

and 100 *druzhiniky*. Around ten p.m. Dubasov's dragoons and gendarmes surrounded the building and demanded that the people inside surrender their weapons. If they complied within two hours, the officer in charge promised, the *druzhiniky* would be permitted to leave unharmed.

Meanwhile, reinforcements and artillery were dispatched to the site, and when the *druzhiniky* refused to comply with the order, the Fiedler Academy was assaulted with artillery. Muscovites saw this action as a scandalous, indeed excessive use of force in a municipal conflict. Faced with artillery fire, the *druzhiniky*, students, and railwaymen offered to surrender, but their offer was answered with further attacks. Finally the officers agreed to take the *druzhiniky* into custody, again assuring them that they would not be harmed, but as soon as the militiamen emerged from the building, troops brutally attacked them with sabers, to the outrage of the many ordinary citizens who were observing the whole affair from the sidelines. About seven students were killed, twenty more were wounded, and about 100 were jailed. Word of the government's treachery and brutality spread all over the city, and in retribution, on the evening of 10 December, SRs bombed the headquarters of the Moscow Security Police.

Finally the police and troops seemed to lose control over their behavior. The morning after the killings at the Fiedler Academy, huge protesting crowds filled the boulevards and streets of Moscow—to which the military responded by raking the streets with artillery fire. This event, too, was seen as an unprecedented action in a civil disorder that so infuriated Muscovites that many of them erected barricades at key intersections of the old capital. No class identities are discernible among these angry insurgents: the insurrection had widespread support not only among the workers but all sections of the middle and well-to-do classes, who were shocked by the needless brutality of the troops. As Laura Engelstein observes, '*Druzinniki*, concierges, workers, students, upper-class women, and even "gentlemen in beaver collars" gathered fruit stands, telephone poles, iron house gates, and other loose objects [to build barricades], which they piled across the streets every hundred feet or so.'<sup>9</sup> In the Zamoskvorech'e district, behind the Kremlin, the barricade building took on a typically festive atmosphere. Writing later about the events of 9 December, the Bolshevik A.V. Sokolov observed:

The streets of Zamoskvorech'e had an excited, holiday air; crowds of people gathered on street corners in an attitude of expectation. Here and there they built barricades, less from considerations of strategy than from the need to find some occupation. The builders were mainly working-class youths, joined by an occasional solid citizen—artisans and shopkeepers could be seen dragging broken benches, two-legged stools, and other superfluous

household objects onto the altar of revolution. Cossacks were concentrated in the center of the city and did not appear. Police uniforms vanished. Simonovo [a district adjacent to Zamoskvorech'e] became something of an autonomous republic: the police evaporated, as they did everywhere else, and full power fell into the hands of the local soviet delegates.<sup>10</sup>

The Presnia district of Moscow, meanwhile, became a separate insurrectionary enclave. Some of the city's most important textile factories—and most resolute workers—were located in the area. On 10 December an unknown participant reported:

The streets overflowed with people. Many were just curious bystanders. But the majority of residents helped put up barricades. Old women, for example, dragged sleds and bed frames; concierges carried gates and wood. Throughout Presnia resounded the rumble and crash of telegraph poles and street lamps falling to the ground, as though an entire forest were being felled. Workers tore off house gates and piled them in the streets. Occasionally house owners and concierges tried to stop them, but they retreated when threatened by *druzhinniki*.<sup>11</sup>

The local soviet had assumed full governmental powers in the Presnia district, and on 12 December *druzhiniky* took over the local police station. Thereafter, workers formed their own patrols to police the district: they conducted house-to-house searches looking for weapons and tsarist officials. A revolutionary tribunal was even established, but the sentences meted out were relatively mild.

Although workers formed its backbone, the Presnia insurgency earned almost universal respect from politically aware people in the district. Local residents offered the insurgents their restaurants and tearooms as gathering places and took over a hotel where the *druzhiniky* could sleep. A local psychiatrist gave the district soviet his clinic as a meeting place, and a humanitarian employer, N.I. Prokhorov, fed his embattled workers and provided them with meeting space. A sympathetic furniture maker, N.P. Schmidt, allowed his factory to be used as a center for the rebellion. This populist character of a seemingly socialist uprising, conducted quite publicly under red flags and banners, attests to the transclass nature of the entire insurgency.

Clearly the *druzhiniky*'s hit-and-run guerrilla street-fighting tactics gave the insurgents the initial advantage in an urban area; regular troops hunting for them often had no idea where they could be found. Small squads of four or five militiamen fired at soldiers from rooftops, windows, and building entrances and from behind trees and bushes, only to fade away when the



troops advanced upon them. Soldiers were never certain what to expect as they moved cautiously through the streets and boulevards. Troops became so jittery that they often fired on harmless individuals and groups of people—which served to turn nearly all the remaining ordinary citizens, except for staunch monarchists, against them.

As scattered army patrols approached the barricades, the *druzhiniky* would snipe at them—only to retreat just before the military could arrive and take them in force. When the troops finally did reach a barricade, they would find nothing to ‘capture’ but furniture and overturned vehicles. They would simply destroy the barricade and leave, but soon afterward the population would spontaneously rebuild them as evidence that the neighborhood or district was still in rebel hands. These tactics produced widespread disarray among the attacking soldiers. With bullets coming at them from every side, the soldiers assumed that their opponents were better armed than was actually the case. Having already been exhausted by service in the Russo-Japanese war, it is surprising that the troops did not mutiny against their officers then and there—so deeply imprinted was their obedience to state authority.

On 10 and 11 December the *druzhiniky* were still holding their own against Dubasov’s forces, so that, in Keep’s view, ‘it could truly be said that the outcome of the struggle hung in the balance.’<sup>12</sup> Had the insurgents been guided by an overall plan, Moscow might very well have fallen to them, although they could not have held the city very long without a similar victory in Petersburg or a widespread mutiny of troops (as would happen in 1917). The *druzhiniky* had no leadership to plan their moves, while Dubasov, who had sent for more troops, had only to await their arrival. The autocracy had issued orders that the insurgency should be put down mercilessly—indeed, in their readiness to shed the people’s blood, Nicholas and his ministers were of a single mind. The soldiers, whose courage was pumped up with generous quantities of vodka, were now only too ready to oblige the authorities. As Christmas, a very sentimental Russian holiday, drew closer, many insurgent workers simply left Moscow and returned to their villages to be with their families.

Dubasov now began systematically to use artillery fire against the remaining insurgents: ‘as soon as rebels fired one shot from a building,’ says Ascher, ‘artillerymen trained their guns on the building and blasted it.’<sup>13</sup> Troops now fired indiscriminately on any group of people who gathered in the streets. By 14 December many of the insurrectionaries in the city had either been arrested or fled. Finally, on 15 December the military forces that Dubasov had requested arrived: notably, 1500 troops of the elite Semenovskiy Regiment. They entered the city on the single railroad line that remained open—the Nikolaevskiy Line from Petersburg. By that time the government had already

reduced all the rebel-held areas in the city except for the proletarian Presnia district. The Semenovskiy Regiment’s commander had no compunction about using artillery against the district’s buildings. Dubasov’s troops trained sixteen artillery pieces on Presnia, and for two full days they systematically bombarded the district, firing more than 400 shells into the buildings and leaving entire sections in smoldering ruins.

The *semenovtsy* who finally entered Presnia on 16 December were ordered to treat the insurgents mercilessly. Having already been greeted by a hail of bullets from the rebels, the elite force followed their orders, with no regard to law or person. ‘Suspicious’ groups of people, whether they were combatants or not, were often shot on sight or executed after drumhead courts-martial. The insurrectionary enclave could not withstand this ruthless onslaught, and by 17 December the fighting was over. A delegation of workers approached Colonel Min, the commander of the *semenovtsy*, and accepted his order for a surrender.\* On the previous day the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks jointly decided officially to end the strike on 19 December. The cost of the uprising had been terrible by the standards of the day: according to the statistics of the Moscow Medical Union, more than 1000 people, most of them probably civilians, including 86 children, had been killed by government troops during the insurrection and the subsequent bombardment of the Presnia district. The number of wounded in this carnage will never be known, but the figure must have been enormous. Yet despite its high cost in human life and injuries, the Moscow insurrection of 1905 had a very important consequence: it severed the political alliance between the bourgeois liberals and the revolutionary workers. None of the bourgeois parties had supported the insurrection. On the contrary, they condemned it to one degree or another and, fearful of a future working-class insurrection, fled into the arms of the autocracy.

Nor did the crushing of the Moscow insurrection end Witte’s repression. To the contrary, Nicholas’s minister, who now revealed that he had a particularly cruel streak despite his reputation as a far-seeing statesman, unleashed a ‘white terror’ over the whole length of Russia. Punitive expeditions were sent out to other restless cities, towns, and peasant villages, and all suspected revolutionaries were arrested, shot by the hundreds, or sent off to Siberia in the many thousands. The repression was especially savage in the Baltic region, where the tsar’s military forces, in a veritable carnage, claimed thousands of

\* That same morning most of the *druzhiniky*, under the orders of their commander, the Bolshevik militant Z. Litvin, drifted out of the district and dispersed. Had they been caught with arms in hand, they would likely have been shot. As it was, the hundreds of casualties resulting from the invasion of the district apparently consisted of ordinary civilians who had the misfortune to be spotted in the streets by the soldiers.



lives by hanging and firing squad. Detachments of soldiers were sent along the Trans-Siberian railroad line to terrorize towns and villages that had risen against the tsar or misbehaved in ways offensive to the officers in charge. Peasants in remote parts of the empire were subjected to public beatings and their huts wantonly burned to the ground. For the rest of the winter of 1905 to 1906, the tsarist regime waged a one-sided civil war against the Russian people that did not abate until the country had been cowed into submission.

## THE SOVIETS OF 1905

The 1905 Revolution created the first soviets as institutions of proletarian self-government. The autocracy had so completely suppressed the kinds of intermediary working-class institutions familiar to Western Europe, such as trade unions and labor parties, that the Russian workers were compelled to create their own institutions *ab novo*. In Petersburg the formation of the 1905 soviet was largely forced upon the workers by a great variety of circumstances. In the absence of any trade unions to take control of the situation, the soviets arose to maintain the most basic amenities of life. Strike committees simply fused together, to feed the capital, to provide its population with means of public transportation, and to police its streets.

The Petersburg and Moscow Soviets thus became governmental centers in their own right. During the three months of its existence the Petersburg Soviet was a relatively democratic and popular body. Its deputies were elected directly by the workers in mass assemblies on shop floors, and soviet delegates were directly answerable to and recallable by the workers who elected them, especially those that existed on the district level. The district soviets approximated a direct democracy more closely than any institution aside from popular assemblies like the French sections of 1793.

Their emergence, it must be emphasized, baffled Bolshevik and Menshevik theorists—soviets were alien to the revolutionary tradition in which Marxists were schooled. Guided by Lenin, the Bolsheviks tended to think of a future 'dictatorship of the proletariat and poor peasantry' not as a confederation of proletarian democracies but as a republic, like the Jacobin republic of the French Convention. Lenin made no secret of his wish for a party-state, controlled by the Bolsheviks. Initially he seems to have accepted the soviets simply as arenas for Bolshevik propaganda, but he also expressed fears that the wide diversity of political perspectives that they could harbor might endanger his own policies. Indeed, Lenin saw any body that was not controlled by his emerging

party as a 'petty bourgeois' indulgence, even as an obstacle to a Jacobin-type centralized state. Soviets, in Lenin's view, were to be welcomed solely

for the purpose of developing the Social-Democratic movement; at the same time the Social-Democratic Party organisations must bear in mind that if Social-Democratic activities among the proletarian masses are properly, effectively and widely organised, such institutions [as soviets] may actually become superfluous.<sup>14</sup>

It should not be surprising, then, that Lenin's role in the 1905 Revolution was minimal: he had no impact on the events and seemed more an observer than a participant, addressing the Petersburg Soviet only once and then ignoring it after a visit or two.

The soviets of 1905 were equally vexing to the anarchists, since as representative institutions, however informal in character (rather than directly democratic bodies), they resembled statist institutions, the embodiments of authority and power. As for the syndicalists, the soviets had little in common with their program of workers' committees for control of production. The Mensheviks, however, welcomed the soviets, regarding them as institutions of proletarian self-government, even as quasi-legal workers' parliaments. But they were either unclear or divided about the relationship of these institutions to the bourgeois republic they professed to demand. To his credit, only Trotsky, among the major Russian Marxists, saw the importance of the soviets as political class institutions that potentially provided a revolutionary alternative to a bourgeois-democratic state, a position that Lenin did not definitively adopt until 1917.

## NOTES

1. Gerald D. Surh, *1905 in St Petersburg: Labor, Society, and Revolution* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1989), p. 279.
2. J.H.L. Keep, *The Rise of Social Democracy in Russia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 234.
3. Nicholas II to Maria Feodorovna (Oct. 19, 1905), quoted in Sidney Harcave, *The Russian Revolution of 1905* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1970), p. 190.
4. The October Manifesto is reproduced in full in *ibid.*, pp. 195–6.
5. Quoted in Surh, *1905*, p. 356.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 370.
7. V.M. Zenzinov, quoted in Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 313.



8. Quoted in Laura Engelstein, *Moscow, 1905: Working-Class Organization and Political Conflict* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1982), p. 200.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
10. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 206.
11. Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 205–6.
12. Keep, *Rise of Social Democracy in Russia*, p. 253.
13. Engelstein, *Moscow, 1905*, p. 320.
14. V.I. Lenin, 'Draft Resolution for the Fifth Congress of the R.S.D.L.P. on "Non-Party Workers' Organisations and the Anarcho-Syndicalist Trend Among the Proletariat"' (Feb. 1907), in *Collected Works* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), p. 12:143.

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## CHAPTER 42 The Crisis of Socialism

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### THE THREE DUMAS

On 23 April 1906, in keeping with his promise to provide Russia with a measure of constitutional legality, Nicholas promulgated the so-called Fundamental Laws, which supposedly established the system of rights sketched by the October Manifesto. In fact, the tsar of the realm actually violated even the mildly reformist spirit in which the Manifesto had been issued. The autocrat (a title the tsar still retained) kept all of the executive powers that he traditionally held as head of state, including control over the armed forces, the exclusive right to make war and conduct foreign policy, and the right to exercise complete authority over the dynastic succession. Significantly, his ministers were accountable only to him, not to the Duma, and he was free to veto any of the Duma's enactments, issue *ukazes* between its sessions (which had the power of law), and even dismiss the Duma as he chose.

Still hopeful for a revolutionary resurgence, all of Russia's established socialist parties—Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, and SRs—called for a boycott of the Duma elections, which were in the offing in April 1906. But the masses were eager to acquire any relaxation of tsarist absolutism, and the boycott call notwithstanding, they participated in the elections in great numbers. In the absence of substantial Left participation, the urban workers and middle classes threw their support to the liberal Kadets. In fact, to everyone's surprise, the normally conservative peasants gave their greatest support not to the Right but to the left-wing Labor Group, or *Trudoviks*. Like the working class, the peasantry no longer relied on the myth of autocratic paternalism; its vote for the *trudoviki* was a clear indication that these 'small proprietors', as Lenin disdainfully called them, were quite capable of acting in a radical manner.

The First Duma's sessions were marked by persistent demands for a constituent assembly, land reform, and expansive civil liberties. The tsar, shocked



by this turnabout, dissolved the Duma after 70-odd days. Faced with elections to the next Duma, the government did all it could to ensure that the new members would be more tractable than the previous ones, but the Second Duma was, in fact, even more obstreperous than the First, not least because this time the Social Democrats and the SRs participated in the elections and gained representation. When the Second Duma met in February 1907, it encountered a new antagonist: the prime minister, Pyotr Stolypin, an unyielding political reactionary who was intent on prosecuting the 55 Social Democratic Duma deputies for treason. To do so, however, the Duma would have had somehow to lift their parliamentary immunity, which it decidedly refused to do. Thus after three months the Second Duma also was dissolved.

An infuriated Nicholas and his ministers were now determined to formulate an electoral law that would drastically reduce peasant and working-class representation, while greatly increasing that of the landed gentry. The Third Duma, which emerged under the new law, was quite willing to accept Stolypin's restrictive policies—hence it was permitted to live out its legally authorized life span, from 1907 to 1912. Stolypin, in turn, began his own rule by making the years 1906 and 1907 into the most repressive experienced by either liberals or radicals since the bleak reign of Alexander III. He ruthlessly crushed the scattered peasant uprisings and military mutinies that followed in the wake of the 1905 uprising. The government's savage attack occurred in great part as a response to the terror that the SRs and assorted anarchist groups unleashed against all levels of governmental authority. Terrorist organizations and soloists assassinated more than 4000 people, principally police officials, gentry, government bureaucrats, overseers in factories and on estates, nobles, and high-ranking administrators. Stolypin's own summer residence was blown up, killing 32 people and wounding the prime minister's son and daughter as well as others in or near the building.

Verging on panic, Stolypin's new government declared a general state of emergency. The empire was sectioned into 82 areas, and each one was placed under special regulations that gave the authorities sweeping powers to subdue the revolutionaries and rebellious peasants. A law promulgated by the prime minister in August 1906—but never submitted to the Duma—allowed special military courts to be established granting officials without any juridical training the authority summarily to try alleged rebels and even hang them. An official could convene such a court 24 hours after an act of terrorism was committed; nor did its deliberations have to last more than 48 hours. Once the accused was found guilty, the sentence—usually death—was carried out immediately. At least a thousand people were executed by these kangaroo courts; the nooses that hanged the victims were grimly called 'Stolypin's neckties'. Known or

suspected Social Democrats and SRs were simply rounded up *en masse* and imprisoned or exiled to Siberia.

So effective was Stolypin's repression that revolutionaries fled to the West in large numbers, including the entire Central Committee of the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries. Groups of soldiers and rightist freebooters, almost certainly subsidized by landlords, roamed the countryside, razing entire villages and hanging or shooting suspected as well as known peasant rebels who were suspected of attacking manors and expropriating land in 1905. Pogroms were waged against defenseless Jews throughout the country until world public opinion, shocked by the massacres, obliged Nicholas to rein in his official and unofficial ruffians.

What remained of the revolutionary movement of 1905 was pulverized. The once-sizable Social Democratic organizations were reduced to small, scattered, and forlorn groups. Their leaders who had not been arrested were obliged to seek refuge in Europe: Lenin resumed his peripatetic exile, mainly in Geneva, Paris, Cracow and finally Zurich. Martov encountered his erstwhile friend in London, Paris and Zimmerwald (in Switzerland), while Trotsky drifted through Berlin and Vienna and, after the outbreak of the world war, crossed the Atlantic to live briefly in New York City.

But Stolypin was too shrewd to resort to brute force alone. To give the monarchy with a social base, he provided peasants with the means to break away from the supposed tyranny of the paternalistic village and consolidate their land allotments into compact farmsteads—in short, economically viable petty-bourgeois enterprises. Peasants, Stolypin hoped, would eagerly embrace individual proprietorship and gratefully support the monarchy. New 'strong and sober' property-owners, the government anticipated, would constitute a base upon which tsardom could rest and re-create the Russian peasantry into a reactionary force comparable to the French peasantry.

The Bolsheviks, especially Lenin, saw Stolypin's policy to break up the village commune as a threat to their hopes for an imminent revolutionary upsurge and a step toward Russia's modernization—which, according to Marxist precept, they should have welcomed. Stolypin's policies, in the event, were only partly successful. Although the government's Land Bank issued loans for private proprietorship and tried to solve the burdensome problems of strip farming, most peasants in the central provinces of European Russia (where the communal system embraced nearly all of the villagers) resisted Stolypin's policy outright or accepted it with considerable reluctance. In all, between 1906 and 1914 only about one in five peasant households—farming only 15 per cent of the land—actually withdrew from the *obshchina* or filed a petition to do so. Many households that chose to privatize did so in order to sell their already small and dwindling allotment, usually with a view to leaving



the village and finding permanent work in a city. To be sure, a number of peasants, the so-called *kulaks* (fists), who already owned considerable tracts, increased their holdings and became successful farmers. But they were thoroughly detested by the mass of peasantry, who found the *obshchina* a major source of stability and support. Stolypin did not live to see the failure of his agrarian reform policy: in September 1911 he was assassinated by SR terrorists.

Before his death, however, the old reactionary had loosened his grip on the country and cautiously allowed a number of political reforms. A year after his assassination the regime he had created used the occasion of the 300th anniversary of the Romanov dynasty to grant a general amnesty to political offenders in prison or in exile within the country. Martov and Fyodor Dan, among the Mensheviks, and Lev Kamenev, among the Bolsheviks, were permitted to return to Russia. Lenin might have done so too, had he so chosen, but always prudent and aware that the government regarded him as especially dangerous, he remained in foreign exile. Trotsky, as a 'criminal' fugitive from internal exile, was not eligible for the amnesty.

## SOCIAL DEMOCRACY AFTER 1905

The 1905 Revolution had temporarily harmonized relations between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks—both factions alike had been swept up by the general strikes and the Moscow insurrection. The positive experience with the soviets had lessened the Bolsheviks' mistrust of mass non-party organizations, upon which the Mensheviks placed a high premium; the Mensheviks, in turn, gained greater respect for the Bolsheviks' capacity to prepare and organize an insurrection. The two factions also began to converge in their more positive attitude toward the soviets. After a Fourth (Unification) Congress in Stockholm in 1906 it seemed that the two groups would come together to form a single organization with a common program.

Lenin's recurring mistrust of the Mensheviks, however, now put him at odds with his own Bolshevik followers, but he reluctantly yielded to their collaborative mood. The marriage was ostensibly finalized at the Fifth Congress of the RSDWP, held in London in April and May 1907. At this congress Bolsheviks and Mensheviks agreed on the details of how to work as a single organization, leading Lenin and his dwindling ranks of followers warily to share places with the Mensheviks on the party's central committee and the editorial board of its newspaper, *Sotsial-Demokrat*.

Lenin, however, was not one to deceive himself that he could remain for

long in the same party with a faction that sought to achieve a working accommodation with the 'bourgeois democratic' liberals, and there is reason to suspect that after 1903 he had formed a secret Bolshevik 'center' of highly committed supporters, which essentially functioned as a *sub rosa* revolutionary central committee for his faction even after the Fifth Congress. His faction remained intact, and he often appropriated financial bequests that had been made to the party as a whole for his own press and organization. Nor did he hesitate to resort to robberies ('expropriations', or 'exes', as they were called) to replenish his faction's funds, despite party policy that condemned them as morally and psychologically reprehensible.

The surface harmony between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks continued up to the end of 1910, when it began to disintegrate and finally collapsed. The Bolsheviks were more resolved than ever to build a highly centralized party composed of an elite of professional revolutionaries. Indeed, Lenin relished the accusation that he was a modern 'Jacobin', and especially after 1905, he was convinced, as he had every reason to be, that the liberal bourgeoisie could not be trusted to make a democratic revolution or any significant social change without compromising with the tsarist order. Accordingly, the proletariat and the landless peasantry would be obliged jointly to establish their own revolutionary 'dictatorship of the proletariat and poor peasantry'. The Bolsheviks, in effect, were prepared to form a revolutionary coalition government with revolutionary workers' and peasants' parties alone—not with the liberals—with the goal of completing the 'bourgeois democratic' revolution on terms most advantageous to the working classes. Exactly what form such a revolutionary democracy would take was by no means clear in Lenin's mind. In some of his writings he seems to have been inspired by a Jacobin-type republic as in 1793 or a 'Commune-state', as he confusedly called it, such as the Parisians had tried to establish in 1871.

The Mensheviks, in turn, had been shaken, during the Moscow insurrection, to find their behavior converging with that of the Bolsheviks; they had not expected to find themselves frightening the so-called 'democratic' bourgeoisie. As Bertram D. Wolfe so astutely observed, they experienced a 'crisis of inner remorse' and emphatically resolved never to repeat this mistake:

So deeply did [the Mensheviks] repent now of their ideological sins, committed when the revolutionary tide had swept them off their feet, that henceforth [they] were to become passionate pedants in their insistence that the working class must thrust the power into the hands of the bourgeoisie, though the latter was losing its appetite for rule without the security of a Tsar.<sup>1</sup>



There are strong reasons to believe that the Mensheviks, in fact, regarded the failure of the 1905 Revolution as the price that Russia had paid for even demanding the eight-hour day. Renewed in their commitment to the formation of a European-type mass working-class party whose rules for membership were relatively lax, they reaffirmed their belief that after a revolution the Russian working class would have to defer to the bourgeoisie and allow it to develop a Western-style industrial economy and a parliamentary democracy in Russia. Only at some distant time in the future, they contended, would it be meaningful for the proletariat to establish a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' (an expression that was plainly distasteful to their liberal sensibilities), albeit one that was highly democratic and that would embrace the vast majority of the working population.

Despite a barrage of criticism, Lenin meant to keep Russian Social Democracy a revolutionary movement and preserve the party's integrity and self-definition as a consistently anti-capitalist force. The Mensheviks, by contrast, were enamored by notions of a mass Western-type organization, a two-stage revolution that first gave power to the liberals, and then sought to throw open the doors of the RSDWP to anyone who agreed with its minimum program. Lenin, by contrast, regarded such an approach as an odious subversion of the party's revolutionary and socialist identity. His refusal to make compromises on these issues exposed him to charges of 'sectarianism', 'dogmatism', and a 'dictatorial' pursuit of 'personal aggrandizement'.

Finally in the summer of 1912 an impatient Lenin assembled his available supporters for a conference in Prague and, with the hesitant aid of Sergo Ordzhonikidze, a hard-fisted Georgian activist, moved toward the formation of a separate Russian socialist party. Lenin persuaded the conference, which had no more than twenty participants (of whom two were stray Mensheviks!) to regard itself as a full party 'congress', and it voted to designate itself as the sole Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party, essentially expelling all opponents of Lenin's basic views. No one else in Russian Social Democracy but Lenin would have taken such a daring step. All Mensheviks and Bolsheviks who were eager to achieve party unity (whom Lenin designated as 'liquidators') were simply placed outside the pale of the organization. The 'congress' elected a new central committee for the new party. Its central committee was divided into two bureaus—a Foreign Bureau, consisting of Lenin and his new young associate Gregory Zinoviev, and a Russian Bureau, which included a large, ever-changing group that, for a time, exercised nominal control over the party's affairs.

After considerable infighting over whether to participate in Duma elections, Lenin, who had doubted the boycott policy of 1906, succeeded in convincing his faction to participate in all Duma contests. With a handful of Bolshevik

deputies in the Duma and a legal, albeit heavily censored newspaper, *Pravda* (Truth), the Bolsheviks began to grow with extraordinary rapidity until they became a major working-class party. Their membership numbered in the thousands, with many supporters in Russia's industrial cities, particularly St Petersburg and Moscow. In 1912 *Pravda* was read by more than 60,000 workers, exceeding the circulation of the Menshevik organ *Luch* (Light Ray) by some 10,000 readers. The Bolsheviks managed to acquire leading roles in most of the legal trade unions and the workers' committees that administered the newly formed and important state insurance system. Notwithstanding many myths about the diminutive size of the Bolshevik Party, on the eve of the world war, it was probably the largest workers' party in Russia.

By no means, however, did Lenin control the new party. Most of the central committee members, although nominally Bolsheviks, were weary of Lenin's fractious behavior and frequently challenged his divisiveness. He was frequently reprovved for his excessive attacks on the Mensheviks and blocked from publishing many of his articles in the party's new organ, which first appeared legally in Russia in April 1912. The six Bolshevik Duma deputies acted very much on their own, at times in concert with the seven Menshevik deputies, much to Lenin's chagrin.

Not only were the Bolsheviks growing steadily, but the Russian proletariat itself was growing numerically and becoming increasingly rebellious. In the first six months of 1914, political strikes brought more workers into the streets than had participated in all the strikes in 1905. Two weeks before war erupted, a general strike, led primarily by Bolshevik worker-militants, gave rise to violent clashes with police that went on for well over a week. According to Leopold Haimson's vivid account:

Many thousands of workers . . . clashed with the police—at times fighting them with clubs or hailing them with rocks from behind improvised barricades. Women and children had joined in building these barricades—out of telephone and telegraph poles, overturned wagons, boxes, and armoires. No sooner was a demonstration dispersed, or a barricade destroyed, than the workers, after evacuating their wounded, would regroup, and clashes would start all over again. Whole districts were without light, their gas and kerosene lamps having been destroyed.<sup>2</sup>

On 1 August 1914, four days after this strike was quelled, Russia went to war with Germany. Almost immediately, a huge wave of nationalistic chauvinism abruptly ended the economic, social, and political crisis that had been spreading over many parts of the empire.



## WAR AND THE COLLAPSE OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

As we have seen, the Second International had discussed the prospect of a general European war at several of its conferences before 1914.<sup>3</sup> But how to respond? Proposals to stage a general strike of the European proletariat had been raised as early as the International's Congress at Zurich in 1893, and again at Paris in 1900, and still again at Amsterdam in 1904. Despite thundering rhetoric against the prospect of a world conflict, however, none of these congresses committed its member parties to an unequivocal agreement to strike against the looming conflict.

At the International's Stuttgart Congress of 1907, Jean Jaurès, Edouard Vaillant and Gustave Hervé presented resolutions that called for general strikes and insurrections against an outbreak of war, but the 'Resolution on War and Militarism' that the Congress actually passed proposed nothing concrete. Its most important paragraph, in fact, was merely a tactical caveat: 'The International is not able to determine in rigid forms the anti-militarist actions of the working class. These naturally vary for different countries for different circumstances of time and place.'<sup>4</sup> Thus the Congress essentially stipulated what the International could not do rather than what it could do to try to prevent a war.

By the summer of 1914, however, a decision on concrete common action could no longer be deferred. On 28 June Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, was assassinated during a visit to Sarajevo by a Serbian nationalist. A month later, on 28 July, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia and a day later bombarded her capital. With dizzying rapidity the situation careened toward a general European conflict. On 30 July, Russia ordered a general mobilization of her vast reserves of peasant-soldiers. In Germany, Kaiser Wilhelm sent an ultimatum to the tsar demanding the demobilization of Russian troops within twelve hours. But the tsar rapidly continued mobilizing his armies, and on 1 August Germany declared war on Russia, followed on 3 August by a declaration of war on France. On the same day the Kaiser sent an ultimatum to the Belgians, demanding the right of German troops to enter the country as they swept across the lowlands to France. The Belgian king refused: the country's neutrality had been guaranteed by Britain, as well as other European powers, and Germany's violation of that neutrality brought Britain into the war on the side of Belgium and France.

Bent on challenging Britain's naval supremacy with his own maritime force and eager to extend his colonial rule in Africa by taking territory that the French had colonized in the previous century, Wilhelm acted with a determination that shocked much of the neutral world. German troops were permitted to commit outrageous atrocities in their advance through the lowlands,

which polarized socialists along national lines. Nationalism replaced class politics, all but effacing the avowed internationalism of Marxists, anarchists and pacifists. France's republican system—and its posturing as the home of the Great Revolution—earned the Allies greater moral support from the world's liberals and socialists than the Reich's authoritarian legacy, but as events unfolded, the French Republic was no less eager than the Kaiser's Germany to resume the Franco-Prussian War and finish it off in its own favor and absorb the German-speaking Rhineland. Russia's participation in the Allied coalition, in turn, allowed German militarists to claim that it was fighting to protect Europe from 'Asiatic barbarism'—a claim that pro-war German Social Democrats invoked (drawing amply from Marx's anti-Russian writings) to rationalize their support for the Kaiser. Britain's participation in the war was patently motivated by an attempt to prevent Germany from gaining supremacy on the seas and to retain the old European 'balance of power', the keystone of British diplomatic policy on the Continent. The English, French and Russians were all eager to carve up the moribund Turkish Empire. The other belligerents, including Serbia, who had their own territorial ambitions, could barely pretend to be fighting for lofty ideological goals. The key to gaining popular support by all the governments in the war was a crude chauvinism that the First International had been created to oppose and that its successor dishonored.

