

**Jean-François Fayet, Valérie Gorin, and Stefanie Prezioso (eds.): Echoes of October. International Commemorations of the Bolsheviks Revolution, 1918–1990, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 2017. 202 pp. (Studies in Twentieth Century Communism. 2). – ISBN 978-1-910448-96-0.**

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The October Revolution was an event and a symbol. Moreover, it was an event and a symbol of international significance, giving rise to the world's first avowedly socialist state and standing as a beacon of radical possibilities. As the anniversary of October rolled around each year, the Soviets narrated and celebrated the foundations of their society, while many outside the Soviet Union read the legacy of October into their own experiences and struggles. For Moscow, the commemoration of October offered a means of fostering internal unity and legitimatising the Soviet project. But, crucially, it also presented an opportunity to stress the international importance and ambition of October.

For many, the October commemorations will conjure up an image of stale, seemingly unvarying military parades passing through Red Square. Indeed, after 1945, military pride and patriotism became the more dominant themes on 7 November. Although, for some, these displays must still have evoked memories of the parades of soldiers and workers standing against hostile forces in 1917. For, while commemorations of October became more formulaic and inward looking, they were not always fixed in the way some might presuppose. Different aspects of October were lauded at different times, reflecting contemporary conditions and concerns. Soviet commemorations were responsive. In this respect, the narrative of October was, to extend Isaac Deutscher's phrase, an 'unfinished revolution.' And, as the editors of this new book are at pains to demonstrate, the commemoration of October was not merely a domestic Soviet affair either. The gaze of the outside world was a constant consideration.

As Jean-François Fayet notes in the preface to this volume, foreign communists living in Russia took part in the earliest domestic anniversary celebrations of October. By 1921–22, after the horrors of civil war, foreign visitors started to form part of the celebrations. Ten years on from October, the Soviets keen to show that they were not isolated, invited thousands of foreign delegates, from forty-three different countries. Eighty per cent of these delegates were workers. There were trade union delegates, as well as guests from the International Workers Relief, MOPR (International Red Aid), cooperative representatives, and Esperantists, among others. Far from coming as spectators, many of these visitors were expected to play an active role in commemorative demonstrations (pp. 8–9). The commemorative bodies in charge of the celebrations were straining to show the world, especially the socialist world, that October and the Soviet Union still stood as the talisman of international progress.

The invitation lists for these commemorations reflected what was happening in the world. During the years of the Great Depression, the largest delegations came from those countries that were experiencing economic crisis. Chinese delegates often took pride of place, presented as the victims of imperialism, with the Soviets emphasising the anti-imperialist credentials of the October Revolution. Come 1936 and 1937, the Spanish delegation occupied a prominent role in the anniversary parade, reflecting Soviet support to the Republic during the Civil War (p.12). The politics of Soviet commemoration was inherently international. Heads of allied states and leaders of communist parties became a regular feature of October celebrations. By the 1950s, representatives from the Middle East and Latin America joined the celebrations. By the 1960s, representatives from Vietnam, Ethiopia, and Somalia were regularly attending. Commemoration 'traced the contours of, and the fluctuations in, Soviet foreign policy' (p. 13).

But the international scope of these commemorations was not limited to foreign participation in domestic celebrations. For a start, those worker delegates and progressive representatives that were invited to be part of the Soviet celebrations, during the 1920s, were also encouraged to carry out lecture tours and publish positive accounts about their experience. And, as the bulk of this book reflects, commemorations were forged and negotiated all over the world. Celebrating October was often a transnational affair. Contributions by Ottokar Luban, Kasper Braskén, Daniel Kowalsky, and Anastasia Koukouna chart commemorative events in Germany, Spain, and Greece. For Germany's far left, the Spartacus Group and the newly formed USPD, 7 November 1918 represented a focal point around which reject the wartime compromise of the SPD and rally the forces of agitation. While some members of the Spartacus Group and USPD had been critical of the October Revolution and the Red Terror, Luban notes, circumstances had changed and there was rank-and-file support for the Bolshevik example. Indeed, the Spartacists, before the expulsion of the Russian embassy on 5 November 1918, had been in consultation with both Nikolai Bukharin and ambassador Adolph Joffe. Planned commemorative rallies became embroiled within a live revolutionary development.

