Lecture on the centenary of the Russian Revolution

# The Legacy of 1905 and the Strategy of the Russian Revolution

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Lenin described 1905 as "the dress rehearsal" for 1917. Trotsky called it, among other things, "a magnificent prelude," which it was. There is an article republished by the *World Socialist Web Site* a few days ago, in which Trotsky reiterates that thought and says that workers must study and learn from 1905.

The Russian Empire was ruled in 1905 by a tsar, tsar Nicholas II, who was an absolute despot. He ruled by decree, resting on a layer of nobles and bureaucrats to run the enormous state machine. A large military, which consumed a great portion of the national wealth, was also ruled by the tsar.

There was no freedom of speech in Russia at that time. There was no freedom of the press, and indeed there was strict censorship. There was no right to assemble, no right even to petition the tsar. It was illegal to even submit a petition to the tsar, only a handful of nobles in his ministries were allowed to do that. There was no right to strike; no right to form a union. There was no parliament; no right to vote; no 8-hour day. Indeed, at the end of the 19th century, the typical working day for most workers was about 14 hours, 12 if you were lucky. In 1897, the tsar magnanimously reduced the working day to 11 and one-half hours, although this was not observed in many factories. Workers would be fined for the slightest offenses. If they were 15 minutes late to work, they would be fined a day's wage. If there were mistakes in production, they would be fined more. Their wages were among the lowest in Europe.

The Russian empire was not all Russian. In fact, Russians—people of Russian ethnicity—made up about 50 percent of the empire. The nationality question embraces, in the modern period, up to 150 identifiable nationalities. Some of the larger ones are better known and understood. So, for instance, there were Poles in the Russian Empire. Poland had been divided up at the end of the 18th century. Poles faced russification under tsarist rule: they were forced not to study in the Polish language in their schools, but to study Russian. The same applied to Finns, as Finland was part of the empire. The same applied to the Jewish population, among the most oppressed of all the nationalities in the Russian Empire at the time. The Jewish population, numbering approximately 5 million, was restricted as to where it could live, in the Pale of Settlement, so-called. They were banned from many occupations. There were quotas for entrance to the universities. They, of course, had no vote. And after 1881, when a previous tsar had been assassinated [Alexander II], there were waves of pogroms launched against the Jewish population. A pogrom would be an armed gang of thugs, essentially, working either deliberately and directly under the direction of the police, or, at the very least, with the police looking the other way. They would burst into Jewish neighborhoods, murder people, torture people, loot their homes, smash their businesses, etc., and basically emerge untouched. Two of the most infamous pogroms prior to the 1905 Revolution were in Kishinev, now in Moldova.

Russia was largely a peasant country. The peasants were for the most part illiterate and impoverished. They lived in 500,000 scattered villages and hamlets. Trotsky describes the "disconnectedness" of the peasantry, and how that posed an immense political problem: How to unite people who are scattered all over such a vast country?

The peasantry was not unified in its social structure. There were extremely wealthy peasants. In fact, there were those who were large landowners, often close to the capitalist class. There were extremely poor peasants who owned nothing whatsoever and really resembled agricultural laborers. They had to sell their wage-labor to capitalists or other wealthier farmers. About 60,000 large landowners controlled as much as 100 million peasants did, so you can see there was a relatively thin layer of extremely wealthy landowners, often nobles. The nobility was falling onto hard times at the end of the 19th century and was beginning to sell its land to the bourgeoisie, which caused a lot of social friction. But they nevertheless were much wealthier than the vast majority of peasants.

In 1861, the serfs, who were not identical to slaves, but very similar, were emancipated, but this emancipation was extremely limited in form. It led to an extreme debt burden. It took 48 years in many cases for the peasants, the "emancipated" peasants, to pay off their debts. They faced heavy taxation and basically lived in misery. They desperately wanted a redistribution of the land and relief from debt.

Industry had begun to grow fairly rapidly at the end of the 19th century. It was largely financed by foreign loans, especially from Britain and France, to a lesser degree from Germany. This led to the phenomenon which Trotsky called "combined and uneven development." Even though Russia had lagged way behind more advanced countries in the West, if a British or French capitalist wanted to invest in Russia, which they did, they would import capital and the most modern technique, the largest factories, the newest industrial machinery, etc. So Russia leaped over several intermediate stages of development that other countries had passed through. This led to a large concentration of workers in factories employing over 1,000 workers (more so than in the US, which at the time was the most advanced, the model for building this type of factory). Thus there was a young proletariat, coming from the countryside, employed in textiles, metalworking, mining, tobacco, etc. It was thrust into industrial centers, usually on the outskirts of cities. These factories did not grow up naturally within the inner cities.

The 3 to 5 million workers in the large industrial centers of Petersburg, Moscow, Ivanovo, Kiev and other cities produced half the national

income, that is, the equivalent to the entire agricultural sector. So even though numerically small, the role that the proletariat played in the Russian economy was immense. Its relative social and economic weight was huge.

