Kremlin greets centenary of the October Revolution with fear and hostility

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The Kremlin oligarchy has greeted the centenary of the October Revolution with a mixture of fear and hostility, falsifying 1917 and attacking it on a nationalist and far-right basis.

There were virtually no official celebrations of the centenary. The Kremlin sponsored a military parade on Moscow's Red Square that reenacted a 1941 event from the Second World War. The Communist Party (KPRF), a right-wing organization that glorifies the crimes of Stalinism and maintains ties to outlawed xenophobic groups, organized the only commemoration.

The extreme hostility of the oligarchy to 1917 found its sharpest expression in the state-financed TV campaign against the revolution and, most notably Leon Trotsky, who was not only, along with Lenin, the main leader of the uprising and founder of the Red Army, but also the central Marxist opponent of the nationalist betrayal of the revolution by the Stalinist bureaucracy.

An eight-part, high-budget series on Trotsky aired last week on Channel 1, Russia's most widely viewed TV channel. It makes blatant use of anti-Semitic and far-right clichés, portraying Trotsky as a sex-addict and blood-thirsty egomaniac. Another "documentary" on Channel 1, "The Demon of the Revolution," revives the old slander of the Bolsheviks as having been financed by the Germans.

President Vladimir Putin, himself by all accounts a multibillionaire, distanced himself from all public commemorations of the revolution. Last month, he expressed his hostility to the revolution, stating before a group of academics, "Was it not possible to follow an evolutionary path rather than go through a revolution? Could we not have evolved by way of gradual and consistent forward movement rather than at the cost of destroying our statehood and the ruthless fracturing of millions of human lives?"

Over the past period, the Kremlin has struggled to find a way to deal with the legacy of the Russian Revolution. In dealing with the events and their political implications, it has vacillated between three main tendencies.

The first, a neo-Stalinist campaign, has found expression in countless books praising Stalin and justifying crimes against the revolution, including the terror of the 1930s. The second, the propagation of far-right anti-Semitic attacks on the revolution and its leaders, has featured works denouncing Trotsky as an agent of the "Rothschilds" and calling him a "man eater." The third and most recent has been an effort by the Kremlin to depict the revolution as essentially national event—a "Great Russian Revolution"—aimed at saving the "Russian state." This falsification has been enshrined in a new history textbook assigned in schools throughout the country.

The assault on 1917, which in many instances revives attacks on the revolution and Trotsky that were the well-known stock in trade of the White counterrevolution, is a sign of the extreme economic and political weakness of the Russian oligarchy that has emerged out of capitalist restoration.

The re-imposition of the market in Russia has been an unmitigated disaster for the vast majority of the country's population. It has created a parasitic layer of oligarchs who rule over an economy that is highly unequal and mostly dependent on energy exports.

According to a report from 2016, the country's top decile owns a stunning 89 percent of all household wealth in Russia, up by 2 percent from 2015. This compares to 78 percent in the United States and 73 percent in China. No less than 122,000 individuals

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from Russia belong to the world's wealthiest 1 percent; there are some 79,000 US-dollar millionaires and 96 billionaires living in Russia.

Some 56 percent of Russian workers make less than 31,000 rubles ($531) a month; 29.4 percent of the population—some 43 million people—are living on less than $256 a month.

Social despair and deprivation find acute expression in devastating epidemics of HIV and heroin addiction. Over 1 million people (about 1 percent of the population) in Russia are infected with HIV, a percentage topped in the world only by sub-Saharan Africa. In 2013, there were almost 2 million injected-drug users in the country. Since 1991, over 1 million people in Russia have committed suicide. The population has declined to now just over 140 million.

Russia faces the threat of carve-up by the imperialist powers and outright nuclear war. The country's ruling elite vacillates between warmongering and desperate appeals for the imperialists to change course.

Under these conditions, the central ideals of the Russian Revolution—against imperialist war and social inequality—inevitably assume a new attraction for significant layers of the population. These sentiments, usually expressed in a vague nostalgia for the Soviet Union, are necessarily confused. After decades of historical falsifications and the crimes of Stalinism—including above all the murder of the entire Bolshevik Party, much of the Comintern and Leon Trotsky himself—basic facts about the Russian Revolution and the struggle of the Left Opposition against Stalinism are not known.

This is why the ruling oligarchy, the historical heir of the Stalinist bureaucracy, is doing everything it can to confuse people about the origins and program of the Russian Revolution, whip up Russian nationalism, and attack the one revolutionary who has been the most closely associated with the struggle against the nationalist betrayal of the Revolution—Leon Trotsky.

But this campaign of historical falsifications is based on extraordinarily shaky ground. Who will lend credibility to the cheap moralizing and attacks on the revolution and its leaders, coming as they do from a ruling class that is steeped in criminality and parasitism and as morally depraved as ever there was?

As the socioeconomic and war crisis intensifies, and as layers of the working class internationally are increasingly drawn into struggles, a new generation of youth and workers will turn to the most monumental event of Russian and world history of the 20th century.

We urge workers and youth in Russia to study the material produced by the International Committee of the Fourth International about the centenary of the October Revolution and join the struggle for the continuation of the world socialist revolution that was begun by the Bolsheviks in Russia in 1917.

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