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# Throwing door open for oppressed people: Bolshevik Revolution changed the world forever

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Vladimir Lenin giving a speech to the Red Army in Sverdlov Square, Moscow, May 5, 1920. On the right of the platform is Leon Trotsky, commander of the Red Army.

One-hundred-and-five years ago, on Nov. 7, 1917, workers and peasants overthrew the capitalist government in Russia. The world hasn't been the same since.

Two million soldiers in the Russian army had died in World War I. Russia was ruled by the cruel Czar Nicholas II.

Like the United States, the Russian Empire was a big prison of oppressed nationalities. Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Poles, Ukrainians, Georgians, Finns, Armenians, and other peoples were denied independence.

Wars of conquest slaughtered Muslims. As with Native nations in the Americas,

Siberia's Indigenous peoples were hunted down and killed.

Russian people were also oppressed. Many had been serfs, a sort of land slavery. But serf families couldn't be broken up and sold like cattle, as African slaves were in the U.S.

Thirty thousand serfs died building St. Petersburg, the former Russian capital.

Serfdom was abolished in 1861, two years after the raid at Harpers Ferry led by John Brown. The outbreak of the U.S. Civil War may have influenced the czar to get rid of serfdom before the serfs got rid of him.

### **Lenin and the Bolsheviks**

By 1914, serfdom was gone, but 30,000 big landlords still ruled the countryside, where five out of six people lived. The vast majority of peasants couldn't read or write. Women had no rights.

Foreign capital poured into Russia, grabbing huge profits from long workdays in the factories. Striking workers were shot down.

Oppression breeds revolution. V.I. Lenin was the greatest leader of Russia's revolution. He organized a communist party known as the Bolsheviks.

Lenin was 17 when his older brother Alexander was hanged for trying to assassinate the czar. When the Black revolutionary Jonathan Jackson was 17, he was killed trying to free his older brother George Jackson and other political prisoners.

Lenin studied the teachings of Karl Marx. Lenin taught that workers had to be saturated with Marx's revolutionary knowledge and determination to win.

### **Soviets vs. pogroms**

The first Russian Revolution broke out in 1905. Workers went on strike, shutting down factories and railroads. Peasants burned the gentry's mansions. Czarism was on the ropes.

Workers formed councils called soviets. Today, we need peoples power assemblies to fight cutbacks, racism, and war.

European banks poured in loans to save czarist tyranny. In 1960, David Rockefeller's Chase Manhattan bank — now the JPMorgan Chase & Co. bank — saved South Africa's tottering apartheid regime with loans following the Sharpeville massacre.

The 1905 Revolution was also defeated because the czar was able to pit peasant soldiers against workers and even other peasants. Billionaires divide poor and working people in the U.S. today with racism and anti-immigrant bigotry.

Mass lynchings called pogroms led by czarist flunkies killed Jewish people. Hundreds of African Americans were massacred in pogroms in East St. Louis, Ill., in 1917 and in Tulsa, Okla., in 1921.

The Bolsheviks fought pogroms with guns in hand. Lenin waged war on racism. He enriched Marxism by teaching that workers in the big capitalist countries had to support revolts in the colonies.

"What emotion, enthusiasm, clear-sightedness and confidence it instilled into me!" was how Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh described Lenin's ["Theses on the National and Colonial Questions."](#)

The Black poet Claude McKay, who wrote "If We Must Die," spoke in Red Moscow.

## **Peace, land and bread**

Sick of war and hunger, women textile workers in Petersburg went on strike on

March 8, 1917 — International Women's Day. The holiday commemorates a strike of women garment workers in New York City.

Five days later, czarism was overthrown. Workers, peasants and soldiers made the revolution, but capitalists seized the reins.

For the next eight months, Lenin's Bolsheviks won millions of poor people to socialist revolution by demanding bread, peace and land. Despite Lenin being forced underground, Bolsheviks won majorities in the soviets that sprung up everywhere.

These soviets overthrew capitalist leader Alexander Kerensky on Nov. 7. It's called the Great October Socialist Revolution because under the old Russian calendar it occurred in October. It's also called the October Revolution because many peoples, not just Russians, rose up to break their chains.

Peasants threw out the landlords. Bolsheviks exposed secret treaties that divided up colonies among the imperialist countries. This revolutionary energy helped overthrow Germany's kaiser and end World War I.

Capitalist governments, including the U.S., waged war against the soviets on a dozen fronts. But the Red Army, led by Leon Trotsky, was victorious.

### **The 73-year-long war**

The Soviet Union remained the target of world capitalism. Hitler came to power over the bones of the German working class.

Following Lenin's death, this political isolation led to backward steps, including abolishing abortion rights. Soviet leader Joseph Stalin framed Bolshevik opponents while increasing inequality.

At the same time, the Soviet Union launched the first and biggest affirmative action

program in history. Every person had the right to an education in their own language. The Soviet five-year plans created the world's second-biggest economy. Everyone had a job.

Under Stalin's leadership, the Soviet Union defeated Hitler. An estimated 27 million Soviet people died in World War II. The Red Army liberated Auschwitz, which the U.S. refused to bomb.

The Bolsheviks inspired the Chinese Revolution. The Soviet Union armed Korea and Vietnam against the U.S. war machine. Cuba was aided.

In 1988, it was Soviet weapons that allowed Angolan, Namibian, African National Congress and Cuban soldiers to defeat South Africa's apartheid army at Cuito Cuanavale. Two years later, Nelson Mandela walked out of jail.

The Pentagon spent \$5.5 trillion on nuclear weapons aimed at the Soviet Union. This unrelenting pressure finally led to the Soviet Union being overthrown in 1991.

Despite this tremendous defeat, the October Revolution will live forever.



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