

## Social Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Russia By David Camfield

The centenary of the overthrow of the Tsarist regime and Provisional Government and the establishment of soviet power is a moment of ideologically-charged discussion concerning the historical interpretation of the events of 1917 and the subsequent evolution of the Soviet Union and "Communism." Against the dominant interpretations of the events of 1917 and their relationship to the ensuing Civil War and the later turn to rapid industrialization and forced collectivization of the peasantry, this paper will develop a historical materialist argument in defence of two theoretical claims.

The first is that the events of 1917 were a social revolution that, within the territories in which it was successful, destroyed the class power of the dominant landlord-capitalist class and replaced it with the rule of the working class and peasantry. This social revolution remains historically unique, in that no subsequent revolution has replaced the rule of an exploiting class with that of an exploited class or classes on the scale and for the duration in which this occurred in Russia.

The second is that the rule of the working class and peasantry, exercised through highly democratic councils and committees, quickly evolved into the rule of a proletarian leadership social layer that was not subject to control by the class whose interests it at first valiantly sought to advance, and by the late 1920s this layer had crystallized into a new ruling class. After winning the Civil War, this bureaucratized class segment's ideology as well as the pressure of social conditions in the isolated Soviet Union set it on a path that culminated in its embarking on a path of rapid economic development that systematically extracted surplus labour from the direct producers. In so doing, this layer became a class garbed in the institutional and ideological heritage of the October Revolution. This represented the triumph of a unique kind of counter-revolution that remains poorly understood; the paper's discussion of its second major claim will concentrate on explaining the processes that led to this outcome.