In August 1914 few Europeans, mindful of the brief Franco-Prussian War, expected the war to last long. Conventional military wisdom—among general staffs and recruits alike—predicted that the conflict would be over by autumn or winter of 1914 at the very latest. The declarations of war initiated by Vienna and Berlin seemed to provide a release for tensions of all kinds—psychological, social and cultural—that had been building up for years. The popular anxiety that was initially manifested in anti-war demonstrations almost immediately gave way to a wave of popular chauvinism and patriotism. Trotsky, walking through the streets of Vienna in August, wondered, 'What was it that drew to the square of the War Ministry the Viennese bootmaker's apprentice, Pospischil, half German, half Czech; or our greengrocer, Frau Maresch; or the cabman Frankl? What sort of an idea? The national idea? But Austria-Hungary was the very negation of any national idea.'<sup>5</sup> The scandalously chauvinistic slogan '*Alle Serben müssen sterben*' (All Serbs must die) was plastered throughout Vienna; comparable slogans appeared on walls in the other belligerent countries, including Russia. The name St Petersburg was changed to the less German-sounding Petrograd, and patriotism became so pervasive that many workers who only a few weeks earlier had supported anti-war Social Democratic slogans now reverentially sang 'God Save the Tsar' and excoriated or even beat up the dwindling number of their fellow proletarians who still



professed to be internationalists. Bolshevik militants who had been leading them in virtual insurrectionary strikes were excoriated and even beaten up. To the astonishment of their deputies to the Duma, the nationalist upsurge overwhelmed nearly all the parties, socialist as well as bourgeois, as did their counterparts in Europe's various parliaments.

The war, once it began, continued not for four months but for four years and claimed the lives of approximately 10 million combatants—mainly men under 40 years of age—in a monstrous network of trenches that sprawled for hundreds of miles across the battlefields of France, northern Italy and Russia. Russia's incompetent generals sent more than 2 million peasants in uniform, poorly equipped and poorly trained, to their graves. Germany's losses quickly approached 2 million as well, followed by nearly 1.5 million Frenchmen, 1.25 million Austro-Hungarians and a million Britons, not to speak of Italian, Turkish and other losses. Men were massacred by the tens of thousands in only a few days of futile offensives, and the wounded—often limbless, blind, or otherwise mutilated—filled nearly every hospital in Europe.

The outbreak of the world war, and the reactions to it, demolished the Second International as an effective socialist organization. Not only did the International fail to stand up resolutely against the very imperialism that its congresses had denounced for decades; but its most important parties—particularly the German SPD, 'Marx's own party', as it was long denoted—discarded its most important anti-imperialist principles. French and Belgian socialists' attempts to create a common front with their German comrades against the Kaiser's patently aggressive policies failed ignominiously. Long-standing friendships among comrades who for decades had affirmed their internationalist solidarity arm in arm at congresses of the International ruptured ignominiously.

No less shameful was the way the German Social Democrats came to the support of Wilhelm and the Fatherland. On 25 July, the party's leadership published an open letter in *Vorwärts* (Forward), its official organ, condemning not Berlin but Vienna for provoking the war—and carefully ignoring the German government's ultimatum to Russia against mobilization. The party's executive committee declared indignantly:

No drop of German soldier's blood must be sacrificed to the Austrian despots' lust for power, to imperialist commercial interests. Comrades, we call upon you to express immediately in mass-meetings the unshakable will for peace of the class-conscious proletariat. . . . The ruling classes, who in peace-time oppress you, despise you, exploit you, want to use you as cannon fodder. Everywhere the cry must ring in despots' ears: 'We want no war! Down with war! Long live international brotherhood!'<sup>6</sup>

Even as the SPD called for mass meetings against the war and inveighed with brave words against the Austrians for fomenting it (leaving Wilhelm's assistance unmentioned), the underlying reformism of Social Democracy began to surface in the behavior of its leaders. When Léon Jouhaux of the French General Confederation of Labor appealed to Carl Legien of the social democratic German Free Unions to join him in calling for a joint general strike, the CGT leader received no answer whatever.<sup>7</sup> On 29 July, the top leaders of the European parties, from Victor Adler of the Austrian party to Angelica Balabanov of the Italian, traveled to Brussels to attend an emergency meeting of the International's bureau. But they quickly found that they could not agree on a practical policy against the impending war and deferred any decision to the congress that the International had scheduled for 9 August.

As early as 26 July, however, German Social Democratic leaders—specifically Hugo Haase, who had succeeded Bebel after his death as the party's chief, and Otto Braun, the party's treasurer—met with the German chancellor, Theodor Bethmann-Hollweg. The chancellor made it very clear to Haase and Braun that Germany would stand by Austria-Hungary—clearly indicating that the Reich would ally itself with the dual monarchy. The hostilities, he emphasized, would be preceded by a period of martial law—meaning that the imperial government would outlaw the SPD if it opposed the war. A right-wing Social Democratic deputy to the Reichstag, Albert Südekum, wrote a secret report on 29 July assuring Bethmann-Hollweg that 'no actions of any kind (general or partial strike, sabotage, and the like) [by the SPD] are planned or even to be feared precisely because of our desire for peace.'<sup>8</sup> The German chancellor could thus knowledgeably assure the Prussian Ministry of State that it had nothing to fear from the leadership of the German socialist movement.

The *Vorwärts* continued to agitate for peace, but by 30 July its editorial board was divided over which line to take. On 31 July the SPD's executive committee convened to wrestle with the agonizing question of whether the party's Reichstag deputies should vote in favor of war credits if the Kaiser declared war. Hugo Haase, who led the SPD's parliamentary caucus, vigorously opposed a vote to finance the war, while Philipp Scheidemann, a leader of the party's right wing, voiced his support for the Fatherland, with the result that the executive initially failed to come to a decision on whether to vote for credits.

Meanwhile the SPD made a final attempt to work out a joint plan of action with the French Socialists. But as soon as their delegate, Hermann Müller, a member of the SPD executive, arrived in Paris, he realized that French Socialists would vote in favor of war credits. Upon returning to Berlin on 3 August, he reported to his party that a joint strategy with the French Socialists would be unattainable. Meanwhile, Germany had actually declared war, and it



was announced that the vote on the war credits to support the Imperial Army would occur in the Reichstag the next day.

On 3 August, after agonizing days of concentrated discussion and argument, the SPD's parliamentary caucus decided (78 to 14, with a few abstentions) to vote for the credits. The 'Russian peril'—Bethmann-Hollweg's line that Russian despotism was the real culprit in the war—became the specious excuse for abetting Prussian militarism in plunging Europe into a four-year continent-wide war, despite the fact that only days before the war crisis emerged, Russian workers had been on the verge of an insurrection.

Party solidarity required that the SPD Reichstag members deliver the vote unanimously, irrespective of dissenting views within the party faction. Thus on 4 August Haase, despite his opposition to the vote, was obliged as head of the party to declare that the SPD supported the appropriation of funds for the conflict. To complete the irony of the occasion, an SPD back-bencher wrote in a letter to a friend:

I saw [German] reservists join the colours and go forth singing Social Democrat songs! Some Socialist reservists I knew said to me: 'We are going to the front with an easy mind, because we know that the Party will look after us if we are wounded, and that the Party will take care of our families if we don't come home.'<sup>9</sup>

The long years of socialist opposition to German expansionism, which had once sent some SPD leaders to prison for refusing to support the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, were now a distant memory. This vast, indeed cumbersome party—raised to public prominence with the support of a huge bureaucracy; financed by its periodicals, cooperatives, varied enterprises, and investments; stupefied by its own parliamentary self-importance; and guided by a highly conservative trade union leadership—had drained German socialism of whatever revolutionary spirit it had had in the leaner years of its existence. Whether the SPD could have succeeded in arresting the war, given the wave of patriotism that swept over the German people, is questionable, but any losses in public support that it might have suffered in 1914 would have been more than recouped in the years that followed. When the French Socialist leader Hervé denounced the SPD at the International's 1907 Stuttgart Congress as 'an electoral and accounting machine, a party of cash registers and parliamentary seats,' indeed shouting that 'the whole Social Democracy has now become bourgeois,' he may have been saying even more than many of the party's left-wingers were prepared to acknowledge.<sup>10</sup>

The French Socialists did not behave very differently. Their most vocal opponent of the war, Jaurès, was assassinated on 31 July by a deranged patriot,

leaving the party's anti-war tendency in the hands of the much less militant Jean Longuet, Marx's grandson. Even if Jaurès had lived, however, it is highly improbable that his views could have prevailed in the party; nor is it certain that he would have continued to hold them when the war took the form of a German invasion. Jules Guesde, who had been the most orthodox of Marxists within the International, became a vigorous patriot and even entered the government. The syndicalist CGT shifted from its traditional anti-statist general strike position to support for the republic. Such esteemed French anarchists as Jean Grave, Charles Malato and Paul Reclus rallied to the support of the Allied cause.

The Belgian socialists, whose country had been brutally trampled upon by German armies, could most easily claim that they had been forced by circumstances to participate in a war they never wanted. But no internationalist sentiments or feelings of class solidarity subsequently diminished their now-passionate hatred of all things German, including German Social Democracy. Indeed, all the Social Democratic parties in the belligerent countries were dramatically transformed from opponents of the war into ardent supporters of their country's respective 'cause'—and *de facto* opponents of their former comrades on the other side of the battlefield. Curiously, the Serbian Socialist deputies dutifully opposed war credits but reversed themselves once the conflict finally got under way. The SPD, like most Social Democratic parties in the belligerent countries, declared a suspension of the class struggle—a 'civil peace' policy of public unity—in support of their respective governments.

Russia proved to be an exception. Here the Bolshevik and Menshevik deputies in the Duma issued a joint statement denouncing the war as imperialist and walked out without voting for financial support for the war. But the 'father of Russian Marxism', Plekhanov, as well as the old *Iskra* hand Potresov, defected to 'social patriotism' (as anti-war socialists named the civil peace policy), joined by a number of Mensheviks and SRs, who supported the Allied cause and, by extension, the very tsarist despotism against which they had struggled throughout their adult lives. Rising Menshevik stars such as Nikolai Chkheidze and Mikhail Skobelev took another tack and declared that, if tsarism were overthrown, they would support the Allies against Prussian militarism. From his London exile Peter Kropotkin, the aging theorist of anarcho-communism, embraced the Allied cause so fervently that he violently broke with some of his closest British comrades.

The Second International was all but dead. Within the secretariat of the International Socialist Bureau, the remnant of the International, most representatives of the various parties in the belligerent countries adopted the same chauvinistic attitudes as their bourgeois compatriots toward the 'enemy' and refused even to meet in the same room with each other. The outbreak of the



war and the SPD's collaboration with the Reich all but shattered Lenin. When he read in *Vorwärts* that the party had voted for war credits, he was so shaken that he initially insisted that the report had been forged by the German general staff in an attempt to disorient the world socialist movement. When he realized the truth, he flatly declared that he no longer considered himself Social Democrat—he was now a Communist.

## THE INTERNATIONALIST OPPOSITION

The war lasted far longer than the belligerents had expected. Following the German offensives in the West and the rollback of Russian troops from Prussia in the East, the conflict ground down into seemingly endless trench warfare, claiming life on an appalling scale and producing extreme economic misery at home—especially for the Central Powers, who were effectively blockaded by Allied navies.

Each passing year after 1914 saw the growth of anti-war sentiment among socialists, anarchists, and even leftist liberals, with the result that the policy of civil peace began steadily to unravel. More than most of their European counterparts, Russian socialists and anarchists remained almost solidly opposed to tsarism and refused to collaborate with the hated monarchy. The British Independent Labor Party had never supported the war: led by Keir Hardie, many Independents were pacifists as well as anti-imperialists. In Germany Karl Liebknecht, a Social Democratic deputy to the Reichstag and the son of the late Wilhelm Liebknecht, broke the SPD's parliamentary unity in December 1914 and voted against any further credits to the military, launching a vigorous public campaign against the war. 'Every people's main enemy,' he declared in May 1915, 'is in their own country!'<sup>11</sup> He was joined by Rosa Luxemburg and a growing coterie of fervent Internationalists, as socialist opponents of the war were called. Despite persecution and arrests by the imperial government, the German Internationalists and others from socialist and non-socialist ranks were now determined to follow a policy of active opposition to the war and to the policy of civil peace.

As a Russian, Lenin would have faced internment on German and Austrian territory and so fled to the safety of neutral Zurich and Bern. In early September 1914, the Bolshevik leader advanced a consistent internationalist position in 'The Tasks of Revolutionary Social Democracy in the European War', bluntly denouncing the war as imperialist, dynastic, and 'a striving to suppress the revolutionary movement of the proletariat and democracy in the individual countries.' He bitterly inveighed against the SPD leaders for their

'sheer betrayal of socialism', including the Belgian and French socialist leaders as well. His attack swept in the tendencies in Social Democracy that had led to the collapse of the International and singled out the various excuses that the parties had made for collaborating with their respective governments. Lenin then propounded a position that in time acquired the name 'revolutionary defeatism': 'From the view of the working class and the toiling masses of all the peoples of Russia, the defeat of the Tsarist monarchy and its army ... would be the lesser evil by far.'

Lenin concluded his article by advancing his own 'slogans of Social Democracy': Bolsheviks must issue 'all-embracing propaganda' in the army as well as among the people; organize illegal nuclei in the army against chauvinism and patriotism; press for a 'republican United States of Europe'; and wage an unrelenting revolutionary struggle against tsarism 'coupled with the immediate slogans of a democratic republic, the confiscation of the landed estates, and an eight-hour working day.'

The document was signed by 'a group of Social Democrats, members of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party.'<sup>12</sup> Later articles by Lenin called for the creation of a Third International, and the anti-war socialists, for reasons of their own, soon took the necessary steps to convene leading Internationalists across all the front lines—obviously motivated by the need for a new International. Between 5 and 8 September 1915, in deep secrecy, a general conference of anti-war socialists convened near Bern in the village of Zimmerwald. Organized by the Italian and Swiss socialist parties, the conference brought together 38 delegates from the Left in the SPD as well as a miscellany of Dutch, Bulgarian, Latvian, Polish, Romanian and Russian delegates, as well as the Swiss and Italian socialists who convened it. The French and British delegates were prevented by their respective governments from attending.

The conference participants immediately divided into the usual three wings—a left, a right and a center—each of which drafted its own anti-war manifesto. The 'Left Zimmerwaldians' were led by Lenin, his close aide Gregory Zinoviev, and Karl Radek of the Polish party; they were supported by Ture Nerman and Karl Zeth Höglund of Sweden and by J.A. Berzin of Latvia. The Left's manifesto sharply attacked the 'social patriots' for betraying their most basic principles and particularly condemned the SPD's Reichstag deputies who had voted for war credits and civil peace. It summoned the masses to 'go out into the streets and fling in the face of the ruling class your rallying cry: *Enough of the slaughter!*' Additionally, the manifesto held that the existing pro-war socialist parties were irremediably compromised by their behavior and urged that anti-war socialists must create an entirely new organization in their stead. The document closed by calling for the formation of 'a powerful International [that] ... will put an end to war and capitalism.'<sup>13</sup> It was signed by an



imposing list of 'delegations' from Russia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Sweden, Norway, Germany and Switzerland, most of whose signatories were either Bolsheviks or their supporters.

The 'Zimmerwald Right', composed mainly of anti-war German moderates, opposed an organizational split within the existing social-democratic parties, and was oriented toward a pacifist position rather than a revolutionary one. It was headed by Georg Ledebour and the French syndicalists Alphonse Merheim and Albert Bourderon. The Russian Mensheviks, including Martov, who had been schooling themselves in the art of moderation since 1905, gave their support to the Zimmerwald Right's manifesto. A small Center, which included the Swiss host of the conference, Robert Grimm, as well as Trotsky, Angelica Balabanov of the Italian Socialist Party, and Henriette Roland-Holst from the Netherlands, also emerged that included the bulk of the pacifists who attended and a number of militant revolutionaries who were alienated by the Left's tendency to draw uncompromising differences with the Zimmerwald Right.

A composite final document or 'Zimmerwald Manifesto' (commonly attributed to Trotsky and Roland-Holst) blamed the horrors of the war squarely on capitalism and denounced the socialist parties' support for war credits and civil peace. It called for international proletarian solidarity, a peace free of annexations and war indemnities, and a continued struggle for the 'sacred aims of socialism' and the 'irreconcilable proletarian class struggle.'<sup>14</sup>

Representing as it did a compromise by the three factions that made up the conference, the document was unavoidably mild. The Left, in fact, felt obliged to issue a statement of its own declaring that it was 'not fully satisfied with the conference manifesto' because 'it contains no characterization of [the] opportunism' that had caused the Second International's downfall. Moreover, 'it contains no clear characterization of the methods of struggle against the war.'<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, the Left signed the manifesto in order to preserve a common front of the Zimmerwaldians against the 'social patriots'. The manifesto was translated into a great variety of languages and made its way surreptitiously through the entire European labor movement, exacerbating the mounting popular hatred of the war.

Critics of the war had been raising their voices well before the Zimmerwald conference and were met by ever-intensifying repression. On 7 February 1915, as hunger riots broke out in Berlin, the Reich tried to silence its most militant and well-known anti-war socialist critic by drafting Karl Liebknecht into the army. Less than two weeks later, it arrested the Marxist theorist Rosa Luxemburg for her anti-war agitation. Whenever the Reichstag held further votes on war credits, however, the SPD continued to vote in favor of them, albeit by ever-diminishing margins. Opposition to the war grew within the SPD's Reichstag faction itself, and on 29 December 1915, twenty SPD deputies

finally broke party parliamentary discipline and voted against war credits, while 22 abstained. Thus approximately half of the entire SPD faction now refused to support the government's requests for funds to continue the conflict. In March 1916 Liebknecht (on leave from his regiment) once again voted against war credits and was joined by still other SPD deputies.

All the independent anti-war deputies were summarily expelled from the SPD Reichstag faction, presenting the party with a major split. The committee that had been formed at Zimmerwald to carry on the conference's work called a second conference, this one at Kienthal, another small town outside Bern, in late April 1916. It was attended by 43 delegates and two observers, twelve of whom belonged to the Zimmerwald Left. With the support of seven additional delegates, who voted with the Left on key issues, about half of the conference could be said to adopt a radical stand on the war and the International. The Kienthal Manifesto, however, was surprisingly pacifistic ('Violence begets violence,' read one rather trite conclusion). But the Left scored its gains in other resolutions—particularly those dealing with the conference's relationship with the executive of the Second International—the International Socialist Bureau. The so-called Lapinsky Resolution, named after its Polish sponsor, excoriated the International's executive committee.

By May 1916 more hunger riots broke out in Germany, followed by major strikes in Berlin, Braunschweig, and even at the Krupp armament works in Essen. Early September 1916 and the winter of 1916 saw one strike wave after another sweep over the main Russian cities, particularly Petrograd, where more than 150,000 workers downed tools on 3–9 September, followed by 100,000 on 9 January in commemoration of the anniversary of 'Bloody Sunday'.

Particularly strong feelings of despair began to well up among foreign revolutionaries who were isolated in Switzerland, who had little if any contact with their supporters in the belligerent countries. Lenin, boxed into Zurich, had little contact with his comrades in Russia. On 22 January 1917, in a speech to young Swiss workers at Zurich's Volkhaus (People's House), he grimly lamented, 'We of the older generation may not live to see the decisive battles of this coming revolution.'<sup>16</sup> Only a few weeks later, however, in a sudden turn of events, Petrograd would explode in a revolution that unseated the 300-year-old Romanov dynasty in less than a week and open a period in which the red flag would fly over government buildings not only in the Russian capital but in Berlin, Vienna, Munich and Budapest, to cite only the major cities. Even as despair settled over central and Eastern Europe after three years of carnage, a revolutionary storm suddenly emerged that was to reshape world history.



## NOTES

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2. Leopold Haimson, 'The Problem of Social Stability in Urban Russia, 1905-1917', *Slavic Review*, vol. 23, no. 4 (1964), p. 642.
3. See *The Third Revolution*, p. 2:306-11.
4. The resolution is reprinted in John Riddell, ed., *Lenin's Struggle for a Revolutionary International—Documents: 1907-1916, The Preparatory Years. The Communist International in Lenin's Time* (New York: Monad Press, 1984), pp. 33-7.
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6. *Vorwärts*, Jul. 25, 1914, quoted in James Joll, *The Second International, 1889-1914* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1966), p. 160.
7. See *The Third Revolution*, p. 2:310.
8. 'Südekum's Report to the Chancellor' (Jul. 29, 1914), rpt. in Riddell, *Lenin's Struggle*, pp. 119-20.
9. Max König [SPD deputy], in *Vossische Zeitung*, May 5, 1916; rpt. in Riddell, *Lenin's Struggle*, p. 122.
10. Gustave Hervé, quoted in *Internationaler Sozialistenkongress zu Stuttgart, 18. bis 24. August 1907* (Berlin: Buchhandlung Vorwärts, 1907), excerpts rpt. in Riddell, *Lenin's Struggle*, pp. 27, 28.
11. Karl Liebknecht, 'The Main Enemy Is at Home', rpt. in Riddell, *Lenin's Struggle*, p. 176.
12. V.I. Lenin, 'The Tasks of the Revolutionary Social Democracy in the European War', in *Collected Works* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1963), p. 21:15-19. [I have Americanized the spelling and punctuation.]
13. Draft manifesto submitted by the Zimmerwald Left, in Riddell, *Lenin's Struggle*, pp. 300, 301.
14. 'The Zimmerwald Manifesto', in Riddell, *Lenin's Struggle*, pp. 318-21.
15. Zimmerwald Left Statement, in Riddell, *Lenin's Struggle*, p. 315.
16. V.I. Lenin, 'Lecture on the 1905 Revolution', in *Collected Works*, p. 23:253.

## PART IX

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# THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONS OF 1917

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## CHAPTER 43 The Revolution of February 1917

### RUSSIA AND PETROGRAD AT WAR

By any standard of reason or morality, Russia's entry into the First World War in July 1914 on the side of the Allied powers was an unprecedented folly. With the possible exceptions of Austria-Hungary and Turkey, no country was less equipped economically and socially to sustain a modern conflict. Austria-Hungary was at least geographically contiguous to the German Reich and could count on its immediate assistance, while Turkey, on the periphery of the world conflict, was generally spared the concerted attention of its opponents.

The Central Powers and the Allies alike had long regarded the seemingly endless manpower reserves of the tsar as Russia's most important asset. This belief may have had some justification during the Napoleonic wars, when massed infantry, hand-to-hand combat, bayonet charges, and cavalry were decisive in winning battles. But from the mid-nineteenth century onward, technology was increasingly replacing the valor of brightly colored infantry and gallant horsemen in national military reserves. By 1914 a great variety of artillery pieces, breech-loading rifles, and especially machine guns rendered mass charges and shoulder-to-shoulder marches of infantry across a battlefield not only obsolete but disastrously wasteful of human life. The Germans had developed their strategies with the aid of the lessons provided by Von Clausewitz and the strategic genius of Von Schlieffen, but most of the Russian command was still frozen mentally in the strategy of the aging Prince Mikhail Kutuzov, whose successful war against Napoleon in 1812 had depended on his huge serf army, the harsh climatic conditions, and the vast spaces of his backward empire.

Russia's pre-modern condition was a recipe for disaster in the Great War, all

the more because her army had no substantial economic base on which to conduct a modern conflict. The country had no land route to the Allied powers along which it could receive material support, and German naval predominance in the Baltic Sea closed off any possibility of transporting adequate foreign aid by a water route. As a result, the Russian army was to suffer immensely high casualties—not only because of superior German weaponry, but also because of huge shortages of supplies.

Moreover, Russian infantry was woefully underequipped. By the time the army was mobilized to its initial wartime strength of 6.5 million in the last days of 1914, its infantry had only about 4.5 million rifles at its disposal. That is to say, anywhere from a quarter to a third of the tsar's infantry lacked the most basic weapons. The army required about 150,000 rifles monthly, but Russian industry could produce only 27,000. In practice, Russian troops in huge numbers had to wait for a suitable number of their comrades to fall before they could enter the conflict against German troops armed with modern guns of all kinds. The Eastern Front required massive artillery bombardments, but Russian industry could supply only a fraction of the shells needed to sustain its guns, at times only two or three for each cannon. Only their rudimentary trenches kept Russian combat troops from being entirely exposed to firepower from sophisticated automatic German weapons. In contrast to other Allied soldiers, the ordinary Russian infantryman went through the war without a steel helmet and commonly without a gas mask. Russian railroad networks were among the most pitiful in Europe and incapable of supplying a huge army; the entire empire had little than a sixth of Austria-Hungary's track mileage.

The initial successes of the Russian army against Germany were highly deceptive. In the opening days of the war Russian armies had sliced suddenly into a militarily unprepared East Prussia, but they were soon driven back at enormous losses and were never again able to mount a serious offensive against the Kaiser's troops that yielded lasting results. By 1916 the Eastern Front was more or less stabilized along a line running from the Gulf of Riga—slightly less than halfway between Petrograd and Warsaw—to the Romanian border. Russia had lost Poland, most of her Baltic provinces, and Galicia at a cost of 2 million dead and wounded as well as 350,000 prisoners. On the eve of the 1917 Revolution, an estimated 1 million Russian soldiers had deserted from the army and returned to their villages. To make up the shortfall, the government conscripted about 15 million men into the army, many of whom were older or younger than the age groups normally eligible for conscription. These peasant-soldiers filled Russian cities in huge numbers, occupying overcrowded and unsanitary barracks, and were commonly at the mercy of newly commissioned junior officers, who treated the older men under their



command with a baronial arrogance that was more redolent of feudal behavior prior to the Emancipation than the conventional military discipline that existed in modern European armies.

Each levy of conscripts for the army, together with the steady drift of peasants into war industries, produced a serious labor shortage in the countryside. As the fateful year of 1917 drew near, severe shortages of staples became the rule in Russian cities, and living costs began to soar beyond the means of the average working-class family. As the availability of consumer goods diminished, the peasants who remained behind to till the land could buy little or nothing in return for their harvests and therefore withheld their crops from the urban centers, which further exacerbated the grave shortages in the cities. Urban women were obliged to line up for hours in front of food shops, often arriving before dawn. Public bitterness, which no amount of patriotic appeals could assuage, intensified steadily, not only against the war but against the autocracy itself, which had grossly mismanaged the distribution of goods for an ill-clad and hungry population as well as military operations.

This anger manifested itself in the increasing restiveness of the working class, whose hatred of the regime burned on a very short fuse after its early outburst of jingoism in 1914 wore off. The war had brought no improvement in the income and working conditions of the proletariat, more than two-thirds of whom were recently arrived peasants from the villages and were housed under terrible and worsening living conditions that already beggared description before the war. Petrograd, however, enjoyed a favored status among Russia's large cities, not only as the capital of the empire but as its most important manufacturing center. Fully 22 per cent of the country's industrial output was produced by its factories, which, during the war, provided work for more than 400,000 men and women in the city proper and its environs. Above all, the capital was Russia's most important center of heavy industry: by 1917 more than 237,000 workers were engaged in metal and hardware production. The city's industrial structure was also its most highly concentrated and technologically advanced: 13 per cent of Petrograd's factories employed nearly 81 per cent (317,000 men and women) of the capital's workforce, or an average of 2400 workers in each enterprise. Impressive as such statistics may be, however, they do not convey the enormous size of the largest plants. The Putilov works, which manufactured vital metal products, employed more than 24,000 workers, making it the largest factory complex in the city. The most socially restless industrial area in the capital was located north of the Neva River, in the Vyborg District, where 18 per cent of the city's proletariat—generally, the youngest, most mobile, and most volatile workers—was concentrated. The two plants with the most militant workers were the Parviainen

and New Lessner plants, with only about 7000 and 6000 workers respectively. Located in the Vyborg District, these two plants were major producers of military goods and had a high concentration of radical workers led by Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries.

Despite the large number of peasants that flooded its factories, the capital's working class was probably the most literate in Russia. Nearly 90 per cent of the men and 65 per cent of the women could read and write. These percentages were even higher among the metalworkers, who were the proletarian backbone of the capital's Bolsheviks in the troubled months preceding the outbreak of war. As has been noted, they formed the most politically advanced and volatile sector of the Petrograd proletariat.

The newly arrived peasants, especially single and mobile young men, may not have been schooled in socialist ideas, but they were disposed to direct action or *buntarstvo*, the typically pre-industrial form of village rebellion from which so many rural uprisings were born. Of the nearly 150,000 workers who entered the Petrograd labor force between 1914 and 1917, an estimated 50 to 70 per cent, or roughly 80,000, were peasants. These newly arrived peasant-workers were not the hereditary proletariat that Marx believed would be the hegemonic class in creating a new society. Indeed, few workers in the tsar's domains were so far removed from the countryside, as has been emphasized, that they had forgotten the riotous *buntarstvo* militancy that had been nourished in the village world for centuries.

Finally, Petrograd was not only a major industrial center of the imperial government; it was also a very important garrison city. Scattered over the city were thirteen barracks containing twelve combat regiments (two of which were Cossack units), armored car units, an engineer battalion, bicycle troops, machine-gunners, and the notorious Semenovskiy Regiment that had played a crucial role in putting down the 1905 insurrection in Moscow. More than 27,000 soldiers actually worked in government-owned munitions plants and other enterprises in the city. These men were under strict military discipline: not only were they subject to the everyday humiliation faced by ordinary soldiers, enduring degrading modes of address and personal treatment, but they could also be brought before courts-martial rather than civil courts for any real or supposed infraction of factory rules.

In the Petrograd garrison soldiers of all types—many of them held in reserve to put down civil disorders, others working as uniformed proletarians in the city's industrial districts, still others in transit to or from the front—ranged in numbers from 160,000 to more than 270,000 and were often quartered in the poorest parts of the capital. This huge force of disciplined men, largely peasant in origin, had been trained in or were familiar with the use of modern weapons. Their barracks were in close proximity to the workers' factories and



residences, which made them easy targets of radical political propaganda. Given the privileges accorded to the officers and the arrogant behavior that the ordinary soldiers had to endure, a genuine if hidden class war simmered in most of the barracks, one that was eventually to explode into the greatest military mutiny Russia had seen up to that time.

## WARTIME DISCONTENTS

The repression that followed the tsar's declaration of war was swift and unrelenting. Social Democrats, particularly Bolsheviks, the capital's most intransigent anti-war activists, were quickly rounded up and sent either into the army or to Siberian exile. Thus Bolshevik membership in Petrograd fell from several thousand to barely one hundred in the months that followed. Strikes were outlawed; violators could receive sentences from several months to four years of hard labor. All the periodicals of the Internationalist Left—be they Bolshevik, Menshevik, or Socialist Revolutionary—were shut down; their city and district committees were arrested; and their grassroots networks were shredded by the police. The Bolshevik deputies to the Duma, led by Lev Kamenev, were obliged to stand trial for their Internationalist views and were eventually exiled to Siberia.

