

Proposal on the Russian Revolution centenary (James B and Colin W)

rs21 notes:

- The approaching centenary of the Russian Revolution of October 1917.

rs21 believes that:

- The society created by the Russian revolutionary movement after October 1917 is a high point in the history of the struggle for freedom from exploitation and oppression and for a classless society.
- This centenary will be marked in the mainstream media - pro-capitalist, liberal and reformist alike - by portrayals of the October revolution as reckless adventurism, an historical aberration or inevitably leading to the gulag. Given the continued failure of the capitalist class to resolve the crisis of 2007-8 these may not take the triumphalist form of previous anniversaries. However, because of it the attacks are likely to be vociferous and deeply ideological.
- Revolutionary socialists trace a line through October to recent liberatory events like the Arab Spring. However, the failure of the revolutionary project instigated by October and the ultimate collapse of the Stalinist state built on its wreckage, compounded by the long period of defeats suffered by the working class movement since the 1980s, mean that we are in a tiny minority in making this connection. For example, for many young people who have not been members of Trotskyist organisations, October is not the familiar point of reference it can be for older comrades.
- We reject the attacks on October by defenders of capitalism. But those who have sought to defend October have often done so in ways we can't accept. For example, the Stalinist tradition portrays the revolution's leaders as incapable of error. We best defend the Russian revolution by understanding its historical context in a society very different from our own, and by acknowledging the huge problems facing the Russian revolutionary movement and that they made some mistakes. Recent scholarship – often based on archival work since the fall of the Soviet Union – can help us to understand and debate how we can apply the lessons of October today.

rs21 resolves to:

- Form a working group to co-ordinate the activities of the organisation relating to the centenary informed by the above beliefs including:
 - Overseeing a unified publications strategy.
 - Develop a recommended reading list.
 - Facilitate discussion and debate about the lessons and legacy of October in local rs21 groups.
 - Commission a series of stickers.
 - Organising a public event *in the autumn*.

[Note: A public event did not go ahead as efforts were instead focused on the independence movement in Catalonia. Read rs21's statement on the centenary of the Russian revolution [here](#).]