

# Teaching the Russian Revolution 1917: Knowledge and Pedagogy Rebooted



*Manchester, 19 November 2022*



In conjunction with the **Study Group of the Russian Revolution.**

## Programme and Timings

**10:00:** Welcome and introduction

**10:15:** Dr. Lara Douds, *The Politics of the Russian Revolution, 1917*

*Dr Douds, a leading scholar of Russian Revolutionary and Soviet politics, will examine how different groups competed and cooperated to seize power and shape the politics of Russia in 1917. Moving beyond the Bolshevik/Liberal divide, she will demonstrate how different political groups developed alliances and enmities during this year, leading towards not just the October Revolution, but also national independence and other more specific aims.*

**11:05:** Tea and coffee break

**11:20:** Prof. Chris Read, *A Revolution of the People*

*Professor Read, a widely published author on revolutionary movements and society in Russia, will look at the kaleidoscope of social movements that animated the Russian Revolution. The traditional focus of historians has tended to be on the 'high politics' of Petrograd. However, recent historiography has focused increasingly on the experiences of Russians in the provinces, countryside, and non-Russian areas. Professor Read's talk will examine many of these previously overlooked groups, from workers, soldiers, and peasants to soldiers' wives, nationalities, prisoners of war, and the unemployed.*

**12.10:** Dr. Rachel Platonov, *Visualising Revolution*

*Dr Platonov, a leading authority on Russian culture and the arts, will discuss the visual representation of the Russian Revolution, including posters and art. Providing an insight into how the revolution was seen through the eyes of people at the time, posters and images from 1917 make for valuable classroom teaching materials. Dr Platonov will highlight how revolution was expressed through visual culture, revealing how this can be used in a classroom setting.*

**13:00:** Lunch

**13:45:** Pedagogy Showcase

**14:30:** Roundtable discussion

## Russian Revolution 1917: Brief Glossary

**Anarchists:** Most radical of left-wing groups in Russia, advocating for social and economic equality without government.

**Bolsheviks:** Radical left wing of the Marxist Russian Social Democratic Workers Party (RSDWP). Seized power in October 1917.

**Constituent Assembly:** Elected body anticipated to give Russia a new constitution and system of government after the February Revolution 1917. Finally met and immediately dissolved by Bolsheviks in January 1918.

**Constitutional Democrats (Kadets):** Russia's largest liberal party by 1917. Key members of the party involved in the Provisional Government.

**Dual Power:** Power-sharing arrangement between Provisional Government and Petrograd Soviet, c. March-October 1917.

**Duma:** State Duma, Russia's proto-parliament, given limited powers by Tsar Nicholas II, 1905-1917.

**February Revolution:** Overthrow of the Tsar, February 1917.

**Kerensky, Alexander:** Moderate socialist leader and, for much of 1917, the most prominent socialist politician in Russia.

**Lenin, Vladimir:** Leader of the Bolshevik Party.

**Mensheviks:** More moderate wing of Marxist Russian Social Democratic Workers Party (RSDWP).

**Nicholas II, Tsar:** Russia's autocratic ruler until the February Revolution, 1917.

**October Revolution:** Seizure of power by Bolsheviks and their left-wing allies, October 1917.

**Petrograd:** Russia's capital city (before 1914 = St. Petersburg; after 1924 = Leningrad; after 1991 = St. Petersburg)

**Provisional Government:** Government formed initially of liberals to lead Russia until Constituent Assembly had been elected. Name also translates literally to 'Temporary Government'. Overthrown in October 1917.

**Red Guards:** Armed worker paramilitaries, allied for much of 1917 with Bolsheviks and other radical left-wing political groups.

**Russian Social Democratic Workers Party (RSWDP):** The largest Marxist grouping in Russia by 1917.

**Socialist-Revolutionary Party (PSR):** Large and influential neo-populist socialist party. In 1917, began to split into 'left' and 'right' factions.

**Soviets:** Elected councils of workers, soldiers, and peasants, established first in 1905, then again in 1917. Name translates literally to 'councils'.

**Tsar:** Title of Russia's emperors and autocrats before 1917.

## The Russian Revolution: Brief Timeline

N.B. Dates are here given in the 'old style' Julian calendar, which was used in Russia until 1918. This was 13 days behind the Grigorian calendar, used in western Europe.

