Role of Soviets in great November Revolution and task of forming people's struggle committees

"The October Revolution differs from these revolutions in principle. Its aim is not to replace one form of exploitation by another form of exploitation, one group of exploiters by another group of exploiters, but to abolish all exploitation of man by man, to abolish all groups of exploiters, to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat, to establish the power of the most revolutionary class of all the oppressed classes that have ever existed, to organize a new, classless, socialist society", (**The International Character of the October Revolution**) observed great Stalin, the worthy student and continuer of great Lenin, the architect of the revolution. It shook the entire world, and the hitherto oppressed workers and peasants found a new socialist system where exploitation of man by man had been given a decent burial. Before 1917, critics dismissed great Marx's ideas of a classless, worker-led society as an impossible dream, a utopia. But accomplishment of November Revolution under the leadership of great Lenin was a turning point that shifted Marxism from a theoretical critique of capitalism into a real-world state system and proved its scientific basis.



Comrade Provash Ghosh, our beloved General Secretary, offering red salute to great Lenin in Kolkata, on 7 November commemorating 109th anniversary of historic November Revolution.

What were Soviets

The new state was called Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Mark the word 'Soviet'. What was Soviet? The word "soviet" originates from the Russian word S*ovet*, which simply means "council" or "advice". But in terms of strategy adopted to accomplish anti-capitalist socialist revolution, a soviet refers to an elected governing council of workers, soldiers, and peasants. These grassroots bodies eventually formed the constitutional building blocks of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). It bears recall that after boldly holding the fort for 72 days from 18 March to 28 May 1871, the Paris Commune, the first attempt of the working class to capture power, was overrun by the enemy force. The Commune ceased to exist, but the spirit did not. As stated by great Marx: "*Working men's Paris, with its Commune, will be forever celebrated*

as the glorious harbinger of a new society." **(The Civil War in France)** Why the Commune failed? Answer was provided by both Marx and Engels: "*One thing especially was proved by the Commune*, *viz*., *that 'the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery* and *wield it for its own purposes*." **(Preface to the new German edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, on 24 June 1872)**

Great Lenin took due cognition of this important observation and understood that to accomplish revolution, it was essential to constitute bodies of people's political power which would act as instruments of struggle. He explained : *"The Soviets are a new state apparatus, which, in the first place, provides an armed force of workers and peasants; and this force is not divorced from the people, as was the old standing army, but is most closely bound up with the people. From the military standpoint, this force is incomparably more powerful than previous forces; from the revolutionary standpoint, it cannot be replaced by anything else. Secondly, this apparatus provides a bond with the masses, with the majority of the people, so intimate, so indissoluble, so readily controllable and renewable, that there was nothing even remotely like it in the previous state apparatus. Thirdly, this apparatus, by virtue of the fact that its personnel is elected and subject to recall at the will of the people without any bureaucratic formalities, is far more democratic than any previous apparatus. Fourthly, it provides a close contact with the most diverse professions, thus facilitating the adoption of the most varied and most profound reforms without bureaucracy. Fifthly, it provides a form of organization of the vanguard, i.e., of the most politically conscious, most energetic and most progressive section of the oppressed classes, the workers and peasants, and thus constitutes an apparatus by means of which the vanguard of the oppressed classes can elevate, train, educate, and lead the entire vast mass of these classes, which has hitherto stood quite remote from political life, from history. Sixthly, it makes it possible to combine the advantages of parliamentarism with the advantages of immediate and direct democracy, i.e., to unite in the persons of the elected representatives of the people both legislative and executive functions. Compared with bourgeois parliamentarism, this represents an advance in the development of democracy which is of world-wide historic significance. ... Had not the creative spirit of the revolutionary classes of the people given rise to the Soviets, the proletarian revolution in Russia would be a hopeless affair; for the proletariat undoubtedly could not retain power with the old state apparatus, and it is impossible to create a new apparatus immediately."* (**Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power? CW Vol 26)**

Origin of Soviets

The first Soviet emerged in Ivanovo-Voznesensk, the most important center of the Russian textile industry. The workers there went into a strike which lasted from the end of May to the beginning of August 1905. About 70,000 workers, among them many women, took part in the strike. It was led by the Bolshevik Northern Committee. Socialist ideas exercised a powerful influence here. This working class movement was distinguished by one feature in particular: the leadership role was not exercised by outside agitators or intellectuals, as so often was the case elsewhere, but by elements from within the working class masses of the city itself. The masses, however, were generally uneducated, as was often the case in this industry where working conditions were worse. In order to crush the strike, the Tsarist authorities ordered the troops to disperse the workers and to fire upon them. Several scores of workers were killed and several hundred

wounded. A state of emergency was proclaimed in the city. But the workers remained firm and would not return to work. They and their families starved but would not surrender. Only after being extremely exhausted, they were compelled to return to work. The strike steeled the workers. It was an example of the courage, staunchness, endurance and solidarity of the working class and a real political education for the workers of Ivanovo-Voznesensk.

