

This week in the Russian Revolution

# October 9 - 15: Lenin steps up campaign for insurrection

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## Petrograd: Lenin urges seizure of power

As working class support for the Bolsheviks surges, and the Provisional Government makes military preparations to crush the Revolution, Lenin, who remains in hiding in Finland, becomes convinced that a uniquely favorable opportunity is slipping away. On October 10 (September 27, O.S), he writes an exasperated letter to Ivar Smilga:

The general political situation causes me great anxiety. The Petrograd Soviet and the Bolsheviks have declared war on the government. But the government has an army, and is preparing *systematically*. . . And what are we doing? We are only passing resolutions. We are losing time. We set "dates" (October 20, the Congress of Soviets—is it not ridiculous to put it off so long? Is it not ridiculous to rely on that?). The Bolsheviks are not conducting regular work to prepare their *own* military forces for the overthrow of Kerensky.

It is my opinion that inside the Party we must agitate for an earnest attitude towards the armed uprising, for which reason this letter should be typed and delivered to the Petrograd and Moscow comrades. . . .

Lenin emphasizes that Smilga should make what preparations he can for the uprising among the troops in Finland and the Baltic fleet: "If we fail to do this, we may turn out to be consummate idiots, the owners of beautiful resolutions and of Soviets, but *no power!*"

Meanwhile, peasant unrest surges in the countryside. The conflicts on the land seized by the peasants from the nobility are especially bitter and violent. When Kerensky's government moves to crush the peasant revolts with military force, Lenin redoubles his insistence that the Bolsheviks take power immediately and stop the suppression of the peasantry.

From his Finnish hiding place, Lenin cannot know that Trotsky is, in fact, taking concrete steps toward the seizure of power, including the arming of the Red Guards. Lenin's fear is that conservative tendencies in the party, concentrated around Kamenev and Zinoviev, might cause it to

fall behind the tasks posed to the working class by the crisis.

His warnings from Finland are calibrated to prepare the Bolsheviks for the seizure of power. In this vein he denounces all those who would "tolerate three more weeks of war" and demands immediate preparations for storming government buildings in Moscow and Petrograd. However, Lenin's position remains a minority. The Central Committee has suppressed Lenin's writings calling for an immediate insurrection.

Within days of writing his letter to Smilga, Lenin writes "The Crisis Has Matured," in which he excoriates those "in the Central Committee and the upper circles of the party" who are "in favor of waiting for the Congress of Soviets, against the immediate seizure of power, against immediate insurrection." He writes:

To "wait" for the Congress of Soviets and so forth under such circumstances would be a *betrayal of internationalism*, a betrayal of the cause of the world socialist revolution.

For internationalism consists of *deeds* and not phrases, not expressions of solidarity, not resolutions.

The Bolsheviks would be traitors to the *peasants*, for to tolerate the suppression of the peasant revolt [would] *ruin* the whole revolution, to ruin it for good. An outcry is raised about anarchy and about the increasing indifference of the people, but what else can the people be but indifferent to the elections, when the peasants have been driven to revolt while the so-called 'revolutionary democrats' are patiently tolerating its suppression by military force!

The Bolsheviks would be traitors to democracy and to freedom, for to tolerate the suppression of the peasant revolt at such a moment would *mean* allowing the elections to the Constituent Assembly to be fixed in *exactly the same way* as the Democratic Conference and the "Pre-parliament" were fixed, only even worse and more crudely.

The crisis has matured. The whole future of the Russian revolution is at stake. The honor of the Bolshevik Party is in question. The whole future of the international workers' revolution for socialism is at stake. . .

It would be sheer treachery to the peasants. To allow the peasant revolt to be suppressed when we control the Soviets of both *capitals* would be to lose, and justly lose, every ounce of the peasants' confidence. . . .