When remnants of the Bolshevik's Petersburg City Committee called for a strike to protest against the trial of the Bolshevik Duma deputation in February 1915, only 340 workers downed their tools in six factories. This humiliatingly small number of strikers reflects the temporary paralysis that silenced the capital's proletariat, due to its fear and its pro-war sentiments. Between August of 1914 and July 1915 only 45 political strikes took place in Petrograd, involving a mere 10,000 workers. Strikes over economic issues were more plentiful, but they rose slowly in number and reached serious proportions only a year after the outbreak of the war. The Petrograd proletariat had been cowed by the war for the time being.

But in the summer of 1915 the strike movement began to surge forward. In August 1915 alone about 24 political strikes, embracing more than 23,000 workers, occurred in Petrograd. On 10 August, textile workers in Ivanovo-Voznesensk were shot while demonstrating—30 were killed and 53 wounded. Like Bloody Sunday 1905, this atrocity produced a near-insurrectionary response: once the news reached Petrograd, a two-day protest strike erupted in the Vyborg, Narva, and Peterhof districts, bringing out more than 22,000 workers from 23 factories. Not only did they clash openly with the police—the hated 'pharaohs', as they were called—but newly recruited soldiers from the

Egersky Regiment sympathetically joined the workers, injuring twenty 'pharaohs' before being quelled by the military police.

The alarmed authorities made another sweep of Petrograd's radical network between late August and early September, arresting 30 of the most active Putilov metalworkers, 23 of whom were Bolsheviks, six SRs, and one Menshevik. But far from intimidating the movement, the police action provoked a full-scale citywide general strike, in which the workers not only demanded the release of the arrestees but raised new political and economic demands. In fact, as the strike movement increased day by day, an All-City Strike Committee was created to co-ordinate it. Within four days, more than 82,000 workers from 70 factories had downed their tools. The Strike Committee called for the formation of a Soviet of Workers' Deputies—the first one since 1905—to which various factories responded by electing deputies.

The prospect of a soviet and a possible insurrection apparently alarmed the Menshevik leaders, especially Chkheidze and Skobelev. Mindful of their 'errors' in 1905, the Mensheviks were frightened by the prospect of alienating the bourgeoisie, particularly members of the moderate liberals in the Duma's Progressive Bloc (headed by the Kadet Pavel Milyukov and the Octobrist leader and reform-minded industrialist, Alexander Guchkov). The Menshevik deputies joined Alexander Kerensky, a rising young deputy and leader of the moderate Duma SRs known as Trudoviks (Toilers), in visiting the factories and trying to induce the workers to return to their jobs. At an enlarged All-City Strike Committee meeting, most of its participants except for the Bolsheviks succumbed to Menshevik and Trudovik pleas for moderation. The socialist majority of the committee, led primarily by the Mensheviks, prudently called off the strike—validating Lenin's mistrust of a speciously united socialist party whose members had fundamentally different goals and analyses.

No less revealing of deep-seated differences among the Mensheviks, Bolsheviks and SRs were the conflicts fought over the issue of forming a Workers' Group as part of the Central War Industries Committee. The committee was a legal but non-governmental agency that had been formed on the initiative of reform-minded industrialists who tried to gain government war contracts for small Petrograd firms and provincial factory owners. In proposing to form a Workers' Group, the committee was eager to promote fairness in governmental military contracts as a means to enlist the support of workers; by ensuring labor participation, they believed, they could foster industrial peace under the expansive umbrella of patriotism.

The members of the Workers' Group were to be chosen from an elected collegium of proletarian deputies, each representing a thousand factory workers. The deputies, in turn, were to select a small committee to represent the workers as a whole. But what the workers found most appealing about the



proposed Workers' Group was the electoral procedure that made it possible for them to discuss their class problems without restraint and to gain a legal institution to promote their interests.

Of the three workers' parties that were expected to participate—Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and SRs—the Bolsheviks were most militantly opposed not only to the war but to any form of class collaboration. The 'Petersburg' Bolsheviks\* decided to use the first stage of the indirect electoral process to campaign against the war and call for the overthrow of the autocracy. They would boycott the final electoral stage to express their refusal to collaborate with the bourgeoisie or the government. They also called for converting the Workers' Group into a Soviet of Workers' Deputies, falling back on the vivid memories of the Soviet of 1905. In this strategy they were supported by the left-wing or 'activist' tendency of the SRs (a collaboration that set a precedent for the more significant alliance in 1917 and early 1918). The Mensheviks, however, chose to follow the whole electoral process to its very end, even standing for election to the initial Workers' Group.

In the first electoral stage, held in September 1915, the 213,000 workers who voted chose 218 electors, of whom 60–70 were Bolsheviks, 80 were Mensheviks and SRs, and the remainder were unaffiliated. The Bolsheviks dutifully withdrew their candidates and boycotted the rest of the process. Accordingly, the Workers' Group that finally emerged from the elections was dominated by Mensheviks.<sup>1</sup> The Mensheviks, to be sure, expressly denied that they were following a class collaborationist policy or supporting the war. Rather, they declared, they planned to use the Workers' Group as a means of expressing the workers' class grievances and as a forum for propagandistic purposes. In practice, however, the Mensheviks had become averse to provoking or alienating their bourgeois allies, even lagging behind the anti-war sentiment that was spreading among the worker-militants. Clearly the Mensheviks had retreated from their militant position of 1905 and were functioning more like liberals than like revolutionaries.

Accordingly, they were more hesitant than ever fully to support proposals for strikes and demonstrations. Their dogmatic notion that the Russian labor movement must strive for a 'bourgeois democratic' regime was straitjacketing them into a fixed, doctrinaire position. Ensconcing themselves in quasi-legal bodies such as the Duma, the Workers' Group of the War Industries Committee, and various workers' cooperatives, they exuded an air of constructive gentility rather than insurrectionary fervor.

\* The Bolsheviks' few committees in the capital retained the name 'Petersburg'—rather than 'Petrograd'—to defy the regime's attempt to foster anti-German sentiment among the population.

The Mensheviks' changing behavior ultimately benefited the prospects of the Bolsheviks. From a membership of only about 100 in the latter half of 1914, the capital's Bolsheviks grew to 2000 by September 1916 and to 3000 only five months later. The number of Bolshevik Party cells in Petrograd doubled from 55 in 1915 to 110 in January 1917. Lenin's associates now accepted the notion that only a revolution could remove the obstructions created by tsarism and install a modern constitutional government, and that such a revolution could succeed only with the support, indeed the leadership of militant workers and their organizations. Although the Petrograd workers as yet had very little knowledge of the disputes among Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, and the various SRs, their more militant cadres learned to regard the socialist moderates with mistrust—which left them open to Lenin's strategic appeals.

## THE GATHERING STORM

In 1916 strike waves were now following one upon another with ever-greater frequency. In January there were 68 strikes, involving 61,000 workers, mainly to commemorate the dead who had fallen in Bloody Sunday. It was followed by 51 in March that involved nearly 78,000 strikers, and a startling 77 in November, which brought out 170,000. All these strikes, let it be noted, were political in nature and were matched in number and size by economic strikes as well.

They expressed a resentment of the tsar's government, moreover, that rose in frequency as the months passed. During the Bloody Sunday memorial soldiers in a military truck belligerently drove their vehicle into a contingent of mounted police—to the cheers of the demonstrators. In October, during a demonstration near the barracks of the 181st Infantry Regiment, the 'pharaohs' attacked the protesters, which angered the soldiers nearby, who joined the demonstrators in a wild fracas against the police. The police might well have been trounced had the authorities not called in mounted Cossack detachments. One hundred and thirty soldiers were arrested after this incident, and the regiment was removed from the capital.

In the face of soaring prices, widespread hunger, governmental mismanagement at the rear as well as at the front, the fact that Petrograd workers struck in increasing numbers and that soldiers gave them occasional support should not have been very surprising—at least, so the authorities consoled themselves. The workers, after all, had raised no barricades, as they had in 1914, and the soldiers had not mutinied, as they had in 1905. Moreover, the authorities expected that the nearly 4000 police mobilized to cope with civil



unrest could handle the workers' strikes and the military episodes. The Cossack detachments, those privileged dragoons, were still loyal to the tsar, and the regiments stationed in the capital, such as the Semenovskiy—which had put down the Moscow 1905 uprising—were still reliable. These forces seemed more than enough to control any civilian 'disturbances', authorities reassured themselves: the police would handle any small disorders that might arise, the Cossacks would take on the more serious ones, and the regiments in and near the capital would suppress any incipient insurrection.

In August 1915 the tsar personally assumed command of his demoralized army, demonstratively moving his residence from Petrograd to Moghilev, the city on the Dnieper River in Belorussia where the Supreme Command or Stavka was installed. This gesture was apparently meant to reassure the Russian people that military affairs were in good hands. But this gesture failed miserably. Nicholas's subjects felt no safer under his guidance than they had under previous army commanders. Moreover, by moving to Moghilev, the emperor simply shifted the blame for the army's failure to vanquish the Germans from his commanders' shoulders on to his own. In performing the onerous job of commander-in-chief of the army Nicholas was out of his depth. The tsar simply loitered around Moghilev and raised his flagging spirits with braided, spoiled and obsequious officers who shielded him from any expression of popular discontent.

When Nicholas left Petrograd for Moghilev, he placed civil affairs in the incompetent hands of his wife Alexandra, her 'holy man' Rasputin, and the self-serving, corrupt court camarilla that had formed around the pair. The wilful, mystical empress took control of the government and appointed ministers and officers to key imperial positions—appalling the more rational figures in the tsar's service. Alexandra was not only grossly incompetent and hopelessly paranoid; she was even more of a tyrant than her husband. Domineering toward her imperial husband, she in turn was dominated by a rapacious Siberian monk, drunkard, and womanizer, Rasputin. Rasputin had used hypnosis to arrest the hemophiliac bleeding of the young heir to the throne, the tsarevich, which made him seem to Alexandra's eyes a miracle worker. Worse, it had earned him the power to play a decisive role in governing the empire and peopling its leadership with rogues.

Recalling all too vividly the events of 1905, the Duma's liberals, in letters and petitions, implored the tsar to make the ministerial and military changes that were visibly necessary to salvage the crumbling empire. Guided by his wife and her 'holy man', Nicholas simply replaced one incompetent minister with an even more incompetent successor. The nobility was equally unable to influence events: even the grand dukes were shut out from the inner counsels of the tsar's immediate family. The court seethed with anger and impotence. In

late December 1916 youthful nobles succeeded in murdering Rasputin—but his removal did nothing to change the course of events leading to revolution. The Kadet leader Milyukov tried to rouse the lethargic monarchy with a stormy address from the rostrum of the Duma, hinting at treason (that is, by the German-born tsarina), but he soon lapsed into a hopeless fatalism about the autocracy's inadequacies.

At the end of 1916 the empire's wartime losses and class hatreds had soared to intolerable proportions. The specific economic dislocations facing Russia would have undermined the stability of any modern nation, even in peacetime. Indeed, had the tsar consulted the statistics that his own Ministry of Interior collected instead of reading the patriotic claptrap that emanated from his War Ministry's press, he could justifiably have panicked over the future of the dynasty. These statistics would have told him that the currency of his realm was becoming worthless; the number of rubles in circulation in the last half of 1916 had leaped more than threefold, from about 2.5 billion to nearly 8 billion, while the prices of goods had risen on the overall about threefold in less than four years. By contrast, average wages had only doubled, leaving the urban lower classes in sheer destitution. Petrograd was facing a famine. It was receiving only a third of the food supplies needed to keep its lower classes alive and only half of the fuel it needed to operate its industries, warm its homes, and fire its bakeries. Food prices edged steadily upward—that is, where food was still available. In a brief two months, from 16 December 1916, to February 1917, the price of such basic staples as potatoes and bread rose 25 and 15 per cent respectively. Cabbages rose in cost by 25 per cent, and the remaining goods soared beyond the reach of even fairly well-paid wage earners, let alone poor ones. A secret police agent reported that:

Resentment is felt worse in large families, where children are starving in the most literal sense of the word, and where no other words are heard except, 'Peace, immediate peace, peace at all costs.' And these mothers, exhausted from standing endlessly at the tail of queues, and having suffered so much in watching their half-starving and sick children, are perhaps much closer to a revolution than [the liberal Duma deputies] Messrs. Miliukov, Rodichev and Co., and of course, they are much more dangerous, since they are the stockpiles of flammable material, needing only a spark to set them afire.<sup>2</sup>

The winter of 1916–17 in the capital was one of the coldest on record, with average temperatures registering 12 degrees below zero (centigrade) and huge blizzards blocking the transportation of direly needed supplies into the capital. By late February 1917 the long queues that normally gathered in the freezing morning hours before the city's bakeries were rife with rumors that the gov-



ernment was planning to limit the bread ration to only one loaf per adult. Factories, lacking fuel, began to close down, leaving thousands of workers free to mill around the depressed neighborhoods or fill the proletarian taverns, heightening the feelings of class hostility that were spreading through the city's industrial districts. Despite the frigid weather, the political temperature in Petrograd was rising to boiling point. Only a mere incident was needed to plunge the capital into an outright mass insurrection.

## THE FEBRUARY REVOLUTION

On 23 February many of the factories and shipyards in Petrograd were closed because of strikes, punitive lockouts, or a lack of raw materials. The strikes were quite disconnected from one another: they were started or led mainly by factory militants, not by the revolutionary parties, in response to the specific needs of their fellow proletarians. The Bolsheviks' Petersburg City Committee played no role in the events under way. In fact, most members of the committee had recently been jailed as a result of police raids, and the party press was closed down by the police. Only the Russian Bureau of the Central Committee\*—the highest Bolshevik committee within Russia—was available for leadership. It was headed by the metalworker Alexander Shliapnikov, along with his two subordinates, the young Vyacheslav Molotov and I. Zolotarev. Shliapnikov seemed almost indifferent to the ferment in the capital and persisted in viewing the strikes as narrowly economic and politically inconsequential. Even when great masses of workers began to take to the streets and shootings occurred between the masses and the 'pharaohs', he tended to dismiss their importance and seemed to be convinced that the troops would easily bring them to an end. The authority for mobilizing the party as an active force during February thus fell to the capital's district committees, especially

\* The Bolshevik Central Committee, it will be recalled, was divided into a Foreign Bureau and a Russian Bureau. The Russian Bureau was composed mainly of 'practicals', responsible for the party's day-to-day affairs in the homeland, in contrast to the ideologically oriented Foreign Bureau living abroad. In February 1917 the Foreign Bureau consisted mainly of Lenin and Gregory Zinoviev in Switzerland, while the Russian Bureau was led by Alexander Shliapnikov, the most senior Bolshevik who was still at liberty in the country. In theory, the Russian Bureau had as much authority as the Foreign Bureau, but Lenin's voice obviously counted for more—he was, after all, the founder of Bolshevism. After 1915, the two halves of the Central Committee were not in close communication with each other, and positions that Lenin was abandoning were unknown to the Russian Bureau and its lower organs.

the Vyborg District Committee, whose members were eager to go the whole way and overthrow the autocracy.

International Women's Day was on 23 February, a radical holiday that had been proclaimed by the Second International in 1910 on the initiative of Clara Zetkin, a close comrade of Rosa Luxemburg. Before textile plants in the Vyborg District, worker-militants and left-leaning Social Democrats staged mass meetings celebrating the holiday (which was still a novelty in the Russian revolutionary movement and did not evoke great emotions). They denounced the war and the terrible food shortages that affected the city, but their oratory did not have to be overheated to stoke up the extreme bitterness of the textile workers. These workers, most of whom were women, were obliged to work thirteen hours a day for scandalously low wages in the capital, and they daily witnessed the growing hunger faced by their families as well as the abusive behavior of their overseers.

Inspired partly by the holiday and partly by their economic burdens, the women in the textile mills decided to strike. They were supported by many young unemployed male workers who were loitering in the streets and cafés. In growing numbers the strikers and unemployed youths filled the streets of the Vyborg crying 'Bread!' and denouncing the war. The women challenged the employed men, particularly the metalworkers, to come out and join them. Bolshevik leaders, in turn, tried to restrain the metalworkers, fearful that the situation was not sufficiently ripe to engage the authorities. But the crowds of infuriated women and their cries were too combustible for the men to ignore. Soon metalworkers flooded the streets, going from plant to plant to induce others to join them or, in some cases, simply forcing them to close down their plants. Whether out of enthusiasm, despair, or simply moral coercion, nearly 60,000 workers and 30 large plants stopped working in the Vyborg District; they were followed by a smaller number in the Petrograd District and were soon joined by the Putilov workers, who had been locked out of their Narva District plant the day after a strike.

By the early afternoon, tens of thousands of workers were marching toward the center of the city, transforming an inchoate movement into an overt political demonstration against the autocracy. Workers pressed against police lines, trying to force their way across the bridges leading from the suburbs into Petrograd's center. The police had all they could do to hold their own ground and restrain demonstrators without recourse to firearms—whose use the government had explicitly forbidden. The workers, in turn, soon sensed that the troops were not averse to their demonstration. One Cossack troop, on orders to charge a crowd, moved almost lackadaisically and came to a full stop without charging into the workers. This reluctance did not escape the notice of the crowd, which realized that these ordinarily brutal horsemen were passively



on their side. Nor did the incident escape the notice of the secret police, who reported the event for posterity.

At nightfall on the 23rd the demonstrators withdrew to their districts, leaving the center of the city deserted. But the working-class suburbs were alive with discussions, arguments, and plans to continue, indeed expand the day's strikes and demonstrations. The unwillingness of Cossacks to attack the workers, limited as it was, undoubtedly played a major role in raising their hopes for success and in encouraging them to press harder the next day to test the government's authority. Thus did a sudden women's strike for 'bread' become an attempt to bring down a centuries-old autocracy.

The Bolsheviks' Vyborg District Committee now raced ahead of the cautious Petersburg City Committee, and its boldness began to override the higher committee's qualms. That evening, acting in defiance of the wishes of its own City Committee, the Vyborg Bolsheviks called for a three-day general strike, thereby opening a new stage in what was seemingly a protest movement. While the City Committee's principal leaders still regarded the strike call as premature, even adventuristic, the Vyborgers brought together the galvanized but inexperienced masses, providing them with guidance and palpable goals.

By the next day, even the normally reticent Mensheviks decided to act conjointly with the Vyborg Bolsheviks. The cold, overcast daybreak of 24 February was charged with excitement in the working-class districts. Orators appeared everywhere, not only from the socialist organizations but from the faceless ranks of the proletariat itself, stirring the workers to use every means at their disposal—from rocks to bolts, screws and tools—in confrontations with the police. At the New Lessner, Erikson, Parviainen and Russian Renault plants, contingents of Bolshevik agitators and worker-militants closed down the remaining Vyborg factories, bringing out 75,000 workers from 61 plants.

At the Sampsonievsky Prospect, which lay just before the Liteinyi Bridge, linking the Vyborg District with the city center, the authorities mobilized two and a half companies of Cossacks, two companies of the Moscow Regiment, and police contingents to cope with the inevitable march into the city proper. It began at nine o'clock that morning, when some 40,000 workers and sympathizers and some 2500 Erikson workers converged at the bridge, face to face with the Cossacks. The Cossacks were ordered to charge into the crowd, but to everyone's astonishment, they passively trotted their horses in swaths behind their mounted officers, leaving the demonstrators virtually untouched. In the exultant words of the Bolshevik Kayurov: 'Some of [the Cossacks] smiled; and one of them even winked at the workers.'<sup>3</sup> In his vivid account of the 'five days' that brought down the 300-year-old dynasty, Trotsky shrewdly observed:

This wink was not without meaning. The workers were emboldened with a friendly, not hostile, kind of assurance, and slightly infected the Cossacks with it. The one who winked found imitators. In spite of renewed efforts from the officers, the Cossacks, without openly breaking discipline, failed to force the crowd to disperse, but flowed through it in streams. This was repeated three or four times and brought the two sides even closer together. Individual Cossacks began to reply to the workers' questions and even enter into momentary conversations with them.<sup>4</sup>

While the Cossacks preserved their neutrality, the mounted police 'pharaohs' charged the crowd in a frenzy and dispersed it. About 5000 workers managed to cross the icy Neva River, but waiting police detachments scattered them all over the city. By now the strike had spread throughout Petrograd and all its environs, bringing out unprecedented numbers of workers who furiously engaged the police in nearly every part of the capital. At Kazan Square in the city center at least four rallies followed upon one another until Cossacks and army cavalry finally cleared the area. At Znamensky Square a mass rally was held before the huge statue of Alexander III, while Cossacks and police impassively stood by. A platoon of the Volynsky Guard Regiment, sent to disperse the crowd, allowed the workers to pass on the sidewalk unharassed. Nearly everywhere the street demonstrators were cheered by bystanders, neighborhood residents, and even wounded soldiers who waved to them from hospital windows. As the last demonstrators, flushed with success, finally left the Nevsky Prospect—Petrograd's main avenue—they declared that they would return in even greater numbers the next day.

But his pledge was uncertain. The workers were showing signs of weariness, and the Petrograd military command would undoubtedly strike back more vigorously if events got out of control. During the night of 24–25 February members of the Bolshevik Russian Bureau, led by Shliapnikov, still opposed a call for an insurrection as premature. It remained for a small internationalist Social Democratic group, the *mezhrayontsy* (Interdistrict-ers), who were committed to unity between the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, to circulate a manifesto calling for an uprising and a democratic republic. Vague as the manifesto's demands were, they buoyed the spirits of the workers and suggested that a firm hand guided the masses.

At the factory level party differences among Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, and SRs began to give way to a sense of common purpose and unity of action. With few exceptions all socialists were now engaged in propagandizing the workers and reaching out to the soldiers. The next morning, 25 February—a Saturday—saw a dramatic broadening of the strike: more than 200,000 workers downed their tools and headed again for the center of the capital. At the



Liteinyi Bridge the Cossacks abandoned their posts to the workers, who streamed into the city center unimpeded. At the Nikolaevsky Bridge, which linked Vasilevsky Island with Petrograd's center, a platoon of Don Cossacks, the cream of the tsar's mounted forces, impassively permitted a crowd of workers to cross into the city, ignoring the Island's military commander's frantic orders to stop them. Still another Cossack detachment permitted a crowd to free detainees who had been arrested by the 'pharaohs' in a nearby building. To the cheers of the surrounding crowd, the Cossacks actually chased away the police guards with insults and freed the detainees themselves.

Perhaps the most dramatic incident of the day occurred in the late afternoon at Znamensky Square. Here mounted police attacked a rally and dispersed the people in all directions while a Cossack detachment sedately stood by. When a few bold workers, caps in hand, approached them with pleas for help, the Cossacks suddenly charged the police with their sabers unsheathed and dispersed them, leaving the commanding police inspector dead in the snow. Nor were the Cossacks alone in their partisanship. Demonstrators who confronted troop contingents across the Nevsky Prospect appealed to the soldiers for their support. The soldiers raised their bayoneted rifles—then broke ranks and melted into the crowd. Other soldiers in the city center, however—many of them non-commissioned officers being groomed for higher positions—fired at demonstrators and left a scattering of dead civilians in the streets.

Meanwhile the working-class suburbs, particularly the Vyborg, were inflamed by feelings of revolt. Everywhere the 'pharaohs' were disarmed and beaten. Police stations were attacked and stripped of their weapons. The city was paralyzed by the general strike. Trams, cabs, even ordinary vehicles were nowhere to be seen; printing presses, banks, business offices, stores, and government buildings were closed down. The universities were empty, cafés and restaurants were closed, postal deliveries came to a halt, and water and gas works were no longer in operation. Crowds surged through the great avenues of Petrograd, singing revolutionary songs, waving red flags, and carrying banners calling for an end to the war and the autocracy. In fact, Petrograd had seen nothing like the fever that now gripped the city since 1905, when the very existence of the monarchy hung in the balance.

The Petrograd workers had now committed themselves to an insurrection that could only be put down by troops. But the workers alone could not overthrow the government. They needed the support of the middle-class population—and above all the full support of the troops themselves. With only small quantities of weapons at their disposal, the workers were incapable of meeting trained soldiers in open combat. The fundamental question was: Would the soldiers go over to the people? Would they undertake a huge military mutiny?

The authorities seemed to understand that the very existence of the autocracy was being challenged and shifted to the worst possible recourse: the use of ordinary soldiers against the people. During the night and early morning the Petrograd military governor, General Khabalov, turned the city center into an armed camp. All the major intersections were occupied by pickets of troops, reinforced by machine-gun nests. Detachments of soldiers were deployed to guard public buildings, railroad stations, and bridgeheads. Cavalry contingents patrolled the avenues, and scattered groups of sentinels checked the papers of all passing civilians.

The next day, 26 February, opened as a bright and crisp Sunday. The high-echelon Bolshevik and Menshevik leaders alike thought the military forces that Khabalov had assembled spelled the end of the uprising. Astonishingly, they thought that the better part of wisdom would be to call off the strike. But the Petrograd proletariat was so impassioned that it seemed to have lost all sense of danger. For reasons that are difficult to explain, workers again assembled in the streets and made their way across the icy Neva to the Nevsky Prospect.

As the crowd marching along the Nevsky reached its intersections with the Vladimir Prospect and Sadovaya Street, detachments of the Semenovskiy Regiment inauspiciously opened fire. Elsewhere, in Znamensky Square, a training detachment of the Volynskiy Guard Regiment unexpectedly fired on a crowd, as did troops elsewhere. But the crowds persisted in their demonstration, scattering and regrouping with resolute determination to shatter the discipline that still held the troops under the command of their officers. Somehow the demonstrators must have sensed that the military forces were undergoing a major change in outlook; the discipline that held many soldiers together was actually beginning to unravel. Nikolai Sukhanov, the Menshevik-Internationalist who observed their behavior, noted that many of the military patrols

had a rather casual, unserious, and unreal character. Both the cordons and patrols looked as though they were hoping for organized attacks on themselves and seeking an occasion to surrender. Single policemen had long since completely vanished. The patrols, who were not marching but strolling around the city, were as a matter of fact disarmed [by the demonstrators] in many places without offering serious resistance. . . . In spite of the presence of an officer, [a cordon of Grenadiers] were standing easy and conversing animatedly with the crowd on political topics. Agitators were haranguing them in quite unambiguous terms. Some soldiers were chuckling, others were listening in attentive silence. . . . There was no direct insubordination, but they were obviously unsuitable material for any active operations, and there was clearly nothing for the officers to do but turn a blind eye on this scene of 'corruption.'



The uprising's militants now knew that events would reach their decisive stage the next day. If the soldiers opened fire on the workers and their supporters, the workers would have to retreat to their homes in defeat. But it was also possible that the soldiers would lower their weapons and go over to the crowds.

When the members of the Bolsheviks' Vyborg District Committee met that night, they seemed inclined to call off the next day's action. But at the same time meetings, even rallies, were occurring everywhere in the workers' suburbs, and here the workers were plainly elated. They had noticed the nonchalant behavior of the troops; under the very eyes of their officers, and many military cordons and patrols had freely talked with the workers. Militants and ordinary workers argued, compared experiences, and formed judgements about the next day. A meeting of Bolshevik worker-militants and *mezhrayontsy* on Vasilevsky Island resolved that the workers should not only continue the strike but extend it further and collect weapons to create a workers' militia. All that stood between the state and a successful popular rising, they were convinced, were the embittered peasants in military greatcoats who comprised most of the Petrograd garrison.

Unknown to the socialist leaders and the workers alike, the bonds of military discipline that had kept the garrison harnessed to the regime were being severed. The lenience of the Cossack detachments had been unnerving enough to the authorities, but the reluctance of troops to fire on the people had produced growing alarm at the headquarters of the Petrograd military command. Most alarmingly, workers had even felt free, at day's end, to rush to the barracks of the Pavlovsky Regiment and inform them that their training detachment (among others) had fired upon demonstrators in the Nevsky Prospect. Outraged by this news, the Fourth Company of the *pavlovtsy* left its barracks to stop the training detachment, then found itself in a fire-fight with mounted police. Bereft of weapons, the soldiers returned to their barracks to incite other companies in their regiment to rebellion. The ringleaders of the mutiny were soon surrounded by loyal troops and duly imprisoned, but it was found that 21 armed men were missing. They probably took refuge in the working-class districts. Each of these soldiers, in effect, was an agitator desperate for an uprising and, as soldiers, could talk freely to others who shared his uniform. The army, no less than the workers, the Cossacks, and the police, was primed for a break with the government.

During the night of 26 February the training detachments of the Volynsky Regiment that had fired on demonstrators hours earlier decided to mutiny and go over to the people. Led by Sergeant T. Kirpichnikov, they secretly commandeered the regiment's weapons, including machine guns. After lining up for reveille the next morning, they had an altercation with a junior officer

(which cost him his life), then ran in squad formation to other soldiers of the regiment. By nine a.m. the next day—Monday, 27 February—they reached the nearby Preobrazhensky and Lithuanian Regiments, who finally decided to join them. Soon the Sixth Engineer Battalion and mutinous troops from other barracks along the way joined forces and appeared on the Nevsky Prospect fully armed, where they encountered cheering crowds of workers and (no trivial fact) middle-class people. Armed soldiers and workers, in turn, plundered tens of thousands of weapons from the Arsenal and other military storehouses. By nightfall revolutionary troops and scattered armored cars appeared in the broad avenues of the city, and the dwindling holdouts soon surrendered to their revolutionary besiegers. As Tsuyoshi Hasegawa observes:

The soldiers' insurrection that began in Volynskii Regiment early in the morning thus involved practically all the military units in Petrograd by the end of February 27. It is estimated that the participants in the soldiers' insurrection rose from 10,200 in the morning to 25,700 in the afternoon, and to 66,700 by evening. It further grew in the morning of February 28 to 72,000, by afternoon to 112,000, and in the evening, 127,000. By the afternoon of March 1, almost the entire garrison, 170,000 soldiers, took the side of the revolution.<sup>6</sup>

## THE END OF TSARDOM

By 1917 imperial Russia's bureaucratic-military complex had become such a lifeless archaism that it simply could not grasp what was happening to the country it ruled. That it had survived the 1905 Revolution—for twelve years—was due more to the inertia of the peasant masses, the product of centuries of subservience, than to any vitality of the tsarist regime. If the autocracy could not bend to historic social changes that were sweeping Europe, it would have to collapse in the hurricane that assailed it in late February. Fearful as the February revolutionaries were of counter-revolutionary troops outside the capital, the generals at the front and at military headquarters seemed as depleted of will as the tsar himself, who was eager only to get to his family in Tsarskoye Selo. Career military officers seemed concerned primarily with retaining their positions and did almost nothing to aid the obviously defunct regime. Informed of the Petrograd rising, Moscow simply tipped over and fell into line, to be followed during the next few days by provincial capitals, cities, and towns across the empire. When the authorities tallied up the victims of the Petrograd rising, they found that fewer than 1500 people had been killed or



wounded, 869 of whom were soldiers. By comparison with other major uprisings, Russia's 'first revolution', which brushed away a centuries-old autocratic state, was comparatively bloodless—which, more than any other fact, revealed that it had been moribund for years and was merely awaiting an appropriate burial.