The first railway, between Moscow and Petersburg, had been opened in 1851. Otherwise, what reigned was what Trotsky called "pristine roadlessness." The roads in Russia were terrible. In the spring or in the fall during the rainy season, or when the snows melted, they were impassible. Mud would virtually go up to your waist, and you could hardly move. So the railways were the major link between the cities and the industrial centers.

In 1905, the year of the revolution, the railway personnel who played such an immensely important political role counted about 667,000 workers. This is an army of proletarians, and, as we will see later, they played a decisive role.

There were some liberals, often in what were called the *zemstvos*, which were forms of local rule in largely rural areas, in charge of roads, education, medical care, but not a lot else. They did not have a lot of political power, they did not have huge numbers. In general, the petty-bourgeois liberals in the cities as well were small numerically, and had limited political influence.

The revolution to overthrow the tsar and establish a bourgeois republic was anticipated by many. Dreams of socialism seemed remote, however, especially when compared to the more economically advanced countries in Western Europe.

Nevertheless, Marx's *Capital* had been translated into Russian in 1872 (it was one of the first translations anywhere). It slipped by the tsarist censors because it seemed to them to be a dry compendium of economic statistics.

The Populist movement, which had dominated well into the 1870s, sought to introduce socialism on the basis of the peasant commune, collective ownership in the countryside, perhaps bypassing capitalist development altogether. They even wrote to Marx in 1881, asking Marx, "What can we anticipate in Russia? Is there a legitimate basis to hope for socialism on the basis of the peasant commune?"

The first Russian Marxist group was formed in 1883, in Geneva, by six revolutionaries in exile, led by Georgi Plekhanov (middle of photo). He engaged in important translations, wrote works popularizing Marx, and participated in the Second International in Europe, which had been founded in 1889. Plekhanov famously said in that year: "The revolutionary movement in Russia will triumph as a workers' movement or it will not triumph at all." To make this statement about a working class dwarfed in numbers by a vast peasantry seemed close to absurd to many of his critics.

There were some small workers' groups that formed in the 1870s and 1880s (The Northern League; the Southern League).

However, the next big step came with the formation in 1895, in Petersburg, of the "Union of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class." Two of its leading member were Vladimir Ulyanov (later to be known as Lenin, leader of the Bolshevik Party) and Iulii Martov, later to become a leading Menshevik. (Martov is on the right, Lenin in the middle by the table).

A big impact on the development of the Union of Struggle was the strike of textile workers in Petersburg, the capital of the Russian Empire in May-June 1896. So just after the formation of this Union of Struggle, a wave of strikes by textile workers took place. The map here shows Petersburg; the symbols for the factories that are marked on the slide are factories where the Union of Struggle had contacts and did political work. It was a near general strike of textile workers. It was one of the biggest strikes that gave a huge impulse to the development of the workers' movement in Russia.

This was not just a Petersburg phenomenon; these are various cities marked by black dots, where the Union of Struggle had members and contacts, was distributing literature and leaflets, and was doing consistent work. One of the themes I want to address is: "Who organized the working class? How did the working class come to revolution?" The work done here, in the 1890s, the work done by Plekhanov from 1883 on, the work done in the major cities by revolutionaries, was an absolutely indispensable element in leading to revolution.

We have to keep in mind that all of this activity was illegal. You couldn't hold a public meeting. If you wanted to celebrate May Day, and that was one of the yearly events, you would have to gather, perhaps in a grove in a forest, maybe on the banks of a river. You couldn't rent a hall, maybe you could find an empty warehouse. Police were everywhere. Spies were everywhere. If you started to speak, you might have 10 to 15 minutes before Cossacks would come swooping down, police would come swooping down. People were often shot. You could be arrested. If you were a worker in a factory, you could lose your job. The work done by these early revolutionaries was totally illegal at the time. Lenin had already been arrested in 1895, in December. When you were arrested, the secret police [*Okhrana*] would open up a dossier, get a photograph, and keep that file as long as they could.

In 1898, the founding congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party (RSDRP) was held in Minsk. There were nine delegates, total, and within days, they were all arrested.

In December 1900, the Social-Democratic newspaper, *Iskra* [the Spark] was founded abroad and smuggled illegally into Russia to aid the building of a nationwide party of the working class. This was no small feat. To get it printed in Munich or one of the major cities in Europe, and then to smuggle it in, in significant numbers, into Russia was a tremendously difficult task. It was complicated by the fact that, yes, the secret police were everywhere. They infiltrated the Social-Democratic movement. Come to find out, the person in charge of smuggling *Iskra* into Russia for a couple of years was himself a police agent. He knew where everything was going, he knew all the addresses, he knew all the contacts, and he organized bringing the paper in.

Although Russia had been seen as a bastion of reaction throughout the 19th century, one of the most perceptive Marxists in Europe, Karl Kautsky, suggested in 1902 that something new was emerging in this vast empire. He wrote then, "Having absorbed so much revolutionary initiative from the West, Russia itself may now be ready to serve the West as a source of revolutionary energy." [1]

The Second Congress of the RSDRP was held in Brussels and London (it couldn't be held legally in Russia) in July-August 1903. At this congress, a split in the party occurred in which the major factions were the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. To many members of the party, the split was seen as temporary, and the reasons for it not entirely clear. Trotsky, for one, felt that eventually the political differences could be overcome and the party reunited.