To "wait" for the Congress of Soviets would be utter idiocy, for it would mean losing *weeks* at a time when weeks and even days decide *everything*. .. To "wait" for the Congress of Soviets is idiocy, for the Congress will *give nothing, and can give nothing!*

.. . The Bolsheviks are now *guaranteed* the success of the

insurrection: (1) we can (if we do not “wait” for the Soviet Congress) launch a *surprise* attack from three points—from Petrograd, from Moscow and from the Baltic fleet; (2) we have slogans that guarantee us support—down with the government that is suppressing the revolt of the peasants against the landowners! (3) we have a majority *in the country*; (4) the disorganization among the Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries is complete; (5) we are technically in a position to take power in Moscow (where the start might even be made, so as to catch the enemy unawares); (6) we have *thousands* of armed workers and soldiers in Petrograd who could *at once* seize the Winter Palace, the General Staff building, the telephone exchange and the large printing presses. Nothing will be able to drive us out. . .

Lenin concludes his letter with his formal resignation from the Central Committee. “I am compelled to *tender my resignation* from the Central Committee, which I hereby do, reserving for myself freedom to campaign among the *rank and file* of the Party and at the Party Congress,” he writes. “For it is my profound conviction that if we ‘wait’ for the Congress of Soviets and let the present moment pass, we shall *ruin* the revolution.”

With Trotsky at the head of the Petrograd Soviet, and with the Bolshevik Party in control of a growing majority of other soviets, the Bolsheviks are now the most powerful force in the Russian Revolution. However, significant differences have emerged within the party’s leadership regarding what course to take.

On the “moderate” wing of the Bolshevik Party, a faction led by Kamenev supports Bolshevik participation in a broad coalition of “democratic” forces that would rule until a Constituent Assembly could be convened. This strategy is oriented towards the formation of a bourgeois republic in which the Bolsheviks would constitute one of the ruling parties.

On the opposite wing of the party, Lenin and his supporters are calling for an immediate insurrection in Moscow and Petrograd, supported by the armed working class, soldiers, and sailors. This Bolshevik government would immediately sue for peace, confiscate and distribute land to peasants, organize the food supply, and carry out the most extensive possible socialist measures.

The “Leninists in spirit,” led by Trotsky, call for the Bolsheviks to assume power at the upcoming Congress of Soviets scheduled for November 2 (October 20, O.S.). Trotsky argues that the transfer of power at this congress would be perceived by the masses as legitimate and would give expression to the popular slogan “Power to the Soviets!” Trotsky explains his position in the *History of the Russian Revolution*:

In co-coordinating the revolutionary efforts of the workers and soldiers of the whole country, giving them a single goal, giving them unity of aim and a single date for action, the slogan of the Soviet Congress at the same time made it possible to screen the semi-conspiratorial, semi-public preparation of an insurrection with continual appeals to the legal representation of the workers, soldiers and peasants. Having thus promoted the assembling of forces for the revolution, the Congress of Soviets would afterward sanction its results and give the new government a form irrefragable in the eyes of the people.

**Washington D.C., October 9: White House censor declares newspapers “may not say the Government is controlled by Wall Street”**

In explanation of a new Executive Order from President Wilson, the US Postmaster General Albert Burleson announces today that newspapers that “encourage insubordination... will be dealt with severely,” under White House powers claimed from the recent Trading With the Enemy Act and the earlier Espionage Act. Burleson explains:

We shall take great care not to let criticism which is personally or politically offensive to the Administration affect our action. But if newspapers go so far as to impugn the motives of the Government and thus encourage insubordination, they will be dealt with severely.

For instance, papers may not say that the Government is controlled by Wall Street or munition manufactures, or any other special interests. Publications of any news calculated to urge people to violate the law would be considered grounds for drastic action. We will not tolerate campaigns against conscription, enlistment, sale of securities, or revenue collections. We will not permit the publication or circulation of anything hampering the war’s prosecution or attacking improperly our allies.

In order to use the mails, foreign language newspapers must first receive a license from the federal government, and they must submit, with every issue, an English language translation of their editions. Whether they will be licensed, however, depends “on their past utterances” according to the *New York Times*, which does not figure to be much affected by the rules.