The uprising of February 1917 was a political insurrection, not a social revolution. The social problems that had induced the workers to go into the streets and the soldiers to mutiny remained unresolved. The war was still going on; agrarian problems remained ubiquitous; employers still exploited their workers; and even the difficulties of feeding the capital were as overwhelming as ever, exacerbated by the presence of tens of thousands of hungry and armed soldiers. Now that the autocracy had been overthrown, what institutions would take its place? Who would lead the centralized, bureaucratic empire that had kept millions of people, including non-Russians, in chains for centuries? Would the war continue? Would the conflicting classes—bourgeois and proletarian, landlord and peasant—unite, after February, to defend the empire against Prussian militarism? Or would the war end in a separate peace? The next few months would reveal the enormous difficulty of answering most of these questions, as well as the inertia that paralyzed the revolutionary leaders to whom the masses turned for guidance.

## NOTES

1. Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *The February Revolution: Petrograd, 1917* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1981), p. 114.
2. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 201.
3. The Kayurov quotation is a slight modification of the one in Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, trans. Max Eastman (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1932), p. 1:104.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 1:104–5. I have compared Trotsky's brilliant but tendentious account against Hasegawa's scholarly history and used material from the Bolshevik writer's work only if the historian substantiates it.
5. N.N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution, 1917: A Personal Record*, ed. and trans. Joel Carmichael (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 26, 27.
6. Hasegawa, *February Revolution*, p. 292.

## CHAPTER 44 The Soviets in Power

### THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT

The insurgency of the Petrograd workers, it need hardly be said, terrified the capital's upper classes. On 14 February, to cope with the city's growing unrest, Nicholas convened the Duma, but then on 26 February, the third day of the strike movement, he inexplicably prorogued it, telling the deputies to leave Petrograd and return to their homes and estates. In so doing the tsar left Russia bereft of any legitimate legislative body. The Duma deputies were astonished by the prorogation—a *de facto* abolition of their institution—but amid the revolutionary upheaval they were undecided on how to respond. On the one hand, they could obey the emperor's order to abandon the city, leaving its political fate to the workers and soldiers. On the other hand, they could meet regardless of the tsar and deal with the situation—but that would mean defying Nicholas's decree and aligning themselves with the insurgents (which would have disastrous repercussions for them personally, should the monarchy survive the upheaval). Most of the conservative deputies chose to obey Nicholas and beat a hasty retreat. That left the members of the Progressive Bloc and the constitutional monarchists to confront the crisis. On the afternoon of 27 February about one-third of the former Duma deputies met in an informal session and selected a Duma Committee. They chose an assortment of members from across the political spectrum, including two socialists, the Trudovik Alexander Kerensky and the Menshevik Nikolai Chkheidze.

The cumbersome full name of the Duma Committee—'Provisional Committee of Duma Members for the Restoration of Order in the Capital and the Establishment of Relations with Public Organizations and Institutions'—was no accident. Panicked both by the insurrection and by Nicholas's decree, the remaining Duma members were unsure whether power lay with the tsar or with the people. Accordingly they designed the Duma Committee to be able



either to keep the revolution under control, should it succeed in changing the government, or to negotiate with a counter-revolution, should the tsar prevail over the insurrection.

Later that day, when news reached the Committee that the Preobrazhensky Regiment had ceased to be at the tsar's disposal, the Committee nervously decided to take power. The Kadet leader Milyukov, the Committee's informal head, was intent on keeping Russia a monarchy and cautiously sought to restore order in the capital and keep a Romanov on the throne. On 1–2 March the Duma Committee agreed that the tsar should abdicate in favor of his son, under the regency of the Grand Duke Michael. The Committee actually had no authority of its own to offer the throne to the reluctant grand duke, who wisely rejected the risky honor. Nicholas, for his part, seemed to be sleepwalking through his dynasty's ultimate crisis. First he demanded the outright military suppression of the insurrection; then he agreed to accept a constitutional monarchy; and finally, 'encouraged' by nervous generals, he acknowledged that a new provisional government was the only alternative to anarchy in Russia.

Nicholas, however, again offered too little too late. The remains of shattered royal insignias that abounded in the streets of the capital made it eminently clear that the masses would not allow the autocracy to continue to rule Russia, let alone with a Romanov on the throne. As he met with emissaries from the Duma Committee and consulted with his more trusted military advisers, it was plain to the emperor that his own supporters were eager to see him removed. Nicholas's capacity to influence events had become so minuscule that his abdication on 2 March was almost a mundane event. With little ceremony the tsar and his family were temporarily placed under house arrest in his palace in Tsarskoe Selo.

With the abdication of the emperor, the Duma Committee had to create a legally responsible provisional government if it was to prevent the immense tide of political change from creating a radically democratic government beyond the control of the bourgeoisie and landowners. In a negotiating session that began at midnight on 1 March, the Duma Committee delegates (headed by Milyukov) and a Soviet delegation (headed by Chkheidze) met and hammered out an eight-point program to establish a provisional government that would run the state until such time as a constituent assembly could be convoked. With this program as its basis, the new government intended to (1) offer amnesty to all political prisoners; (2) guarantee freedom of speech, assembly, and association, including the right to form unions and engage in strikes; (3) abolish all privileges based on national, religious, and social status; (4) prepare for the convocation of a constituent assembly; (5) replace the police force with a militia whose officers would be elected; (6) provide for

elections for new organs of municipal self-government, by a 'four-tailed' suffrage (universal, secret, direct, and equal voting); (7) ensure that insurgent military units in Petrograd would keep their weapons and would not be sent to the front; and finally (8) give all off-duty soldiers the right to enjoy the freedoms possessed by civilians. Finally Milyukov drew up a list of ministers to fill the positions of the proposed government. All of these measures were undertaken without any public involvement—indeed, behind the back of the Revolution.

With a Provisional Government in place, Milyukov now needed to somehow gain a semblance of popular consent for its existence. His strategy was simple. An anonymous crowd of 'the people' had gathered in the Catherine Hall of the Tauride Palace 'for the purposes of information' (as the Menshevik-Internationalist Nikolai Sukhanov later put it). Milyukov, passing by the hall, felicitously chanced to encounter them. In a sudden burst of inspiration he decided to regard the crowd as a sample of the revolutionary people. He announced that a new government had been formed, described its structure and ministers, and then simply asked for their approval.

The 'people', however, were not nearly as accommodating as Milyukov had hoped.

'Who elected you?' was one rather difficult question, to which the answer had to be given that no one had elected anyone, that there was no time for elections, that the 'revolution' had done the electing. When Miliukov called [the proposed] Premier [G.E.] Lvov the incarnation of Russian 'society' oppressed by the Tsarist regime, an exclamation was heard from the crowd: 'Propertied society!'

The whole program and list of ministers might have been discarded then and there had Milyukov not mentioned that Alexander Kerensky would be minister of justice. 'I have just received,' he said, 'the consent of my colleague A.F. Kerensky to occupy the post of Minister of Justice in the first people's Cabinet, in which he will mete out just retribution to all the servants of the old régime.'<sup>1</sup> The 'people' naïvely greeted this news with 'thunderous applause'. Kerensky, widely known to the masses for his opposition to the autocracy, would undoubtedly declare a general amnesty, it was assumed, for all political prisoners at home and expatriates abroad, an issue that was of paramount importance to the capital's residents. Once Milyukov mentioned Kerensky's name, the crowd agreed to accept the rest of the program with little complaint.

That single, *ad hoc* encounter made up the ratification process in its entirety. The Provisional Government was thereby created and endowed with



all the privileges and status of the governing power of the land. The Allied powers eagerly recognized it as the legitimate Russian state. That its legitimacy had been granted by a heckling crowd of 'the people', whom the ministers would normally disdain, seemed to disturb no one in those chaotic days. Put bluntly: the Provisional Government had been created to prevent the masses from establishing a radically democratic government outside the control of the bourgeoisie. Months later the complaint would be raised that the Bolsheviks had 'illegitimately' seized power from Russia's 'legitimate' government—yet the Provisional Government was virtually a *coup d'état* carried out by Milyukov, with the co-operation of the Menshevik-controlled Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet.

Its members were a gray list of bourgeois liberals: the *zemstvo* leader and landowner Prince G.E. Lvov would be the official head of the government, acting as chairman of the Council of Ministers; Milyukov was its minister of foreign affairs; Kerensky, its minister of justice; Nekrasov, its minister of transport; and the industrialist Guchkov, its minister of war, to cite the principal figures. Hand-picked by Milyukov, its eminence grise, this cabal held power primarily by virtue of the presence of Kerensky.

Still, after casting aside a four-centuries-old semi-Asiatic autocracy in less than a week of street fighting, the February Revolution catapulted Russia into the freest liberal democracy in the Western world. In March 1917 the Provisional Government would institute a series of progressive reforms that had few equals in modern European history. It granted a package of civil liberties that included guarantees of freedom of speech, press, and assembly, as well as the right to form trade unions and declare strikes—this in the midst of a bloody war. A large section of the proletariat was given the eight-hour day. It abolished the death penalty and declared an amnesty for all political prisoners, thereby opening Russia to the return of politically incendiary revolutionaries. It eliminated legal inequalities based on race, religion, and legal status, granting Jews civil rights for the first time in Russian history. It granted national minorities varying degrees of autonomy, and it gave Poland, after generations of sanguinary struggle, its independence.

## THE FORMATION OF THE PETROGRAD SOVIET

The real power in the capital, however, lay not with the Provisional Government but with the newly formed Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. The Soviet had obvious roots in the soviets of 1905. During the brief general strike in Petrograd in 1915, it will be recalled, Bolshevik worker-

militants had also raised the demand for a soviet,\* and it was echoed again in the January 1917 general strike. On 24 February, even before the Petrograd Soviet came into existence, the workers in several factories (the Franco-Russian and Promet plants) elected delegates to form a soviet. Before Nicholas prorogued the Duma, these delegates met with the Menshevik Duma members to demand that a soviet be organized. The next day, whether in reaction to these workers or on their own initiative, the Menshevik deputies did precisely that: a party meeting agreed to organize a soviet and called a meeting for 26 February at the headquarters of the Petrograd Union of Workers' Cooperatives. Before that meeting could be held, however, the police rounded up more than half the delegates, and the formation of the soviet was stalled.

The definitive step toward forming the Petrograd Soviet occurred on 27 February, when insurgent crowds freed several imprisoned members of the Workers' Group of the War Industries Committee. On the same day several leaders of the Group—notably K. Gvozdev, B. Bogdanov, and G. Breido—quickly made their way across town to the Tauride Palace, where the Duma sessions had been held. There they encountered Chkheidze and Kerensky, who arranged to set aside a room for their common use. These socialists 'immediately formed a Provisional Executive Committee,' as Tsuyoshi Hasegawa notes, whose purpose was to organize a Petrograd Soviet.<sup>2</sup>

The self-appointed 'Provisional Executive' that met consisted of the Mensheviks Chkheidze, Volkov, Grinevich, Gvozdev and Bogdanov; and the non-party intellectuals Kapelinsky, Frankorussky, Sukhanov and N. Sokolov. The Petrograd Soviet thus began as a committee that had a moderate socialist orientation. At two o'clock that afternoon these members issued an appeal to Petrograd's 'citizens', calling on them to assemble at seven that evening at the Tauride Palace and elect delegates to what would become a soviet (although the word did not appear in the appeal). Soldiers were to elect one deputy for each infantry company (about 250 soldiers), one for each thousand workers in the large factories, and one for each agglomeration of small factories whose workers collectively totaled a thousand, which thereby gave a huge majority to the peasant-soldiers.

The Mensheviks and their allies were not alone on 27 February in the effort to form a soviet. A number of groups were racing to create the institution;

\* In 1915 Menshevik deputies to the Duma—most conspicuously Chkheidze—had opposed both the general strike and the demand for a soviet, because the situation, they believed, was not 'ripe' for openly challenging the authorities. Now two years later, ironically, Chkheidze was the head of the soviet delegation negotiating with Milyukov over ways to legitimize the bourgeois Provisional Government's custody of a revolution that he had done nothing to foster.



indeed, the competition among them was nip-and-tuck. In the early afternoon, while the Mensheviks were conferring in the Tauride Palace, the revolutionary *mezhrayontsy* and their radical Socialist Revolutionary allies were meeting at their headquarters, where they unanimously agreed to issue an appeal for an insurrection and the formation of a soviet. In fact, the *mezhrayontsy* were almost certainly the first socialist tendency to raise the demand for both an uprising and a soviet.

The *mezhrayonts* appeal for a soviet of workers' deputies was patently an attempt to make the Soviet into a 'provisional revolutionary government'—a soviet with governmental powers.<sup>3</sup> This strategy was more radical than that of the Mensheviks, who seemed to be endeavoring to avoid the creation of a proletarian revolutionary government. During the evening of 27 February the *mezhrayontsy* and their allies distributed 30,000 copies of their appeal throughout the capital, but by this time, at nine o'clock, the Mensheviks were already holding their own soviet plenary in the Tauride, pre-empting the *mezhrayontsy* effort.

Both the Mensheviks and the *mezhrayontsy*, however, had outpaced the Bolshevik leaders, who continued to underestimate the importance of the soviets. In an October 1915 article Lenin had opposed the Petersburg Bolsheviks' demand for a soviet, warning that it should be created only 'in connection with the development of a mass political strike'<sup>4</sup> and not as an institution around which to build a revolutionary regime. On 25 February the Russian Bureau of the Bolsheviks issued a leaflet that echoed Lenin's view, declaring that soviets were instruments of struggle, not forms of self-governance. It called upon the workers to create specifically Bolshevik committees in the factories and in the city's districts—a demand that must have seemed more like a recruitment drive for the party than a call to serious confrontation. The leaflet went so far as to demand that such committees had to subordinate themselves to the party's Petersburg City Committee, which all but prevented Bolsheviks from participating in non-party mass organizations.\* The Bureau seems to have viewed the February Revolution strictly as a party affair, to be conducted by party committees under direct Bolshevik leadership—a view it derived from Lenin's organizational writings.

By no means, however, did all the Bolsheviks in Petrograd support this highly sectarian policy. On the same day that the Mensheviks were organizing the Soviet in the Tauride Palace, the Vyborg District Committee, which was subordinated to the party's City Committee, called upon the strikers to elect

\* The Bolsheviks' City Committee, it should be recalled, retained the name 'Petersburg' instead of shifting to 'Petrograd' because it despised the chauvinism that motivated the autocracy's name changes once war broke out.

deputies to a soviet. It was to be convened at the spacious Finland Station and form the basis for a provisional revolutionary government. The committee's leaflet declared that the workers should 'start immediately ... elections to the factory strike committees. Their representatives will compose the Soviet of Workers' Deputies, which will create a Provisional Revolutionary Government.'<sup>5</sup> Like the earlier *mezhrayonts* leaflet, this Bolshevik leaflet was extraordinary: it anticipated the policy that Lenin would adopt on his return to Russia in April and that would ultimately carry the Bolshevik Party to power nine months later.

On 27 February, however, the insurgent Petrograd workers and soldiers largely ignored this appeal in favor of the Mensheviks' soviet. As Hasegawa tells us, it 'could not divert the massive procession of insurgents to the Tauride Palace.'<sup>6</sup> The Mensheviks understood only too clearly that the Left was trying to create a workers' and peasants' government—and they made every effort to outpace all their revolutionary rivals and ensure that the Soviet's leadership, committed to moderate policies, would provide room for Milyukov's Provisional Government. Even the choice of the Tauride Palace—the seat of the Duma—as the new Soviet's meeting place was a political act. It suggested that *the new government should be bourgeois in character and, in some manner, include the Duma*. Although the Menshevik appeal claimed to be issued by 'representatives of the workers, soldiers, and other people of Petrograd', none of its authors appears to have participated in the strike movement and insurrection, let alone to 'represent' anyone but themselves.

After the planning meeting ended, some of the Soviet's organizers made haste to canvass the city's factories and call upon whomever they could find there instantly to elect 'deputies' for a meeting of the Soviet that was to be held only a few hours later. At nine p.m. the first plenary session of the new Soviet finally got under way at the Tauride. The palace itself was literally divided topographically into a 'right wing', where the Provisional Government met, and a 'left wing', occupied by the aborning Soviet, thus creating what would soon be called a 'dual power'. The participants in the Soviet, by most accounts, numbered no more than 50 voting 'deputies' and 200 observers. Apart from Shliapnikov and a handful of his party comrades, only a few Bolsheviks were present at this fateful opening session. The workers were apparently unclear about the ultimate goals of the various socialist parties and turned to their better-known deputies. Due to the quasi-legal status that the Mensheviks enjoyed as a result of their participation in the Duma and the Workers' Group, they were widely known to the mass of workers in the capital and easily rose to leadership of the Soviet.

At the first meeting in the Tauride, the Mensheviks and their moderate socialist supporters consolidated their control over the new Petrograd Soviet



by electing Chkheidze as chairman and Skobelev and Kerensky as vice-chairmen. The plenary also created an Executive Committee, which included six Mensheviks (Chkheidze, Skobelev, Gvozdev, Grinevich, Sokolovsky and Pankov), two moderate Socialist Revolutionaries (Kerensky and Alexandrovich), two Bolsheviks (Shliapnikov and Zalutsky), and five non-party intellectuals (Sukhanov, Steklov, Sokolov, Krasikov and Kapelinsky), most of whom initially tilted politically toward the Mensheviks' policy.

## SOVIET POWER

The Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet was quickly endowed by the Revolution with power unequalled by any other authority in Russia. Workers were at its beck and call in any action it chose to take, and Russia's peasants soon came to follow its lead, especially if it promised a repartition of the land. Although its Menshevik leaders were avowedly reluctant to turn the Soviet into a state—Menshevik dogma explicitly assigned that task to the alleged 'revolutionary bourgeoisie'—material circumstances and popular allegiances soon forced the Soviet to function as a state power.

The Executive Committee began to function as a state when it established commissions to handle affairs that properly belonged to a bourgeois government. During the afternoon of 27 February, before the Soviet had even met, the Provisional Executive Committee had already formed a Food Supply Commission to handle the distribution of food in the capital, and a Military Commission to restore order in the army. A Socialist Revolutionary, one Colonel Sergey Mstislavsky, was instrumental in forming the Military Commission, which decided to meet, not in the left wing of the Tauride Palace, but in the right—in fact, in the offices of the Duma's vice-chairman, the Kadet Nikolai Nekrasov. This change of venue all but placed control over the military in the Duma Committee's hands. That night the first plenary of the Soviet angrily overruled Mstislavsky's literal 'move to the right' and brought the Military Commission back to its place in the palace's left wing, placing it under its own jurisdiction.

Moreover, while meeting in its first session, the Soviet enacted an old demand of the Left. It decided to replace the capital's hated police forces with a militia, to be composed of a hundred out of every thousand factory workers in the capital. These contingents were to be led by commissars from the Soviet's district committees, which were being established in all of Petrograd's boroughs. Two days later, militia units composed of factory workers were formed throughout the capital, to the chagrin of the Provisional Government.

Among the members on the Executive Committee, the executors of the Soviet's power, notably the right-wing members, visibly outnumbered the leftists. At the 27 February session of the committee Shliapnikov, dissatisfied with the low representation accorded the Bolsheviks, proposed that every socialist party in the city assign two deputies to the Soviet's Executive. His motion was approved, and when the Executive Committee met the next morning, its membership had grown to include two Socialist Revolutionaries (Zenzinov and Sviatitsky), two additional Bolsheviks (Molotov and Shutko), and a *mezhrayonts* (Iurenev).

But it also included additional right-wing socialists: two Trudoviks (Bramson and Chaikovksy), two members of the right-wing Popular Socialist Party (Peshekhonov and Chernolusky), two Jewish Bundists (Ehrlich and Rafes), and two additional Mensheviks (Bogdanov and Batursky). Most of these added members were hostile to the Bolsheviks and the *mezhrayontsy*. The net effect of Shliapnikov's motion was thus inadvertently to tilt the Executive Committee even further to the right than before, reinforcing the Menshevik policy of collaboration with the liberal bourgeoisie.

Tradition and precedent also played a role in the formation of social loyalties. Given the insurrectionary mood of the masses, the Soviet plenaries could not allow the Executive Committee to collaborate too closely with capitalists. Thus when the time came for the Petrograd Soviet to define its power in relation to that of the Provisional Government, the members of the Executive Committee suffered from political schizophrenia. On 1 March, following Marxist precept, it duly voted (13 to 8) not to join the Provisional Government, and on 2 March the Soviet adopted the semi-Bolshevik position of functioning as a "controlling organ of revolutionary democracy" vis-à-vis the [official] government." Hence it agreed only to 'conditionally support' the government—a formula that was to harness the Soviet to the government in all the months that followed.

Meanwhile, on 28 February the Provisional Government had issued an order, under the Kadet minister Rodzianko's signature, commanding the insurrectionary troops to return to their barracks and place themselves at the disposition of their former officers. It should be understood that the soldiers had rebelled not only against the tsarist regime but against the old military hierarchy and its disciplinary authority as embodied by the officers. On the day Rodzianko's order was issued, the insurrection was by no means over; armed conflicts were still continuing in the capital. The revolutionary soldiers had every reason to believe that if they followed the order and returned to their barracks, their former officers would disarm them and subject them to retaliation.

That Rodzianko had even dared to issue such an order produced shock and



dismay among the workers and soldiers. The Soviet plenary session furiously condemned the order and even demanded Rodzianko's arrest. For their part the insurgent soldiers took matters into their own hands by electing their own commanders. The Moscow Regiment even went so far as to arrest suspect officers and bring them to the Tauride Palace for confinement. Rodzianko's order thus had the ultimate effect of inducing any reluctant soldiers to elect delegates to the Soviet, following the workers on the day before, and to air their grievances there, making the Soviet into the sole armed popular power in the capital.

On 1 March, while the Executive Committee was completing the day's business, soldiers poured *en masse* into its meeting room and demanded that it prevent the Duma Committee from placing them under the command of their old officers. In Hasegawa's colorful description,

suddenly the doors of the assembly hall [of the Soviet] flung open and a large group of soldiers burst into the hall. Overwhelmed by the number of soldiers, who for the first time appeared in the Soviet session *en masse*, and panic-stricken by their anger, [the Menshevik] Skobelev immediately announced that the session was open. The soldiers turned this general session to an exclusive meeting of soldiers, not allowing other delegates to speak.<sup>8</sup>

The Petrograd Soviet of Workers' Deputies, now filled with angry gray-coated delegates, quickly renamed itself the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, uneasily giving the volatile soldiers a direct voice in its operations and decisions.

A new plenum was thus established consisting exclusively of soldiers. This plenum, thenceforth called the Soldiers' Section, proceeded to pass resolutions of its own that required that the Soviet approve of all military orders before the soldiers would execute them. It further resolved that no weapons could be turned over to the officers; rather, arms were to be placed in the custody of battalion committees elected by the ranks. After much debate about whether officers should be elected, the Soldiers' Section agreed to limit the authority of the officers exclusively to men on duty, and it required officers to give their orders to ordinary soldiers respectfully and politely (as they had rarely done in the past). Lastly, the plenum demanded that the garrison soviets be composed of deputies from all units of the army.

When these resolutions were transmitted to the Provisional Government, Rodzianko and Guchkov categorically rejected them. After the delegates from the Soldiers' Section made several vain attempts to gain the adoption of their resolutions, they finally left, angrily asserting, 'So much the better, we will

write them ourselves.' And so they did. Ten soldiers—two Bolsheviks, two Menshevik-Internationalists, one moderate Menshevik, a Socialist Revolutionary, a Kadet and a handful of unaffiliated soldiers—were elected to the Executive Committee of the Soviet as soldiers' representatives. Together with the Menshevik Sokolov they betook themselves to a room adjacent to the meeting place of the Executive Committee and wrote the remarkable Order Number 1, which essentially shifted full command of the army over to the Soviet.

The soldiers who wrote this vitally important order were no political naïfs—most were likely members of revolutionary parties, and a few may even have been junior officers. Sukhanov, who witnessed the writing of the order, describes the scene with earthy authenticity:

Around 10 o'clock, going back behind the curtain of Room 13, where the [Executive Committee] had been in session shortly before, I found the following scene: N.D. Sokolov was sitting at a table writing. He was surrounded on all sides by soldiers, standing, sitting, and leaning on the table, half-dictating and half-suggesting to Sokolov what he should write. . . . It appeared that this was a committee elected by the Soviet to compose an 'Order' to the soldiers. There was no agenda and no discussion of any kind, everyone spoke, and all were completely absorbed in the work, formulating their collective opinion without any voting. I stood and listened, extraordinarily interested. When the work was finished they put a heading on the sheet: 'Order No. 1.'\*

Trotsky appropriately called the Order Number 1 'a charter of the freedom of the revolutionary army.'<sup>9</sup> Addressed to 'all the soldiers of the Guard, army, artillery and fleet for immediate and precise execution, and to the workers of

\* N.N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution 1917: A Personal Record*, ed. and trans. by Joel Carmichael (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 113. Richard Pipes, a historian who was also a member of Ronald Reagan's National Security Council, asserts: 'One of the myths of the Russian Revolution is that Order No. 1 was dictated by a crowd of grubby soldiers. Sukhanov has left a vivid picture of the Social-Democratic lawyer N.D. Sokolov seated at a table in Taurida and writing down the demands of the troops. There even exists a photograph which seems to lend visual credibility to this version of the order's origins.' But, says Pipes, the Order 'was initially formulated, not by rank-and-file soldiers, but by civilians and garrison delegates picked by the Ispolkom, some of them officers and most of them affiliated with the socialist parties.' Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p. 304. Is this interpretation tenable? Sukhanov was certainly in a better position to describe the event than Pipes, and there is nothing whatever in his report that indicates the presence of a 'crowd', let alone 'grubby soldiers'.



Petrograd for information', it abolished all honorific titles and forms of address for officers; officers were to desist from addressing soldiers in the familiar second-person singular, the form by which masters had addressed serfs. Off-duty soldiers and sailors were no longer obliged to salute their officers, act deferentially toward them, or provide them with services as they had in the past. 'Arms of all kinds,' which it specified in detail, were to be placed 'at the disposition and under the control of the company and battalion committees' and were not 'in any case to be given out to officers, even upon their demand.'

Moreover, the order opened a wide breach between the Soviet and the Provisional Government. It bestowed upon the Soviet's Executive Committee full command of the Petrograd garrison—a large army in its own right—and control over most of the military forces at the front. Resolutions passed by the Soldiers' Section became commanding directives of the Petrograd Soviet, and orders issued by the Provisional Government could be fulfilled 'only in those cases which do not contradict the orders and decisions of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.' The order called upon all military units to 'choose committees' and elect 'one representative to a company [generally, 250 men], who should appear with written credentials in [the Tauride Palace] at ten o'clock in the morning of March 2.'<sup>10</sup> The soldiers seized upon it as their declaration of independence from the tsarist military system and established front-line committees at all military levels, from company to division.

The Menshevik-dominated Executive Committee was by no means eager to accept the tremendous amount of power that the order conferred upon it—in fact, it issued an order appealing to the troops to obey their superiors. But the Petrograd typesetters refused to publish the committee's document. Two days later the Executive Committee tried again, issuing Order Number 2, a more prudent ordinance that attempted to repeal the more radical aspects of its predecessor. It established a 'commission', composed principally of Executive Committee Mensheviks, that was designed to curb the authority of all soldiers' committees. The committee's subsequent Order Number 3 limited the jurisdiction of the first two orders solely to the Petrograd garrison. But many army formations simply ignored the order and established frontline committees that were composed of three soldiers and one officer to interpret them.

## EARLY SOVIET POLITICS

In the months that followed the February uprising, soviets were established in the *uezdy* and the provinces of the old empire, while the large cities and towns

of the realm formed municipal soviets. Often even a village *skhod* would be renamed a 'soviet', although many of them remained direct democracies, in contrast to the representative system used by the urban soviets. By the end of 1917 an estimated 900 soviets existed in Russia. The Petrograd Soviet, in turn, formed the apex of an elaborate structure of soviets that existed at all levels of political life.

While the provincial soviets tried to emulate the Petrograd Soviet, they varied enormously in structure, in number of members, and in their occupational background. The Moscow Soviet of Workers' Deputies, for example, was composed of 700 deputies, 540 of whom were workers, while the remainder were professionals and salaried employees. The soviet was divided into two plenaries—Workers' and Soldiers' Sections—that met separately and had separate executive committees (whose combined membership totaled 75); they were co-ordinated in joint meetings.

Although the Petrograd proletariat greatly outnumbered the garrison, the soldier-deputies to the Soviet outnumbered the worker-deputies by three to one. In March a Petrograd Soviet plenary comprised only 800 workers and 2000 soldiers. The same disproportion was replicated in most of the urban centers that had garrisons. Military units of various sizes—companies, battalions, and regiments—flooded soviet plenaries with deputies, skewing decisions in favor of the garrison rather than reflecting the views of the much larger proletariat. The numerical superiority of soldier-deputies made the soviets more conservative than they should have been, reflecting the views of the peasants-in-uniform, who generally felt that Russia should continue to fight the Central Powers until a separate peace could be achieved 'without annexations and indemnities.'

Irakly Tsereteli's return from Siberia in March pushed the moderate Menshevik faction, initially led by Chkhaidze, markedly to the right. Before the Revolution, Tsereteli had been a paragon of Marxian orthodoxy. But the success of the Revolution had changed his views profoundly: not only did he believe strongly that the liberal parties had vigorously to lead a 'bourgeois democratic' revolution, but his influence on the party did much to change the Mensheviks from defenders of the workers into supporters of the liberal bourgeoisie, or the 'democracy', as the Provisional Government and its supporters came to be called.

The rightward tilt of the Petrograd Soviet was thus supported both by its Menshevik-dominated Executive Committee and by its politically unsophisticated soldier-delegate majorities in its plenaries. Accordingly, the Soviet passed measures that played directly into the Provisional Government's hands. The very unruliness of many soviet plenaries, which often resembled rallies more than popular legislatures, facilitated this outcome. In many cases, votes were



held by acclamation rather than by balloting. The plenaries' very looseness and informality made it easy for organized cliques to manipulate them, militating against democracy and concentrating power in committees and commissions. Political celebrities tended to overshadow the intellectually more responsible figures from the old underground. An unknown number of 'deputies' were self-appointed rather than elected. The absence of regulations to guarantee fairness in the plenaries' procedures and identify legitimate delegates—far from fostering revolutionary democracy, as anarchists might have supposed—served the interests of the Right. These problems worsened as the Soviet's plenaries grew in size. Plenaries were held in the largest Petrograd theaters, but even these venues, especially during joint plenaries of the Soldiers' and Workers' Sections, were filled so completely that the deputies—overheated, weary, and choking on tobacco smoke—were obliged to stand wearily for many hours during the disorderly proceedings.

As the weeks passed, however, and as experienced socialist leaders returned from abroad or from Siberia, the soviets became more deliberative bodies. Although some voices still favored large plenaries as more democratic, legitimate delegates replaced free-wheeling interlopers who spoke for no one but themselves, and the proceedings were conducted in a more orderly fashion.

The 18–19 March plenary meetings of the Petrograd Soviet decided that the Soviet's two sections had to be trimmed down to 250–300 delegates each, forming a full Soviet of 600. In the middle of April, the credentials committee began excluding illegitimate would-be delegates. These measures made the Soviet's plenums more workable bodies.