Trotsky looked back at the 2nd congress in his description of the atmosphere in Russia on the eve of 1905:

> Even at the time of the party congress, the entire southern part of Russia was in the throes of a great strike. [The celebrated Rostov strike in November 1902 and the July days of 1903, which extended over the whole of the industrial south, prefigured all the future actions of the proletariat]. Peasant disturbances grew more and more frequent. The universities were seething. For a little while, the Russo-Japanese War stopped the movement, but the military debacle of tsarism promptly provided a formidable lever for revolution. The press was becoming more daring, the terrorist acts more frequent; the liberals began to wake up and launched a campaign of political banquets. The fundamental questions of revolution came swiftly to

the front. [Trotsky, *My Life*, p. 165]

I'm not going to deal with terrorism at any length in this lecture, but I will just mention, regarding Trotsky's reference to the terrorists: between 1893 and 1917, terrorists, who largely came out of the old Populist movement such as *Narodnaya volya* [The People's Will] and many of whom later went into the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, killed approximately 12,000 tsarist officials. These might be assassinations carried out by a student, or a young worker, who would walk up to a governor, or a police chief, or a high official, and gun them down. Sometimes they would throw a bomb and blow up the victim and themselves. They struck down some very prominent figures. In 1904, they killed Plehve, the minister of the interior, in charge of all the police activity in Russia. He was blown to bits by a young Socialist-Revolutionary. The tsar's uncle was assassinated. Many other figures survived attempts, such as Trepov. But they lived in constant fear of assassination. The Bolshevik Party and the Mensheviks did not accept individual terrorism as a tactic. They did not feel that it would bring down the tsar. Kill one tsarist official, and they replace him with another, maybe even more vicious. However, this was a widespread phenomenon that took place throughout the period we are dealing with.

Trotsky also refers to the Russo-Japanese War that had broken out in February 1904. The era of imperialist wars had been underway at least since the Spanish-American War (1898), which included the brutal invasion of the Philippines by the US, and the Boer War in South Africa (1899-1902), where Great Britain was the major imperialist predator.

The Russian Empire did not want to be left out of the imperialist wars of plunder and territorial expansion. This image shows how a young Japanese student viewed the Russian Empire at the time, as a large octopus with its tentacles clutching at a number of countries. Poland is in the upper left. There are tentacles on Turkey, Persia, Tibet. One is reaching out for China, represented in green. One tentacle is reaching for Korea, and perhaps even Japan.

Here is an image of what Tsar Nicholas had in mind. Since both Russia and Japan had designs on Manchuria, Korea, and the further carve-up of China (in which they were competing with Britain, France, Germany, the US), the Tsar wanted to defeat Japan in war.

The Tsar expected easy conquests. This image shows Tsar Nicholas in the lower right; he is blowing away a Japanese soldier; the Japanese navy is destroyed; and the "Japanese children," who have obviously been roughed up, are being comforted by Uncle Sam and John Bull, representing US and British imperialism, who did in fact back Japan for the time being.

As a launching base for these plans, Russia had forcibly leased Port Arthur from China in 1895, and turned it into a supposedly impregnable fortress and navy base, with a railroad line running through Harbin, in northeastern China. The Trans-Siberian Railroad was not yet complete, and passage through Manchuria was far from guaranteed.

The opening days of the war, however, saw considerable losses inflicted on the Russian fleet by the Japanese navy. After a siege of more than 300 days, Port Arthur fell to the Japanese, and the bulk of the Russian Pacific fleet was destroyed in the harbor. Not in a sea battle, but shelled from the hills overlooking the harbor.

This shocking surrender of Port Arthur caused considerable unrest in Russia. The Tsar and his armed forces were increasingly viewed as corrupt and incompetent. Antiwar agitation spread in the working class and even in some liberal circles.

The next step leading to the 1905 Revolution seems rather innocuous. Four workers had been fired at the Putilov plant, the ironworks on the outskirts of Petersburg. When negotiations failed to win their reinstatement, a strike broke out on January 3, 1905.

As Fyodor Dan, a leading Menshevik, would write: "No one could have expected that this strike, which at first set itself such a modest goal as the reinstatement of four workers dismissed by the factory management, would in the course of a week or so seize hold of the entire capital, and be transformed into a gigantic political movement of the Petersburg proletariat." [2]

Within a week, on Sunday, January 9, a mass demonstration was planned, in which a priest, Father Gapon (shown with a cross in the middle of the photo), would lead a procession of 150,000-200,000 petitioners, including many workers, students, women and children, to ask the "Father Tsar" for relief.

Their demands included: an eight-hour working day; freedom of assembly for the workers and land for the peasants; freedom of speech and press; separation of church and state; the stopping of the war; and the convocation of a Constituent Assembly, to lay the foundations for a new parliamentary republic.