On 13 May, an Assembly of strikers attended by 30,000 workers elected a Council or Soviet composed of 110 delegates, who were responsible for carrying out negotiations with the employers and the authorities in the name of all and to assume leadership of the strike. This Committee was not just an ordinary strike committee, by virtue of both the way it was elected as well as its character. From the very first moment of its existence the Soviet established close links with the Russian Social Democratic Party (RSDLP), in which then worked the future Bolsheviks at that time. In 1905 Saint Petersburg was the center of all the events, and in the capital itself, the Soviet was the center of the entire movement, and this was so. The Moscow Soviet was formed quite late during the movement, later even than some of the provincial Soviets.

The 1905 revolution

It warrants a brief recap of the 1905 failed revolution to understand the importance of the soviets as they arose during the course of that revolution. In the period 1901-04, with the growth of the revolutionary working-class movement, the Marxist Social-Democratic organizations in Russia grew and gained strength. In the stubborn struggle over principles, waged against the "Economists," the revolutionary line of Lenin's *Iskra* gained the victory, and the ideological confusion and "amateurish methods of work" were overcome. In the struggle waged at the Second Congress of the RSDLP there emerged two groups —the Bolshevik group and the Menshevik group.

The Mensheviks drew closer to the "Economists" and took their place within the Party. The Mensheviks were opposed to a militant revolutionary party of the type advocated by Lenin. Instead, they wanted a loose, unorganized *khvostist* party ("Khvostism" translated as "Tailism" from the Russian word *õâîñò*, meaning tail is a derogatory Marxist political term coined by Lenin). They worked to split the ranks of the Party. With Plekhanov's (who popularized Marxist ideas in Russia but later deviated from Marxism) help, they seized the Central Committee of RSDLP and used the central organs like Iskra for their own purposes—to split the Party. Seeing that the Mensheviks were threatening a split, the Bolsheviks adopted measures to curb the splitters. They mustered the local organizations to back the convocation of a Third Congress.

In the meantime, the humiliating defeat of Tsarist troops in the battle with Japan, considerably damaged Russian national pride and exposed the Tsarist regime's incompetence. At the same time, severe land shortages for peasants and brutal working conditions for industrial workers created widespread desperation. Lack of civil liberties, free speech, and repression of the autocratic rule alienated the middle and working classes from the Tsarist regime. Sensing the mounting discontent among the workers, the Tsarist regime cunningly planted a priest named Father Georgy Gapon to prevail upon the agitated workers and convince them to place their demands before the Tsar, who, Gapon assured, would accept all of them. The workers were swayed by his words and on 22 January 1905, Gapon led a peaceful march of over 100,000 workers toward the Winter Palace

in St. Petersburg to deliver a petition to the Tsar. But Knowing full well that Gapon might mislead the workers, Lenin asked the Bolsheviks to join the rally since mases were involved in it and try to orient the movement along right direction as far as possible. Proving Gapon a lier, the Tsarist troops opened fire on the unarmed crowd, killing around 1,000 people and grievously injuring many more. The Day is known in history as bloody Sunday. This massacre shattered people's myth that Tsar was their protector and triggered massive general strikes involving millions of urban workers across industrial centers. Peasants staged land seizures and burned manors, while military mutinies broke out—most famously the mutiny aboard the battleship *Potemkin*. At that point of time, workers formed revolutionary councils known as *Soviets* to coordinate strikes. There were armed street battles in Moscow but those were eventually crushed by Tsarist military and police forces. Facing the collapse of civil order, Tsar Nicholas II issued the October Manifesto in autumn 1905, promising basic civil liberties, freedom of speech, and the creation of an elected legislative assembly called the State Duma.