But other changes tended to reduce the plenaries' democracy. During late February and early March plenums had been held daily, but in March only five were held, and only six in April. As plenaries met less frequently, more of the plenary's business was left to the Executive Committee. As Oskar Anweiler observes, 'most practical activity ... remained in the hands of the Executive Committee,' which 'maintained its preeminence dating from the first days of the revolution.'<sup>11</sup> Smaller, less frequent plenums were easier for the Executive Committee to manipulate, which it did with considerable dexterity. 'The soviet Executive,' Anweiler continues, 'became increasingly independent, even though it remained subject to certain controls by the deputies, who had the right to discharge it.'<sup>12</sup>

Irakly Tseretelli also did much to centralize the Petrograd Soviet and diminish the power of its plenaries. On 14 March he induced his fellow Mensheviks to set up a small select bureau (sometimes called a presidium) within the Executive Committee, which was charged with 'preparing all the business' for the committee's sessions and with 'solving current questions'—a vague formulation that could be interpreted quite broadly.<sup>13</sup> The bureau met

secretly and more frequently than even the Executive Committee, which had initially met daily but now held its meetings only three times a week.

The bureau was composed of eleven Mensheviks, six Socialist Revolutionaries, three Trudoviks, and four unaligned Social Democrats. A scant few seats were assigned to the Bolsheviks, but far fewer than they would have received had the bureau reflected their real strength among the workers. Outraged, the Bolsheviks accused Tseretelli and his colleagues of creating the bureau specifically for the purpose of excluding them, and they refused to legitimize its authority by occupying their assigned seats. The Bolsheviks began to attack the bureau unremittingly. They were joined by Martov's newly formed radical group, the Menshevik-Internationalists; one of its members, Sukhanov, called the bureau a 'star chamber.' A month after it was formed, Tseretelli and his supporters were obliged to compromise: members of the Executive Committee were permitted to attend the bureau's meetings—but only as non-voting observers. That is, they could sit in on bureau meetings, but they were not permitted publicly to disclose its proceedings or even the location of the meeting place. To add injury to insult, the bureau reserved the right to reject as a member anyone who refused to support the Executive Committee's Menshevik 'defensist' line. This rule automatically excluded everyone—Bolsheviks, *mezhrayontsy*, and Menshevik-Internationalists—who differed furiously with Tseretelli and his followers on support for the war. Political homogeneity now became the order of the day.

Thus by the end of March a hierarchy had emerged in the Petrograd Soviet that increasingly limited its democratic practices. The tightly controlled, essentially secretive bureau, which was dominated by Tseretelli and, to a lesser degree, Chkheidze, presided over the Executive Committee and by extension over the Soviet's ever-rarer plenums, greatly diminishing the democracy they professed to defend. Nor was the Petrograd Soviet by any means alone in pursuing this authoritarian direction. In Saratov, too, the plenum was gradually subordinated to its executive, and the executive to its bureau. Initially, the plenum of the Saratov Soviet had met every second day, preceded by a meeting of the executive the evening before. By the end of July, however, the plenum met only every two weeks (although its workers' section met weekly), and the executive met only twice a week. But the bureau met daily, which suggests, as John Keep observes, 'that the executive committee itself lost influence to its bureau, which was nominally subordinate to it.'<sup>14</sup> As the months passed, executive committees in other locales gradually appropriated powers from plenums, and bureaus steadily usurped the powers of executive committees, with the result that Russian workers and soldiers saw their control over the Revolution's course begin to slip from their fingers.

The multi-tiered structure of soviets was also becoming less democratic and



more centralized, particularly as elections to the various levels of local and provincial soviets came to be conducted indirectly. Members of a 'higher'-level soviet were chosen not by all the workers that had particular jurisdiction in a popular election, but by the various soviets on the level 'below' them in the soviet hierarchy. District soviets, for example, elected the members of city soviets, who in turn elected the members of provincial soviets. This decidedly hierarchical system of representation increasingly removed the soviets from direct popular control.

Throughout Russia, as winter and spring passed into summer, the layers of soviets that had blossomed in March developed sizable bureaucracies. Commissions or departments, established for the various tasks that confronted the country, steadily took on a life of their own, with growing staffs, offices, and emoluments. The proliferation of departments in the Petrograd Soviet is typical. On 3 March the Petrograd Soviet created eleven departments (initially commissions), each of which was equipped with a staff of experts, administrators, and office workers. These departments dealt with military affairs, supply, labor, the formulation of legislative proposals, international affairs, propaganda, finance and the co-ordination of the city soviet with its district soviets, among other things. To its credit, the Petrograd Soviet dared to do what had daunted the Paris Commune: it placed a guard over the state bank, the mint, and the government printing office, thereby taking the financial life of Russia into its own hands.

But a gap was opening and widening between the leaders who sat on the executive committees and bureaus and the masses who had placed them in power. The steady growth of the Bolsheviks' popularity in the late spring and early summer of 1917 is normally attributed to the failure of the Provisional Government's liberals and the Soviet Mensheviks to satisfy the desires of the people for peace, food and land. But the widening gulf between the Soviet leaders and the people, which occurred fairly early in the Revolution, was doubtless a major factor as well. As the Petrograd Soviet's bureaucracy grew, so too did its need for space. The Petrograd Soviet soon took over the entire Tauride Palace, while the Provisional Government moved its quarters to the former tsar's Winter Palace, where ministerial eyes could linger on the large square where troops had shot so many workers on Bloody Sunday in 1905. Oskar Anweiler observes that after two months the Petrograd Soviet changed 'from a provisional revolutionary organ into a well-organized administrative machine. ... However, as the soviet worked more efficiently, it lost proportionately its direct contact with the masses.'<sup>15</sup>

After the Bolsheviks took over the soviet government in October, the Mensheviks would regret establishing these centralizing and authoritarian precedents, which the Bolsheviks enlarged upon. Still, the Mensheviks and SRs

in the Petrograd Soviets were far less authoritarian than the Bolsheviks would become. Under their control the Petrograd Soviet never became a statist ogre, and the Executive Committee and the various committees were still subject to many democratic controls from below. The Mensheviks still adhered to their long-time position that Russia needed to undergo a liberal 'bourgeois democratic' stage, a precept that made them very responsive to changes in popular mood. No less important, it led them to develop a richly articulated society that took the form of factory committees, militia contingents, trade unions, local soviets, and a finely spun network of popular societies that annulled the effects of the many governmental institutions that had existed under the old regime.

## NOTES

1. N.N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution 1917: A Personal Record*, ed. and trans. Joel Carmichael (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 145.
2. Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *The February Revolution: Petrograd, 1917* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1981), p. 330.
3. *Izvestia*, Feb. 28, 1917; quoted in *ibid.*, p. 332.
4. V.I. Lenin, 'A Few Theses' (Oct. 1915), in *Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1942), p. 5:155.
5. Hasegawa, *February Revolution*, p. 334.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Oskar Anweiler, *The Soviets: The Russian Workers', Peasants', and Soldiers' Councils, 1905-1921*, trans. Ruth Hein (New York: Pantheon, 1974), p. 105.
8. Hasegawa, *February Revolution*, p. 394.
9. Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, trans. Max Eastman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1932), p. 1:276.
10. 'Order Number One', rpt. in William Henry Chamberlain, *The Russian Revolution, 1917-1921* (1935; New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1965), p. 1:429-30; emphasis added.
11. Anweiler, *Soviets*, p. 107.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
13. *Izvestia*, Mar. 16, 1917.
14. Keep, *Russian Revolution*, p. 126.
15. Anweiler, *Soviets*, p. 108.



## CHAPTER 45 Popular Committees and District Soviets

### THE FACTORY COMMITTEES

Following the overthrow of the monarchy, a vast array of popular organizations—factory, neighborhood, military, and village committees, councils, unions, and cooperatives—appeared, in which workers, soldiers, sailors and peasants created a dazzling new social and economic reality that remade the institutional structure of Russian society. Russia's *komitetchina*, as this growth was called, which convened politically in local, regional, and all-Russian congresses and conferences, was comparable in degree of self-management only to that of the French revolutionary sections of 1793.

Factory committees in particular began to exercise great economic control over the industrial cities, rapidly politicizing and radicalizing the proletariat. To be sure, the factory committees long antedated the February Revolution; as we have seen, Russian workers had a long tradition of working together in corporate bodies. The peasants who came to the cities looking for jobs brought with them deeply ingrained values of collective decision-making that had served them so well in the countryside. A strong spirit of co-operation and mutual aid, born in the Russian *obshchina*, was carried over into the cities by rural craftsmen and 'peasants in overalls'. After the February Revolution, this cooperative tradition found its formal expression in factory committees, which increasingly gained control over the shop environment after February and commonly determined the length of the workday, the wage scale, and even industrial output. As John Keep observes, the revolutionary factory committees emerged directly out of the February strikes: 'It was natural that those [workers] who organized the informal strike committees which emerged in Petrograd during the February days should seek to perpetuate their existence

once the men had returned to work.'<sup>1</sup> One of the first formally organized factory committees was established on 1 March at the Petrograd Cable Works, which was engaged in munitions production. The workers demanded that they be permitted to create a militia and a committee to oversee the operations of the factory shop—a measure to which management was obliged to agree.

Thereafter factory committees proliferated rapidly throughout Petrograd and other industrial cities. On 10 March, Petrograd employers concluded a joint agreement to permit workers to establish such committees; less than two weeks later, on 23 April, the Petrograd Soviet promulgated a law making the factory committees into permanent institutions. On 6 May the Provisional Government took cognizance of the committees, passing a statute allowing for workers' participation in industrial management.

Factory committees normally consisted of the most militant workers in an enterprise. Known as the worker-intelligenty, they were the most politically informed workers in a shop—the men with 'ideas', so to speak—who either belonged to or were associated with *kruzhky*, or study circles, and revolutionary parties. They were the workers whom their peers chose to speak for their interests on the shop floor and with the fighters who had come to the foreground during strikes and spoken for strike committees. And they were the informal leaders who propelled strikes into virtual insurrections. The more zealous factory committees met frequently, often under the eyes of the entire factory workforce, so that they sometimes resembled workers' assemblies more than committees. The 1866 Electric Power Company workers' committee, established on 2 March 1917, convened 45 times during March and April—indeed, almost daily. Initially the committees concerned themselves with bread-and-butter issues, such as the eight-hour day; but they soon demanded and even exercised much broader rights, vetoing the appointment of managers and dismissing those whom they found objectionable. Foremen and even engineers and technicians against whom workers had long-standing grievances were dismissed by the score and in some cases were handed over to the army to be dispatched to the front.

Over time the committees involved themselves in ever more detailed aspects of the workers' everyday lives. They saw to the workers' food supply, opening canteens and establishing cooperatives as hunger set in. They maintained discipline among unruly workers and absentees. In time they took responsibility for the formation and maintenance of workers' militias, educational and cultural affairs, and campaigns against gambling and drunkenness. They organized classes to improve literacy, staged cultural events such as plays, promoted lectures, and fostered political discussion. Virtually no aspect of life escaped the attention of the committees. In one instance a committee took it upon itself to decide whether to buy scented soap for the workers. Such



concerns, trifling as they seem, made the committee meetings the most intimate locus of working-class life. As S.A. Smith tells us:

Precisely because of this concern with the detail of everyday life at the factory ... the committees were considered by the workers to be 'their' institutions—far closer to them than the [trade] unions or the soviets, and consequently more popular. Workers did not hesitate to turn to the committees for help and advice. The wife of a worker at the Sestroretsk arms works turned to the works committee when her husband threw her out, although the committee was unable to do much.<sup>2</sup>

The committees were developing political goals that were soon to be remarkably radical. On 13 March representatives of the factory committees in twelve enterprises under the management of the state's Main Artillery Administration expressly raised the call for workers' control over industrial production. During the course of several months, the representatives' conference drew up a programmatic 'instruction' that advanced many syndicalistic ideas, reflecting the growing power of the factory committees: 'All administrative personnel, such as works directors, departmental and workshop heads,' it read, 'all technical officials ... and other managerial staff are to assume their duties with the approval of the general factory committee.'<sup>3</sup> The conference assigned itself the role of controlling 'the activity of the works management in an administrative-economic and technical sense'; as Keep explains, 'its representatives were to be present in all departments of the enterprise and were to have access to all documents, accounts and other official papers.'<sup>4</sup> In varying degrees most of the proletariat of Petrograd accepted the conference's 'instruction'. But they interpreted it differently: some thought it meant that workers should participate in the management of industrial enterprises through advisory boards, while others thought it meant that workers should take over industry outright and fully manage it through democratically elected factory committees.

On 24 April the Putilov workers devised their own 'instruction' on establishing shop committees, calling for factories to take, as Smith puts it, 'as much independence and initiative as possible.'

The success of the labour organisations in the factories fully depends on this. By becoming accustomed to self-management ... the workers are preparing for that time when private ownership of factories and works will be abolished, and the means of production, together with the buildings erected by the workers' hands, will pass into the hands of the working class as a whole. Thus, whilst doing the small things, we must constantly bear in

mind the great overriding objective towards which the working people ... is striving.<sup>5</sup>

As much as this statement resembled what anarcho-syndicalists were preaching in Petrograd at the time, the influence of actual anarcho-syndicalists was negligible. Smith warns, 'This passage, which is typical of working-class discourse at the time, cannot be interpreted as reflecting a spirit of shop sectarianism; it rather expresses a commitment to grass-roots democracy and to self-activity which is characteristic of 1917.'<sup>6</sup>

Attempts to achieve workers' control over industry must have varied greatly from region to region, and much of the evidence tends to be anecdotal. Nor is it clear that workers fully understood the difference between placing factories under the jurisdiction of workers' committees and placing them under the jurisdiction of the state. Given that workers received the idea of workers' control with enthusiasm, however, few obstacles could have prevented daring militants from achieving economic democracy in many of the city's industrial facilities. By October, as Paul Avrich writes, 'some form of workers' control existed in the great majority of Russian enterprises.'<sup>7</sup> But attempts by workers to actually take over factories, as Smith observes, were relatively rare and usually happened in order to preserve the factory's existence.

Although anarcho-syndicalism did increase in popularity after October, most such takeovers were motivated not by a utopian desire to set up producers' communes but by the hope of forcing the government to take financial responsibility for the enterprise by appointing an official, or board, to run it (so-called 'sequestration'). This was true, for instance, of the few cases of workers' management in Moscow (at the Dinamo machine-construction works, the Benno-Rontaller button factory, and the Ganzen wood factory). Only in the Ukraine did the fevered tempo of class conflict, combined with appalling levels of closure, lead to significant numbers of worker takeovers.<sup>8</sup>

In the early months of 1917 committee members were most commonly chosen not because of their specific political affiliations but because of the respect they had earned among the workers. A Bolshevik chairman might head a committee of non-party-affiliated members. The central body at the Putilov works, for example, had a Bolshevik chairman but a majority of unaffiliated members. In other cases, workers chose committee members of a particular political affiliation, not because they were familiar with a party's program, but because its name seemed to accord with their own sentiments. Workers in the Obukhov arms plant, for example, probably adopted the name Socialist



Revolutionaries 'simply because the name of this party seemed to harmonize with their own ideals,' says Keep.<sup>9</sup> Factories whose workers were ideologically close to the extreme Bolsheviks often nonetheless elected committees that contained majorities of Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries—even while objecting to those parties' foot-dragging positions.

It was not until the summer of 1917 that workers begin to choose factory committee members based on political affiliation. By that time Bolshevik propaganda—reinforced by the undemocratic behavior of the Menshevik- and SR-controlled Executive Committee—had made the political distinctions between the socialist parties fairly clear, with the result that party allegiance became an issue of real importance in factory committee elections. Factory committees were in fact the first bodies in Petrograd consciously to elect Bolshevik majorities; in April the 1886 Electric Power Company established a Bolshevik-controlled committee by a vote of 673 out of 1230.

Inevitably, the many factory committees in Petrograd sought to work together institutionally, and in the spring of 1917 the Putilov workers made an appeal for a citywide conference. By this time the Bolsheviks probably exercised the strongest influence within Petrograd's factory committees; indeed, according to Frederick I. Kaplan, it was they 'who seem to have been the chief initiators of the First Conference of the Factory Committees of Petrograd and its Environs.'<sup>10</sup> This conference was held from 30 May to 3 June at the Tauride Palace, the citadel of Menshevik-SR soviet power. Nearly 570 delegates appeared, of whom about half came from metallurgical factories. Representation was based on one delegate from factory committees in enterprises with 1000 workers or fewer; two from factory committees in enterprises with 1000 to 10,000; and three from enterprises with more than 10,000. Some speakers extolled the value of workers' control as a preparation for socialist production and underscored the crucial role of the factory committees in fighting the bourgeoisie. The Mensheviks presented a dissenting view, spurning workers' control as chaotic and particularistic: the Menshevik Skobelev declared that 'the regulation and control of industry is not a matter for a particular class' and invited the delegates to co-operate with management. By a vote of 230 to 128, however, the delegates rejected the Mensheviks' position. On the second day of the conference, Lenin (who by now had returned to Russia) excoriated the Mensheviks for trying to obstruct workers' control. The statement apparently surprised everyone: as a result, remarks Keep, the 'anarchists and syndicalists present could be forgiven for thinking that Lenin had been converted to their views.'<sup>11</sup> The conference closed by establishing a formal 25-man Central Committee of Factory Committees of Petrograd (CCFCP), chaired by a Bolshevik.

During the spring and summer, factory committees spread irresistibly to the

remaining Russian industrial cities. Conferences like the one in Petrograd were held in Kharkov at the end of May, in Moscow at the end of June, and in other provincial industrial cities in the weeks that followed. The Kharkov conference, more than any other, was militantly syndicalist, eschewing the influence of the moderate trade unions and calling for a national organization of factory committees.

Despite the factory committees' support for the Bolsheviks, however, the workers continued to distrust all intellectuals or 'professional revolutionaries' who professed to speak for them, as they had since the 1890s. They never felt that the Bolshevik Party, in particular, was their own organization, and they were often uncomfortable with, even hostile to, much of its intellectual leadership. The factory committees, as a result, began to compete with the Bolsheviks for the allegiance of the working class. If the soviets were a dual power in relation to Kerensky's republican state, the factory committees were potentially a dual power in relationship to the soviets as well as the Bolshevik Party, which had taken over many of the soviets. Indeed, over the course of 1917 a 'triple power' began to appear in Russia: the Provisional Government, the soviets, and the factory committees.

## THE MILITIAS

The February Revolution led to the abolition of all tsarist police agencies. At the first general session of the Petrograd Soviet on 27 February, a Menshevik deputy, M.A. Braunstein, proposed that the Soviet issue a directive to the factories in the capital, instructing them to form militia units consisting of ten men out of every hundred, and appoint a commissar for each district to oversee the militia's activities. Braunstein's motion was adopted by a voice vote, but the workers needed no directive from the Soviet to form their own militia units. During the February street fighting they had already begun to do so, with considerable gusto. In fact, the factory committee of the Putilov works had called for the formation of armed workers' detachments as early as 25 February. As Hasegawa observes, the aims of these militias were revolutionary:

On February 27 at least three groups of insurgent workers attempted to create a militia; and in two cases of these three the creation of a militia directly resulted from the workers' struggle against the police. This militant desire to destroy the old order and establish their own autonomous power underscored the principal purpose of the workers' militia thereafter—a



purpose far more important in their minds than the mere restoration of order and the struggle against lawlessness and anarchy.<sup>12</sup>

In calling for a workers' militia, the Soviet was simply acknowledging an accomplished fact and adding legitimacy and momentum to the ongoing process of forming armed working-class detachments. By 1 and 2 March all large factories were enthusiastically forming or enlarging their militias. Eduard Dune, who had been a member of a Moscow workers' militia, later described militia training in that city:

The volunteers numbered 150 and were all drawn from among the young workers, with the exception of some three dozen older men. Twice a week we lined up and were taught military drill, tactics, camouflage, and the rifle manual. We had no weapons, so we learned the rifle manual using wooden staves. We also marched with these. Ensign Lygzdyn', son of a worker at the factory, was elected commander of the militia.<sup>13</sup>

In contrast to the Moscow workers, the Petrograd workers had access to weapons in great variety and number. The seizure of the Arsenal placed at least 60,000 rifles, 30,000 pistols, and an enormous number of cartridges in their hands, in addition to the weapons and ammunition they had already seized from regimental stores. Although the Provisional Government issued appeals for the return of these weapons, very few workers did so. Much of the Petrograd proletariat was thus well armed, particularly in the Vyborg District, where workers' detachments patrolled the streets and occupied strategic positions in the locality.

To be sure, the workers were not alone in forming militia units within Petrograd's city limits: on 28 February the City Duma—the equivalent of the pre-revolutionary city council—established a city militia under its own jurisdiction. Regarded by the Provisional Government as a regular police force, the city militia's function was organized to preserve public order, protect property, disarm juveniles and 'hooligans', and handle logistical problems such as traffic control. In effect, this force simply replaced the old tsarist police force. As of early March, it numbered some 7000 armed men, most of whom were students, civil servants, civic-minded middle-class people, and regular police who were free of compromising political connections with the autocracy.

In many industrial areas, however, the workers' militia units supplanted the city militia. Workers' units patrolled the streets not only in the Vyborg but in the industrial Vasilevsky Island District, where a general meeting of workers at the Cable Works explicitly demanded that the Petrograd Soviet give full

authority to the workers' militia in preference to the city militia. As Hasegawa notes, 'In the industrial sections of the city, the workers' [militia] commissariats constituted the sole, highest power, establishing the workers' self-government and fulfilling the most direct day-to-day administrative function, thus filling the power vacuum created by the elimination of the tsarist police.'<sup>14</sup> The Petrograd city militia acquired pre-eminence over the workers' militia only in the less industrialized parts of the city, like the Moscow and Kolmna Districts. By mid-March the city militia controlled about 65 militia centers, compared to the twenty controlled by the workers' militia.

But the armed workers outnumbered the city's force by 11,000 to 8000. In some parts of Petrograd, there was a great deal of overlapping between the two militias, which sometimes led to a mutually tolerant integration of functions: the city militia would patrol one street, while contingents of workers' militia patrolled an adjacent one. In other areas, however, the coexistence of two militia forces led to considerable friction. In the Petrograd District, for example, the relations between the two forces were so tense that, in order to avoid outright conflict, they were obliged to work out a guarded compromise.

In Moscow, as Dune tells us, the workers' militia was highly selective in choosing its members: 'The candidacy of each prospective member was discussed at a session of the factory committee, and applicants were often turned down on the grounds that they were regularly drunk or engaged in hooliganism or behaved coarsely with women.'<sup>15</sup> Petrograd's militia was, if anything, even more selective: applicants were carefully screened, then members were chosen by lot and grouped in squads of ten men each, which in turn were combined into companies of one hundred men each. Ten companies, or a thousand men, made up a battalion.\* The rank-and-file elected all their commanders. The characteristic insignia, both for ordinary militiamen and for officers, was a red armband, and the normal form of address was 'comrade', with no honorifics.

Initially it was the factory committees that controlled the workers' militias and provided militiamen with identification permits. Once established, the units commonly trained in their respective factory yards during paid working hours. Ostensibly they were responsible for protecting the factory's property, but a militiaman often spent his time guarding party and soviet headquarters and strategic governmental centers as well as patrolling neighborhoods.

\* It is unclear whether this decadal structure of tens and hundreds was inspired by Braunstein's directive. But it was to be duplicated by the militias in the Spanish Civil War, although most Spaniards almost certainly knew nothing about the organization of the most militias in the Russian Revolution.



Criminal investigations and the defense of property were usually left to the city militia, whose recruits were drawn chiefly from the middle and upper classes.

Politically, the workers' militias were intensely radical from their inception, although at first, like the factory committees, they drew only the vaguest distinctions among the various socialist parties, and tended to distrust all institutions—including the Petrograd Soviet—with the result that workers' militia units often operated primarily under conditions and rules set by their own factory community. As Rex Wade observes in his study of the militias:

The workers' militias and the Petrograd Soviet . . . already looked upon their organizations as much more political and distinctly class-oriented (even if this sentiment was not yet clearly articulated), and at least by implication insisted that the City Militia also was in some way partisan. The workers especially mistrusted the basic concept of a neutral police force. Their experience with the tsarist police led them to look upon the police as agents of the political authorities and backers of the factory management.<sup>16</sup>

In the eyes of the Petrograd proletariat, the militias were not only the means to achieving their long-sought material goals; they were also sources of dignity and class empowerment.

For the workers and their factory committees . . . the presence of factory-based armed units gave emphasis to their demands. Although overt use of arms to settle work issues was very rare in the spring, the threat was already there. Indeed, the whole coercive relationship between workers and management was reversed. Now the workers had arms and some organizational basis for their use, whereas management had lost its factory guards and the ultimate threat of government police and troops. The factory guards now were the workers themselves, and the City Militia was too weak to assist employers even if it wanted to.<sup>17</sup>

The militias and later class-based military units thus imparted to workers a sense of identity and strength that led them to feel that they were now masters of their own fate.

The Provisional Government, however, viewed the workers' militias with extreme disfavor and determined to disarm them, when doing so became possible. The Petrograd Soviet's Executive Committee, which was also very eager to subordinate the workers to the bourgeoisie, agreed. As Hasegawa explains:

Its actions were motivated not only by a desire to help the 'bourgeois' forces organize a new government but also by its fear that popular pressure might push it to seize power—a course which it was not capable of pursuing and had no intention of following. Indeed, the leaders of the Executive Committee were as scared as the Duma Committee leaders of the uncontrollable energy of the masses, which defied their rational approach and the 'objective' law of history.<sup>18</sup>

But for the present both bodies agreed to hold back and attempt to amalgamate the Petrograd workers' militia with the city militia under the official jurisdiction of the city government. The workers' militia vigorously repulsed this effort, disallowing any city militia officials from joining its staff.

Unfortunately for the Mensheviks and their Socialist Revolutionary colleagues on the Executive Committee, however, the workers and probably many of the soldiers did not yearn for a government led by the bourgeoisie—nor, for that matter, by the landowners. Hence the masses generally ignored the attempts by the City Duma, the Provisional Government, and the Soviet's Executive Committee to surrender their hard-won gains and dissolve their factory committees and militia units. Try as it might, the Executive Committee could not persuade the workers to give up their arms and dissolve their fighting institutions.

## THE DISTRICT SOVIETS

Politically conscious Russian workers and soldiers nonetheless saw the soviets as their own political organs, the embodiment of their power. Indeed they saw them not simply as a means to achieve their immediate political ends but as the almost quasi-mystical means for creating a new society. This view was basically an extrapolation of the peasant concept of *volya*, the freedom within the village assembly, with all its egalitarian presuppositions. Thus when workers assembled in the open spaces of their factories, mobilized by their shop and factory committees whose deputies consisted of their co-workers, they felt newly empowered and in possession of the means of life upon which their own welfare and that of their society depended.

After the Vyborg District created its soviet on 28 February, district soviets sprang up in every part of Petrograd. Soon the capital was networked by local soviets, which were concerned primarily with neighborhood and factory issues. Situated as they were in the administrative districts or boroughs of Petrograd, the district soviets were very close to, indeed interlocked with, the factory



committees—and hence the workers themselves—than to the Soviet, and they did much to fill the institutional void that was growing up between the Soviet's Executive Committee and the city's working class. They had their own executive committees that reflected with relative sensitivity the changing moods of the masses. In theory the district soviets were obliged to obey the citywide Petrograd Soviet, of which they were extensions or components. Because of the influence that the workers exercised upon them, however, the district soviets were usually more radical than the Petrograd Soviet and tended to act at variance with it—a problem that the Mensheviks and SRs in the Executive Committee could do little to resolve.

Indeed the district soviets became major centers of proletarian mobilization. They often formed direct alliances with factory committees, with which they held joint executive and public meetings. In the Putilov works, observes S.A. Smith, the two bodies 'so dominated the life of the Narva-Peterhof district of Petrograd, that the local soviet of the workers' and soldiers' deputies at first functioned as a committee of the Putilov works.'<sup>19</sup> It was precisely this soviet that, as we have seen, issued the remarkable 'instructions' that cited the factory committee as a school for 'self-management' in a future society.

Eventually representatives of district soviets established an Interdistrict Conference of the Petrograd Soviets to co-ordinate their activities and to use their influence in opposition to the increasingly centralized and bureaucratized citywide Soviet. They thereby created a parallel power of their own within the capital. (In much the same way, during the Great French Revolution, Jean Varlet had attempted to use the revolutionary *Évêché* Committee to circumvent the Hébertist Paris Commune.) This Interdistrict Conference met as the need arose, with increasing frequency in the late summer.

Workers' militia battalions were generally at the disposition of the district soviets, a relationship that the Petrograd Soviet made official after it had already been established in fact. Thus, as early as 28 February, while fighting was still going on in the capital, workers in the gunpowder factories in the Porokhovye District, directly north of the Vyborg, organized the Executive Commission of the Porokhovye District Soviet, which co-ordinated not only the disarming of the police but the formation of one of the first militias in the Revolution. On Vasilievsky Island the workers of the Cable Works created their own militia on 1 March—and demanded that the Petrograd Soviet transfer weapons to their district soviet. When the Petrograd Soviet attempted to dissolve the workers' militia into a city militia in Vasilievsky Island's first subdistrict, the island's district soviet co-operated closely with the workers' militia to counter it.

On 8 March the executive commission of the Vyborg District Soviet vigorously voiced its opposition to amalgamation between the two militias, and

on the same day the Narva District Soviet accused the city militia of dividing and disorganizing the workers' militia. Such protests so escalated that, at a meeting of the Interdistrict Committee in July, representatives of the district soviets warned that they would refuse to co-operate with the government in its effort to disarm the population, calling it 'a counter-revolutionary assault on the working class.'<sup>20</sup> By mid-July the district soviets 'were becoming overwhelmingly suspicious of the government, increasingly exasperated with the temporizing of national Menshevik and SR leaders, and, gradually, more strongly attracted to the idea of creating a revolutionary soviet government.'<sup>21</sup> The district soviets, in fact, were the first institutions to follow the factory committees in openly shifting their allegiances to the Bolsheviks. In August 1917, as we shall see, when General Kornilov tried to stage an uprising against the Revolution, it was largely the district soviets that mobilized the workers' militias against his plot. Throughout most of 1917 the district soviets, working with the factory committees and workers' militias, guarded the Revolution against emerging counter-revolutionary threats and against attempts by Mensheviks and SRs to rein in the masses.

## SOLDIERS' COMMITTEES

Among the reserve troops billeted in cities, soldiers had easy access to newspapers and were exposed to a great deal of radical propaganda. But the front-line troops were isolated from worker-militants and revolutionary organizations, and in terms of political radicalism they generally lagged behind the soldiers in the city barracks. Nonetheless, after the fall of the autocracy and the promulgation of Order Number 1, agitators descended upon the front-line troops in hordes and helped to create a rich political culture consisting of political deputies and orators. A strong wave of democratic sentiment swept through the front-line committees, producing a seismic shift toward democracy and self-empowerment. Soldiers' committees and soviets proliferated everywhere, in companies, battalions, and regiments.