As the procession approached the square in front of the Winter Palace, where the Tsar resided, they were not greeted by Nicholas II, but by a volley of gunfire by tsarist troops and police. The procession came from many different venues in the city but they all converged on the Palace Square. The crowd then was charged by Cossacks, whose sabers cut down many victims. Many people were shot. There is no exact count, but about 1,000 were killed and 2,000 wounded (perhaps more). Many of the bodies were dragged away. The police dumped them in mass graves. The exact number of victims was never established. January 9 became known henceforth as "Bloody Sunday."

The massacre sent shock waves throughout Russia. Workers went out on strike in many industrial areas. Students shut down many universities. There was a wave of gigantic demonstrations and strikes in Georgia, Baku, Odessa, Ivanovo-Voznesensk, Lodz (in Poland), Nizhni-Novgorod, Sormovo, etc. There were even demonstrations in some military units, although not as widespread, that proceeded through the spring, summer and autumn of 1905.

Members of the liberal bourgeois intelligentsia denounced the Tsar as a butcher. This image is of one of their newspapers, *Osvobozhdenie*, edited by Struve, who had been a legal Marxist but then shifted way to the right, becoming a bourgeois liberal. The headline is "Revolution in Russia"; the lead article is "Executioner of the People," denouncing the tsar as a butcher, followed by an article by Jean Jaurès, "The Death of Tsarism." The liberals opposed absolutism, but they lacked the political force or will to bring down the Tsar.

Major strikes ebbed and flowed over the next months. There were hundreds, but one in particular is worth noting.

In Ivanovo-Voznesensk, a town of large textile mills about 150 miles from Moscow, the workers went on one of the longest strikes, which lasted more than 100 days. In the course of the strike, which involved tens of thousands of workers, a new form of organization emerged: a Soviet, or council, was elected by the workers to lead the strike and present all demands. Most of the demands were economic, but there were also calls for overthrowing the Tsar, convening a Constituent Assembly, and other political demands. The Ivanovo workers later claimed the honor of forming Russia's first Soviet, the first workers' council. While technically this is true, its role was greatly overshadowed by the Petersburg Soviet that would be founded in October 1905.

Mass demonstrations took place in other parts of the empire, including in Latvia in May 1905.

As the Ivanovo strike was taking place, further bad news came from the war front. The tsar still believed that his navy could dispatch the Japanese fleet. Since most of the Russian Pacific Fleet had been destroyed, however, in October the Baltic fleet was ordered to sail to Port Arthur. They traveled from October to May, a total distance of 33,000 kilometers. Along the way, they heard of the military disaster at the Battle of Mukden

(February-March 1905), where the Russian army lost 90,000 troops. Despite low morale on board the ships, the ships sailed on; the admiral, Rozhdestvensky, was forced to hang several sailors who were urging a mutiny in order to turn back. They knew that they were doomed if they proceeded, but they were ordered by the admiral to go ahead anyway and several of them were executed.

Since Port Arthur, their original destination, had fallen, the ships aimed for Vladisvostok to the north. As they approached the straits of Tsushima, an island near Japan, they were met by the Japanese navy and annihilated. The Russians lost eight battleships, many smaller vessels, and more than 5,000 sailors. Only three major vessels survived out of their entire fleet. So, within a few hours on May 27-28, the Russian fleet was essentially annihilated. The Japanese lost three torpedo boats and 116 men, in contrast, which was a huge shock to large portions of the population in Russia. How could such a disaster take place?

Trotsky wrote a leaflet about the Tsushima debacle that was distributed in Petersburg. Here are excerpts:

> Down with the shameful slaughter!
>
> After the battle off the island of Tsushima, the Russian fleet no longer exists. The Russian battleships perished ingloriously, and carried with them to the bottom of the Pacific Ocean thousands of our brothers who had fallen victim to the crimes of Tsarism. … The Russian fleet, bought at such a high cost, is no more. Every mast of it, every bolt is the blood and sweat of the working people. Every battleship is many years' work by peasant families. All gone, all sunk in the depths of the sea: the unfortunate men and the useless wealth created by their hands …
>
> Down with the shameless slaughter! Let this call, raised by politically-conscious workers on the very first day of the war, find firm support among all workers, among all honest citizens.
>
> Down with the culprit of the shameful slaughter—the Tsarist government!
>
> Down with the bloody butchers!
>
> We demand peace and freedom! [3]

The next event which captured wide attention was the mutiny on the Battleship Potemkin in Odessa in June 1905, immortalized in Sergei Eisenstein's 1925 film. Throughout 1905, most of the army and navy remained loyal to the tsar; the fact of a mutiny on one of the best ships in the Black Sea Fleet certainly caused fear in tsarist circles that others in the armed forces would follow. Most of the sailors on the Potemkin survived when the ship slipped past others in the fleet and made it to the Romanian port of Constanza. These are some of the actual leaders of the mutiny on board the Potemkin who were not caught by the tsar and hanged.

I'll jump ahead to the next major event in this revolutionary year: the October general strike. To a certain extent, the strike was unplanned. Party leaders in the workers' movement intended to hold a major strike in January 1906 on the anniversary of Blood Sunday. But a simple strike at a print shop in Moscow set things in motion much earlier.