Nine years later, on the tenth anniversary of October, commemorative planning resulted in the emergent formation of what Braskén views as transnational civil-society networks (p. 78). This manifested itself in the form of German workers travelling to Moscow to participate in 'the showcasing of the Great October Revolution,' while the Soviet agitprop troupe, 'Blaue Blusen' (the Blue Shirts), toured through Germany. This 'moment of transnational interconnectedness' was negotiated through the International Workers' Relief (IAH), in Germany, and Comintern's leadership, in the Soviet Union. What is more, Braskén makes clear, organisers in Germany and the USSR looked to connect commemoration with geopolitical developments, including the national liberation struggle in China, lauding October and the Soviet project as the enemy of imperialism (p. 87). Ten years further on, as Kowalsky shows, the Spanish Civil War suddenly elevated the significance of the Iberian Peninsula in the eyes of the Kremlin. Stalin was minded to proceed cautiously when it came to practical support. Yet as the anniversary of October came into sight, parallels between the Russian Civil War and the Spanish were made quite explicit. VOKS and the Spanish left initiated a dialogue on commemoration, the October project and Soviet Union, rather than the events of October, soon embraced by each as a motivational vision of a alternative future. Similarly, with the formation of the Greek Socialist Labour Party, in 1918, October was celebrated for its explicit international potential, as the most important day in the international

proletarian calendar. But by 1940, with Greece enduring Axis occupation, the narrative of commemoration shifted to emphasise the victories of the Red Army and the 'Herculean strength' embodied in October. The anti-imperial and anti-fascist credentials of October came to the fore.

Eric Aunoble's innovative contribution to this volume proffers an 'internal' transnational account of how October was told in Soviet Ukraine, tracing the neglected and frequently contradictory means of celebrating and narrating revolution in a Soviet republic. The Ukrainian experience of October was not the same as that of Petrograd or Moscow. In fact, there was no October in Ukraine. Kiev experienced a failed red insurrection in October, and a moderate Central Rada was established in November. As Aunoble demonstrates, there were memorandums from Moscow about what to celebrate, and there were calls to acknowledge the specificities of the Ukrainian experience. But, in common with the other chapters in this volume, we see that historical events were 'interpreted from a present-day perspective' (p. 32). During the shortages of 1921, October was celebrated as 'a struggle against hunger.' Importantly, we see October was celebrated as a process. 'The issue was not ... whether something occurred in Ukraine on 25 October or not,' continues Aunoble, 'but which side you had taken in those years' (p. 33). In this way the Ukrainian experience was presented as part of the arc of October.

Next to Aunoble, André Liebich offers a kind of 'transnational' internal account, charting the remembrances of the exiled Menshevik community. Here, too, these accounts demonstrate the 'continuity between the past of the socialist tradition and the contested present' (p. 160). In other words, Liebich shows how the issues raised in Menshevik anniversary publications and commemorations were overwhelmingly connected to contemporary concerns and developments. During Stalin's ascendancy, October was understood through the lens of the Napoleonic example, the extremes of October were highlighted during the Great Terror. Likewise, a sort of 'international' internal account can be seen in Stephan Rindlishbacher's contribution, which focuses on the pages of Pravda to show how the party sought to use commemoration to legitimise both its own domestic authority and its position as leader of the global communist movement. The prospects of world revolution and the check of realpolitik can be seen in the shifting patterns of commemorative narration. Rindlishbacher illustrates how celebrating October as part of an international cause in the years immediately following 1917 gradually gave way to presentations of October and the Soviet Union as the defender of an existing and defined communist world, especially after 1945.

This volume builds on previous work by Frederick C. Conroy and Malte Rolf – who revealed the undetermined, shifting, and even confused nature of October commemoration narratives – as well as the work of Michael David-Fox and Jean-François Fayet – who have each illustrated the importance of transnational relations and institutions such as VOKS in shaping the Soviet Union's self-projected image. Emerging from a conference on 'The International Echoes of the Commemorations of the October Revolution,' held at the University of Lausanne, in 2016, further work on this topic can be found in the accompanying special edition of *Twentieth Century Communism*. Both published in 2017, when mention of the broader 'legacy of 1917' was abound, these publications present a welcome focus on active and immediate attempts to forge the legacy of October through live transnational and international commemorative developments.

What this collection fails to portray, however, is a full sense of the significance of the ideological shifts introduced by the Soviet leadership, as well as the resulting impact on Soviet cultural diplomacy and commemoration, across the stated timespan of the book, 1918 to 1990. In particular, there is no sustained or threaded assessment of the effect of Stalinism on international ambitions and/or the commemorative narrative. While individual chapters reference Stalin and Stalinism, the volume tends to move forward with an assumed knowledge of Stalinist inflections and adaptations. Stalinism as an influence is thus asserted, not assessed. Admittedly, it is not easy to present a cohesive assessment across a multi-authored volume such as this, but this is one area where the reader might be left wanting a bit more insight.

Regardless, this volume must be considered as an important work that furthers our understanding of October commemoration, treating the narration of 7 November as an on-going project of self-definition with transnational and international considerations at the core. It pushes forth transnational readings of Soviet and socialist history.