Soon representatives of the revolutionary socialist parties were organizing among the troops. Each party established a military committee, composed largely of reserves, that tried to propagandize the front-line troops. Where the front lines were close to major industrial cities, the committees established intimate contact with army rankers and tried to recruit them as members. Seldom, if ever, was a huge army brought so completely into the political life of a country. In the cities the gray coats of the garrisoned troops were to be seen everywhere: at mass meetings, in demonstrations, at soviet plenaries, and in



open-air rallies, characteristically wearing red armbands. Party newspapers, explicitly oriented toward soldiers' problems, including agrarian issues (a matter of deep concern to the peasants in uniform), were made available in large numbers, as was party literature.

The Bolsheviks were particularly canny in attending to the problems of the soldiers and sailors. They provided interested units, both in the reserve and on the front lines, with lecturers. In Petrograd the Bolshevik Military Organization, which was greatly influenced by left-wing Bolshevik worker-militants like Shliapnikov, established a soldiers' club where off-duty soldiers or men on leave could relax, drink, read periodicals, find comradeship, and listen to lectures. Many soldiers found their way into the Bolshevik Party through this club and began promoting the Bolshevik program among the troops.

Order Number 2 of the Petrograd Soviet, as we have seen, was issued expressly to prevent soldiers' committees from taking complete command of their units and electing their own officers. But as front-line conditions worsened, as the military situation deteriorated, and as disciplinary problems increased, ever more *de facto* power was shifted into the hands of the committees. Officers were obliged to deal with their subordinates with the utmost prudence, not only to gain their obedience but to survive assaults from the ranks. During the heated days of February, soldiers had arrested officers who were loyal to the autocracy and even shot or bayoneted them if they became overtly threatening. Officers found themselves increasingly trapped between the demands of military discipline and the overt hostility of the troops under their command. In time an officer dared not issue an order that might stir up the animosity of the ranks. Accordingly, officers prudently gained the advance agreement—and hopefully the active support—of a soldiers' committee. Many of the hated junior officers avoided reprisals by removing their epaulets and insignias.

The Petrograd Soviet reluctantly permitted the committees to retain their early authority. On 30 March, in conjunction with the Provisional Government, the Soviet officially legitimized the right of the soldiers to form their own committees. A committee, it specified, was to consist of three soldiers, including one officer, all of whom were to be elected by each company, cavalry squadron, and artillery battery. The committees' authority was ostensibly restricted to non-military matters, such as regulating rations, mediating grievances between soldiers and officers, and handling cultural and political activities (often including outright propaganda). In time, the formation of committees (whose members were increased from three to six in April) extended from the lower military echelons up to the regimental level. In the spring, the military committees held a congress of delegates from various armies and fronts to create a soviet of eleven officers and 22 rankers, bringing

the dual power directly into the trenches and barracks. The military, in effect, was not only significantly politicized but was becoming 'sovietized' at the expense of the command at all levels of the army hierarchy.

## PEASANT COMMITTEES

In the countryside the peasants had long wished for the expropriation and repartition of the estates of the tsar, the landlords, the clergy, and the state. In fact, they saw such actions as the first step toward the solution of their historic agrarian problems. But after the February Revolution the Provisional Government, faced with the task of land redistribution that the 'bourgeois revolution' was supposed to achieve, faltered disastrously. It appropriated the vast estates that belonged to the tsar, which naturally created a deep sense of expectation among the peasants and soldiers. But it delayed taking action to redistribute the Crown lands, postponing it to a future constituent assembly—whose date remained conspicuously unspecified.

Ever since Emancipation every governmental measure to give land to the peasants had been a fiasco. Now a revolution had ousted a 400-year-old autocracy—and distrustful peasants were told that land redistribution would be delayed. As time passed with no land distribution, and with legal avenues to redistribute the land foreclosed, the peasantry became deeply skeptical of the government's intentions and began overtly to challenge the existing agrarian system. First they committed small infractions, such as allowing their cattle to graze in a squire's meadow, or cutting wood from his forest without payment, or reaping hay from his meadows. When no Cossacks appeared to restrain them, they steadily grew bolder: they withheld payment for the land they leased and even raided the landlords' storehouses. Finally, when these acts of outright theft produced no punitive consequences, they went on to seize the unused land of the squire and turn it over to the local village commune for repartition.

Meanwhile the rural gentry were alarmed by the government's promise that land would be redistributed. Stolypin's law of November 1906, which made land alienable or subject to sale, was still very much in place. Accordingly the gentry began to sell its land at very low prices, especially to foreigners who were not subject to the Russian governmental policies and to 'separated' well-to-do peasants. The extent of these speculative practices alarmed the peasants: if land sales continued, it could mean that when land redistribution finally came, fewer allotments would be available for the peasants to acquire.



By the late spring of 1917 a menacing peasant movement arose that demanded the complete prohibition of land sales. Peasant delegations trekked to the capital, where they were joined by soldiers—the conscripted and armed ‘peasants in uniform’, for whom land redistribution was the most compelling of all political and social issues. An All-Russian Congress of Peasants’ Deputies, composed of representatives from rural soviets, was convened in Petrograd between 4 and 28 May—the first national congress of its kind to meet in Russia—that issued a call for the transfer of all land to the peasantry.

The Provisional Government, however, ignored the call, even dismissing the peasants’ concern as an oafish exaggeration. Stymied, the peasants in the countryside took matters into their own hands and began to expropriate land outright from the gentry on their own initiative. Meeting in village assemblies presided over by their village elders, they voted, often in a quite orderly manner, calmly to take over a nearby estate, confiscating the squire’s land and livestock and redistributing it in the time-honored manner of the *chernyi peredel*. In fact they often left the landlord and his family enough grain and foodstuffs to tide them over to the next growing season—as well as a small land allotment. In other cases, however, the peasants drove the gentry off the land, if not by persuasion, then by threats.

Reports soon flowed into Petrograd that villages were forcing landlords to redistribute their land, that manors and monasteries were being seized, and that ‘separators’ from the *obshchina* were being compelled to return to the commune or abandon their land. The Provisional Government was outraged. On 21 April it banned land expropriations and set up an ‘orderly’ system of land reform—or more precisely, a system that would defer land reform to the unspecified future constituent assembly. In the meantime, the first minister of agriculture, Prince Shingarev, a Kadet provincial doctor, created an elaborate hierarchy of land committees, headed by a Main Land Committee, whose purpose was to adjudicate land disputes, collect information, and draft recommendations for a comprehensive land reform. As a concession, on 21 April the Provisional Government stipulated that the district land committees were to be made up exclusively of peasants. Many of the peasants who joined these committees, however, were soldiers on leave from the front whose military experience had trained them to act in an organized manner. Hence while the Main Land Committee obeyed the Provisional Government, the district land committees became instruments for more politically sophisticated peasants to legitimize the seizures of the great estates and monasteries.

In the autumn of 1917 peasants began to create their own soviets, guided neither by the Bolsheviks nor by the PSRs but primarily by the newly created Left SRs. Indeed the traditional PSR actually played a regressive role by preventing the peasants from uniting with the workers’ and soldiers’ soviets,

thereby closing the villages off from the most volatile forces in the Revolution. As Anweiler observes:

Peasant soviets at various levels generally remained independent of workers’ and soldiers’ soviets that existed alongside them. Very rarely was a soviet of workers, soldiers, and peasants’ deputies formed; more frequently the soviets met in joint congresses within the provinces or their executive committees held joint deliberations. Social Revolutionaries, who predominated in the peasants’ soviets, increasingly feared takeovers by more radical workers’ and soldiers’ soviets, and therefore resisted mergers.<sup>22</sup>

While the Left SRs were making considerable progress in radicalizing the countryside, their parent party, the PSR, was fostering rural parochialism, keeping the proletariat and the peasants at a distance from each other. Despite Stolypin’s reforms, communal sentiments were still very much alive in the countryside. The peasantry’s traditional collectivism and equality in the *obshchina* had generated popular visions of a Communist society, to which even Marx had given qualified approval and which the increasingly literate working class could have helped modernize without damaging its egalitarian and collectivist values. The Revolution had opened the prospect of a melding of town and country, of self-governance with a strong sense of collective responsibility. As it was, Russian workers gradually tended to become assimilated into an industrial society, while in the countryside, peasants stagnated and provided mere muscle power for the industrializing cities.

In 1917, however, the relationship of the working class to the peasantry seemed not to concern the revolutionary parties, least of all those that fed on notions of urban and proletarian social hegemony. The problem that loomed above all others was the crisis in the locus of power that the February Revolution had opened. On one side stood a bourgeois liberal government that was committed to the continuation of the war and a delayed land redistribution. On the other side stood a popular power—the soviets and the committees—that were slowly coming into conflict with the very ‘bourgeois democratic’ institutions that were expected to bring modernity to a predominantly agrarian Russia. This profound contradiction would produce a split between town and country that haunted the Revolution for decades.



## NOTES

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## CHAPTER 46 Parties and Programs

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### THE BOLSHEVIKS IN PETROGRAD

Among the host of competing organizations, institutions, and programs that descended on the Russian people during the Revolution, one question stands out that acquired decisive proportions: What kind of social order should replace the old monarchical system and its subsequent provisional government? Should it be a democratic, laissez-faire form of capitalism, as many liberals hoped? Should it be Marxian socialism, which many intellectuals and workers regarded as history's 'final chapter'? Or should it be anarchy of one kind or another, as many marginal strata and aesthetes desired? Over the course of nearly a year these social ideals and their corresponding organizational forms were put to the test of their historical viability. Played out in demonstrations, riots and endless conferences that were more like mass meetings than deliberative bodies, the Russian Revolution probed all the radical ideas and schemes that had emerged between 1789 and 1914, in order to determine which of them should replace Russia's tottering semi-feudal social system, with a few unique alternatives of its own.

By the beginning of 1917 the Bolshevik Party had declined from the relatively important workers' party it had been in 1914 to a relatively minor one, largely because of the severe repression it suffered at the beginning of the war. In the days immediately following the February Revolution, it emerged as a legal entity but its membership sank to its nadir. With only 2000 members in Petrograd, it was a minority party in nearly all the revolutionary institutions created by the Revolution. This poor showing made the Bolsheviks seem like the poor cousins of the Mensheviks. In contrast to the Mensheviks, who were a notable presence in the Duma and the legal workers' institutions, the major Bolshevik leaders were still in Siberia or in foreign exile. In Petrograd neighborhoods like the Vyborg and on the islands that made up the Kronstadt naval



base, the Bolsheviks were a lively presence, but for the most part the rank-and-file militants in the capital area either did not know of them or confused them with the Mensheviks.

In fact, the Petrograd Bolsheviks often had difficulties distinguishing themselves from other anti-war opponents of the regime. While they agreed with the Mensheviks that the February Revolution would usher in a long period of social change in which the capitalist class managed the economy and accelerated the country's technological development, it was hard to see how this could be done under a 'dictatorship of the proletariat and poor peasantry' (as Lenin insisted) without establishing a parliamentary republic and replacing the redistributive village land system with systems of private property and large mechanized farms. The Bolsheviks differed from the Mensheviks mainly in viewing themselves as the most radical of working-class parties. Their task, as they saw it, was to try to create the most democratic regime possible, by maximizing the power of the workers and the landless peasants and establishing the technological pre-conditions for a socialist society. Once these goals were achieved, they would proceed to overthrow capitalism and establish a proletarian dictatorship—or rule by the proletarian majority created by the expansion of a relatively extended bourgeois industrial development.

Given this outlook, the Bolshevik leaders in revolutionary Petrograd necessarily accepted the course that the leading Mensheviks had charted. The first issue of *Pravda*, the party's official organ, ambiguously declared that 'the fundamental problem is to establish a democratic republic.'<sup>1</sup> Publicly the Russian Bureau of the Central Committee, faithful to Lenin's program, called for a 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and poor peasantry', but as Shliapnikov later recalled, he and his colleagues on the Bureau 'agreed with the Mensheviks that we were passing through the period of the breakdown of feudal relations, and that in their place would appear all kinds of "freedoms" proper to bourgeois relations'<sup>2</sup>—in short, a 'bourgeois democratic' regime based on liberal parliamentarism. At a meeting of the Executive Committee on 3 March, Molotov echoed Lenin by stating that all political power must be shifted to the soviet democracy, but as Sukhanov notes,

the opinion he expressed was not all that of his party. ... On the following day we learned from the papers that on March 3rd the Petersburg Committee of the Bolsheviks had declared that 'it would not oppose the authority of the Provisional Government insofar as its activities corresponded to the interests of the proletariat and the broad democratic masses of the people.'<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, within the Executive Committee itself, many Bolsheviks went along

with the Mensheviks and conventional SRs: of the eleven Bolshevik members of the 39-member committee, Sukhanov notes, none voiced any objection on 1 March to the establishment of the bourgeois Provisional Government—thereby giving it a *de facto* vote of confidence. In the Soviet plenary vote the next day, only nineteen of the 40 Bolsheviks present opposed the transfer of power to the Provisional Government. The Bolsheviks' Petersburg Committee was equally tepid: it declared that it would 'not oppose the power of the Provisional Government insofar as' its ministers met various qualifying conditions. 'In essence,' Trotsky observed acidly, 'this was the position of the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries—only moved back to the second line trenches.'<sup>4</sup>

The Bolshevik Party at this time, it should be emphasized, was far from being the monolithic, highly centralized organization that it became in later years. Indeed, until the early 1920s the party was torn by open disagreements and factional challenges, most of which were fought out in the party's public press. Many actions that seemed to be carefully planned by the Bolshevik Central Committee were actually conducted without the committee's approval and even against its wishes. The Menshevik Party and the PSR were no more democratic in formal terms than the Bolsheviks; they were simply more lax about procedures. The Bolsheviks simply placed a higher premium on party discipline than their socialist rivals. They would never have tolerated the pro-war views of a Kropotkin, who virtually foamed at the mouth every time he denounced a 'Zimmerwaldist' in his public addresses, but they patently tolerated factions that were opposed to the leadership on concrete issues.

The party's various institutions—from the Central Committee to the Petersburg Committee to the district committees—often functioned independently of and sometimes at odds with one another. As Robert Service observes in his survey of the party:

Local Bolshevik committees, while upholding ideas of centralism in theory, acted in practice as independent agencies of socialist revolution. They set their own policies, both domestic and international. Thus their behavior introduced an anarchic jaggedness to the neat pattern of democratic centralism [the party's organizational principle of centralism in action and democracy in decision making].<sup>5</sup>

In his excellent history of the revolution Alexander Rabinowitch emphasizes that the various Bolshevik Party organizations in Petrograd—the Central Committee, the Petersburg City Committee, the Military Organization, and the various district committees—each functioned 'with its own responsibilities and interests.'<sup>6</sup> The nine-man Central Committee tried to persuade rather than order dissenting lower committees to obey its decisions. In fact, the Central



Committee itself was often divided internally. 'As elected in late April, 1917,' Rabinowitch notes, it generally 'about evenly split between individuals who usually could be counted on to follow Lenin and more moderate or "right" Bolsheviks of L.B. Kamenev's persuasion.'<sup>7</sup>

The immensely influential Petersburg City Committee was composed of representatives of the party's district committees; guided by a small executive commission, it steered a course between moderates and radicals. Sometimes it favored the more prudent tactics of the Central Committee, but because it had to answer to the district committees, it often supported their more militant views. During February, for example, the Petersburg Committee opposed participation in the Revolution, regarding the proletariat as unprepared to confront the tsarist regime; then in April, under Lenin's influence, it shifted rapidly to the left, placing its imprimatur on an accomplished fact.

The district committees, in turn, were closer to the workers than were the higher committees in the Bolshevik organizational hierarchy and often directly reflected their views by staking out positions farther to the left. Made up of representatives of the party's local and factory units and cells, these committees were interlocked with the factory committees, district soviets, and militias, as well as cooperatives and educational clubs, all of which often reacted militantly against attempts by the Petrograd Soviet and the Provisional Government to impinge upon the gains made by the proletariat. In general the Bolshevik worker-militants held far more left-wing positions than did their Petrograd leaders. Instead of 'conditionally' supporting the Provisional Government, for example, district militants bluntly called for outright soviet power. The Vyborg District Committee, Trotsky tells us, called mass 'meetings of thousands of workers and soldiers, which almost unanimously adopted resolutions on the necessity of the seizure of power by the soviets.'<sup>8</sup> But thereafter the Petersburg Committee actually censured the Vyborgers for raising the demand for soviet power as premature!

Finally, the Military Organization, created by the Petersburg City Committee in March 1917, was assigned the important task of propagandizing the garrison and the Kronstadt naval base. It had its own newspaper, *Soldatskaya Pravda* (Soldiers' Truth), and established its committees in garrison towns, as well as creating a soldiers' and sailors' club in the Kshesinskaya Mansion, where many soldiers and sailors spent their free time. Politically, the Military Organization was among the most radical of Bolshevik bodies: it was created

for the purpose of conducting revolutionary activity in the Petrograd garrison and at the Kronstadt naval base. . . . From its inception, the Military Organization enjoyed a surprisingly large measure of autonomy. Moreover, because of the uniformly radical spirit of its leadership, the mass pressure

from garrison followers desperate lest the socialist revolution occur too late to save them from death at the front, and the confidence inevitably inspired by substantial armed force, the Military Organization tended as a rule to stand to the left of the Central Committee on questions regarding the development of the revolution.<sup>9</sup>

As such the Military Organization often favored not only radical but even reckless tactical methods. Although it had policy differences with the Petersburg City Committee, they united at times to oppose the policies of the party's more prudent Central Committee.

It would be difficult to understand either the events of 1917 or the behavior of the Bolsheviks without recognizing the internal tensions and conflicts that pervaded the Bolshevik organization. The crises of 1917 provoked sharp differences among the party's various committees and within them, leading some party committees to take actions that others strongly opposed. Most notably, the issue of whether to support the Provisional Government produced sharp divisions within the Central Committee and especially within the Petersburg City Committee. The lower-level committees often felt free to go their own way, either ignoring or executing the decisions of the higher ones. The Petersburg Committee would simply disobey decisions of the Central Committee, while the district committees disobeyed the Petersburg Committee.

But in the end the Central Committee remained the most influential of all the party's committees, and in the latter half of March it moved noticeably to the right. On 6 March the Provisional Government had passed an amnesty law that permitted revolutionaries exiled to Siberia to return to Russia. This law provided the official mandate for Lev Kamenev and Joseph Stalin to return to Petrograd, which they did in mid-March. As senior members of the Central Committee, both men were in a position to formulate official party policy; and both quickly gave Bolshevik policy a moderate turn. Kamenev and Stalin interpreted Lenin's notion of a 'dictatorship of the proletariat and poor peasantry' to mean that Russia had to pass through a 'bourgeois democratic' stage—indeed a bourgeois historical era—before a socialist revolution could hope to succeed. Under their influence the Petrograd Bolsheviks adopted what J.L.H. Keep calls a "'soft" line' toward the Provisional Government and the Soviet.<sup>10</sup> Taking over editorial control of *Pravda*, they declared that the Bolsheviks would support the Provisional Government 'insofar as it struggles against reaction and counterrevolution.'<sup>11</sup> Moreover, although they enjoined the Provisional Government to seek a negotiated peace, they declared that as long as German troops were obeying the orders of the Kaiser, the Russian soldier's duty was to return bullet for bullet. This jingoistic position, in effect, amounted to an acceptance of 'revolutionary defensism'.



Advocating a collaborative policy with the Mensheviks, the Kamenev–Stalin duo brought the party ever nearer to the Menshevik orbit. At the beginning of April, in fact, they were planning a meeting to discuss a merger between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks that would have resulted in a single united party. They intended to hold this meeting at the end of the First All-Russian Conference of Soviets, which would meet in Petrograd from 29 March to 3 April. There Bolshevik and Menshevik leaders would discuss the unification of Russian Social Democracy, restoring the party as it had essentially existed before the split in 1903. This meeting, however, never achieved its goal: on the night before it was to occur, Vladimir Ilych Lenin finally arrived back in the Russian capital, after his European exile of nearly fifteen years.

## THE APRIL THESES

At 11:30 on the evening of 3 April, Lenin, together with some 30 other Russian revolutionaries, returned to Petrograd. The Bolshevik exiles had asked the German government to permit them to travel through German-controlled territory into Russia in a 'sealed train', which meant that the railroad cars on which they traveled were to be regarded as an extraterritorial enclave: no soldier or officer of the belligerent countries could enter. In return, the exiles promised the German authorities that after they arrived in Russia, they would seek the release of German prisoners held by Russian authorities. While the journey was under way, Lenin was almost certainly fulminating at Kamenev's and Stalin's changes in the editorial policy of *Pravda*, which he regarded as breaches of revolutionary principle. Indeed, as soon as he reached Petrograd, he initiated his historic campaign to persuade the party to discard the 'revolutionary defensist' policy adopted by *Pravda*, oppose any continuation of the war, and demand that all state power be placed in the hands of the soviets.

A crowd of soldiers, workers, and Bolsheviks, as well as an armed honor guard of sailors, met Lenin when he arrived at Petrograd's Finland Station and disembarked from the sealed train. The Menshevik leaders were present to greet him formally in the name of the Petrograd Soviet. The Bolshevik leader was thereupon lifted to the top of an armored car, where he presented his own salutation that N.N. Sukhanov, who was present, has immortalized:

Dear Comrades, soldiers, sailors, and workers! I am happy to greet in your persons the victorious Russian revolution, and greet you as the vanguard of the worldwide proletarian army. ... The piratical imperialist war is the beginning of civil war throughout Europe. ... The hour is not far distant

when at the call of our comrade, Karl Liebknecht, the people will turn their arms against their own capitalist exploiters. ... The worldwide Socialist revolution has already dawned. ... Germany is seething. ... Any day now the whole of European capitalism may crash. The Russian revolution accomplished by you has prepared the way and opened a new epoch. Long live the worldwide Socialist revolution!<sup>12</sup>

By invoking Liebknecht and the German workers, and by appealing for a world socialist revolution, Lenin was throwing down a gauntlet to the leadership of the Bolshevik Central Committee as well as the Mensheviks. He further called for unequivocal opposition to the war—which unnerved the Central Committee's advocates of 'revolutionary defensism'.

Lenin was then taken to the Kshesinskaya Mansion, which the Bolsheviks had expropriated for their headquarters, for a small welcoming 'tea party', and then to a meeting of Bolshevik Petersburg City Committee members and delegates to the all-Russian soviet conference. On the next day, while the Menshevik delegates were patiently waiting on the floor below for their Bolshevik counterparts to join them in a discussion about restoring the old RSDWP, Lenin delivered a speech to the Bolsheviks that, according to Sukhanov, astonished nearly everyone present: 'It seemed as though all the elements had risen from their abodes, and the spirit of universal destruction, knowing neither barriers nor doubts, neither human difficulties nor human calculations, was hovering around Kshesinskaya's reception room above the heads of the bewitched disciples.'<sup>13</sup> The speech presented the seven points—'April Theses', as they came to be called—that Lenin had written down in the sealed train.<sup>14</sup>

Contrary to existing Bolshevik thought, Lenin contended that Russia would not have to undergo a stage of 'bourgeois democracy' as a necessary precondition for a later proletarian revolution but could, in fact, skip over it. In what was little more than an ideological coup, he insisted that the 'bourgeois democratic' stage was now completed and the moment had come for Russia to undertake a proletarian revolution that would overthrow the 'bourgeois democracy' embodied in the Provisional Government:

The specific feature of the present situation in Russia is that it represents a transition from the first stage of the revolution—which owing to the insufficient class consciousness and organization of the proletariat, led to the assumption of power by the bourgeoisie—to the second stage, which must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poor strata of the peasantry.<sup>15</sup>

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The historic task that now lay at hand was to carry out the *second* stage of the revolution: the seizure of power by the proletariat and poor peasantry. Bolsheviks, he declared, must give no support to the Provisional Government and make no compromises with it; to the contrary, they must expose the utter falsity of all its promises. Similarly, they must give no support to the pro-war parties; to the contrary, the party must break decisively with the Mensheviks, and he excoriated the notion of reuniting the two wings of Russian Social Democracy. He appealed to the party to adopt a new name—the Communist Party—which would make the split with the Mensheviks definitive and irreparable.

Lenin's argument that the 'bourgeois democratic' stage of the revolution was complete as a socio-economic form may legitimately be regarded as theoretical nonsense. All that had changed in Russia since the February Revolution was the country's political structure. The Bolshevik leader, in effect, was making a caricature of Marx's 'stages' theory by grossly overlooking Marx's view that a long span of time would be needed for capitalism to remake the massively agrarian and politically absolutist empire that tsarism had produced over the centuries, with its many feudal (indeed 'Asiatic', in Marx's word) traits, and to transform the empire into a modern industrial nation. Lenin thus reduced the 'bourgeois democratic' phase of revolution to a mere change in political institutions. As of early April, Russia had patently completed no such phase.

Thus Lenin's theses were based less on a careful analysis of the Russian situation than on the international situation that existed in April 1917. The protracted war and the alluring prospect of European revolution encouraged the Bolsheviks to hope they could ignite a revolutionary firestorm in the West, a prospect that even Marx entertained as a possibility before his death. Indeed, Lenin's schematization of the February Revolution into a completed 'bourgeois democratic' stage—which was actually meant to involve many years of social development, not only a change in political institutions—was based on his hope that the Russian proletariat, by overthrowing tsarism, might induce the Western European proletariat, especially the German, to overthrow capitalism on the Continent. Even a seemingly socialist revolution in Russia, they hoped, could trigger a real socialist revolution in Central Europe and possibly elsewhere among the industrially advanced countries in the world. It would not be wrong to say that Lenin regarded revolution in Russia primarily as a 'spark' to produce a proletarian revolution in Germany.

The February Revolution of 1917 had also produced a phenomenon that neither Marx, nor Lenin, nor any other socialist theorist had foreseen—the emergence of a dual power. In addition to the bourgeois republic, February had produced a 'proletarian-peasant' government, embodied in the soviets,

supported by other institutions (factory committees, district and interdistrict soviet federations, and a vast popular committee system) to manage Russian society. The empowered institutions necessary to achieve a workable popular socialism in Russia were thus essentially at hand. So powerful were the soviets after the February Revolution that they would have had only to declare themselves the official government in Russia to annul the Provisional Government's limited authority.

Now Lenin went even further in overturning the sacred precepts of conventional Marxism: he dared to demand that *all* power be given to the soviets, or what he called a 'Commune state' in deference to the Parisian uprising of 1871. Where Lenin had once regarded the soviets merely as a possible *means* for insurrectionary mobilization, he now regarded them as *institutions* that would structure the new 'Commune state'. Only two days after he arrived in Russia, in an article called 'A Dual Power', he explained that the 'Commune state' was to be based on soviets as the ultimate repository of popular power:

Its fundamental characteristics are: 1) The source of power is not a law previously discussed and passed by parliament, but the direct initiative of the masses from below, in their localities—outright 'seizure', to use a popular expression; 2) The direct arming of the whole people in place of the police and the army, which are institutions separated from the people and opposed to the people; order in the state under such a power is maintained by the armed workers and peasants themselves, by the armed people itself; 3) Officials and bureaucrats are either displaced by the direct rule of the people or at least placed under special control; they not only become elected officials, but are also *subject to recall* at the first demand of the people; they are reduced to the position of simple agents ... and remunerated at a salary not exceeding that of a competent worker.<sup>16</sup>

Taken at face value, this program could easily be regarded as representing a form of libertarian socialism. The new polity would be based on the 'direct rule of the people', whose 'representatives' were the people's 'direct agents'. This was hardly a state in any exploitative or domineering sense of the term—indeed, the Petrograd Federation of Anarcho-Communists was also hailing the Paris Commune as a model and in May issued a newspaper called *Kommuna* (Commune) that called for modeling revolutionary Petrograd on the Paris Commune of 1871.

Other aspects of the theses were no less libertarian. Instead of calling for a system that would promote capitalist development in Russia, Lenin now favored institutions that might well inhibit it. Moreover, he demanded a people in arms and the elimination of the army—both libertarian socialist demands.



The 'April Theses,' observes Paul Avrich, were 'the kernel of a program that few anarchists would have disavowed.'<sup>17</sup> Upon learning of them, many anarchists in Petrograd who had once bitterly opposed Lenin's notion of a 'dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' became convinced that he had genuinely altered his position to one that was quite consistent with their own and that he intended to abolish the state as soon as the Bolsheviks took it over.

If anarchists now felt a new solidarity with Lenin as a result of the April Theses, the leadership of his own party was for the most part aghast. Kamenev, for one, decidedly saw it as a breach of Marxist doctrine. Those Bolsheviks who had just voted, at the First All-Russian Conference of Soviets, not to reject the Provisional Government but to exercise 'vigilant control' over it through the soviet apparatus were embarrassed. Instead of discussing the speech with Lenin, however, the Bolshevik leaders received his words politely, then rushed off to meet the Mensheviks, who were still waiting for the unity discussion. Lenin, not to be overlooked, went with them and at the meeting presented his theses to the Mensheviks as well. The Mensheviks met his words with derision, jeering at each point Lenin made. By exempting Russia from the 'bourgeois democratic' stage, they scoffed, he was not only advancing a policy that was historically preposterous but was repudiating Marxism itself.

In fact, Lenin's April Theses produced the greatest shock and outrage among members of his own party. Sukhanov, moving around the hall, noted that Lenin was almost entirely isolated; only Alexandra Kollontai, a former *mezhrayonts*, and Shliapnikov gave him support. One Bolshevik, I. Goldenberg, who was drifting toward Menshevism, hooted derisively: 'Lenin has now made himself a candidate for one European throne that has been vacant for thirty years—the throne of Bakunin!'<sup>18</sup> Goldenberg's description, ironically, was by no means inaccurate. By demanding, not a parliamentary state, but 'All power to the soviets!' Lenin was adopting the view of the militant workers in the Vyborg and other district committees.

The hostile response he received, however, did not deter Lenin. Immediately upon presenting his theses, he went to work to persuade the Bolsheviks of their validity. It was a difficult uphill struggle: on 8 April the Petersburg Committee voted (13:2) to reject the theses. But Lenin's powers of persuasion were formidable. Petrograd's district committees—the party institutions that were closest to the rank-and-file members—were the first to express support for the theses; the higher party committees one by one eventually followed suit. On 14 April the party finally voted to accept the theses; at the Seventh All-Russian Conference of the Bolsheviks, held in Petrograd on 24–29 April, the majority of delegates approved Lenin's call to reject the Provisional Government. Eventually, the Bolsheviks adopted the theses as a basic policy statement, as well as the slogan 'All power to the soviets!'

## WORKERS' CONTROL AND LAND REDISTRIBUTION

With the coming of summer, workers in growing numbers began taking over their factories and establishing overt control over production. Lenin, who had made no mention of factory committees in his April Theses, rapidly began to adapt to this new situation, and hailed the committee movement as an expression of revolutionary power. On 17 May in *Pravda* he expressly endorsed the slogan 'workers' control of industry.' This was another conspicuous departure from conventional Marxism, which emphatically favored nationalized centralized economic planning. Russian Social Democracy, Menshevik and Bolshevik alike, had always disdained workers' control in favor of centralized state control of industry. In 1917, however, Lenin adopted that quasi-syndicalist approach—probably less out of ideological conviction than in an effort to court favor with Russia's decidedly libertarian workers.