The 1905 Russian Revolution failed to overthrow Tsar Nicholas II because the regime retained the loyalty of the armed forces, made strategic political concessions that divided the opposition, and faced disunity and poor organization among revolutionary groups. Lenin emphasized that the combination of urban proletarian mass strikes and rural peasant land movements was powerful, yet it lacked the sustained, unified tactical coordination needed to deliver a fatal blow to the regime. He also criticized liberal and bourgeois elements for being half-hearted, fearing true mass victory, and rushing to compromise with the Tsar through premature concessions like the October Manifesto rather than pushing for a democratic republic.

Creation of Soviets

Though the revolution failed, the Russian people found spontaneous emergence of a new instrument to exercise their political power i.e. the Soviets. The revolutionary creative initiative of the working-class masses forged the Soviets of Workers' Deputies as a new and powerful weapon. So, Soviets were no more strike committees but a new revolutionary form of the creative initiative of the people. They were a manifestation of the independent action of the people who were rising to fight Tsardom. The Bolsheviks regarded the Soviets as the embryo of revolutionary power.

Thus, it is clear that the Soviets did not arise all at once, with the relatively well defined forms that they were to assume in October of 1905, when the movement reached its peak, but were the result of the transformation of distinct combat organizations created in the heat of the struggle.

Soviets could not discharge the desired role in 1905 revolution

The St. Petersburg Soviet of Workers' Deputies, being the Soviet of the most important industrial and revolutionary centre of Russia, the capital of the Tsarist empire, ought to have played a decisive role in the Revolution of 1905. However, it did not perform its task, owing to its compromising Menshevik leadership. As we know, Lenin had not yet arrived in St. Petersburg; he was still abroad. The Mensheviks took advantage of Lenin's absence to make their way into the St. Petersburg Soviet and to seize hold of its leadership. They managed to turn the St. Petersburg Soviet against the policy of an uprising. Instead of bringing the soldiers into close contact with the Soviet and linking them up with the common struggle, they demanded that the soldiers be withdrawn from St. Petersburg. The St. Petersburg Soviet, instead of arming the workers and

preparing them for an uprising, just marked time and was against preparations for an uprising at that point of time. The Bolsheviks, without denying the importance of the Soviets as organizations of mass representation, pointed out that, in the process of the struggle, from simple strike committees they would be transformed into "organs of the general revolutionary struggle" and that they were the "embryo of revolutionary power".

It goes without saying that without the Soviets, the 1905 revolution would have escaped the control of the proletariat, since, prior to their creation, the movement was led by distinctly bourgeois organizations, which hijacked the movement, depriving the proletariat of hegemony and subordinating it to the leadership of the liberal bourgeoisie.

The Revolution of 1905 was defeated, but the working class never gave up for even one moment its hope for victory. The attempted insurrection of 1905 was only a test run for the Revolution of 1917. Lenin attributed immense importance to 1905 revolt. He considered it necessary for the Bolsheviks to assume the leadership of this movement and to link it up with the movement of the workers, peasants and the local garrisons in preparation for successful proletarian revolution in in October (November) 1917.

Historic role of the Soviets in Russian revolution

Lenin, on his arrival to Russia, immediately understood the true nature of the events. Upon receiving news of the uprising in Petrograd, and the establishment of the Provisional Government headed by Kerensky, the leader of the socialist revolutionary party, he wrote: "… *this government is not a fortuitous assemblage of persons. They are representatives of the new class that has risen to political power in Russia, the class of capitalist land lords and bourgeoisie which has long been ruling our country economically, and which during the Revolution of 1905–07, the counter-revolutionary period of 1907–14, and finally—and with especial rapidity—the war period of 1914–17, was quick to organize itself politically, taking over control of the local government bodies, public education, congresses of various types, the Duma, the war industries committees, etc. This new class was already "almost completely" in power by 1917, and therefore it needed only the first blows to bring tsarism to the ground and clear the way for the bourgeoisie. …We have obtained a "coalition", a "national" (i.e., adapted for carrying on the imperialist slaughter and for fooling the people) "parliamentary" government. Side by side with this government—which …is but the agent of the billion-dollar "firm" "England and France"—there has arisen the chief, unofficial, as yet undeveloped and comparatively weak workers' government, which expresses the interests of the proletariat and of the entire poor section of the urban and rural population. This is the Soviet of Workers' Deputies in Petrograd…."* **["Letters from Afar. First Letter". March 1917. CW Vol. 23]** He further clarified that "*State power in Russia has passed into the hands of a new class, namely, the bourgeoisie and landowners who had become bourgeois. To this extent the bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia is completed."* (**The Task of the proletariat in our revolution—CW Vol 24**) The first Provisional Government consisted of representatives of the bourgeoisie, i.e., the capitalists, who were joined by the party of the landowners, The "Cadet" Party, and was an important constituent of the bourgeois government. With the bourgeoisie assuming state power, the task of the oppressed Russian people was then to overthrow the bourgeoisie from state power by accomplishing anti-capitalist socialist revolution.