Especially targeted are socialist newspapers. The *Times* notes that socialist newspapers will not be blocked from the mails unless they contain “treasonous or seditious matter.” However, Burleson, whose other notable achievement in the Wilson administration has been the reintroduction of segregation in the federal workforce, explains, “The trouble is that most Socialist papers do contain this matter.”

### **Berlin, October 9: Fall-out from sailors’ revolt triggers government crisis**

At a stormy session in the German Reichstag (parliament), the government tries in vain to gather support for proceeding against the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD) on the charges of high treason in the wake of a major revolt by sailors. The events trigger yet another government crisis which will lead to the resignation of the German Chancellor.

Early in the morning, prior to today’s planned sitting of the Reichstag, Chancellor Georg Michaelis and State Secretary for the Navy Eduard von Capelle receive a telegram about the investigations in Wilhelmshaven into this summer’s sailors’ movement which have already resulted in several death sentences. According to the telegram, one of the accused, the boilerman Paul Calmus, has admitted to having met with USPD Reichstag deputies Wilhelm Dittmann and Georg Ledebour, who allegedly instigated the sailors’ movement in alliance with English and French officers.

The Reichstag sitting proceeds in a stormy atmosphere. USPD deputy Dittmann begins by asking the State Secretary for the Navy von Capelle if it is true that in the navy, hundreds of years of jail sentences have been imposed, death sentences issued and two already carried out. Wide sections of the population are deeply embittered about these actions, he continues. The Chancellor immediately answers: Dittmann is least of all entitled to speak about actions taken in the army or navy. He belongs to a

party which endangers the existence of the German Reich. This brief answer triggers not only a “storm of outrage” (according to the official record of the sitting) from USPD members, but also from the Social Democratic Party, Centre Party and Progress Party.

Only the Conservatives and National Liberals, a small minority in the Reichstag, back the government in its attempt to crack down on the USPD.

The right-wing Progress Party and social chauvinist SPD’s sudden alliance with the USPD is not the result of principled opposition to German militarism, let alone feelings of solidarity and sympathy with the executed soldiers. It is rather the fear that open support for the government could lead to the rebellious moods brewing in the population culminating in a revolutionary movement. As a result of the increasingly threatening news from Russia about the rise of the Bolsheviks, this fear has been growing rapidly over recent days.

The cross-party committee wants to compel the government to institute domestic reforms, including reform of the Prussian electoral law and an easing of the state of siege so as to retain the class truce and “banish the Bolshevik danger in Germany.” Michaelis is ready to adopt this course, but within a few days it becomes clear he is incapable of carrying it through.

Soon after the session, it emerges that the testimony by Paul Calmus, which has formed the main basis for the accusation of high treason against the USPD, is a forced, false confession, and the Chancellor’s position becomes untenable. Facing a demand to either confess or be sentenced to death, Calmus indicated a date for his alleged meeting with USPD politicians in Berlin when, as he knew, they were in fact at a “Peace Conference” in Stockholm.

### **Kiev, October 10 (September 27 O.S.): Declaration by General Secretariat raises specter of Ukraine's separation from Russia**

The General Secretariat of the Ukrainian Rada (parliament), which was formed in the wake of the February Revolution, takes yet another step toward a complete separation of Ukraine from Russia. The declaration calls for a Ukrainian constituent assembly, agricultural reforms, a reorganization of the banking, taxation, and education systems. The Rada’s secretariats in charge of food, communications, post offices and telegraphs, justice and war are reestablished, amounting to the *de facto* formation of an independent Ukrainian government.

The growing separatist movement in Ukraine has for months been a central component of the ever deepening political crisis of the Provisional Government, which refuses to grant any additional concessions to the Ukrainian national movement. In June, the adoption of the First Universal (Pervyi Universal), which proclaimed Ukrainian independence, helped precipitate the downfall of the second coalition government. Relations between Petrograd and the Rada have been strained ever since. The Ukrainian national movement, which is deeply hostile to the Bolsheviks’ cause, grew again in strength with the aborted Kornilov coup.