He presented his new position at the First Conference of the Factory Committees of Petrograd and its Environs, which convened between 12 and 18 June. Lenin personally helped to draft the resolution on workers' control that the Bolsheviks introduced to the conference. 'The coalition government of which the "socialists" are now part,' the resolution declared, 'do nothing to achieve this control, and therefore it is completely understandable that the factory committees want *real* workers' control and not workers' control on paper only.'<sup>19</sup> The Bolshevik leader's demand was scarcely distinguishable from that of the handful of anarcho-syndicalist delegates at the conference. Workers' control had now become a major part of the Bolshevik program.

By the time of the Bolsheviks' Sixth Congress which commenced on 26 July (at a time when the Petrograd Soviet seemed intent on trying to repress the Bolshevik Party), Lenin demanded that the party drop the slogan 'All power to the soviets!' altogether. According to Sergo Ordzhonikidze's memoir, Lenin told him: 'Now it is possible to take power only by means of armed uprising, which will come not later than September or October. We must transfer our main attention to the factory committees. They must be the organs of uprising.'<sup>20</sup> In 'The Tasks of the Revolution', which he wrote on 27 September, Lenin was explicit:

The Soviet government must immediately introduce workers' control over production and distribution on a nation-wide scale. . . . [In the absence of such control], all the promises of reforms and attempts to introduce them are powerless, and famine, accompanied by unprecedented catastrophe, is becoming a greater menace to the country week by week.<sup>21</sup>

The demand for workers' control profoundly impacted upon ordinary workers



and gained for the Bolsheviks an immense amount of support. The Petrograd proletariat leaned in a libertarian direction, however alien the word would have been to many of them. Although their consciousness varied from factory to factory, indeed from worker to worker, by early fall they had instituted some degree of workers' control in the majority of Petrograd factories.

Meanwhile, during the summer the soldiers at the front and in the garrisons were deserting the army *en masse* and returning to their villages to join the rising movement to expropriate the land. Like his policy on workers' control, Lenin's agrarian policy on land redistribution also underwent a change in the spring and summer of 1917. As a young man, Lenin had profoundly absorbed the agrarian views of Plekhanov-inspired Marxism, which expected capitalism to industrialize agriculture and proletarianize the peasantry. This 'advance' would make it possible for a 'workers' state' to nationalize and socialize agriculture. Indeed, Lenin had first gained widespread attention as a Marxist theorist by challenging *narodnik* hopes that Russian agrarian socialism would be structured around the *obshchina* and the *chernyi peredel*.

In late 1917, however, Lenin's position on traditional peasant practices changed radically. Breaking with Marxist agrarian convention, Lenin conspicuously adopted the SRs' program to rescue the land redistribution policy based on the *obshchina*. The Bolsheviks now called upon the peasantry and particularly the landless poor to seize the large estates outright and divide them, in *narodnik* fashion, among family households. Like his new support for workers' control, his new support for land redistribution seemed, to many Mensheviks, to fulfill Goldenberg's warning that the Bolshevik leader was behaving like the reincarnation of Bakunin.

During the late summer of 1917, in what is sometimes known as Bolshevism's 'libertarian' or even 'utopian' phase, Lenin played up to the most extreme views of the Russian masses, often in marked opposition to conventional Marxist tenets. The workers and peasants opposed the war—and so did Lenin, calling upon the army to fraternize with German troops on the front, elect their own officers, and honeycomb the army with rank-and-file committees in opposition to a centralized command. The workers wanted workers' control of the industrial-capitalist process—and so did Lenin, adopting a view that was alien to Marxism. The workers and peasants opposed bureaucracy and demanded soviet democracy, even amateurism in dealing with public affairs—and so did Lenin, who called for a 'Commune state' based on soviet power. The peasants wanted to expropriate land from the landlords and voiced a sweeping demand for the repartition of the land conducted by the *obshchina*—and so did Lenin. The image of a 'utopian' Lenin and other such mutations actually gained him considerable support among libertarian elements in Russia.

Did Lenin genuinely embrace the new program that he was advocating? Or was he simply willing to advance *any* radical slogan in 1917, provided it brought the Bolsheviks to power? To some extent, the new demands expressed a recognition, generated by the radical mood of the workers and soldiers, that the February Revolution did not conform to conventional Marxist dogma; but to an even greater extent, Lenin was guilty of outright demagoguery. In his less polemical writings the Bolshevik leader remained a very orthodox Marxist. He had thoroughly assimilated the kind of Marxism propounded by Plekhanov and Kautsky, which held that socialism could be organized only around a nationalized and planned economy guided by managers; that agriculture had to be industrialized; and that industry—especially in Russia—would have to be highly rationalized to promote economic, technological and cultural development. Before 1914 he and other Bolsheviks had written articles, tracts, and even books criticizing populism and emphasizing the importance of centralization, state control over industry and agriculture, and an authoritarian, indeed openly dictatorial Jacobin-type republic. He never professed to be an anarchist or a syndicalist, least of all a 'utopian'—a word that was particularly alien, even distasteful to him as a devout 'scientific socialist'.

To be sure, he also exhibited a uniquely Russian admiration for the *narodniks*, and he personally possessed a lively streak of *narodnik* boldness. Although he repeatedly attempted to justify his views by quoting Marx and Engels, in practice his Marxism was less than principled. He often—perhaps unconsciously—accepted the *narodnik* emphasis on the role of will in history, and he was an insurrectionary by disposition, for whom exhibitions of bravado and even terror were acceptable. He greatly admired the 'practicals' in the Russian revolutionary movement, such as the colorful Georgian Bolshevik Komo, who staged a particularly daring expropriation in Tiflis and, later, the Ukrainian anarchist guerrilla fighter Nestor Makhno.\*

A consummately practical man himself—indeed, a *realpolitiker*—Lenin was prepared to improvise upon Marxian precepts whenever he faced a new situation. One of his favorite maxims, '*On s'engage et puis on voit*' (loosely translated, 'Let's just do it, then we'll see'), borrowed from Napoleon, seems to have guided many of his political acts during 1917. By disposition, he was

\* Makhno, for his part, acknowledged (admiringly, although anarchists regarded such admiration as heresy) that Lenin was a revolutionary. Lenin reciprocated by providing Makhno with the papers and contacts necessary for his return to the Ukraine. In contrast to Kropotkin, who found Makhno uncouth and formed a rather negative picture of him, there is every reason to believe that the remarkable Ukrainian partisan leader and the head of the Bolsheviks found each other attractive, notwithstanding their differences in ideology and the tragic circumstances that forced them to fight with each other years later.



personally inclined to go along with the predisposition of Russian workers and peasants for direct action, jettisoning one long-held position after another as new possibilities arose to gain state power for his party. Lenin, in effect, was more of a pragmatist than a theorist, and more of a voluntarist than a passive believer in the existence of inexorable laws of history that rendered socialism a historical inevitability.

The war and the success of the February Revolution had profoundly radicalized the Russian workers and the peasants-in-uniform. The April Theses, in effect, consisted of very broad formulas for gaining control over an increasingly libertarian revolution. Without following a left-libertarian strategy, indeed, a syndicalist-*narodnik* one, Lenin could not have gained widespread support among the Russian workers and peasants. Accordingly, the Bolshevik leader was prepared to say and do almost anything that would make it possible for his party to take state power and push Europe, if possible, into a 'world revolution'. Given the extraordinary circumstances produced by the war, he was patently convinced that he had only to give history a push, to make his movement into a vanguard of a European socialist revolution.

## THE ANARCHISTS

In the summer of 1917, something very close to a syndicalist outlook guided the behavior of the Petrograd workers. At such a historical moment, it might be supposed, anarcho-syndicalist organizers would be eager to enter the soviets, factory committees, and all the remarkably popular institutions created by the Revolution, and work to build their movement. But anarchists as a whole failed to give due recognition to the rare opportunity that the soviets afforded them as a means to achieve their social ideals. In 1917, as in 1905, most anarchists avoided the soviets; they regarded them as arenas for political parties—in effect, as small political parliaments. They permitted the highly malleable workers' and soldiers' councils—which could very well have served as federative or co-ordinating bodies—to go their own way and largely contented themselves with *ad hoc* and theatrical actions.

After the collapse of the monarchy, the Petrograd Federation of Anarchist-Communists—the capital's largest anarchist 'organization', if such it can truly be called—appropriated the villa of General Durnovo as its headquarters. The villa, located in the Vyborg District, had spacious gardens that the anarchists used for a children's playground, and rooms that the anarchists used for classes, discussion groups, and other public activities. When the major

anarcho-syndicalist writer known as Voline arrived in Petrograd that summer, he was startled by the absence of serious anarchist activity:

When I returned to Russia from abroad and arrived in Petrograd in the early part of July, 1917, I was struck by the impressive number of Bolshevik notices announcing meetings and lectures in all parts of the capital and suburbs, in public halls, in factories, and in other gathering places. I didn't see a single Anarchist notice. ... And I observed at the same time, with bitter disappointment, that there was not in the capital a single Anarchist newspaper nor any oral Anarchist propaganda.<sup>22</sup>

Voline tried to remedy the situation in August by co-initiating a weekly anarcho-syndicalist newspaper:

It was not until August, and with great difficulty, that a little group of Anarcho-Syndicalists, consisting mainly of comrades returned from abroad, finally succeeded in starting a weekly newspaper, *Golos Truda*, The Voice of Labour, in Petrograd. As for oral propaganda, however, there were scarcely three or four comrades in that city capable of performing it.<sup>23</sup>

By Voline's own admission, their efforts were too limited to have a significant impact on the Revolution. Perhaps the greatest single problem that the Russian anarcho-syndicalists faced was the bias of the purist anarchists generally against the formation of organizations. The distinction between pure anarchists and syndicalists cannot be drawn too sharply. The commitment of the purists to raw popular spontaneity superseded their willingness carefully to organize an effective movement. Nor did serious and responsible workers respond to their idiosyncratic lifestyles: the Petrograd Federation of Anarchist-Communists, in particular, composed of highly volatile and often unstable individuals, issued wildly inflammatory—and often laughable—leaflets, calling for uprisings on every conceivable occasion. Very significantly, the Federation showed little or no concern for the systematic preparation of its activities, let alone long-range work among the masses. Apart from declamatory statements, it made little or no attempt to formulate a coherent program. Indeed, the Federation had no strategic policy at all for overthrowing the government and offered no institutional structure to replace the old regime. On the contrary, the Federation apparently believed that a revolutionary continuum would instinctively and spontaneously emerge from below and bring together a delineable and co-ordinated course of action. Thus the Federation's members were mainly engaged in provocative actions—notably raids on jails, seizures of property, and scattered potshots at the police.



By contrast, the anarcho-syndicalists were made of sterner stuff. Most of them focused their efforts on the factory committees, to which relatively sympathetic workers elected them. But they were unable to take full advantage of the strongly libertarian consciousness that prevailed in the plants, not least because of anarchism's organizational inadequacies. Without a well-organized faction or federation, they were easily outmaneuvered by the Bolsheviks, who shrewdly combined their newly adopted libertarian views with a well-structured organization. In practice Russian anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists generally aligned themselves with the Bolsheviks in demonstrations and street actions. After the October Revolution a large number of them joined the Bolshevik Party or the new soviet administration. Some worked so closely with the government that they acquired the sobriquet 'soviet anarchists' and were given important positions by the Bolsheviks in the new regime.

## NOTES

1. Quoted in Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, trans. Max Eastman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1932), p. 1:287.
2. Ibid.
3. N.N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution 1917*, ed. and trans. Joel Carmichael (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 191.
4. Trotsky, *Russian Revolution*, p. 1:286.
5. Robert Service, 'The Bolshevik Party', in *Critical Companion to the Russian Revolution, 1914-1921*, ed. Edward Acton, Vladimir Iu. Cherniaev and William G. Rosenberg (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 235.
6. Alexander Rabinowitch, *Prelude to Revolution: The Petrograd Bolsheviks and the July 1917 Uprising* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), p. 5.
7. Ibid.
8. Trotsky, *Russian Revolution*, p. 1:286.
9. Rabinowitch, *Prelude to Revolution*, p. 6.
10. John L.H. Keep, *The Russian Revolution: A Study in Mass Mobilization* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975), p. 559.
11. Trotsky, *Russian Revolution*, p. 1:290. 'Insofar as' became a magical phrase not only among the Bolshevik leaders but also in the Executive Committee of the Soviet. The socialist parties continually used it to render their capitulations to the Provisional Government less unsavory.
12. Quoted in Sukhanov, *Russian Revolution*, p. 273.
13. Ibid., p. 280.
14. These seven theses were soon elaborated into ten and were published in *Pravda* under the title 'The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution (Theses)'. Kamenev, in an accompanying comment, designated them a 'personal' document of Lenin, reflecting his own opinion, rather than the official party position. See V.I. Lenin, 'Tasks of the Proletariat and the Present Revolution', in *Collected Works* (Moscow:

- Foreign Language Publishing House, 1960), p.24:21-6, from which I have taken the quotations.
15. Ibid.
  16. V.I. Lenin, 'A Dual Power', *Pravda* (Apr. 9, 1917), in *Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1943), p. 6:27-8.
  17. Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 127, 128.
  18. Sukhanov, *Russian Revolution*, p. 287.
  19. The resolution is quoted in Frederick I. Kaplan, *Bolshevik Ideology and the Ethics of Soviet Labor, 1917-1920: The Formative Years* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1968), pp. 56-7.
  20. Quoted in William Henry Chamberlin, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1935), p. 1:184.
  21. V.I. Lenin, 'The Tasks of the Revolution', in *Collected Works*, p. 26:65.
  22. Voline, *The Unknown Revolution, 1917-1921* (New York: Free Life Editions, 1974), p. 185.
  23. Ibid.



## CHAPTER 47 Toward Red October

### THE CRISIS OVER WAR AIMS

The Provisional Government had arisen from a Duma Committee, which itself was the product of a Duma that had been created under the restrictive suffrage of 1907 and had no revolutionary legitimacy. It was thus understood to be only a temporary regime. But the question of what kind of government would succeed it remained in doubt: Would Russia become a republic? A constitutional monarchy? A federation of free states? The answer was deferred to an unspecified constituent assembly whose meeting the government kept delaying. These delays fed the deep sense of mistrust that pervaded the workers and peasants, even toward the tepid Petrograd Soviet. Most gravely, as we have seen, the government deferred all questions of land reform to the future constituent assembly. It thus opened the prospect of old Russia's most frightening eventuality—the outbreak of a huge peasant war.

The only government the masses truly recognized were the executive committees of the country's soviets. The soviets, or rather those that were closest to the people they represented, wanted enough power to be able to stand guard over the revolution and accordingly withheld full authority from a bourgeois government. Indeed, a plenary of the Petrograd Soviet on 2 March resolved that sitting members of the Soviet Executive Committee could not become ministers in the Provisional Government. (This provision seemed not to apply to Alexander Kerensky, who combined the positions of vice-chairman of the Petrograd Soviet's Executive Committee and minister of justice in the Provisional Government.) In any case, the Petrograd Soviet's Executive Committee fatally kept trying to use its authority to validate the Provisional Government, supporting the Provisional Government's policies 'insofar as they corresponded to the interests of the proletariat and of the broad democratic masses of the people', to use its tedious formula for surrender to the ostensibly hegemonic status of the bourgeoisie.

Committed as it was to the Provisional Government, the Executive Committee found itself the object of increasing scorn and hostility by the Petrograd masses. The Bolsheviks shrewdly exploited this disaffection: they made the immediate convocation of a constituent assembly a major programmatic demand. This demand, together with their call for workers' control and land redistribution, made their program simply a recipe for grabbing the reins of power. And fortunately for the Bolsheviks, the fatuous Provisional Government inadvertently did much to aid them.

Shortly after the February Revolution, the Soviet's Executive Committee and the Provisional Government were faced with the challenge of defining Russia's war aims. Before February many socialists had been adamantly opposed to continuing the conflict. But afterward, with a republic in place, the nature of the war had, in their eyes, changed. Most Mensheviks and SRs, as we have seen, now argued that it was necessary to defend the new, progressive Russian republic against Prussian militarism. 'Revolutionary defensism' became the conventional socialist position—to be distinguished from 'patriotic defensism', the support that monarchists and their bourgeois allies gave to the war. Where patriots called for the defense of the 'Motherland', onetime Internationalists now clamored for the defense of the 'Revolution'. PSR leader Victor Chernov, an erstwhile Zimmerwaldian, became a 'revolutionary defensist', as did the Mensheviks Chkheidze and Tseretelli, who had previously opposed war credits. In fact, Tseretelli's opposition to the war had even caused him to be exiled to Siberia.

Despite their support for the war, Russia's new socialist rulers nonetheless had to invoke the need for worldwide proletarian solidarity and a peace without compensation. Hence on 14 March the Executive Committee issued a ringing 'Call By the Petrograd Soviet to the Peoples of the World'. This 'emotional, verbose, and confused document,' as Michael T. Florinsky describes it, strongly endorsed peace, renounced imperialist war aims, and was committed to fighting a strictly defensive war. Using socialist jargon to strike an anti-imperialist tone, it addressed itself to 'Comrade-proletarians, and toilers of all countries': 'Conscious of its revolutionary power, the Russian [soviet] democracy announces that it will, by every means, resist the policy of conquest of [Russia's former] ruling classes, and it calls upon the peoples of Europe for concerted, decisive action in favor of peace.' The Call further appealed to workers in other countries to make an international proletarian revolution that would end the war and allow for such a non-imperialist peace:

We are appealing to our brother-proletarians of the Austro-German coalition, and, first of all, to the German proletariat. From the first days of the war, you were assured that by raising arms against autocratic Russia, you



were defending the culture of Europe from Asiatic despotism. . . . Now even this justification is gone: democratic Russia cannot be a threat to liberty and civilization.

Despite these avowals other passages in the Call were fully in accord with a continuation of the war. 'The Russian revolution will not retreat before the bayonets of conquerors,' it proclaimed, 'and will not allow itself to be crushed by foreign military force.' By committing the Soviet to the defense of 'our own liberty from all reactionary attempts from within, *as well as without*,' the Executive Committee was actually resolving to support the war until such time as an international proletarian revolution took place. The Call was a 'revolutionary defensist' statement, prepared by a Soviet Executive Committee that included former Zimmerwaldians.

The Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionary press greeted the Call with effusive enthusiasm. The socialist newspapers saw it as a repudiation of the old regime's expansionism, the opening of a new era in foreign policy, and a first step toward ending the conflict. But the Call also raised problems for the Russian bourgeoisie: although it reassuringly promised to keep Russia in the war until the Kaiser's government fell, its anti-imperialist tone and territorial renunciations were highly disconcerting to Russia's capitalist class.

During the course of a press conference on 23 March, Milyukov stated that Russia's war aims actually included the absorption of the Ukrainian provinces of Austria-Hungary into Russia and the takeover of Constantinople and the Straits. These remarks embarrassed the Soviet, and even the Menshevik press denounced them as evidence of the government's hypocrisy, declaring that they undermined the Revolution's goal of a peace without imperialist annexations. To ease the growing furor, on 27 March the Provisional Government tried to reassure its citizens that Russia did not seek 'domination over other nations, or seizure of their national possessions, or forcible occupation of foreign territories.'<sup>2</sup> This statement was intended for domestic consumption, but on 18 April Milyukov sent it on to the Allied powers—accompanied by a covering note that emphasized Russia's commitment to Allied war aims and declaring that 'while *safeguarding the rights of our own country*, [we] will, in every way, observe the obligations assumed toward our Allies.' It claimed, contrary to all fact, that 'the aspiration of the entire nation to carry the world war to a decisive victory has grown more powerful' since the Revolution.<sup>3</sup>

Milyukov's note of 18 April, when it became public, nearly sparked an insurrection. On 20 and 21 April Bolshevik rank-and-file delegates demanded that the overthrow of the Provisional Government be placed at the head of the party's agenda. As Alexander Rabinowitch observes:

On April 20, when raging mobs were gathered at the Mariinsky Palace [the seat of the Provisional Government], some district delegates at the afternoon session of the First Bolshevik Petrograd City Conference appealed for the immediate overthrow of the Provisional Government, and V.I. Nevesky of the [Bolshevik] Military Organization spoke out in favor of mobilizing troops, evidently for agitational activity on behalf of seizure of the power by the Soviet. . . . S.Ia. Bogdatiev [of the Petersburg Committee] is credited with having prepared a leaflet over the signature of the Petersburg Committee appealing for the immediate overthrow of the Provisional Government.<sup>4</sup>

On the same day the Finnish Reserve Guards came out with other fully armed units of the Petrograd garrison to the Maryinsky Palace, carrying placards that declared 'Down with Milyukov!', 'Down with annexationist policies!' and—in a slogan that suggested Bolshevik influence—'Down with the Provisional Government!' The Finns and their supporters were joined by a detachment of Kronstadt sailors, whose banners blazed the slogan 'All power to the soviets!' Before long Petrograd was rocked by tumultuous demonstrations in opposition to Milyukov's note—and by counter-demonstrations in its favor. The street fights, which cost about four lives, did not come to an end until the evening of 21 April, when the Soviet issued a two-day ban on demonstrations and the Provisional Government published a retraction of Milyukov's note. Milyukov, for his part, was obliged to resign from the government. Still, the turmoil engendered by his note had so weakened the Provisional Government that, in order to save itself, it had to invite Mensheviks and SRs from the Executive Committee to join it.

On 1 May, without consulting the Soviet's plenum, the Executive Committee voted 41 to 18 in favor of allowing its members to join the bourgeois government. (The nays consisted mainly of Bolsheviks and Martov's Menshevik-Internationalists.) It thus sent Chkheidze, Tseretelli, Skobelev and Chernov, among others, to join Kerensky as ministers. This was a truly extraordinary decision. By entering a bourgeois government, the Mensheviks and SRs were violating one of the most sacred tenets of Social Democracy. It had been a cornerstone of revolutionary Marxist policy that no socialist should accept a ministerial post in a bourgeois government—not even in one that had emerged from the loins of a 'bourgeois democratic' revolution. Marxists were expected to retain complete political independence of the capitalist state and function as critical guardians of the proletariat's interests. The Mensheviks and SRs, in effect, had retreated to what Marxists called a 'Millerandist' strategy, in order to legitimize the bourgeois state and render it politically viable. But the masses were not familiar with Marxian theory and, contrary to Marxist doctrine, were eager to have 'their own men' inside the government as a step



toward a socialist takeover of the state. Far from denouncing the socialist entry into the cabinet, working-class opinion generally supported it. For the masses who were unschooled in Marxist doctrine, power was simply power—whatever its form—and those who wielded it were to be supported as long as they did so in the interests of the working class.

Accordingly the old cabinet was reshuffled, and on 5 May a new Coalition Government was formed, in which Kerensky was given the Ministry of War and Marine; the sugar magnate Mikhail Tereschenko replaced Milyukov as minister of foreign affairs; the wealthy industrialist Alexander Konovalev became the minister of trade and industry; Prince Lvov was kept on as prime minister; and the remaining posts were filled by men of no particular distinction. As if to place the full weight of the Revolution's most basic problems on socialist shoulders, Chernov was given the Ministry of Agriculture, and Skobelev the Ministry of Labor; but Tseretelli, who remained very active in the Petrograd Soviet, was given the politically neutral Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs. Including Kerensky, there were now six self-professed socialists and ten 'capitalist' ministers in the new Coalition Government. Now that its leading members held ministerial posts, the Soviet gave official recognition to the Coalition Government as the sole state authority. The Executive Committee thereafter played the role of the cabinet's defender and alter ego, guarding the flanks, rear, and now even the front of the Coalition Government from the growing tide of its radical opponents.

## THE MILITARY OFFENSIVE

In the meantime, especially by April, the Russian army was experiencing mass desertions. Entire units were drifting away from the front or refusing to fight. Commanders were increasingly fearful that their troops, when ordered to attack, would aim their rifles at their officers instead of the enemy. Generals spoke of leaving most of the army unused and throwing only selected units or 'shock troops' against thinned-out parts of the German lines.

At the same time the Allies were planning to launch offensives on the Western Front. To strengthen their prospects of success, French and British diplomats began pressuring the Russians to open a new offensive of their own on the Eastern Front, which would compel the German commanders to transfer their forces from west to east. Thus early in May the new Coalition Government laid plans of its own to launch a phased military offensive along the Eastern Front, beginning in the southwest against the Austrians and then if possible rolling against German-held lines in the center and north. The Co-

alition Government witlessly expected to activate its dormant Eastern Front, bolster the morale of its troops there, and restore Russia's prestige and dwindling patriotic ardor. Hopes ran high within the cabinet that, with the passing of the autocracy, a new Russian soldier had been created who would exhibit extraordinary nationalistic valor.

But would the Petrograd Soviet support the new government's endeavor to mount an offensive? Its recent Call, rippling with rhetoric about international proletarian solidarity and appeals for peace, suggested that the Soviet might refuse to throw uniformed Russian peasants against their German brothers. As it turned out, however, the Executive Committee, with incredible naïveté, not only endorsed the offensive but even promoted the sale of war bonds. Kerensky, who still occupied positions in both the Executive Committee and the Coalition Government, effused to the Allies that the Revolution had rejuvenated the Russian army as a military force. But as this notoriously unstable, often hysterical man toured the front to stir up rank-and-file excitement for the offensive, signs of a rejuvenation were scarce: the sullen troops who listened to him dreaded the coming bloodbath into which they were being led.

Tseretelli, for his part, mingled with the Petrograd workers whom he professed to represent and tried to compare the coming offensive to the onward march of the French revolutionary armies of 1793. The reception he got was tepid at best and often angry. Chernov, in turn, tried to steer clear of giving the offensive his full endorsement without resigning from his ministerial position. The Bolsheviks, the Menshevik-Internationalists, and the increasingly numerous Left Socialist Revolutionaries (Left SRs) vocally emphasized that the Executive Committee's support for the offensive flatly contradicted the Soviet's call for an end to the war. During these simmering months the socialists showed themselves to be myopic toward the crisis—indeed, the revolutionary situation—that they themselves were creating.

## THE 10 JUNE DEMONSTRATION

By mid-June the news that an offensive was being planned was generating widespread unrest in the Petrograd garrison, fearful that it might soon be decimated in a new bloodletting, for a war it detested.

Petrograd was becoming increasingly radicalized. The Bolsheviks had acquired a majority of the deputies in the Workers' Section of the Petrograd Soviet (albeit still not in the Soldiers' Section). Together with the Menshevik-Internationalists and the Left SRs, who also opposed the war, they collectively comprised two-fifths of the Soviet's full plenum. The Petrograd factory com-



*Bolshevik popularity*  
 mittees were completely supportive of the Bolsheviks—the workers had shifted to the left in a matter of weeks. The Putilov workers, initially influenced by the PSR, went overwhelmingly over to the Bolsheviks in a span of only two months. In Moscow the Bolsheviks comprised the largest single deputation in the city's soviet, although they were still a minority by comparison with the joint deputations of the Mensheviks and SRs. The Bolshevik slogan 'All power to the soviets!', however, was gaining enormous credibility among workers and soldiers in Moscow, who otherwise knew very little about the Bolshevik program.

Even more advanced politically than the Petrograd and Moscow workers were the sailors and soldiers garrisoned at the nearby Kronstadt naval base. Less than a month after the February Revolution, the Kronstadters were demanding 'all power to the soviets', and as early as 17 March their soviet, which was by no means controlled by the Bolsheviks, officially declared itself an independent 'commune', recognizing only the authority of the Petrograd Soviet. The island thereby became, as Trotsky called it, 'a herald of the advancing second revolution.'<sup>5</sup> Although the Kronstadters reluctantly acknowledged the authority of the Coalition Government, in practice the naval fortress functioned independently of the capital and became a piercing thorn in the side of the Petrograd Soviet and the Coalition Government alike.

The Petrograd Soviet's Executive Committee, eager to counter this burgeoning radicalism, tried to pit the country as a whole against the capital that it ostensibly represented by deciding on 3 June to convene the much-awaited First All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. Essentially, the Congress was a mass mobilization of Russia's provincials against its revolutionary center. Approximately 1300 delegates from more than 300 local and 53 district, regional, army, and even some peasant soviets were summoned from many parts of Russia to appear in the spacious Cadet Corps building in Petrograd. Not surprisingly, only a fifth of the delegates were Bolsheviks and Internationalists; the overwhelming majority identified themselves as SRs and Mensheviks. Their political sophistication was very low, and their understanding of these parties' ideas and shifting political allegiances was meager.

The First All-Russian Congress of Soviets more than afforded the Coalition Government an opportunity to use the provincial delegates to countervail the radical developments in Petrograd, Kronstadt and Moscow. When it came time to vote on the entry of socialists into the Coalition Government, the majority of provincial delegates gave it a resounding vote. They even refused to pass a resolution in favor of the eight-hour day. And most significantly, they voted in favor of continued participation in the war and the forthcoming offensive.

To formulate national policy between future all-Russian soviet congresses and to exercise ongoing control over all the soviets in Russia, the Congress of Soviets established a Central Executive Committee (CEC), corresponding in national authority to that of the Petrograd Soviet's Executive Committee. Moreover, the Congress gave the Mensheviks and SRs a majority in the CEC. Finally, it also prohibited any demonstrations from taking place in the capital unless they were authorized by the Petrograd Soviet. This last restriction was a matter of considerable concern in the capital: on 23 May the soldiers of the Petrograd garrison, inspired by the radical Bolshevik Military Organization, had decided to hold a mass demonstration to protest against the coming offensive. The strongly pro-Bolshevik First Machine Gun Regiment, in fact, was eager to stage an armed demonstration, and it resolved to take to the streets with arms regardless of what the party decided, pledging to respond only to orders that came from the Military Organization. Although Lenin initially supported the action, Krupskaya, his wife and his closest party comrade, expressed concern that the demonstration could lead to violence, followed by government repression. A failed insurrection at this point, it could be argued, would have grim consequences for both the party and the Revolution.

Then in early June a sudden explosion of strikes swept through the Vyborg District, precipitated by the government's attempt to evacuate the Durnovo villa, the headquarters of the Federation of Anarchist-Communists. On 5 June a group of anarchist-communists—with characteristic adventurism—had 'expropriated' a printing press and brought it to the villa. The next day the minister of justice, P. Pereverzev, forced them to return the press, then on 7 June gave the anarchists 24 hours to evacuate the premises or face forcible eviction. For the anarchists the moment of revolution seemed at hand, and they fecklessly called upon the Vyborg workers and Kronstadt sailors to come to their aid. Thousands of workers went out on a sympathy strike the next day, closing down 28 factories. More seriously, they were joined by a number of troop contingents and 50 armed Kronstadt sailors who holed up with the anarchists in the villa, vowing to meet any attempt to remove them with force. A confrontation was avoided only when the Soviet sensibly intervened and prevented the government from taking action.

To the Bolsheviks, the strong turnout for the anarchists was evidence that the workers would in fact be willing to join the soldiers in a common demonstration against the offensive. At a meeting on 8 June the party's Central Committee met with the Petersburg City Committee, the Military Organization, and representatives of sympathetic trade unions, regiments, and factories, and decided to call a joint demonstration for 10 June. Its principal goals would be to protest the offensive and the war and demand the transfer of power from the Coalition Government to the soviets. The Bolshevik leadership vetoed any



attempt to turn the demonstration into an insurrection, however, warning that the time was not ripe. The Bolsheviks still lacked sufficient support among the people of Petrograd, Lenin had concluded, let alone among frontline troops and especially in the country at large. But with an impending military offensive that was certain to fail and the beginnings of a peasant war in the rural areas, the Bolshevik leader concluded that time was on the party's side. Hence restraint was to be the order of the day, and strict party discipline was invoked to ensure it.