Here is how Trotsky outlined the events in his book *1905*:

> "The typesetters at Sytin's print-works in Moscow struck on September 19. They demanded a shorter working day and a higher piecework rate per 1,000 letters set, not excluding punctuation marks. This small event set off nothing more nor less than the all-Russian political strike—the strike which started over punctuation marks and ended by knocking absolutism off its feet. … [p. 85]
>
> * By the evening of September 24, fifty printing works were on strike … The Moscow bakers began striking …
>
> * October 2 the Petersburg typesetters … demonstrate their solidarity with their Moscow comrades by means of a three-day strike.
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> * A meeting of workers' deputies from the printing, engineering, cabinet-making, tobacco, and other trades adopted a decision to form a general council (Soviet) of Moscow workers.
>
> * October 7, the Moscow railroad workers began striking.
>
> * October 9, Petersburg railway workers join in: they demand an 8-hour day, civil liberties, amnesty of all political prisoners, and a Constituent Assembly.
>
> * Revolutionary class claims were advanced ahead of the economic claims of separate trades. Having broken out of its local and trade boundaries, the strike began to feel that it was a revolution—and so acquired unprecedented daring.
>
> * The entire army of the railways—three-quarters of a million men—was on strike.
>
> * October 13, the Petersburg Soviet of Workers' Deputies is formed. [*1905*, pp. 87-92, passim.]

The scope of the strike was breathtaking. Virtually every major city was shut down; the railways were paralyzed; the telegraph and postal services were in the hands of the workers.

Massive demonstrations took place in other parts of the empire: Warsaw (Poland) in October; Tashkent, in Central Asia, today's Uzbekistan; and Finland, a mass demonstration. All three areas resisted the tsar's russification policies that I mentioned earlier, but the Tsar was pledged, as always, to the official policy of tsarism: "Autocracy, Nationalism (that is, Great-Russian chauvinism), and Orthodoxy (the Russian Orthodox Church)"—at the point of a bayonet if necessary.

The general strike revealed the enormous power of the working class. But how could a strike lead to a revolution? Who could organize and direct a nationwide uprising? Here, the formation of the Petersburg Soviet is crucial: it represented, in embryo, how a future workers' government could emerge.

Trotsky points out that you can only conduct a general strike for so long. If you shut down the railways, nothing moves. If the telegraph is shut down—no communication. Bakeries are shut down, food isn't being produced. How long can people hold out? Without food, without communication, without movement from city to city?

Trotsky described what the Soviet was in his book *1905* :

> The history of the Petersburg Soviet of Workers' Deputies is the history of 50 days [that's how long it lasted]. The constituent meeting of the Soviet was held on October 13. On December 3, a meeting of the Soviet was closed down by government troops. [They were all arrested].
>
> The first meeting was attended by a few dozen persons; by the second half of November the number of deputies had grown to 562, including 6 women. [*1905*, p. 250]

As for the deputies, and this is important: the call went out for every factory to elect one deputy, one delegate, for every 500 workers. Now this wasn't absolutely, rigidly observed, but if there was a large factory, let us say, 20,000 workers, there would be one representative for every 500 workers. If you happened to work in a factory that had two or three hundred workers and didn't meet the threshold of 500 workers, that was OK, send a delegate. Trotsky continues:

> These persons represented 147 factories and plants, 34 workshops and 16 trade unions. The main mass of the deputies—351 persons—belonged to the metalworkers; they played a decisive role in the Soviet. There were 57 deputies from the textile industry, 32 from printing and paper industries, 12 from the shop-workers and 7 from office workers and the pharmaceutical trade. The Executive Committee acted as the Soviet's ministry. It was formed on October 17 and consisted of 31 persons—22 deputies [elected from the factories] and 9 representatives of parties (6 from the two Social-Democratic factions and 3 from the Socialist-Revolutionaries.
>
> … The Soviet organized the working masses, directed the political strikes and demonstrations, armed the workers (which was crucial), and protected the population against pogroms. [1905, pp. 250-251] [While this was going on, the tsar was beginning to organize his reactionary forces, and urging pogromists to attack the workers.]
>
> The name of "workers' government," which the workers themselves on the one hand, and the reactionary press on the other, gave to the Soviet was an expression of the fact that the Soviet really was a workers' government in embryo. The Soviet represented power insofar as power was assured by the revolutionary strength of the working-class districts; it struggled for power insofar as power still remained in the hands of the military-political monarchy. [ *1905*, p. 251]

In this struggle, something had to give. How could the Soviet be tolerated by the tsarist forces? On October 17, the tsar issued his famous (or infamous) Manifesto, which was a shocking capitulation, as far as the nobility was concerned, to the general strike, but also somewhat deceptive.

Just two days before the Manifesto, Trepov, the tsar's deputy minister of the interior, in charge of suppressing the masses, recommended gunning down the strikers. He said they should not concede anything, but just mow the strikers down. On the next day, he reconsidered. But, on October 15, he issued the infamous statement that was never forgotten by anybody: "No blanks [don't issue any blanks to the troops]. Don't spare the bullets."

