

Preface to the Urdu edition of *Lessons of October*

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It is an honor to introduce the first-ever Urdu-language edition of Leon Trotsky's *Lessons of October*, since it remains, more than nine decades after its original publication, a crucial, even indispensable work: indispensable both for understanding the history of the October 1917 Russian Revolution and the pivotal role of revolutionary leadership in the socialist revolution.

Lessons of October was written by Trotsky in 1924, as the introduction to a volume of his writings and speeches from 1917 issued by the Soviet Union's state publishing house. But it is not a history of the revolution as such. After being expelled from the Soviet Union by the Stalinist regime in 1929, Trotsky would write a monumental three-volume *History of the Russian Revolution*, which remains the authoritative account of the revolution's causes, events, and dynamics.

Written from the standpoint of politically preparing future "Octobers"—that is, socialist revolutions—both in the advanced capitalist countries of Europe and North America and the oppressed countries of the East, *Lessons of October* documents the internal conflicts within the Bolshevik (later Communist) Party between the February 1917 overthrow of the Tsar and the seizure of power by the Russian working class under the Bolsheviks' leadership in October.

Trotsky shows that the Bolshevik victory was prepared through an ongoing internal political struggle over the party's evaluation of the revolution's development, its class dynamics and tasks, and its relationship to the mounting opposition of the European working class to the capitalist carnage of the First World War.

The socialist revolution is an objective process, rooted in the contradictions of capitalism—the conflict between the increasingly socialized character of production and the subordination of all socio-economic life to private capitalist profit, and between the development of world economy and the continued existence of the capitalist nation-state system. But, as Trotsky explains, at a certain point in the revolution's development, the most important objective determinant in its victory is the role of the revolutionary party, which, having organized the most class-conscious and self-sacrificing sections of the working class, becomes the instrument for the working class to seize power and begin the socialist reorganization of

society.

Should the party fail to recognize the approach of the revolution, and to take the necessary steps to bring its practice in alignment with it, a revolutionary opportunity can be lost in a matter of days or weeks, thereby allowing the ruling classes to regroup and restabilize their rule for years to come.

As Trotsky demonstrates, V. I. Lenin played the principal role in the elaboration of the Bolsheviks' strategic orientation in 1917: *first* in the evaluation that unless the revolution liquidated capitalist rule, none of the most essential needs of the workers and peasants could be met, and that the task, therefore, was to "patiently explain" the need for workers' power; and *second*, in the fall of 1917, after the complete discrediting of the bourgeois Provisional government and its Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary (S-Rs) supporters, and with the Bolsheviks' emergence as the mass party of the working class, that the Bolsheviks had to shift from politically preparing the working class for the struggle for power, to the organization of the insurrection itself.

Central to this was the political rearming of the party, brought about by Lenin upon his return to Russia from exile in April 1917. In a matter of a few weeks, Lenin won the party away from the policy it had been pursuing, namely, providing "conditional support" to the Provisional government, under the direction of the "Old Bolsheviks," Kamenev and Stalin. With his celebrated *April Theses*, Lenin reoriented the Bolsheviks to politically prepare the socialist revolution, under the slogan "All power to the Soviets"—the councils of workers, soldiers and (later peasants) that had formed in the immediate aftermath of the February Revolution, and which the masses viewed as the revolution's embodiment and guarantor, but which, under the leadership of the Mensheviks and S-Rs, had ceded power to the bourgeoisie and its Provisional government.

The April 1917 differences reemerged at every major turning point in the revolution, up to and including the October 1917 insurrection, with a section of the Old Bolsheviks arguing that socialist revolution in Russia was premature, given the country's relative economic backwardness. They sought to justify this position with references to the Bolsheviks' pre-1917 call for a "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry."

Lenin, for his part, had discarded this conception as outdated, and adopted, as was widely recognized at the time, Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution: that the fundamental tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution in Russia—including the liquidation of Tsarism, radical redistribution of the land to the tiller, and the elimination of Great Russian national oppression—would only be realized through socialist revolution; a revolution that would begin in Russia, but whose fate would be bound up with, and ultimately determined by, its spread to the more advanced countries of Europe; that is, the development of the world socialist revolution.

