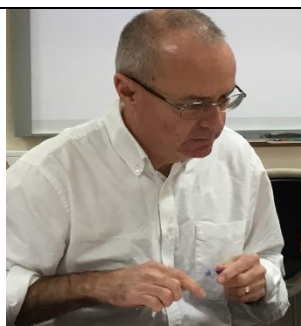


Soviet Revolution: Lessons to Learn from both the Birth and Fall

One-Day Workshop on the Centenary of 1917 Year of the Two Revolutions in Russia at Keele University on 24th October 2017 has been a successful meeting. It was organised by *Keele University*, in collaboration with *EMAR-Easdale Foundation for Labour Research* and *Journal of Global Faultlines*.



First Session on “What kind of socialism” began after the introduction by **Prof Shane O'Neill**.



Nick Rogers spoke on the left and right programmes of action for the success of Soviet Revolution, where all the antagonisms of the future were rooted. Nick reminded us that the debates in 1920s focused mostly on relations between workers’ power and the peasants and whether Soviet economy could stay outside the world (capitalist) economy. Position of Left Opposition of 1923-24, United Opposition of 1926-27, Bukharin and Stalin’s approaches to problems as well as Trotsky’s were taken up.



Bulent Gokay (Keele) took up the critical support given by German Communist Rosa Luxemburg to Lenin’s theoretical and practical position before and after the Soviet Revolution. Her critical approach to Lenin and Bolsheviks were mainly focused on the National Question, Land Question and rights of workers under the workers’ state. There was lively debate at the end of the session which was chaired by *Brian Doherty*.



Session Two on “The Impact of Russian Revolution in Europe”, which was headed by Suzana Ibsi, began with **Jonathan Davis’s** (Anglia Ruskin) presentation on the often conflicting attitudes of the British Labour Party intellectuals on the first Russian Revolution. There were contradicting views of what to tell the revolutionaries in Russia. Some wanted the Russia’s involvement in the war whereas some others supported the Bolsheviks’ “Stop the War” slogan. Radical democracy in Soviet Russia had created an atmosphere where people in Great Britain began chanting the slogans of workers’ and soldiers’ councils in Britain and democratic control of economy. Labour leaders who supported the

February Revolution in 1917 with the hope that Liberal Cadets and socialists would work together were not impressed and reacted to October Revolution with reluctance, finding the removal of Kerensky government from power “regrettable”. Bolsheviks were “uncompromising party of the revolution” for Labour, although there were radical Labour members who were supportive of Bolsheviks as well.



Norman LaPorte (S Wales) gave us a detailed account of what was happening in Weimar Republic during the year of two revolutions in Russia. Bernstein were representing the right socialists, Kautsky holding the middle ground where Luxemburg and Liebknecht were on the left. Support for Bolshevism was rather weak and insignificant where Karl Radek as ECCI representative was pushing KPD for the revolutionary offensive. However, German Left was divided therefore all the local attempts to gain power were contained by being local. KPD had a strong existence in 1926 with strong youth organisation led by Thaelman. But the sustained success of the October Revolution directed Weimar Republic to take strong measures against the communists and eventually supply support to emerging Nazi party.

There was a lively debate at the end of the session, where the positions of ECCI and KPD were questioned.



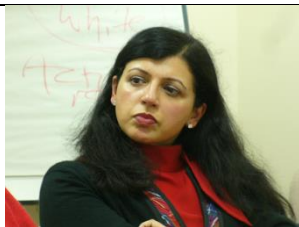
Lunch Break was followed by the Session Three on “Revolution as a tradition of modernity” chaired by *Matthew Wyman*. The presentation by **Robert Emerton** (Keele) had the title of “Mass Line: 1917 and 1989. Chinese Experience”. By making all politics mass-politics, Chinese Maoists hoped to prevent a slide into a repressive social order. However, the mass-line achieved the opposite end and created a hollowed-out politics through reactionary violence. In the post-1989 era, Chinese factory

workers have found a new mode of grassroots mobilisation that severs all ties with the party-state, but can this protest be considered political, and what wider lessons does it provide?