What typically happened when the police, or the army, or the Cossacks, confronted strikers or a mass demonstration, they would sometimes attack them with whips. They would sometimes attack them with sabers and cut a few down. Then, they would generally fire a round of shots, blank cartridges, to frighten the crowd. If the crowd didn't move, they would then load real cartridges and just open fire. Trepov's recommendation was: just forget the blanks, go straight to live ammunition.

As the tsar was printing his Manifesto, the Petersburg Soviet published its own newspaper, *Izvestiia*. A few words about how it was printed. It was illegal, so what did they do? They didn't have their own print shop, since it would have been taken over by the tsarist police immediately. So the Soviet organized a group of armed workers who would go to a print shop, producing three of four newspapers in the city, perhaps bourgeois newspapers, or tsarist papers. They would take it over, perhaps ten o'clock at night, walk in armed and say: "The press is ours for the next few hours. You're going to print our paper." Many of the typesetters may have been sympathetic and would have gladly cooperated, but they would say, "At least point your guns at us and say we were forced to do this." They would print their newspaper, *Izvestiia*, and a couple days later, seize another print shop. They couldn't have their own.

The tsar, too, had problems with printing. All the print shops were on strike, and the striking printers refused to publish the tsar's Manifesto—the great tsar, ruler of all. It did get printed, however. The army was called upon to fulfill the task and print the document in a hurry. This is his Manifesto.

The tsar promised limited reforms, perhaps leading to some electoral rights and a Duma, a legislative body with extremely limited powers. Reactions were mixed. Some workers denounced it quickly, printing a poster of the Manifesto with Trepov's bloody hand. Students at Petersburg University went on strike the next day.

The liberal bourgeoisie was jubilant, however. They thought a bourgeois-democratic parliament was within grasp.

The Petersburg Soviet had a different reaction:

> "And so we have been given a constitution. We have been given freedom of assembly, but our assemblies are encircled by troops. We have been given freedom of speech, but censorship remains inviolate. We have been given freedom of study, but the universities are occupied by troops. We have been given personal immunity, but the prisons are filled to overflowing with prisoners. We have been given Witte [the prime minister who was supposed to carry out liberal reforms], but we still have Trepov [the butcher]. We have been given a constitution, but the autocracy remains. Everything has been given, and nothing has been given." [ *1905*, p. 123]

Under these conditions, something had to give. The tsarist regime was organizing its forces for a massive crackdown.

A day or so after the tsar's Manifesto was issued, pogroms were launched, the most horrific of which was in Odessa, the seaport on the Black Sea. For three days, October 18-20, Black Hundred gangs roamed through Jewish neighborhoods, murdering, beating and torturing people, looting homes and shops. Four hundred were killed, as many as 50,000 had to flee their homes. Jewish defense squads were organized by the workers which limited, but did not prevent, the killing. The photo depicts one of the defense squads, with some of their dead comrades who had been killed while defending the neighborhoods in which they lived.

Things were really getting out of control. The Moscow strike ended on the 19th. The Petersburg Soviet decided to end their strike on October 21.

However, the Petersburg Soviet continued its work. In addition to the widely read newspaper, *Izvestiia*, a new paper began to appear on November 13: *Nachalo* (The Beginning). Its masthead proudly proclaimed that it was a paper of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party. One of its main writers, and virtually its editor, was Leon Trotsky, who had returned to Petersburg from Finland on October 14, the second day of the Soviet's existence. Other contributors were Parvus, Martov, Dan, and other, mainly Menshevik writers. There were only 14 issues of this newspaper ever printed, since it was shut down with the arrest of the Soviet on December 3.

When I said that Trotsky arrived from Finland, he had returned to Kiev from abroad in February, when the revolutionary events were unfolding. He then made it to Petersburg. On May Day in Petersburg, there was a May Day demonstration at which his wife, Natalia, was arrested. Trotsky had to flee. He went to a remote village in Finland. While he was there he worked out many of the main essentials of his Theory of Permanent Revolution. The Petersburg Soviet was formed on October 13. Trotsky was there the next day.

The Soviet adopted a decision of enormous importance: it called on all factories and plants to introduce an eight-hour working day by taking the initiative on their own. They were not granted this right by anybody. At the end of eight hours, they just downed tools and began leaving. The employers, the bosses, the capitalist factory owners threatened a mass lockout. For the time being, the workers had to retreat. Trotsky writes: "Having met with the organized resistance of capital, the working masses again returned to the basic issue of revolution, the inevitability of an uprising, the essential need for arms." [*1905*, p. 186] What do we do next?

This had to be addressed.

The last stage of 1905 that I will cover is the December armed uprising in Moscow.

On December 4, the Moscow Soviet endorsed a "financial manifesto," written by Parvus, which threatened the tsar's taxation and banking system. On December 6, directly influenced by major disturbances in the Moscow garrison, the Soviet, which by this time represented 100,000 workers in Moscow, decided, together with the revolutionary parties, to proclaim a political general strike in Moscow on the next day, December 7, and to do its best to transform the strike into an armed insurrection. The Moscow *Izvestiia* declaration read:

> The Moscow Soviet of Workers' Deputies, the Committee and Group of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party, and the Committee of the Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries HAVE DECREED: to declare in Moscow, from Wednesday, December 7, at 12 noon, a general political strike and to attempt to transform it into an armed uprising.