In response to the declaration, the Kadets, who fervently oppose an independent Ukrainian state and seek to defend the territorial integrity of Russia by all means, withdraw from the Rada. The representatives of the two major national minorities in Ukraine, the Jews and the Poles, are also taken aback by the declaration. They oppose a separation from Russia and fear—not without reason—that the Ukrainian-dominated new government would curtail the rights of national minorities and lead to an increase of ethnic and religious strife.

The Provisional Government in Petrograd, itself in deep crisis, moves swiftly to prevent a separation of Ukraine. It orders an investigation

against the Rada’s General Secretariat, threatening to bring it to trial.

### **Flanders, October 12: Thousands slaughtered in the mud near Passchendaele**

The first battle of Passchendaele erupts between a joint Australian-New Zealand force and German troops on the Western Front near the village of that name, which the Allies hope to control in order to disrupt the Germans’ supply system. The attack is a gruesome failure, due in part to incorrect information about the extent of previous advances, but also the worsening weather conditions.

With 846 deaths recorded on October 12 alone, New Zealand loses approximately one one-thousandth of its population in a single day. More than 2,000 New Zealanders are also injured. New Zealand’s blackest day would be described in 2007 by historian Glyn Harper, who wrote that “more New Zealanders were killed or maimed in these few short hours than on any other day in the nation’s history.”

While the German command considers the battle to have been a defensive success, casualties are unsustainably high. The 195th division was decimated between October 9 and 12, losing 3,325 men. Official estimates of overall German casualties were 12,000 for the period October 11 to 20, with an additional 2,000 reported missing.

The British, Australian and New Zealand commanders persist with their attack plans despite heavy rain, which has turned the ground to mud since the beginning of October. This has made artillery extremely ineffective, since guns can no longer be moved into position. Even those which can still fire unload their shells onto waterlogged ground, resulting in the exploding shells having a limited impact.

The British commanders call off further attacks on October 13 following the failure of the previous day. New troops, including the Canadian Corps, are brought in to reinforce the front for the next attack later in the month. Meanwhile, the Germans commit all of their reserves to hold their positions October 12, and are forced to cancel the deployment of two divisions to Italy in order to strengthen their lines.

### **Lübeck, October 15: SPD newspaper raises funds and appeals for the continuation of the war**

The Social Democratic newspaper *Lübecker Volksbote* prominently publishes an appeal to contribute to the latest war loan. The war loan is aimed at helping to finance new offensives and the “continuation of the war until victory” with the population’s money.

The SPD’s appeal states:

Mothers, think of your children! When you were still young and helpless, each of you surely once thought: ‘My child ought to have a good life!’ How much more does this apply now, you mothers! Your children must live to see better times than we are going through. Shame on us if they come to us and say: why did you not relieve us then and stay with us until the end?

Mothers, every penny you loan to the fatherland improves the future for your children! So help, so they will not have to live in want one day and can become a free, strong people: sign up for the war loan!

The *Lübecker Volksbote*, one of the SPD's many provincial newspapers, focuses on a daily basis on reporting the "victorious" battles of the German army, while celebrating the enemy's high casualties. The entire newspaper is devoted to the war propaganda of the Supreme Army Command (OHL), its lies, and even its slogans to continue the war. The full spirit of these slogans is always retained, and often they are even printed word for word. Only isolated reports are prepared by the social democrats, with which the newspaper seeks to maintain the appearance of an organ representing the interests of working people. For example, the article on the Third Battle of Ypres complains of the "boundless sacrifice" of the English workers' blood, which is being shed for nothing against the unbeatable military strength of the German workers and their moral superiority. They are, after all, allegedly fighting a defensive war.