As a prelude to that, Lenin raised a demand for a dual power in April 1917. In his words: *"What is this dual power? Alongside the Provisional Government, the government of bourgeoisie, another government has arisen, so far weak and incipient, but undoubtedly a government that actually exists and is growing—the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies… What is the class composition of this other government? It consists of the proletariat and the peasants (in soldiers' uniforms). What is the political nature of this government? It is a revolutionary dictatorship, i.e., a power directly based on revolutionary seizure, on the direct initiative of the people from below, and not on a law enacted by a centralized an entirely different kind of power from the one that generally exists in the parliamentary bourgeois-democratic republics…. This, and this alone , constitutes the essence of the Paris Commune as a special type of state"* **(A Dual Power CW Vol. 24)** He vehemently criticized the Mensheviks for reusing ***"****to recognize the obvious truth that in as much as these Soviets exist, in as much as they are a power, we have in Russia a state of the type of the Paris Commune."* **(ibid)** He further clarified that these petty-bourgeois forces were *"befogging them (the workers); instead of dispelling petty-bourgeois illusions, they are instilling them; instead of freeing the people from bourgeois influence, they are strengthening that influence."* **(ibid)**

Lenin had taught that *"the basic question of every revolution is that of state power".* **(The lessons of revolution CW Vol 25).** So, to denote the stage of revolution in Russia, Lenin made it clear that the provisional Kerensky government representing the Russian bourgeoisie who had assumed the state power in February 1917, *"should be overthrown, for it is an oligarchic, bourgeois, and not a people's government.."* (ibid) The Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries had compromised with the capitalists in one way or another at every stage of the Russian revolution. So, he pointed out that the Soviets, where the Mensheviks and other reactionary as well as vacillating forces were then majority and helping the provisional government to be in power by a direct and indirect, a formal and actual agreement. To transform the Soviets into bodies of political power of the class-conscious workers, he emphasized that the Bolsheviks must launch an intense ideological struggle within the Soviets to isolate the Mensheviks and other compromising forces and win the majority to their side. Lenin could understand that unless people's political power was organized through Soviets, only the workers of the Bolshevik Party cannot accomplish revolution.

As advised by Lenin, the Bolsheviks succeeded to increase their influence within the Soviets step by step and expose the treacherous role of the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries. One after another, the Soviets fell into the hands of the Bolsheviks. There ensued a period of revival of the Soviets, of a change in their composition, their *bolshevization*. Factories, mills and military units held new elections and sent representatives of the Bolshevik Party in place of Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries to the Soviets. This magnificent result was obtained by correct application of a revolutionary tactics. The crowning achievement of this patient labour was the conquest of the majority in the Petrograd Soviet. This achievement was of decisive importance for the future of the Revolution.

Way to accomplish proletarian revolution

From then on, the revolutionary movement proceeded at a faster pace. The Provisional Government was losing all its points of support. The mass movement became irresistible. The peasants were demanding the land, without any more delays and postponements. Everyone was calling for peace and the formation of a truly popular Government. Such a Government could only be a Soviet Government. At that point of time, Lenin raised the slogan— "*All Power to the Soviets*". Finally, after 10 days of armed battle, the first proletarian revolution was accomplished on 17 November 1917.

The All-Russian Congress of Workers, Peasants, Red Army Soldiers and Cossacks is constituted on the basis of the following rules of representation: a) from the urban Soviets, on the basis of one deputy for every 25,000 voters; b) from the provincial Congresses, on the basis of one deputy for every 1,25,000 inhabitants. The Congress of the Soviets of the USSR was constituted in accordance with the same rules as the All-Russian Congress. The Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets formed the first Soviet Government—the Council of People's Commissars—which consisted entirely of Bolsheviks. Lenin was elected Chairman of the first Council of People's Commissars.