The first city to strike was Moscow (on the 7th). On the next day, it was joined by Petersburg, Minsk and Taganrog; on the 10th by Tiflis; on the 11th, Vilna; on the 12th, Kharkov, Kiev and Nizhniy Novgorod; on the 13th, Odessa and Riga; on the 14th, Lodz; and on the 15th, Warsaw, to mention only the largest centers. In all, the strike was joined by 33 towns as against 39 in October.

Moscow, however, stood at the center of the December movement. Some 100,00 men stopped work the first day. On the second day, the number of strikers increased to 150,000; the strike in Moscow became general and spread to factories in the countryside around Moscow. Huge meetings were held everywhere. Soon barricades were built, and fighting ensued. The uprising had begun.

The barricades depicted here were not so much to provide cover for armed workers hiding behind them, but to block the tsarist troops from sweeping through the city. There were some barricades manned by insurrectionists, by workers, but they were the minority.

What was the fighting like? On the part of the workers, it resembled guerilla warfare, rather than exchange of gunfire behind barricades. Trotsky describes how more of the fighting took place.

> Here is an example, one of many. A group of 13 *druzhinniki* [armed workers] occupying a building withstood, for four hours, the fire of 500 or 600 soldiers with 3 guns and 2 machine guns at their disposal. When they had used up all their ammunition and inflicted great losses on the troops, the *druzhinniki* withdrew without a single wound; whereas the soldiers destroyed several city blocks with artillery fire, set a number of wooden houses on fire and killed more than a few terrified citizens, all in order to put a dozen revolutionaries to flight. [*1905*, p. 241]

That's basically how the workers fought. They were ordered to form small groups—two, three, maybe, four—fire from the courtyards, fire from up above, move fast, don't stay in one spot for very long.

Dubasov, who was ordered to put down the insurrection, reported to Petersburg that only 5,000 of the 15,000 men of the Moscow garrison could be put into action. The rest were unreliable. He called the Tsar directly and declared that he could not guarantee that "the autocracy would remain intact" unless the Tsar sent more troops. The order was given at once to dispatch the elite Semyonovsky guards regiment to Moscow. In actual fact, they were almost stopped. The railway workers tried to tear up the tracks in some areas, but the army prevented them from doing so, and the troops got through.

On the 16th, the Soviet and the party decided to end the strike on the 19th.

The toll of the Moscow rising was about 1,000 dead and about the same number wounded. There were several hundred soldiers killed.

At one point in the fighting, in the Presnya district, workers faced nonstop artillery fire from six in the morning until four in the afternoon, at a rate of seven shells per minute. One can imagine in an urban area filled with civilians and, yes, some workers who were armed, what damage that would do. The shelling reduced the area, and some of the factories there, to complete rubble.

Although the uprising in Moscow was the largest, other areas engaged in armed struggle. Soviets appeared in many more cities—Odessa, Novorossiisk, Kostroma, etc.

The massive scale of the Revolution of 1905 can be seen from this image. All of the back dots represent cities that were either in insurrection or conducting a general strike. And the railways were largely involved.

A period of mass repression ensued, the Tsar's bloody repression from 1905-1907. The Tsar sent out punitive expeditions, particularly along railway lines, where, of course, railway workers had played such a major part. The troops would come into a railway station and just start shooting everybody, whoever happened to be near—women, children, railway workers, whoever was there, just gun them down. Some were hanged along the way, to terrify people.

Trotsky wrote on the reprisals:

> In the Baltic lands, where the insurrection flared up a fortnight earlier than in Moscow, … Latvian workers and peasants were shot, hanged, flogged to death with rods and sticks, made to run the gauntlet, executed to the strains of the Tsarist anthem. According to highly incomplete information, 749 persons were executed, more than 100 farms were burned down, and many people were flogged to death in the Baltic lands within the space of two months. [*1905*, p. 248]
>
> Between January 9 and the convening of the first State Duma on April 27, 1906, according to approximate but certainly not exaggerated figures, the Tsarist government killed more than 14,000 persons, executed more than 1,000, wounded more than 20,000 (many of these died of their wounds), and arrested, exiled and imprisoned 70,000 persons. The price [the Tsar felt] was not excessive, for what was at stake was the very existence of Tsarism. [*1905*, p. 249]

Not all were executed. These are leading members of the Petersburg Soviet, where you can see Trotsky in the second row. They were arrested, put on trial in 1906, and "merely" sentenced to external exile in remote parts of Siberia. They were not hanged, however, at the time.

The tsarist regime, although shaken, assembled its forces to further consolidate its regime. The nobles felt that the insurrection had been crushed, and it was now time to really take control of things.

In the period, both leading up to and after the revolution of 1905, debates had raged about the revolution within the Social-Democratic movement. Three important variants of how the revolution would unfold were advanced by Plekhanov, Lenin and Trotsky.