<b>1894</b>	<b>Nicholas (Nikolai) II becomes Tsar of Russia</b>
<b>1904</b>	<b>Russia goes to war against Japan</b>
<b>1905</b>	<b>Revolutionary unrest across Russia, threatening to overthrow the Tsar</b>
<b>1914</b>	<b>Start of the Great War (First World War)</b>
<b>February 1917</b>	<b>The February Revolution</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 23-27 February: Popular protests in Russian capital, Petrograd</li> <li>• 27 February: Soldiers join protests, revolution spreads to provinces</li> <li>• 27 February: Petrograd Soviet formed, led by socialists</li> </ul>
<b>2 March 1917</b>	<b>Abdication</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nicholas II abdicates the throne</li> <li>• A "Provisional Government" is established, led by liberals</li> <li>• One socialist, Alexander Kerensky, also joins Provisional Govt.</li> </ul>
<b>April 1917</b>	<b>Lenin's Return</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin returns from exile to Russia</li> <li>• Publishes 'April Theses', pledging to oppose Provisional Government</li> </ul>
<b>18 April 1917</b>	<b>The April Crisis</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After pledging to continue the war (the 'Milyukov note'), Pavel Milyukov is forced to resign from Provisional Government</li> <li>• Moderate socialists join Provisional Government</li> </ul>
<b>May 1917</b>	<b>Alexander Kerensky appointed Minister of War</b>
<b>June 1917</b>	<b>The June Offensive</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Russian army launches a major offensive on the Eastern Front</li> <li>• After brief initial successes, the offensive collapses</li> <li>• In Petrograd, June 18 demonstrations turn vs. Provisional Govt.</li> </ul>
<b>3-7 July</b>	<b>The July Days</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Violent protests break out in Petrograd against Provisional Govt.</li> <li>• Followed by arrests of Bolsheviks and leftists, blamed for unrest</li> <li>• Lenin flees to Finland</li> </ul>
<b>8 July 1917</b>	<b>Kerensky appointed Prime Minister in new Provisional Government</b>
<b>22-27 August</b>	<b>Kornilov Affair</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Right-wing military general, Lavr Kornilov, attempts to seize power</li> <li>• Stopped by workers and revolutionary soldiers</li> </ul>
<b>September</b>	<b>Bolsheviks take control of key soviets</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bolshevik resolutions passed in Petrograd and Moscow soviets</li> <li>• Bolsheviks and their allies establish majorities in many soviets</li> </ul>
<b>25-26 October</b>	<b>The October Revolution</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bolsheviks launch seizure of power in Russian capital, Petrograd</li> <li>• Provisional Government ministers arrested</li> <li>• Kerensky flees capital city</li> </ul>

## Lecture 1: Lara Doucs, *The Politics of the Russian Revolution, 1917*

Space for your notes

## Lecture 2: Chris Read, *A Revolution of the People*

Space for your notes

## Lecture 3: Rachel Platonov, *Visualising Revolution*

Space for your notes

## Pedagogy Showcase

Space for your notes



## Anatoly and the Anarchists: A Revolutionary Love Story



1 When revolution broke out, Anatoly Zhelezniakov celebrated like everyone else. A sailor  
2 and **anarchist** at the **Kronstadt** naval base, he looked forward to the end of not just the  
3 Tsar, but also capitalism and all government. Yet Zhelezniakov was quickly frustrated. He  
4 opposed the liberal Provisional Government and, although more enthusiastic about the  
5 soviets, he hated the moderate leadership of the Petrograd Soviet.

6 Though few in number, Zhelezniakov and his fellow anarchists quickly made a nuisance of  
7 themselves. They seized the villa of a former Tsarist minister, Peter Durnovo, in nearby  
8 Petrograd and turned it into their headquarters. While the anarchists at the **Durnovo Villa**  
9 were still just a tiny fringe, the revolution was already radicalising. In April, the **Bolshevik**  
10 leader, **Vladimir Lenin**, returned to Russia and announced workers should replace the  
11 Provisional Government with a government of soviets. Moderate socialists and even some  
12 Bolsheviks were appalled – some called Lenin an anarchist (which he was not). But real  
13 anarchists, like Zhelezniakov, were excited by the idea of that soviets could take over.

14 Zhelezniakov's suspicions of the Provisional Government were being confirmed. On 20 April  
15 1917, the liberal Foreign Minister **Pavel Miliukov** was revealed to have written to Russia's  
16 Allies in the war promising Russia would continue fighting until they had defeated Germany  
17 and seized more land for Russia. Now not just Zhelezniakov, but thousands of other workers,  
18 soldiers, and sailors in Petrograd poured onto the streets, protesting against the '**Miliukov**  
19 **note**'.