The *Volksbote's* reporting is typical of the entire social democratic press. Since the outbreak of the war, it has been doing all in its power to convince the working class that it has to sacrifice for the "defense of the fatherland." Over 100 daily newspapers, the workers' comparatively high level of education, their discipline and readiness to fight, millions of marks in contributions and donations to the party: everything the workers fought for decades to establish is expended to fuel the war. The Supreme Army Command could never have reached workers' households in the large and provincial cities, and the villages with their slogans to continue the war and lies about victories, had the SPD's apparatus and daily newspapers not assumed this task. Without the SPD and its propaganda apparatus, it would have been impossible to wage the war for so long on all fronts.

### **October 15 (October 2, O.S.): Anti-Jewish pogrom in the southern Russian city of Roslavl'**

An anti-Jewish pogrom erupts in the southern Russian city of Roslavl'. The pogrom erupts in the evening, one day after the city Soviet passed a resolution to proceed against speculators. Most of the pogromists are reportedly soldiers. Demanding galoshes (rubber boots) and shouting "Beat the Yids," the mob loots Jewish shops and homes. At least two men are killed, and 12 wounded. Many Jews flee the city in panic.

Attempts by members of the Soviet and the Bolshevik party to calm down the rioters apparently yield no results. Patrols by soldiers deliberately refrain from preventing the looting of Jewish stores.

The city is in the midst of a severe economic and social crisis. In addition to 10,000 civilians, it has also been home during the war to 15,000 soldiers from the local garrison. The city, a major transit point for war refugees, also houses several thousand Polish refugees.

This is the first anti-Jewish pogrom in the city, which is home to the region's second-largest Jewish population. It is part of a wave of anti-Semitic violence and pogroms that have swept through the crisis-ridden country over the past weeks. Pogroms and violent attacks on Jews have already occurred in cities such as Kharkov, Odessa, Kiev and Tiraspol.

As in the revolution of 1905, anti-Semitic agitation serves the government and reactionary social forces against the revolutionary masses. The Black Hundreds try to whip up anti-Semitism in order to channel the growing political and economic frustration of the peasant-soldiers and workers into right-wing channels. Decades in which anti-Semitic propaganda, which places all blame for economic misery on the Jewish population and has been systematically promoted as a weapon against the socialist movement, have left their mark especially on the peasantry, which forms the bulk of the Russian army. Pogroms by Russian soldiers have occurred throughout the war in Eastern Europe, and especially during the retreat in 1916-17.

### **Vincennes, October 15: Mata Hari executed by French firing squad**

At 6:15 a.m., a 12-man firing squad carries out the execution of Margaretha Geertruida Zelle, better known by her artist name Mata Hari. Zelle, who gained popularity in influential circles in the decade prior to the war in France and other European capitals as an exotic dancer, was sentenced to death in July after being found guilty of spying for the Germans and acting as a double agent.

The facts surrounding Hari's spy career remain contentious. It is beyond doubt that Hari entered the pay of the German intelligence service in late 1915. She was offered 20,000 francs, which she accepted as her dancing career was in decline. It is also known that the French intelligence agency later paid her money.

During 1916, Hari traveled from the Netherlands to France and later to Spain, where she had a contact at the German embassy. French intelligence became aware of her activities but did not immediately detain her when she returned to Paris in January 1917. She was finally arrested in mid-February, and her trial took place in July. After just a day and a half in court, the military judge found her guilty of high treason and being a double agent.

Widely divergent interpretations of Hari's guilt and spying activities will later be offered. The claim that she was able to provide valuable information to the Germans, causing the deaths of thousands of soldiers, will largely be discredited. Sam Waagenaar, who will write a book on the subject in the 1960s, puts forward the position that Hari was innocent. France exploited her as a scapegoat for the worsening military situation facing the country during 1917 and mounting anti-war sentiments among the population, others would suggest. The Mata Hari Working Group, based in Leeuwarden, the city of her birth, would reach the conclusion that different intelligence agencies used Hari as a political football and she ultimately paid with her life for being aware of compromising information about high-ranking politicians. The information she passed to the Germans was of little value.

The French authorities would reject three attempts, the last in 2001, to overturn Hari's conviction and designate her death as a judicial murder.