Plekhanov had advocated a bourgeois revolution, within which the hegemony (the leading role) of the proletariat would be in an alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie. The aim would be to establish a parliamentary democracy with universal, direct, equal and secret suffrage. The socialist

revolution in Western Europe would precede the revolution in Russia. He did make the statement in December 1905, when responding to the events that had taken place, especially the armed insurrection in Moscow: "The workers should not have taken up arms." He really discredited himself in the eyes of many workers and Social Democrats when he made that statement.

Lenin had a different position. He said that, yes, the bourgeois revolution must be completed. He called for a "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry." He said there should be no alliance with the bourgeois liberals, and called for a radical resolution of the agrarian question by allying with the poorest peasantry in particular. He did feel that the socialist revolution in Western Europe would aid the revolution in Russia; he said they will "teach us how to do it."

Trotsky called for a dictatorship of the proletariat, supported by the peasantry. He agreed that there should be no alliance with the bourgeois liberals, and no stopping at a bourgeois revolution, but an uninterrupted or permanent revolution, pursuing socialist policies. The socialist revolution in Russia would spark the socialist revolution in Western Europe. That had *not* been the accepted view.

Trotsky later elaborated his views on permanent revolution in January 1922:

> It was precisely in the interval between January 9 and the October strike of 1905 that those views which came to be called the theory of "permanent revolution" were formed in the author's mind.
>
> This rather high-flown expression defines the thought that the Russian revolution, although directly concerned with bourgeois aims, could not stop short at those aims; the revolution could not solve its immediate, bourgeois tasks except by putting the proletariat into power. And the proletariat, once having power in its hands, would not be able to remain confined within the bourgeois framework of the revolution. On the contrary, precisely in order to guarantee its victory, the proletarian vanguard in the very earliest stages of its rule would have to make extremely deep inroads not only into feudal but also into bourgeois property relations. While doing so it would enter into hostile conflict, not only with all those bourgeois groups which had supported it during the first stages of its revolutionary struggle, but also with the broad masses of the peasantry, with whose collaboration it—the proletariat—had come into power. [*1905,* p. vi]
>
> [How to resolve this contradiction?]
>
> The contradictions between a workers' government and an overwhelming majority of peasants in a backward country could be resolved only on an international scale, in the arena of a world proletarian revolution. [*1905*, pp. vi-vii]

So, no resolution of this contradiction within the confines of Russia alone.

Rosa Luxemburg, who had briefly participated in the revolution of 1905 before being arrested in Warsaw, wrote an important work in 1906 analyzing what had happened in Russia and demanding a debate on the role of the mass strike within the German Social Democratic Party. The trade union leaders resisted, and a ban was placed on even further discussing the issue. She supported Trotsky's analysis of 1905 at the London Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers Party in 1907.

The scale of the events of 1905 was immense. Many described it as a semi-victory and semi-defeat. Tsarism remained in power, but it was mortally wounded. The working class had emerged as the most powerful revolutionary force ever seen in the early 20th century. New parties, new programs, and new forms of organization had emerged. Russian Social-Democracy was proving in practice that it could organize and lead the working class. The mass strike and its relation to armed uprising and the seizure of power had to be studied and its lessons assimilated.

Internationally, the events had a particularly powerful impact on revolutionary movements in three countries: China, Turkey, and Persia (today's Iran). In America, the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) was formed in 1905; in France, a huge boost was given to syndicalism.

The lessons learned by the working class in Russia in 1905 were a crucial part of preparing for October 1917.

Trotsky summed up 1905 in his autobiography, written 25 years later:

> The partial victory of the October strike had for me a tremendous theoretical as well as political importance. It was not the opposition of the liberal *bourgeoisie*, not the elemental risings of the peasantry or the terrorist acts of the intelligentsia, but the strike of the workers that for the first time brought Tsarism to its knees. The revolutionary leadership of the proletariat revealed itself as an incontrovertible fact. I felt that the theory of permanent revolution had withstood its first test successfully. Revolution was obviously opening up to the proletariat the prospect of seizing the power. The years of reaction which soon followed failed to make me move from this position. But from these premises I also drew my conclusions about the West. If the young proletariat of Russia could be so formidable, how mighty the revolutionary power of the proletariat of the more advanced countries would be! [*My Life*, p. 180]

**Citations**

Quotes from Trotsky's *1905* are from: Leon Trotsky, *1905*, translated by Anya Bostock, Vintage Books, 1971.

Quotes from Trotsky's autobiography are from: Leon Trotsky, *My Life*, translated by Max Eastman, Pathfinder Press, 1970.

[1] Kautsky, "The Slavs and Revolution," in: *Witnesses to Permanent Revolution*, ed. by Richard B. Day and Daniel Gaido, Brill, 2009, p. 64.

[2] Theodore Dan, *The Origins of Bolshevism*, edited and translated by Joel Carmichael, Schocken Books, 1970, pp. 299-300.

[3] "An Anti-War Leaflet," in: *The Russian Revolution of 1905 : Change Through Struggle*, *Revolutionary History*, Volume 9, No. 1, pp. 85-87.