20 The Provisional Government survived – just – after socialists from the Petrograd Soviet agreed  
21 to become ministers. Pavel Miliukov resigned in disgrace. For a brief moment, it seemed the  
22 Provisional Government might gain support. Workers might have hoped that Menshevik  
23 ministers might improve their working conditions. Peasants might have hoped that Socialist  
24 Revolutionary ministers might give them land. Soldiers might have hoped for a socialist-led  
25 end to the war.

26 In Kronstadt, however, Zhelezniakov and other radicals continued to challenge the  
27 Provisional Government. In May 1917, the Kronstadt Soviet declared itself the only authority  
28 in the town – rejecting the Provisional Government altogether. People called it the  
29 '**Kronstadt Republic**' – the first time a local soviet had tried to take power. For radicals like  
30 Zhelezniakov it was proof soviets could, after all, overthrow the government.

31 In nearby Petrograd, the Provisional Government and Petrograd Soviet decided to crush  
32 the anarchists. In June 1917, they ordered anarchists to leave the **Durnovo Villa**.  
33 Zhelezniakov and fifty other sailors from Kronstadt seized their weapons and rushed to  
34 defend the building. When government soldiers arrived, a fight broke out and one anarchist  
35 was shot dead. Zhelezniakov was arrested and thrown in prison.

36 Meanwhile, trouble was brewing on the streets of Petrograd. Workers and soldiers had  
37 become increasingly frustrated at the lack of change in Provisional Government policy. The  
38 Bolsheviks, who were growing in strength, planned a demonstration against the war and  
39 Provisional Government. Just before it was due to begin, on 10 June 1917, the Petrograd  
40 Soviet ordered it stopped. But workers and soldiers remained dissatisfied. A week later, the  
41 Petrograd Soviet called its own demonstration in support of a 'defensive' war and the  
42 Provisional Government. It was a fiasco. Workers and soldiers joined in their thousands, but  
43 most marched under the radical slogans 'Down with the Provisional Government!' and 'All  
44 power to the soviets!' The moderate socialists and Provisional Government were humiliated  
45 by the '**June Days**'.

46 Over the following weeks, while he sat in prison, Zhelezniakov saw Russia slide into chaos. In  
47 June 1917, the Provisional Government, now led by the moderate socialist **Alexander**  
48 **Kerensky**, began a military offensive to push the German army back and win the war. It was  
49 a disaster, leaving hundreds of thousands of dead and wounded. Many workers and  
50 soldiers became increasingly convinced a new revolution to overthrow the Provisional  
51 Government was necessary. At the start of July 1917, during the '**July Days**', massive protests  
52 broke out. While Lenin and the Bolsheviks remained unsure about supporting the  
53 demonstrations, anarchists and other radicals took the lead. Protesters again demanded  
54 the Petrograd Soviet seize power. Shooting broke out between the protestors and their  
55 opponents, leaving several hundred dead. Radicals, including anarchists and Bolsheviks,  
56 were arrested; Lenin fled Russia for Finland. Civil war seemed possible.

57 It was now that right-wing groups began to emerge once. Business owners, who at first had  
58 tried to work with workers' trade unions, began to challenge workers' demands. Some  
59 liberals, who at first had sought to work with the soviets, began to call for them to be closed  
60 down. With growing chaos in Russia, some army generals even began to plot a **coup d'état**.  
61 In August 1917, Alexander Kerensky appointed a right-wing general, **Lavr Kornilov**, to lead  
62 Russia's army. Kornilov instead ordered troops to march on Petrograd, arrest the Petrograd  
63 Soviet, and seize power for the army. Only the quick thinking of workers, who stopped  
64 Kornilov's trains before they reached the capital, prevented a military takeover of power.

65 By now, Zhelezniakov had escaped from prison and was at large again. He threw himself  
66 into the action, organising demonstrations in the capital city. Now, when he spoke to  
67 workers and soldiers, he found more than ever before agreed another revolution was  
68 needed. Worsening working conditions and continuation of war had turned many ordinary  
69 people into radicals.

70 The slogan 'All power to the soviets!' rang out across Russia. It was no longer just anarchists  
71 and Bolsheviks demanding the soviets overthrow the government, but left-wing Socialist  
72 Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, too. Some socialists had even left their old parties and  
73 joined the Bolsheviks. The most important was **Leon Trotsky**, who became a key Bolshevik  
74 leader. A powerful **coalition** of Bolsheviks, left-SRs, Menshevik-Internationalists, and

75 anarchists was emerging. In September 1917, it won a majority in the Petrograd Soviet,  
76 which chose Trotsky as its chairman and voted to support Bolshevik policies.