The many unanswered questions surrounding Hari's career also led to a proliferation of books and films, including 1931's *Mata Hari* starring Greta Garbo in the title role.

### **Also this month: Andreas Latzko publishes bestselling anti-war book**

Among the authors in Switzerland advocating peace during the war is Austro-Hungarian writer Andreas Latzko. He writes six stories which first appear in René Schickele's journal *The White Pages* [Die Weissen Blätter]. Later in 1917, they are published anonymously in a book titled *Men in War*. The volume is a resounding success, and with its third edition of 20,000 copies becomes a bestseller in October. It is translated into 19 languages.

The book finds Latzko working through his own war trauma. The writer Romain Rolland later reflects in his diary on what Latzko has told him of his experiences: "He had a severe nervous shock. He had seen how two oxen and three men had been torn to pieces by an artillery shell. At first sight, he felt nothing. But two days later, when someone placed a plate with bloody steaks on his table, he began to howl, spit and became seized by convulsions. For six months he had tremors throughout his body and

avoided food.” Latzko loses up to 85 pounds and is sent to Switzerland to recover, where he remains until the end of the war.

Latzko’s writing is intense and filled with great psychological empathy. It shows different facets of the war and what it does to human beings. In the first chapter, “Off to War,” he writes:

The time was late in the autumn of the second year of the war; the place, the garden of a war hospital in a small Austrian town, which lay at the base of wooded hills, sequestered as behind a Spanish wall, and still preserving its sleepy contented outlook upon existence ... Every human sound coming through the windows fell upon the silence like a furious attack. It was a wild denunciation of the war that out there at the front was doing its work, discharging mangled human bodies like so much offal and filling all the houses with its bloody refuse.

Men wounded in various ways are found there, many of whom, like the cavalry captain with his leg in plaster, consider their injuries a stroke of luck:

...they were sitting chatting in front of the hospital on benches moved together to form a square. They spoke of the war and – laughed, laughed like happy schoolboys discussing the miseries of examinations just gone through. Each had done his duty, each had had his ordeal, and now, under the protection of his wound, each sat there in the comfortable expectation of returning home, of seeing his people again, of being fêted, and for at least two whole weeks, of living the life of a man who is not tagged with a number.

In contrast to the “shell-shocked” soldier gone mad in his trauma, who denounces women, wives, mothers and fiancées for allowing their men, sons and loved ones to march off to war, Latzko describes how the newly married wife of his comrade Dill throws roses after him as he goes off to war. Dill is killed right next to him, just as he shows him a photo of his wife:

[A]nd Dill fell over with his dashing wife’s picture in his hand and a boot, a leg, a boot with the leg of a baggage soldier sticking in his head—a soldier that the twenty-eightier had blown to pieces far away from where we stood.

In the chapter “The Victor,” the author writes of the military base and the fairy-tale “wishing-table” of luxury enjoyed by the supreme command and the war profiteers:

No worry, no disputing, no stinting of one’s self to be borne with a sigh. With an air of boredom one stuffed his pockets with greenbacks, which were really quite superfluous in this lazy man’s paradise that the war had opened up to its vassals ... The general knew that the crowd gaily thronging in the sun would not read in the newspaper till the next morning that out at the front a fierce battle had been raging for the past twenty hours, and hardly sixty miles from the promenade shells were bursting without cease, and a heavy rain of hot iron was pouring down upon his soldiers.

Latzko’s condemnations of the rulers responsible for the war are done with a forcefulness found in few other anti-war books, though for decades they have been as good as forgotten:

Front—Enemy—Hero’s death—Victory—the curs rage through the world with frothing mouth and rolling eyes. Millions who have been carefully inoculated against smallpox, cholera and typhoid fever are chased into madness. Millions, on either side, are packed into cars—ride, singing, to meet each other, blow each other into bits, give their flesh and their bones for the bloody hash out of which the dish of peace is to be cooked for those fortunate ones who give the flesh of their calves and oxen to their fatherland for a hundred per cent profit, instead of carrying their own flesh to market for fifty cents a day!



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