Kyril Drezov's (Keele) presentation was on Facebook projects on 1917 where the periods of that history were presented as historical gazette on internet where the historical figures, events, facts were uploaded day by day. The website is both in Russian and English (as summary). Drezov also told the audience that the anniversary of 1917 had been problematic for present Russian leadership of today who had used the language of “marking the event” rather than “celebrating” it. There were talk of creating monuments in the memory of both Whites and Reds of the Revolution, honouring both, with the aim of creation of a “unified” approach to 1917. The following debate brought lots of questions to the presenters of the idea.

Session Four had *Shalini Sharma* (Keele) and *Francisco Dominguez* (Middlesex) speaking on the “Revolution in the South”. The session was chaired by *Lorna Lloyd*.



Shalini Sharma spoke on the 1917 Russian revolution in the Indian political elite’s imagination. She gave us a vivid picture of the Indian bourgeoisie’s apprehension and awe of the October Revolution which gave a great impetus to followers of independence of India from British colonialism. However, although there was much respect and love for the Russian Revolution, it was obvious that the Indian rulers, like Nehru, did not show the same sympathy to Indian working class and communists.

That was a big lesson to learn for communists of India who were told by Soviet Russia that they should support their progressive bourgeoisie.



Francisco Dominguez's presentation, "The sui generis impact of the Russian Revolution in Latin America" told us that it had certain aspects which made it "sui generis". Russian Revolution had a gigantic importance and had immense impact on Latin America where 15 CPs were organised between 1918 and 1931, Argentine being the first. However, this effect went away quickly. Jose Carlos Mariategui were one of the brilliant communist intellectuals of the period. He thought Latin America could jump over capitalism to communism. Communist intellectuals regarded the bourgeoisies of Latin American countries as weak and collaborators of imperialism. They were compradors. Also, ECCI directives on National Question did not suit the Latin American reality of indigenous population. Large chunks of peasants were indigenous, and had "collective" spirit. ECCI directives on national question were rejected whereas ECCI also rejected Mariategui's position. Comintern's Popular Front tactics demolished and evaporated the power of CPs in Latin America, Dominguez told. They became isolated and powerless.

The last Session Five was chaired by **Ali Aksoy** (EMAR) and had three speakers: **Bulent Gokay** and **Vassilis Fouskas** (East London) speaking on the impact of Russian Revolution in the Balkans, with a special emphasis on Turkey and Greece. The third and last speaker was **Mustafa Yasacan** (Keele). He presented the three personalities as contradictory and often conflicting representatives of the impact of Russian Revolution on Turkish intelligentsia. Fuat Sabit, Suleyman Nuri and Sefik Husnu.



Yasacan presented the audience that the communist cadres during the Russian Revolution were concentrated in three groups as Istanbul, Anatolia and Baku. This diversity was reflected in the establishment and later development of TKP with subsequent contradictions following it throughout history.



The concluding panel was chaired by **Ismail Buyukakan** (EMAR), included **Bulent Gokay** and **Ali Aksoy**. Buyukakan's introduction to discussion began with differentiating between a political revolution and the social revolution, which spans over an era. He would rather call Russian Revolution as Soviet Revolution as it was the characteristic aspect of it. It was a democratic revolution lead by working class and revolutionary soldiers, with the aim of establishing communism by first capturing the state power and transforming the whole society.

However, one should keep in mind that the tasks of the level of social economical political development of the country were naturally tasks of bourgeoisie. Industrialisation, preparing the

infrastructure for its development were practically bourgeois tasks. “Electrification is communism” had Lenin said. It was to show to working class that without electrification in the whole society, without industrialisation, there couldn’t be any talk of future communism. Today, this slogan would be transformed into, for example, “mobile phones & wi-fi is communism” to pay attention to the required levels of development in order to talk about communism.



One cannot and should not talk about communism (or socialism for that matter) when the categories of law of value, such as commodity, money, price, wages, profit, market, trade exist. Marx told us on communist society (not at all mentioning socialism) as a *post-value society*. One should also ask about what would represent the shoots of the communist productive forces developing within capitalist society.

The one-day workshop which has been attended by over 25 participants closed after the lively discussion which concluded that the Soviet Revolution was indeed of a gigantic importance and had enormous influence over the world.

There are many lessons to learn from its birth in 1917 and fall 74 years later for the future struggles.

Report by Ismail Buyukakan