Imperativeness of the Soviets in Russian revolution

"The October Revolution cannot be regarded merely as a revolution 'within national bounds.' It is, primarily, a revolution of an international, world order, for it signifies a radical turn in the world history of mankind, a turn from the old, capitalist world to the new, socialist world", said great Stalin. **(International character of October Revolution)** The new government, at first called the Russian Soviet Socialist Federated Republic, was later named the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The Soviet Constitution establishes that, *"All power in the USSR belongs to the working people of town and country as represented by the Soviets of Working People's Deputies,"* the advanced proletarian forces of the world from the outset rallied effectively in defense of the Soviet Union. They realized that the future of world democracy and peace were tied up with the growth and development USSR. The attitude assumed towards the Soviet Union was to be regarded as the supreme measure of proletarian internationalism. By claiming that governing legitimacy belonged exclusively to the mass democratic councils of workers and soldiers rather than bourgeois elites, the soviets provided the ideological justification to overthrow the state. Thus, the Soviets played a crucial, if not key, role in achieving the revolution.

Comrade Shibdas Ghosh's emphasis on developing People's Committees

Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, founder General Secretary of the SUCI(C), an outstanding Marxist thinker of the era and a worthy continuer of Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin-Mao Zedong, had categorically pointed out that *"In society, out of the discontentment of the workers and peasants revolutionary tide will surge forth in waves after waves; the contradictions and conflicts brewing inside the society will burst forth again and again seeking fundamental change of the existing social order and will fervently appeal to human conscience and consciousness seeking revolution. But there will be no revolution. Again and again, revolutionary tide will recede and go astray; time and again reaction will take upper hand. Revolution will have to wait till a*

revolutionary party emerges with necessary strength to lead it…." **(Tribute to a Revolutionary Character SW Vol. 3)** Drawing necessary lessons from the November revolution, he said: *''Those with even a smattering of knowledge and study can see for themselves, if they go through Lenin's writings, in page after page in what strong language did he criticize the Mensheviks, the socialist revolutionaries, even while the Bolsheviks led by him were conducting struggle jointly with them in the Soviets! But simultaneously, Lenin conducted struggle jointly from inside the Soviets, as per the common united programme, against the Tzar, against the Kerensky government."* **(Mass Movement in India and Tasks of the Youth, CW Vol III)**

He further said:*''...you have to understand that in order to change this capitalist social structure, you will have to build up and develop people's struggle committees from the village up to the town and city levels—people's committees which will have to ultimately confront the state power through struggles."* **(Mass Movement in India and Tasks of the Youth, CW Vol III)** *"…if the political power of the people cannot be developed as being conducive to revolution, revolution can never be brought about by a handful of party workers alone, no matter how honest and sincere they may be. And it also has to be borne in mind that …to give birth to the political power of the people, right from the grassroots level up to the highest level, comprising the forces of students, youth and the masses, made politically conscious and equipped for revolution through arduous political battles based on class struggle…"* **(Problems of Mass Movements in India, CW Vol. III)** *"the political power of the people conducive to revolution, the instruments of struggle of the toiling people on the model of Soviets have not been built up through all these mass movements here. So, while conducting movements, these are matters to be looked into very seriously. It is imperative to pay attention to whether the base political line of the movement is correct, that is, whether it contains the strategy and tactics of the anti-capitalist socialist revolution. Thus, the political power of the people conducive to revolution, the instruments of struggle of the toiling people on the model of Soviets have not been built up through all these mass movements here. So, while conducting movements, these are matters to be looked into very seriously. It is imperative to pay attention to whether the base political line of the movement is correct, that is, whether it contains the strategy and tactics of the anti-capitalist socialist revolution. And who are those who in reality create hindrance to the formation of these people's struggle committees under various pretexts, and in its stead want to mislead the people by passing off the expansion of the party's organizational strength and the tightening grip of the party over the people as the growth of the people's political power."* **(Problems of Mass Movements in India, CW Vol. III)**

Closing remarks

It can thus be seen that Comrade Shibdas Ghosh repeatedly preached for development of *people's committees* as bodies of people's political power while developing class and mass struggles on a sustained basis. This lesson is not just for India but for every country where genuine communists longing for revolution treading correct path. On the occasion of 109th anniversary of Great November Revolution, this is one of the fundamental tasks that enjoin all genuine revolutionaries.