To prevent the Mensheviks and SRs from sabotaging the plan for the demonstration, the Bolshevik organizers vowed to keep it a secret until the morning of 10 June. But news of the plan reached the Executive Committee, which accused the Bolsheviks of planning a coup. To diminish the demonstration's size, if not abort it altogether, the Menshevik- and SR-dominated CEC of the Congress of Soviets (which was still meeting in Petrograd) in the early morning hours of 10 June dispatched about 500 delegates in groups of ten to the workers' districts and the soldiers' barracks to try to dissuade the masses from 'coming out'.

Finally, in a tension-filled morning meeting the full Bolshevik Central Committee voted to cancel the demonstration—over the wishes of the Petersburg City Committee, the Military Organization, and even some of its own members—and ordered the Military Organization to visit the workers and soldiers and inform them of the cancellation. The workers and troops complied, and the demonstration did not take place. But the provincial delegates who were sent out to cancel it were met with intense hostility; the regiments that had initiated the plan for the demonstration registered the most intense outrage and disgust—and their reaction effectively taught the provincials that the workers and soldiers of Petrograd detested both the government and the war. Far from winning support for their moderate views, the provincial delegates found their own loyalty to the Coalition Government greatly shaken.

In June 1917 the Petrograd workers were clearly far more radical than the rest of the country—and the Bolshevik rank and file were more radical and zealous than their party leadership. This deepening revolutionary sentiment was due in great measure to the influx of new, inexperienced, and undisciplined members into the party, whose membership leaped fifteenfold between February and July, from 2000 to 30,000. Thus was the finely tuned cadre organization of 'professional revolutionaries' that Lenin had built after 1903 transformed into a mass organization of militants. But these new workers and soldiers were politically unsophisticated; they desperately needed resolute revolutionary leadership to steer clear of further unfocused, premature actions like the Durnovo incident that could have unwittingly set the Revolution back rather than advance it.

To provide this leadership, the party had to establish better organizational ties with its newer members and with the workers and soldiers generally. It had to be able to restrain the membership, when necessary, without stifling its militancy and creativity. And it had to retain and develop its flexibility, its capacity shrewdly to nuance its strategy in a period of social upheaval—a capacity that was largely absent among the groups that mouthed ultra-leftist notions rooted in instinct rather than rationality. Personally, Lenin was deeply suspicious of popular militancy, regarding it as errant and chaotic; nor did he trust the capacity of militants, however zealous and heroic, to create lasting grassroots institutions of their own, such as soviets and factory committees. He supported only those popular actions and institutions that had been carefully schooled in Bolshevik ideas. But in 1917 the political situation was changing too rapidly for his stringent views, and events often obliged him to assent to actions with which he disagreed, lest the party lose its influence among the inexperienced workers and soldiers in its rapidly swelling membership. Thus in the summer of 1917 the Bolshevik Party, which Lenin had intended to be highly centralistic, became, for a while, a remarkably open movement in which leaders and masses interacted freely. The party's greatest single asset was Lenin's insistence on discipline and responsibility, as well as the party's adherence to the core ideas that gave it its identity and sense of revolutionary purpose.

## THE JULY DAYS

After the Bolsheviks aborted the 10 June demonstration, Tseretelli and other right-wing Mensheviks on the Executive Committee and in the Coalition Government tried to use the crisis to disarm the Bolsheviks and ostracize them from the Soviet. On 11 June Tseretelli accused the Bolsheviks of steering a course toward an armed seizure of power and warned: 'We cannot satisfy ourselves [merely] with an ideological fight with the Bolsheviks and verbal prohibitions of armed demonstrations, but must at the same time adopt practical measures to make it impossible for them to conduct armed attacks on the democratic system.'<sup>6</sup> Tseretelli's grim warning that he would fight the Bolsheviks by force, however, went too far even for some members of his own party, who recognized that to circumscribe the Bolsheviks might provide a troubling precedent against even moderate socialists. In the end he was beaten down by his Menshevik comrades F. Dan, B. Bogdanovitch and L. Khinchuk, who reproached Tseretelli for proposals that ran counter to the spirit of the 'democracy' and that might end up benefiting even the Bolsheviks.



Meanwhile, the newly formed CEC of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets decided that it had to mitigate the hostility aroused by the cancellation of the 10 June demonstration and show the provincials that, contrary to appearances, the Menshevik- and SR-controlled Soviet did indeed have popular support among the Petrograd proletariat. To this end the CEC called a demonstration of its own for 18 June, under the slogan 'Peace without annexations and indemnities'. The crowd that turned out was massive, numbering an estimated 400,000. The Bolsheviks joined in, with the intention of demanding the transfer of power from the Coalition Government to the Soviet. They brought along the anti-war and anti-government placards and banners that they had prepared for the aborted 10 June demonstration. From their position on the reviewing stand on Petrograd's Champ de Mars, where the dead of the February Revolution had been entombed, Tseretelli, Chkheidze and other members of the CEC were appalled to find that slogans supporting the Coalition Government and the Soviet were vastly outnumbered by Bolshevik slogans. Column after column, representing districts, factories and regiments, proclaimed 'End the war' and 'Down with the ten capitalist-ministers'. In fact, hardly any of the slogans advanced by the Congress of Soviets were to be seen at all. The event was a fiasco for its initiators: to Sukhanov, 'it seemed that the Coalition [Government] was already formally liquidated and that Messrs. the Ministers, in view of the manifest popular mistrust, would quit their places that very day without waiting to be urged by more imposing means.'<sup>7</sup>

The Coalition Government, although greatly perturbed, was not cowed. For one thing, the demonstration occurred the day before the much-heralded military offensive was launched, and the Russian army, re-equipped by the Allies, was able to attack the feeble Austrian front lines in Galicia with initial success. Moreover, the government attacked the Durnovo villa on the same day, 19 June, recaptured it, and arrested everyone present. Combined with the launching of the offensive, this action electrified the garrison and the workers; there was much talk of an uprising against the government and of forcing the Soviet to take power, even against its wishes. No less provocatively, on 21 June the strongly pro-Bolshevik First Machine Gun Regiment was ordered to send about two-thirds of its men and 500 machine guns to the front. The machine-gunners, stationed in the Vyborg District, simply refused to obey the order and declared that it would decline to comply with all future troop levies until governmental power was transferred to the soviets.

Could the growing tension between the pro-Bolshevik troops and the government have led to a successful insurrection? The Bolshevik Military Organization was ready for an immediate uprising—as the All-Russian Conference of Bolshevik Military Organizations met in Petrograd on 16–23 June, one observer noted that the participants were filled with 'eagerness and the

strong desire for the final, great, tense battle. ... Everywhere are heard the voices of comrade soldiers to the effect that the time for a decisive man-to-man fight for power has come.'<sup>8</sup> But the majority of the Bolshevik Central Committee, influenced by Lenin, still opposed a rising as premature and likely to fail, bringing about the collapse of the Revolution as a whole. M. Lashevich, a Bolshevik member of the Petrograd Soviet, denounced the Military Organization's drift toward 'adventurism' and called for restraint, remarking of his own comrades: 'it is impossible to make out where the Bolshevik ends and the Anarchist begins.'<sup>9</sup>

This time, however, the soldiers, especially the men of the First Machine Gun Regiment, were not to be restrained, least of all now that the Coalition Government was insisting that they furnish troops and machine guns for the front. Despite the Central Committee's injunction against a rising, the Military Organization supported the machine-gunners and other Petrograd troops slated for front-line duty. Militants on the Bolsheviks' Petersburg City Committee vehemently protested the Central Committee's efforts to contain the movement and resolved that the party should stand at the head of the insurrection.

Meanwhile on the Austrian front, the Russian troops were fighting only desultorily, often making only token attacks, sometimes even against empty trenches from which troops had been moved to the Western Front. Since the Austrians were even more demoralized than the Russians and were greatly outnumbered, the Russians easily broke through the front lines. But once German troops arrived to reinforce the Austrians, the Russians were driven back with little difficulty. As early as 24 June, Kerensky observed that 'units participating in the battle began drawing up resolutions with demands for immediate leave to the rear, so that only with difficulty was it possible to talk them into remaining in position and there was no possibility of moving them into the attack.'<sup>10</sup> On 3 July the press reported that Russian forces were suffering heavy losses; indeed, as the Austro-German counter-offensive rolled back the army, Russian soldiers deserted the southwestern front *en masse*.

In Petrograd the machine-gunners met with an anarchist self-styled Provisional Revolutionary Committee and decided provocatively to demonstrate on 3 July, calling upon the garrison and the workers to join them. At seven p.m., after a day of intensive discussion and planning, trucks full of machine-gunners took their places in the streets, occupying key points in the capital and posting their guns on the approaches to the bridges that led to the city's center. The Moscow, 180th Reserve Infantry, Finlandsky, Grenadier, and Pavlovsky regiments and the Sixth Engineer Battalion joined them. Added to these troops were numerous workers from Petrograd's factories, but



significantly, several regiments that had mutinied in the February Revolution—most notably the Preobrazhensky, Semenovskiy and Izmailovskiy Guard regiments—either refused to support the machine-gunners or declared themselves neutral, a sign that an unknown number of the Petrograd garrison soldiers was unprepared to overthrow the government.

At eight p.m., led initially by the anarchist Provisional Revolutionary Committee, the demonstration got under way. Columns of workers and soldiers, fully armed, proceeded through the proletarian thoroughfares into the city center. Their first destination was the Kshinskaya Mansion, the Bolshevik headquarters, where, according to *Izvestia*, 'parts of the First Machine-Gun, Moscow, and Grenadier regiments, in full fighting order, with red banners and signs ... call[ed] for the resignation of the bourgeois Ministers.'<sup>11</sup> They demanded that the Bolsheviks decide once and for all whether they would assume leadership of the demonstration.

Inside the palace, mayhem reigned. The Military Organization in particular argued in favor of leading the demonstration and a would-be coup against the Coalition Government. Conditions seemed favorable: a cabinet crisis was under way. The bourgeois Kadet ministers in the Coalition Government had quit because the government seemed too willing to accommodate the Ukraine's demands for autonomy. They were determined to prevent regional components of the empire from spinning off and even gaining new territory at the expense of the Austrian and Turkish empires. Russia, it was argued, had only one functional government: the newly formed CEC of the Congress of Soviets, which presumably spoke for the country's oppressed classes. If the Bolsheviks failed to take over the leadership of the demonstration, the Military Organization members contended, they would lose immense prestige among the masses.

Those who opposed taking over the leadership argued, however, that despite the instability of the Coalition Government, it was still capable of wielding enough force to suppress a Bolshevik-led insurrection, especially if the CEC backed its effort. Many troops in Petrograd, the more prudent leaders argued, were still loyal to the Soviet. And even the dispirited troops at the northern front were not likely to refuse to obey orders that came from the Petrograd Soviet. Finally, they warned, as the political composition of the Congress of Soviets revealed, the Bolsheviks still had only limited support in the country at large, particularly among the peasants, many of whom gave credence to the allegation that the Bolsheviks were, if not agents of the Germans, at least advocating a policy that the German war effort found desirable. Lenin reproved the Military Organization for the 'mess' it had helped to create and called for reining in any violent actions against the Coalition Government and the Soviet.

In the end the Bolsheviks, fully cognizant of the risks, decided to take responsibility for the demonstration but try to lead it in a peaceful direction. Thereafter the crowd dispersed, as *Izvestia* reported, some going 'to the Marinsky Palace [where the Coalition Government was located], still others to the Peter and Paul Fortress.'<sup>12</sup>

By midnight thousands of protesting troops and workers, urged on by the anarchists, were packed into the square before the Tauride Palace—the meeting place of the Soviet—and along its side streets, declaring that they would remain there until the Central Executive Committee of the Congress of Soviets took the power—which it adamantly refused to do! Two hours later about 30,000 Putilov workers joined the protesters. The armed crowd, by now numbering as many as 70,000, seemed on the verge of overwhelming the palace. The anarchists were eager to turn the demonstration into an insurrection, which most likely would ultimately have led to a massacre of workers not unlike that of May 1871 in Paris. Notwithstanding the anarchists' claims, however, 'spontaneity' was not enough: the demonstration remained formless and incoherent. The streets did not organize the demonstrators (contrary to the anarchists' expectations). After a war of words among the contending speakers, dawn broke, and the masses drifted back to their homes.

The next day began with a drizzle and a forecast of heavy rainfall, but the outpouring of workers and soldiers was massive nonetheless. A flotilla of some 10,000 Kronstadt sailors disembarked and tramped to the Kshinskaya Mansion, where they were greeted by Bolshevik orators. Once again the Bolshevik militants were filled with uncertainty. They called upon Lenin to address them, but he was reluctant to do so; he gave a brief speech that primarily appealed for self-restraint. This was not what the Kronstadters wanted to hear, and they received it with respectful coolness. As many as half a million demonstrators proceeded into the city center, where in some places provocateurs or police opened up volleys of rifle fire on the crowd from rooftops or upper-story windows, killing in all about 400.

The crowds finally converged on the Tauride Palace, where the Soviet was meeting, to demand that it transfer power from the government. Within its chambers the Menshevik and SR members of the Executive Committee ('Mamelukes', as Sukhanov called them) were busy denouncing the Bolsheviks; in the end they admitted only a five-member delegation to speak for the huge crowd outside, then patronizingly advised the delegation that their demands would be taken under advisement. Chernov was sent out to the Tauride's entrance to address the crowd—whereupon a group of enraged Kronstadt sailors seized the SR leader, apparently intending to lynch him. One furious sailor, shaking a clenched fist in Chernov's face, shouted, 'Why don't you take the power, you son-of-a-bitch, when we are giving it to you?' Trotsky,



who was particularly admired by the Kronstadters, calmed the sailors, who thereupon freed the SR leader without injury.

Unknown to the workers, soldiers and sailors outside, who were demanding that the Soviet take the power, the Soviet itself was making appeals to the commanders on the northern front to rescue it from its own supporters. The minister of justice, Pereverzev, moreover, had been circulating documents among the regiments purporting to prove that Lenin was a German agent and that the Bolsheviks were fomenting the uprising with a view toward establishing their own government. Apparently that was enough for the 'neutral' regiments to come to the rescue of the Soviet. Garbed in full battledress and armaments, with bands playing and feet tramping, the regiments arrived at the Tauride, only to find the square virtually empty. The troops were rewarded by the Soviet delegates with passionate embraces, while the demonstrators, weary of the entire farce, returned to their homes.

## AFTERMATH OF THE JULY DAYS

Every uprising that is incomplete and fails to run its full course invariably induces a harsh counteraction. As a result of the July Days the nearly moribund Coalition Government, the Mamelukes in the Soviet, and the reactionary officer societies that had sprung up since February found themselves united against a common enemy: the Bolsheviks, and especially Lenin (the 'master spy'). The party was all but banned, the Kshinskaya Mansion was closed down, and Bolshevik militants were rounded up and imprisoned. An arrest order went out charging 21 Bolshevik leaders still at large with treason. The party's periodicals were suppressed, and the *Pravda* printing plant demolished.

— Lenin took refuge in the relative safety of Finland.

Nor did the government limit its repressive actions to the Bolsheviks alone.

— It ordered the workers to turn in their weapons (which only a few did). It issued a stern order forbidding land seizures by the peasants. Military units that had conspicuously participated in the July Days—notably the First Machine Gun, the 189th Infantry, and the Grenadier regiments—were sent to the front, where they helped spread the Bolshevik 'contagion' to the trenches. The government restored the death penalty for insubordination in the front lines and took other onerous measures to increase the authority of the officers over the troops.

The reaction intensified in the weeks that followed. Smears against the Bolsheviks, particularly Lenin, reached hysterical proportions, challenging the credulity of all but the most dyed-in-the-wool right-wingers. But it gradually

became clear to the public that the charges of Bolshevik collusion with German intelligence were doubtful. To be sure, the Bolsheviks, particularly Lenin, would have been willing to take money from any source—the Bolshevik leader had stated early in his revolutionary career that he would take funds even from the devil to overthrow the autocracy—and the Germans, who detested the Bolsheviks, may have channelled some funds to them through a Scandinavian route. But this hardly made internationalists such as Lenin and his comrades into mere agents of the German government. No group in the Russian revolutionary movement outdid the Bolsheviks in declaring their solidarity with the German proletariat and in propagandizing German soldiers against their officers and the Kaiser's regime. Moreover, the attacks upon the Bolsheviks soon turned against their originators. Thereafter the Bolsheviks were able to recover from the denunciations leveled against them. They found good allies in the Left SRs, who were programmatically, albeit not theoretically, in agreement with their policies.

Meanwhile the offensive assumed farcical proportions. At the front the troops were so disaffected by the hopeless military operation that they finally refused to fight except to protect their lives. Once the Austrians, reinforced by German reserves, went on the counter-offensive and drove them back, the Russians' defections became massive. On 21 August, in fact, German troops entered the strategic seaport of Riga, placing themselves within easy striking distance of Petrograd and pushing the Eastern Front appreciably into the Russian heartland. The failure of the offensive, together with the existence of near-famine conditions in the cities, severely eroded the authority of the Kerensky regime and the Petrograd Soviet, and fears that Kerensky was tilting toward a dictatorship greatly enhanced the standing of the Bolsheviks. Within little more than ten weeks the Bolsheviks transformed themselves from a fugitive party into one that was ascendant in the cities of European Russia and in the army on the Eastern Front.

## PEASANT JACQUERIES AND SOLDIER MUTINIES

In the early autumn of 1917 the morale of the Russian people had sunk to a new nadir. Prices soared in the cities, food was scarce, queues before bakeries and other shops grew ever longer and angrier, and the war's end seemed nowhere in sight. None of the compelling social problems that troubled the people was being resolved; nor did the government show any signs of working toward their solution. On the contrary, the Coalition Government seemed to distance itself symbolically from the restive masses by moving its headquarters



from the Maryinsky Palace to the former seat of tsarist power, the posh and ornate Winter Palace itself. The Petrograd Soviet, in turn, shifted its offices and meeting place from the Tauride Palace to the more humble Smolny Institute, a former girls' boarding school, located far to the east of the city center, near the Neva River.

The vast network of revolutionary and potentially revolutionary committees that existed in the army, the factories, and the countryside showed no signs of weakening. The increasingly militant peasantry kept seizing land and restoring it to the communal tenure of the *obshchina*. In March only 34 counties had reported peasant land seizures. In April the figure escalated to 174, then to 256 in May, 280 in June, and 325 in July. 'These figures, however, do not give a complete picture of the actual growth of the movement,' observes Trotsky, 'because in each county the struggle assumed from month to month a more and more stubborn and broad mass character.'<sup>13</sup>

The only group with any political influence in the countryside—and hence with a mass base outside the cities—were the Socialist Revolutionaries. Accordingly it became fashionable and necessary for government officials who wished to exercise any popular influence to designate themselves as SRs. Even Kerensky, who tried to postpone land reform to the forthcoming constituent assembly, designated himself a moderate Socialist Revolutionary. Such adhesions so diluted the party program that they made the SR label all but meaningless. Meanwhile, the efforts of authentic SR ministers like Chernov to achieve land redistribution were stymied by the patina the party had acquired as a member of the ruling coalition, which included the Kadets, who in turn threatened to withdraw from any government that rejected private property rights. Revolutionary SRs who remained true to the party's long-standing program no longer felt at home within its ranks and in growing numbers began to consolidate a faction known as the Left Socialist Revolutionaries (Left SRs).

By the end of July, peasant soviets had emerged in 52 of Russia's 78 provinces and in 371 of its 813 districts. In the late summer of 1917, village assemblies and district land committees were nearly indistinguishable from rural soviets. Indeed, land redistribution began to top the agenda of district and provincial congresses in rural areas. The frightened gentry insistently demanded that the Coalition Government take action against the rebellious peasantry, and in July the interior minister ordered local officials to prosecute all land seizures. The arrests, in turn, served not to intimidate the peasants but to incense them. The Executive Committee of the Soviet of Peasants' Deputies, reflecting the angry mood of the countryside, denounced the aggressive behavior of the ministry as a 'counter-revolutionary offensive', all but validating peasant resistance. Peasants clashed with police. Soldiers on leave and deserters, who had been propagandized by both the Bolsheviks and the

emerging Left SRs, assisted the militant leaders in fighting off government attempts to protect estate owners.

By late summer, the peasant movement was assuming all the characteristics of an outright *jacquerie*. Organized peasant bands, discarding their traditional humility, murdered gentry and pillaged and burned their manors. In earlier months of the Revolution such acts had been few; but in September they reached epidemic proportions. Even well-to-do peasants were being reduced to the level of their fellow villagers. A vast transformation of Russian agriculture was taking place on a scale that had not been seen in centuries. The egalitarian peasant ideal of freedom, *volya*, seemed on the brink of becoming a reality.

In the meantime the army was steadily decomposing into a ragged mass of ill-fed, ill-clothed, and aimless beggars with rifles. Frontline troops and reserves alike did not hesitate to treat their military superiors with belligerency. As William Henry Chamberlin notes in his classic history of the Revolution, 'the practise of throwing bombs and grenades into officers' quarters ... became a very popular sport during the last weeks of the Provisional [Coalition] Government.'<sup>14</sup> The army was on the point of erupting into another full-scale mutiny. Although the government tried to bolster the authority of the officers over the troops by giving them new powers, the officers were afraid to exercise those powers; in many cases they joined the ranks of the deserters, leaving the command of their military units to committees or to radicalized junior officers.

## THE KORNILOV REVOLT

The widespread social breakdown in Russia was matched by the breakdown of the government's authority. On 3 July, after failing to get their way on the question of autonomy for the Ukraine, the three Kadet ministers resigned. A few days later Prince Lvov followed them and surrendered his office as prime minister. For three long weeks thereafter Russia had no functioning government. Finally, on 24 July, a Second Coalition Government was formed, heralding itself as a 'government of salvation of the revolution' and claiming wide plenary powers. It was this coalition that was signally identified with one man, Alexander Kerensky, who became prime minister while still remaining minister of the army and navy. In appointing all the other ministers, he gave a slight concession to the socialists (eight, as against seven liberals); the Kadets, in turn, agreed to participate in the coalition only on condition that the socialist ministers were no longer answerable to the Soviet or even to their own parties. Astonishingly, the socialist ministers duly accepted the Kadet terms and



entered the government of 'Comrade Kerensky', as the Mensheviks and SRs ironically called the prime minister. The PSR chief Chernov, who had resigned as minister of agriculture on 20 July, returned to the government for a third time on the insistence of the CEC of the Congress of Soviets, which wanted to keep an eye on Kerensky's doings.

The bourgeoisie, represented by the Kadets, did not take the Second Coalition seriously. Feelings ran high among the upper classes that only a military dictator could save Russia from the revolutionary Left; they were patently eager for a counter-revolutionary man on horseback to clean out the Augean stables of the Revolution and eliminate all its detestable committees, soviets, militias, and left-wing socialists, to restore law and order, and to mobilize the defense of the motherland against the Central Powers. But who would the man on horseback be? He was already eagerly waiting in the wings: General Lavr Kornilov, the self-described 'son of a peasant Cossack' who had grossly mismanaged his command of the recent Galician offensive. On 18 July, Kerensky appointed him commander-in-chief of the army. Doubtless some kind of understanding existed between the two men. Kerensky seemed to entertain the fantasy that he could control Kornilov, who in turn began mobilizing hand-picked forces for a march on Petrograd that would install him in power—and dispose not only of the soviets but of the Kerensky government as well.

To legitimize the Second Coalition Government and to consolidate his base among the respectable classes, Kerensky and his supporters assembled a State Conference, to be held on 12 August, composed, as he put it, of 'all responsible organizations, State Dumas, and municipalities.' The choice of Moscow over Petrograd as the conference's venue was not arbitrary: the government expected fewer workers and soldiers to demonstrate against its authority. The Bolsheviks, who were not permitted to participate, responded to their exclusion by organizing a general strike in the old capital on the opening day of the conference. Of the 2500 delegates who showed up at the Bolshoi Theater for the conference, possibly half were wealthy industrialists and financiers, military men, landowning monarchists, and Duma bureaucrats. Only about 500 came from various dumas; 313 from cooperatives; a mere 330 from soviets; and 176 from trade unions.

Far from unifying the country, the conference merely exposed its cleavages. In all it was a fiasco for Kerensky. One speaker after another condemned in varying degrees the changes wrought by the February Revolution, much to the enthusiasm of the right-wing participants. Even the aging 'father of anarchist-communism', Peter Kropotkin, who zealously supported the Allied war effort, denounced the Zimmerwaldians, to the enthusiastic applause of the Right. Kornilov unexpectedly put in an appearance, to the wild cheers of the Right. The 'son of a simple Cossack peasant' was becoming the darling not only of

reactionary Cossack officers but of conservative Kadets and wealthy patricians and industrialists, who eagerly plowed funds into his movement for an authoritarian government. The old tsarist political spectrum had shifted radically to the right.

The prime minister, by contrast, came off as a dishrag. Kerensky was no less eager than Kornilov to eliminate the Petrograd Left, including the Soviet, but he was unprepared to leave the scene to Kornilov. Each of the two men apparently considered himself to be the strongman to whom the other had to accede. For two weeks Kerensky and Kornilov had been positioning themselves on how to divide the power. It was only at the very last moment, on 25 August, that Kerensky realized that Kornilov intended to eliminate the Second Coalition Government, Kerensky included, and assume power for himself.

No sooner was the conference over than, to widespread public astonishment, the prime minister peremptorily dismissed Kornilov as commander-in-chief. But the resolute Cossack general simply ignored Kerensky's dismissal order (absurdly declaring that the prime minister had acted 'under the pressure of the Bolshevik majority of the Soviets' and accusing Kerensky of acting 'in full agreement with the plans of the German general staff'<sup>15</sup>). On 26 August, on the eve of the six-month anniversary of the February Revolution, Kornilov began to move troops toward Petrograd, ostensibly to forestall a Bolshevik plot from using the celebration to take over the government. The man on horseback would then use this trumped-up excuse to establish a military dictatorship. The bourgeoisie was ecstatic; the Kadet ministers obligingly resigned from the coalition, to destabilize the government and ease Kornilov's ascent to power. Ironically, Kerensky was left with a government composed mainly of socialists.

Kornilov's troops were highly select forces who were believed to be the most reliable in the Russian army. They included the 'Savage Division', made up of Caucasian mountain tribesmen well known for their ferocity in battle, as well as reactionary Cossack units. Kornilovite generals pledged entire divisions—which they barely controlled—to aid in the coup. Their initial movement toward Petrograd produced panic within the government and the Soviet leadership. But it aroused the fighting spirit of Petrograd to an extent that the capital had not seen since February. Every political organization to the left of the Kadets—labor organizations, soviets, revolutionary committees, and the like—rallied unhesitatingly to the defense of the city and the Revolution. The CEC pledged full support for Kerensky and even voted to allow him to form whatever government he chose as an alternative, as long as he actively fought Kornilov's coup attempt. The Bolshevik Party, whose enormous influence among the Petrograd workers could no longer be ignored, was restored to legality, and its members arrested after the July Days were freed. All the



socialist parties, together with numerous soviet executive committees—including that of the Congress of Soviets of Peasant Deputies—joined together to constitute a Committee for Struggle with Counter-revolution, which resolutely went about mobilizing Petrograd and its environs against the mailed fist of military counter-revolution.

The backbone of the city's defense consisted of the local soviets—especially district soviets and various naval soviets—which quickly formed a multitude of revolutionary committees—more than 240 on the night of 27–28 August alone. The initiative that these secondary soviets took in organizing the opposition to the military coup cannot be overstated. At a meeting of their Interdistrict Conference on 28 August, they laid out the following plan of action:

[T]he assembled district soviet representatives voted to delegate a representative to the Committee for Struggle and to each of its sections, to remain in permanent session, to take the lead in organizing an armed workers' militia under the political responsibility of the Interdistrict Conference and district soviets, to impose control by district soviets over the actions of local government commissars, to send out roving patrols charged with detaining counterrevolutionary agitators, and to establish close contact between soviets and dumas in all districts. These were not mere statements of intent: the Interdistrict Conference at once dispatched to all district soviets in and around Petrograd specific directives relating to the recruitment, organization, and arming of a workers' militia. For the duration of the Kornilov emergency, the Interdistrict Conference's offices at Smolny and the headquarters of each district soviet became directing centers for the preservation of revolutionary order and for mass action against the counterrevolution.<sup>16</sup>

On 28–29 August, the soviets began to train workers to form a 'Red Guard' that soon numbered some 25,000 fighting men. The Bolsheviks, in effect, now had their own proletarian army, equipped not only with rifles but also with machine guns and carefully structured around the command of class-conscious revolutionary leaders. By contrast, the 'Savage Division', upon which Kornilov placed so many of his hopes, consisted of a mere 1300 horsemen, and even that small complement was 600 rifles short. Despite their reputation for ferocity, their morale was no higher than that of the rest of the Russian troops. As the trains bearing the Caucasian regiments neared Tsarskoe Selo and the capital, they encountered a multitude of obstructions created by railroad workers, who had torn up some tracks and blocked others with lumber-filled railroad cars. Telegraphers, in turn, prevented Kornilov's forces

from communicating with either their officers or even Kornilov personally, whom illness had obliged to remain at supreme military headquarters at Moghilev.

As it happened, many of Kornilov's troops had not been informed of the purpose of their deployment and had no idea what they would do when they occupied Petrograd. While they were idled along the tracks, a Caucasian-speaking delegation from the Soviet fraternized with the division and informed them of the aim of their mission. The Caucasians were easily persuaded to disobey their orders and even formed a committee to prevent any further movement toward Petrograd. The Cossack units, most of which were demoralized by the war and by their unsavory role as the policemen of reaction, were turned against the Kornilov coup and refused to march on the capital.

The Kornilov affair thus ended pitifully, without a shot being fired or a blow being struck on the general's behalf. It fell apart primarily as a result of actions by railroad workers and a handful of agitators. Even if the troops had reached the capital and attempted to take it, they almost certainly would have been defeated by the thousands of armed workers and garrisoned soldiers who were mobilized against them. Kornilov himself surrendered on 1 September and was duly imprisoned. Right-wing politicians and officers who had supported him were arrested, and pro-Kornilov groups were immediately disbanded.

## KERENSKY IN POWER

The Kornilov plot served not only to expose the weakness of the counter-revolutionary forces but to restore the resolute Bolsheviks as a major force in the Revolution, even adding to their prestige among the masses.

Following Kornilov's surrender, Kerensky, filled with hubris, struck the pose of a revolutionary Napoleon, naming himself commander-in-chief of the army. Inasmuch as the Kadets had resigned from the Second Coalition Government, it was necessary to form a third one. But should the Kadets be included in the new coalition? They had supported Kornilov's plot, which in itself seemed to exclude them; and they were also the principal bourgeois party in Russia in what was a nominally bourgeois revolution. The perplexing question proved to be intractable, and on 1 September Kerensky named a five-man inner cabinet or Directory (a name redolent of the 1795–9 French government), to exercise plenary powers as an interim government. The Directory's members included Tereschenko, a right-wing Social Democrat; Nikitin, a Menshevik who had already been interior minister; and two military officers,