77 Yet Zhelezniakov had to wait for his radical revolution. The Bolsheviks, now the strongest  
78 political party in Russia's capital city, spent much of September and October debating  
79 whether or not to launch a new revolution (and seize power for themselves). Anarchists, still  
80 far smaller and weaker than other socialist parties, could not launch a revolution by  
81 themselves. Finally, on 25 October 1917, the Bolsheviks acted. With the support of **Red**  
82 **Guards**, soldiers, and sailors from nearby Kronstadt, they attacked the Winter Palace, where  
83 the Provisional Government and its ministers sat. Zhelezniakov was already in the capital  
84 city, representing Kronstadt's sailors at the **Second Congress of Soviets**. He hurried to the  
85 Winter Palace to take command of a group of sailors, guns and cartridges hanging from  
86 them like bandits. By the end of the day, he would finally achieve his aim – the Provisional  
87 Government would be overthrown, its ministers arrested, and the soviets take power.  
88 Russia's radicals had finally taken over the revolution.

## Singing a Revolution, Feeling a Revolution

**Extract 1:** John Reed, *Ten Days that Shook the World* (1919)

Suddenly, by common impulse, we found ourselves on our feet, mumbling together into the smooth lifting unison of the **Internationale**. A grizzled old soldier was sobbing like a child. Alexandra Kollontai rapidly winked the tears back. The immense sound rolled through the hall, burst windows and doors and seared into the quiet sky. "The war is ended! The war is ended!" said a young workman near me, his face shining. And when it was over, as we stood there in a kind of awkward hush, some one in the back of the room shouted, "Comrades! Let us remember those who have died for liberty!" So we began to sing the Funeral March ["**You Fell a Victim**"], that slow, melancholy and yet triumphant chant, so Russian and so moving. The Internationale is an alien air, after all. The Funeral March seemed the very soul of those dark masses whose delegates sat in this hall, building from their obscure visions a new Russia—and perhaps more.

**In John Reed's account, what made songs so important to the Russian Revolution?**

**Now listen to the two songs. What impression do they give? Write down any words that come to mind.**

The Internationale	You Fell a Victim

**Read the lyrics of the two songs. What messages do they appear to carry?**

<b>The Internationale (extracts)</b>	<b>Key Messages</b>
<p>1 Arise, wretched of the earth                  2 Arise, convicts of hunger                  3 Reason thunders in its volcano                  4 This is the eruption of the end                  5 Of the past let us wipe the slate clean                  6 Masses, slaves, arise, arise                  7 The world is about to change its foundation                  8 We are nothing, let us be everything</p> <p>9 This is the final struggle                  10 Let us gather together, and tomorrow                  11 The Internationale                  12 Will be the human race</p> <p>13 There are no supreme saviors                  14 Neither God, nor Caesar, nor tribune.                  15 Producers, let us save ourselves                  16 Decree on the common welfare                  17 That the thief return his plunder,                  18 That the spirit be pulled from its prison                  19 Let us fan the forge ourselves                  20 Strike the iron while it is hot</p> <p>21 Laborers, peasants, we are                  22 The great party of workers                  23 The earth belongs only to men                  24 The idle will go reside elsewhere                  25 How much of our flesh they feed on,                  26 But if the ravens and vultures                  27 Disappear one of these days                  28 The sun will still shine</p>	

You Fell a Victim (extracts)	Key Messages
<p>1 You fell victim of the deadly struggle  2 Of unselfish love towards your people  3 You gave whatever you had for it  4 For life, for honour, for freedom.</p>	
<p>5 You sometimes crouch in damp jails  6 Judges and executioners had passed judgement  7 On your boldness  8 And grudgingly you went with fetters on your feet.</p>	
<p>9 But you silently bear your fetters  10 You suffer for the cause of love  11 Because you cannot bear seeing indifferently  12 Your brother dying in wretchedness.</p>	
<p>13 In your soul you keep the holy faith  14 The truth is stronger than a sledgehammer  15 The time will come and this blood  16 That you are shedding for your brother will be  17 esteemed</p>	
<p>18 Tyranny shall fall and the people will rebel  19 The great powerful and free people  20 Farewell our brothers! You have walked with honour  21 Your road of worthiness and righteousness.</p>	

Audio and lyrics can be found at website Marxists.org. Follow link/QR code below:



<https://www.marxists.org/history/ussr/sounds/>

## Session Feedback and Future Events

We value your feedback on today's session!

Please consider taking 2 minutes to complete an online survey and sign up for further Russian History CPD events.

Simply scan the QR code or follow the link below.



<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/SXKFCHZ>



In conjunction with the **Study Group of the Russian Revolution.**