Although the republication of Trotsky's 1917 writings and speeches served as the formal reason for his *Lessons of October*, its preparation was very much a response to the failure of the German Communist Party (KPD) to seize the revolutionary opportunity that had developed in the summer and fall of 1923. With the German bourgeois regime facing political and economic collapse, and support for the KPD surging, the leadership of the German Communist Party set the date for a proletarian insurrection, only to lose its nerve and call it off at the last minute.

Lessons of October must also be recognized as an important blow in the struggle against the privileged bureaucracy, which emerged in the apparatus of the workers' state and the Communist Party under conditions where the revolution remained isolated in a backward, predominantly peasant country; one moreover that had been ravaged by world war and then by the imperialist-supported Whites during the post-Revolution civil war.

The missed German Revolution of 1923 compounded the isolation of the Soviet Union and thereby strengthened the bureaucracy, which was now openly usurping political power from the working class.

Only weeks after the publication of *Lessons of October*, Joseph Stalin, who, as General-Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, was emerging as the political leader of the bureaucracy, openly repudiated the socialist internationalist perspective that had animated the Russian Revolution, propounding a new strategic orientation—"socialism in one country."

This break with the program of world socialist revolution invariably went hand in hand with all manner of opportunist maneuvers. They included the Communist International's revival of the Menshevik "two-stage" theory of revolution, which had provided the "theoretical" justification for the Mensheviks' support for the bourgeois Provisional government in 1917 and Russia's continued participation in the world war, and the claim that in countries of belated capitalist development, the working class had to limit itself to acting as the subordinate ally of the national bourgeoisie in the democratic (anti-feudal, anti-imperialist, national) revolution.

The Stalinist insistence that the working class subordinate itself to the "progressive" national bourgeoisie was to have

catastrophic consequences. First in China, where the Chinese Revolution of 1925–27 was crushed, due to the Stalinized Communist International's insistence that the Chinese Communist Party liquidate itself into the bourgeois Kuomintang of Chiang Kai-Shek.

During the 1930s and 1940s, the Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy and its South Asian acolytes, organized in the Communist Party of India (CPI), would advocate a similar line on the subcontinent, with no less disastrous results. Willfully ignoring the central lessons of the 1917 October Revolution, the Stalinists pursued a course that, at every point, served to reinforce the control of the national bourgeoisie over the anti-imperialist struggle and prevent the working class from challenging it for the leadership of the peasant masses. This included hailing the bourgeois Congress Party as a multi-class front, supporting the British Indian authorities in their repression of the 1942 Quit India movement on the grounds that it was jeopardizing the Allied war effort, and supporting the Muslim League's reactionary demand for a separate Pakistan.

Partition was only the most immediate and striking expression of the suppression of the democratic revolution at the hands of the Indian and Pakistani bourgeoisies, which was itself a major element in the post-World War II restabilization of world capitalism.

As Trotsky had warned, the political triumph of the Stalinist bureaucracy was the first stage in a capitalist counter-revolution. Between 1985 and 1991, the bureaucracy carried out its ultimate betrayal, restoring capitalist private property and dissolving the Soviet Union.

But the respite for capitalism has proved to be short-lived. Today, one hundred years after the Russian Revolution, world capitalism is beset by its greatest economic and geopolitical crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s and its outcome, the Second World War. Once again, rival national ruling elites are turning toward reaction, authoritarianism, and war.

As Trotsky insists in *Lessons of October*, "without a party, apart from a party, over the head of party, or with a substitute for a party" the socialist revolution cannot triumph. The critical question in every country is the building of a revolutionary workers' party—one that has learned the lessons of the great strategic experiences of the last century, including the politically destructive role of the Stalinist CPI and its many offshoots and, most importantly, the lessons of Russian Revolution and the struggle against its bureaucratic degeneration. This means building sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International throughout the world.



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