrograd and the All-Russian Soviets convene for an emergency session as reports of military collapse at the front reach the capital. In a previous resolution, the Executive Committees have condemned the July Days as "an adventurous, abortive armed uprising" by "anarcho-Bolshevik elements," and explicitly acknowledged the authority of the government to protect revolutionary freedoms and the maintenance of order.

Now, they go even further. The Menshevik Dan, who just a few weeks earlier had argued against excessive sanctions against the Bolsheviks in the wake of the aborted June 23 (June 10, O.S.) demonstration, calls upon the Soviet to declare the Provisional Government immediately a "government to save the revolution" which should be vested with far-reaching powers to restore discipline in the army, fight against all manifestations of "counterrevolution" and enact the reform program announced one day before.

The Soviet indeed adopts such a resolution, issuing "a blank check for a government whose makeup and program were at this point completely unclear." (Rabinowitch). In a proclamation announcing this decision, the Soviet declares:

Let the government crush all anarchical outbursts and all attempts to destroy the gains of the revolution with an iron hand...
Let [the government] carry out all those measures required by the revolution.

The resolution is opposed by the Bolsheviks, the Menshevik-Internationalists, and the Left SRs.

Also this week: Mount Wilson, California, July 19: Discovery enormously expands scale of known universe

Working with a 60" telescope, George Willis Ritchey accidentally discovers a bright star (now known to be a supernova) in the galaxy NGC6946. Combined with several similar prior observations, Ritchey's discovery suggests that these phenomena are not accidental alignments with brightening stars in our galaxy, but rather that these stars—and the "spiral nebulae" containing them—are entirely outside of our own galaxy, thus expanding the scale of the known Universe enormously. A new 100" telescope commissioned late in 1917 will confirm this hypothesis by detecting and measuring the properties of individual bright stars in nearby galaxies.





To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact