

one of whom had to be released from prison to occupy his new position. On the same day, in accordance with a long-standing popular demand, Kerensky finally—and belatedly—proclaimed Russia a republic.

These changes satisfied no one. Two days after the formation of the Directory, the executive committees of the Petrograd Soviet and the All-Russian Congress of Peasants' Deputies issued a call for a Democratic Conference to counter the Directory and oppose participation of the Kadets in any new government. The Democratic Conference consisted mainly of representatives of soviets, trade unions, peasant cooperatives, village committees, the socialist parties, and other left-oriented bodies. Unlike the State Conference, the Democratic Conference convened in Petrograd in order to 'subject the government to some sort of improvised representative institution until the convocation of the Constituent Assembly,' as Trotsky put it—in effect, 'to bridle the too eager Kerensky.'<sup>17</sup> Against Kerensky's Bonaparte, the Democratic Conference was prepared to play the role of the revolutionary Convention.

The Democratic Conference's 1200 participants, who met from 14–22 September, oscillated wildly on the question of a bourgeois coalition government. First they voted (766–688) in favor of a coalition; then they voted (595–493) to exclude the Kadets. Inasmuch as the Kadets were the only major bourgeois party in Russia, the vote was a political absurdity. Thereafter the conference voted *against* any bourgeois coalition at all (813–183) but left it to the party leaders to negotiate the details of forming a new, presumably socialist government. Ever resourceful, the leaders devised an inane compromise favoring a bourgeois coalition but making no reference to the Kadets (which passed 829–106). The effect of these vacillations was to open the way to yet another ignominious bourgeois-socialist coalition government.

Out of this confusion a Third Coalition Government was officially formed, consisting of three right-wing SRs, three Mensheviks, six unaffiliated members—and four Kadets! On 19 September, the Democratic Conference—with the agreement of the new government—also created a Provisional Council of the Republic, or 'Pre-Parliament', to function as a preliminary parliamentary body—a legislature with Kerensky's cabinet as an executive—pending the convocation of the Constituent Assembly (which was now scheduled for sometime in November). About 300 of the Pre-Parliament's representatives came from the groups that participated in the Democratic Conference (including delegates of the CEC, the executive committees of regional soviets, and the executive committee of the Congress of Peasants' Deputies), while about 150 were non-socialists, including various barely functional bourgeois groupings.

Negotiations for the Third Coalition Government took place on 22–24 September. The Kadets, realizing that after Kornilov there would be no more

men on horseback, entered the cabinet, together with the socialists. But they agreed to return only on one condition: the new cabinet must be independent of the Pre-Parliament, not accountable to it—which meant that the Pre-Parliament would be merely an advisory body. Incredibly, the other parties agreed, and on 25 September Kerensky announced the formation of the Pre-Parliament and the Third Coalition Government. Utterly disgusted, the newly radicalized Petrograd Soviet denounced the government and refused to give it any support, declaring ominously that the coming Congress of Soviets would soon create 'a truly revolutionary government'.

Their pronouncements sounded like the death rattle of a doomed regime. Far from unifying Russia, they reflected the country's sharp polarization. First a monarchy had been exhausted by three years of war and a revolution; then the dream of a man on horseback had been dispelled; and now even the prospect of a Convention followed by a Bonaparte seemed to be receding into the horizon. Taken together, this series of governmental failures had cleared the way for a takeover by a resolute Left that promised to remove Russia from the war, distribute land to the peasants, and create a new institutional democracy—namely the Bolshevik Party and its supporters.

## NOTES

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2. 'The Provisional Government and War Aims' (Apr. 10 [Mar. 29], 1917), in *Documents*, p. 330.
3. 'Miliukov's Note on War Aims' (May 1 [Apr. 18], 1917), in *Documents*, p. 334, emphasis added.
4. Alexander Rabinowitch, *Prelude to Revolution: The Petrograd Bolsheviks and the July 1917 Uprising* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), pp. 44–5.
5. Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, trans. Max Eastman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1932), p. 1:431.
6. Quoted in Rabinowitch, *Prelude to Revolution*, p. 81.
7. N.N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution, 1917* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 417.
8. Quoted in Rabinowitch, *Prelude to Revolution*, p. 113.
9. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 129.
10. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 110.
11. 'The "Izvestia's" Account of the Uprising (Jul. 3, 1917),' in *Documents*, p. 445.
12. *Izvestia*, Jul. 3, 1917, in *Documents*, p. 145.



13. Trotsky, *History*, p. 1:403.
14. William Henry Chamberlin, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1935), p. 1:237.
15. Quoted in Florinsky, *Russia*, p. 1439.
16. Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1978), pp. 139–40.
17. Trotsky, *History*, p. 2:328.

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## CHAPTER 48 The October Revolution

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### BOLSHEVIKS AND LEFT SRs

From his hiding place in Finland, Lenin watched the events unfolding in Petrograd and elsewhere with growing anxiety. Could the Bolsheviks gain a majority of delegates at the coming Second Congress of Soviets? He was aware that the Left SRs, the growing left wing within the PSR, had split decisively from Chernov's party and formed the Party of Left Socialist Revolutionaries. Led by Boris Kamkov, Vladimir A. Karelin, and Maria Spiridonova, the Left SRs repudiated all collaboration with the Kerensky government and adopted a *narodnik* program of land redistribution, coupled with a demand for peace similar to that of the Bolsheviks. Almost inevitably the two parties became allies, and in September the Left SRs became an indispensable factor in shifting control of the Petrograd Soviet to the Bolsheviks.

As isolated as he was, Lenin wrote prolifically, completing not only *The State and Revolution* but many shorter polemical pieces as well. In 'The Tasks of the Revolution', probably written on 6 September, he revived his pre-July support for the revolutionary role of the soviets, readopting the slogan 'All power to the soviets!' Instead of a parliament, Lenin argued, the soviets alone could provide a framework for a new government. In another article a few days later he explained that he had made the change because soviets were democratic in nature:

'Power to the soviets' means radically reshaping the entire old state apparatus, that bureaucratic apparatus which hampers everything democratic. It means removing this apparatus and substituting for it a new popular one, i.e., a truly democratic apparatus of soviets, i.e., the organized and armed majority of the people—the workers, soldiers, and peasants. It means allowing the majority of the people initiative and independence not only in



the election of deputies but also in state administration, in effecting reforms and various other changes.<sup>1</sup>

— Lenin's faith in democracy, as we have seen, was minimal, but the masses at this time were highly supportive of the soviets—and of the Bolsheviks as well. By September Petrograd, as William Henry Chamberlin remarks, had become 'a seething caldron of Bolshevik agitation.'<sup>2</sup> The factory committees were already resolute supporters of the Bolsheviks. On August 31 the Petrograd Soviet, its Soldiers' Section (now controlled by Left SRs) as well as its Workers' Section, voted to support the Bolsheviks' call for soviet power to replace the existing coalition government, their demand for immediate peace, and their Left SR-inspired program for an immediate land redistribution. The Bolsheviks now became the majority party within the Petrograd Soviet. On 7 September, after the Soviet reaffirmed its allegiance to the Bolshevik program, it elected a new Executive Committee, which was not only Bolshevik-controlled but chaired by the dynamic Trotsky, who took office on 25 September. Under his leadership the Soviet voted to refuse to recognize Kerensky's new Third Coalition Government (which was announced on the same day) and openly called upon the masses to seize power through the soviets.

— From Petrograd, Bolshevik influence was spreading to Russia's other industrial cities. In soviet after soviet the party gained majority votes. On 5 September the Moscow Soviet passed its first pro-Bolshevik resolution, reflecting a Bolshevik majority, and two weeks later elected a new executive committee with a Bolshevik majority. Between 9–17 September the Third Regional Congress of the Soviets of the Army, Fleet, and Workers, meeting in Helsinki, Finland, voted to support Bolshevik resolutions by large majorities and elected a regional executive committee composed almost entirely of Bolsheviks and Left SRs. Social upheaval in the countryside was reaching fever pitch, opening new doors for the Bolsheviks and especially the Left SRs in rural areas. In contrast to the July Days, when the rest of the country was not yet in step with Petrograd, most of the provinces now seemed likely to support a Bolshevik seizure of power—or at least not oppose it.

— Without the support of the soviets, no coalition government could hope to survive—and the soviets were passing into increasingly radical hands. Even in some of the most remote cities, citizens, voting under conditions of universal suffrage, approved ballot items that rejected the Third Coalition Government and called for the transfer of power to the soviets. Histories of the period seldom mention that the Bolsheviks and Left SRs made substantial gains not only in the proletarian soviets but in the traditionally middle-class municipal dumas as well. On 24 September they even swept the vote for members of the Moscow Duma; their showing dwarfed that of the Kadets and SRs, who had

once enjoyed large majorities there. By October the Mensheviks and SRs held a dominant position only on the CEC of the Congress of Soviets, and even that fragile hold was endangered when the CEC voted to endorse Kerensky's new government.

By late September disorganization and mutiny were rife in the army, throwing the forces of the counter-revolution into pell-mell retreat. An unprecedented revolutionary situation had developed in Russia. Power was all but lying in the streets; seldom could an avowed revolutionary party hope to find itself so strategically placed to pick it up as was the Bolshevik Party. At this precarious moment lack of leadership could easily reverse the movement of the Revolution and instead plunge Russia into a counter-revolution that would erase all the gains the masses had made over the past year. No one understood the need for haste better than Lenin, who frantically urged his party's Central Committee to take power lest the 'impending surrender of Petrograd' to the German army by 'Kerensky and Co.' make 'our chances a hundred times less favorable.'

That Kerensky might prefer German occupation to a seizure of power by the Bolsheviks and Left SRs was by no means idle speculation. Had not Rodzianko, the former Duma president, in a well-publicized speech, recently expressed satisfaction that Petrograd was in military danger? If the Germans captured the city, he had declared, they would destroy all the central soviet organizations. 'I should be glad if these institutions were destroyed,' he admitted, 'because they have brought Russia nothing but grief.'<sup>3</sup>

On 12 September, in a letter to the Petersburg and Moscow City Committees titled 'The Bolsheviks Must Assume Power', Lenin insisted that the time had finally come for the Bolsheviks to prepare for an armed seizure of power: 'Having obtained a majority in the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies of both capitals [Petrograd and Moscow], the Bolsheviks can, and must, take over the power of government.'<sup>4</sup> Repeating Marx's injunction that 'insurrection is an art!' he closed his impassioned letter by affirming, 'Power must be assumed in Moscow and in Petrograd *at once* (it does not matter which begins, even Moscow may begin); we shall win *absolutely and unquestionably*.'<sup>5</sup>

This letter, as well as another that followed two days later, threw the Central Committee and the Petersburg and Moscow city committees into turmoil. Meeting jointly on the evening of the 15 September to discuss their contents, they rejected his advice unanimously and even voted to burn these compromising documents—save for one copy to keep for the party's archives. The Bolshevik committees were at this time advocating a policy of conciliation toward the SRs and Mensheviks, proposing that all three parties form a joint socialist government and occupy the Soviet's Executive Committee. Indeed, they would be accountable to the soviets, where the Bolsheviks would play a loyal oppositional role.



see notes  
In mid-September a continuing stream of letters and articles was flowing from Lenin in Finland to the Bolsheviks in Petrograd, urgently demanding that the party leadership plan for an immediate armed seizure of power. Hardly any member of the Central Committee responded favorably to Lenin's demand. Kamenev and a large majority of the Central Committee had been chastened by the repression of the party during the July Days and feared the prospect of isolation, repression, and civil war, followed by the establishment of a reactionary regime. The dominant tone in the Central Committee was clearly set by Kamenev, who repeatedly advocated moderation and compromise. Even Bolshevik leaders who accepted Lenin's views in principle did not propose to proceed immediately toward an insurrection. They were convinced that they must wait to gain legitimization from the Congress of Soviets, whose next meeting was to begin several weeks later, on 20 October.

This stalling tactic threw Lenin into a rage. He shot back that 20 October would be too late; such a delay would give Kerensky time to mobilize forces to quash the insurrection. Insistently he demanded that the Bolsheviks take power now, *before* the convocation of the Soviet Congress, in order to present it with a *fait accompli*. Any failure to act now, he admonished the Central Committee, would constitute nothing less than treachery to the international proletarian revolution. Again, however, the Central Committee rejected his demand. On 17 September, his frustration reached a point of such despair that, at some risk to his life, he moved from Helsinki to Vyborg, a town near the Russian frontier (not to be confused with Petrograd's Vyborg District), which placed him precariously within the government's easy reach. Writing from his new location on 29 September, he went as far as to 'tender my resignation from the Central Committee, which I hereby do, reserving for myself freedom to campaign among the *rank and file* of the Party and at the Party Congress.'<sup>6</sup> (Lenin plainly understood that he had substantial support in the lower party bodies, especially in the Central Soviet of Factory Shop Committees.) But again the Central Committee ignored his resignation letter—as did Lenin himself, who continued to send messages to the committee as if he had never resigned from it.

## THE MAKING OF AN INSURRECTION

The ostensibly centralized, disciplined organization of 'professional revolutionaries' that Lenin had worked so hard to fashion had now successfully blocked him for weeks. Finally, on 7 October, he took the enormous risk of

moving into an apartment in the northernmost part of the Vyborg District itself. His new domicile belonged to a trusted comrade, Margarita Fofanova. On 10 October, for the first time in weeks, he met personally with the Central Committee definitively to resolve if and when an insurrection would occur. Slightly more than half of the 21 Central Committee members attended the meeting, gathering of all places in the apartment of Sukhanov, whose wife, a Bolshevik, had persuaded her unwitting Menshevik husband to absent himself. *Lenin returns*

In a passionate hour-long address to the committee, Lenin again made his case for an immediate uprising. The majority of workers and soldiers supported the Bolsheviks, he admonished, then warned that Kerensky was about to surrender Petrograd to the Germans. The committee, he insisted, must get to work without delay to make the logistical plans for the uprising and decide how and when to eliminate the existing government. The discussion that followed was impassioned. Kamenev and Zinoviev, undoubtedly thinking of the July Days, maintained that most of Russia was not committed to the Bolsheviks; indeed, they argued, the workers wanted to make a revolution through the Constituent Assembly, while the peasantry had yet to be persuaded that the new government should be overthrown.

Lenin thereupon penciled a resolution calling upon all party organizations to prepare for an insurrection—a 'coming out', in the language of the time—which the committee adopted by a 10-to-2 vote, with Kamenev and Zinoviev alone dissenting. But the resolution was a cautious one: it set no specific date for the insurrection and established no practical machinery for its execution. It most resembled a statement of intention. Thus even as Lenin successfully obtained the vote he wanted in principle, the uneasy Central Committee continued to leave room for procrastination.

A flurry of local and regional meetings filled the following week. The Bolsheviks expressly agitated for power to be transferred to the soviets—not necessarily as the result of an insurrection, they averred, but under the auspices of the forthcoming Congress of Soviets. On 15 October, at a meeting of the Petersburg Committee, the Bolshevik district leaders reported that while the city's workers and soldiers supported the Bolshevik program and the transfer of power to the soviets in principle, they were not prepared to carry out an immediate insurrection. One leader after another advised that the workers had already lost too much pay and feared the prospect of imprisonment, transfer to the front, or even execution if the uprising failed, as it had in July. The Congress of Soviets (whose meeting was rescheduled to 25 October), they believed, was the appropriate body to settle the issue of Russia's future government. Meanwhile the Bolsheviks created no insurrectionary organs. The Red Guard units languished in disarray; arms and ammunition remained in short supply; no drills of insurrectionary workers were occurring; and no effort



was made to call upon the rail workers to keep the lines intact after the uprising.

Given these difficulties, the Central Committee met on the night of 16–17 October to reconsider its 10 October resolution. Kamenev and Zinoviev firmly insisted that the necessary conditions to call for a rising did not exist—if only because the Bolsheviks were unprepared! Lenin, however, adamantly refused to back down. An immediate insurrection, he argued, would re-energize the workers. At length the Bolshevik leader asked for a new vote on the resolution, and the committee reconfirmed the insurrection by a vote of 17 to 2, with 4 abstentions. This resolution too failed to specify a date for the uprising.

At the end of the meeting, Kamenev resigned from the Central Committee and, for all practical purposes, moved into public opposition to its decision. On 18 October his statement opposing the Central Committee's decision to stage a 'coming out' was published in Gorky's periodical, *Novaya Zhizn'*. By allowing his statement to be published, Kamenev revealed his party's insurrectionary intentions to the general public, a gesture that could have led to the arrest of all Bolsheviks on charges of conspiracy to commit treason.

Although Lenin wrote a reply to Zinoviev's article, on 19 October the Bolshevik leader himself seems to have become despondent. As Robert V. Daniels observes:

By all appearances Lenin had lost hope that an insurrection could still be launched before the [Second] Congress of Soviets. . . . He did not leave the Fofanova apartment after the 17th; as far as the record shows, none of the Central Committee came to see him after Trotsky's reported visit on the 18th. Feeling politically and physically isolated, Lenin seems to have lapsed into a state of a real depression. He was not to be heard from again until the revolution was actually under way.<sup>7</sup>

The 'supreme' leader of this ostensibly centralized party was being bypassed and ignored in the course of his party's greatest single historical action. His supposed followers were putting their energy, not into preparing for an uprising, but into preparing to persuade the upcoming Congress to replace the Third Coalition Government with a soviet regime.

Trotsky too seems to have resisted Lenin's pressure for an immediate insurrection, as his history of the revolution makes fairly evident; rather, he took the position that galvanizing the workers, the Red Guards, and the garrison into 'coming out' would require a serious provocation by the government; the insurrection was likely to gain more support if it was dressed as a defensive measure against government belligerency. Almost as if following Trotsky's script, Kerensky inadvertently provided the Bolsheviks with precisely

the provocation they needed. During the first week of October the German forces occupying Riga had seized two islands in the Gulf of Riga and driven off Russia's Baltic fleet. With characteristic oafishness, the prime minister thereupon blamed this military fiasco, which cut Petrograd off from the Baltic Sea, on the Baltic sailors, many of whom were known to be Bolshevik supporters. Using this defeat as an opportunity to rid Petrograd of the garrison's politically unreliable members, Kerensky on 5 October ordered that most of the government's military opponents be moved to the front.

The garrison's reaction was fierce. Already depleted by the August advance of the Germans, the soldiers saw the move as evidence of treachery on the part of Kerensky, who appeared to be planning to leave Petrograd defenseless before a new German advance. Speaking in one voice, the garrison abjured all support for the government and demanded that power be shifted to the soviets. Bolshevik agitators, particularly Trotsky, made the most of the situation, denouncing the government to cheering crowds of soldiers and sailors and winning most of the troops to the Bolshevik agenda. The Red Guards reassembled and began to drill assiduously, while various army units openly pledged to 'come out' in the event of a government crackdown. Perhaps most indicative of the garrison's mood, many Cossack units pledged to remain neutral in the event of a rising.

Meanwhile on 9 October, at the Petrograd Soviet, a stormy plenary session adopted a resolution, formulated by Trotsky, that authorized the formation of a 'revolutionary committee of defense' to resist the government's effort to transfer garrison troops to the front. The resolution cast the situation as a crisis comparable to the Kornilov revolt: the new committee was to arm the workers and co-ordinate military action to defend 'the people from the attack which is openly being prepared by military and civilian Kornilovites'<sup>8</sup>—a phrase that unmistakably referred to Kerensky, the government, and the army command.

The Left SR Soviet deputy Pavel Lazimir was placed in command of what, three days later, was renamed the Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC). Although the MRC's original function was not overtly to overthrow the government or seize power, during the next weeks this historic committee would guide the Bolshevik insurrection. Its leading Bureau, chosen on 20 October, was composed of Lazimir; Andrei Sadovsky, the Bolshevik chairman of the Soldiers' Section of the Soviet; and Vladimir Antonov-Ovseyenko and Nikolai Podvoisky, two Bolsheviks who belonged to the party's Military Organization. On 21 October a conference of the Petrograd garrison gave its final approval to the formation of the MRC and repudiated the government's control over the troops in the city. In effect, the garrison had declared war against the government, in what a number of historians regard as the actual beginning of the October Revolution.



By ordering a large part of the Petrograd garrison to the front, Kerensky had cocked the insurrectionary pistol that was aimed at his own head. He now proceeded to pull the trigger by attempting to suppress the city's extreme Left. Among other things, he ordered that the Bolshevik press be shut down. Early on 24 October a detachment of young officer cadets arrived at the Bolshevik printing plant, closed it, and confiscated all copies of its paper, *Rabochy Put*. In response, at nine o'clock the MRC Bureau dispatched a machine-gun company to reopen the plant; at eleven the Bureau proclaimed that the capital faced a 'Kornilovite plot' and alerted all troops and Red Guards to prepare for battle. Kerensky, in turn, ordered the deployment of troops that he hoped were loyal to the government to go from the front to Petrograd. His principal supporters within the city—the officer cadets and several Cossack units—sent patrols into the streets and reinforced the Winter Palace. By early afternoon the cadets had raised some of the drawbridges over the Neva to secure the city's center and cut the telephone and electric lines at the Smolny Institute, the Petrograd Soviet's and the Bolsheviks' headquarters.

Although the MRC Bureau members pored over maps, issued orders, and co-ordinated the deployment of troops, Red Guards, Kronstadt sailors, and commissars, its tactics were surprisingly defensive. For most of the 24th it sent out armed detachments simply to undo measures that the government had already undertaken, such as reopening the Bolshevik printing plant, lowering the drawbridges, and repairing the telephone and electric lines. The workers remained in their factories during the day, as though no insurrection were under way, and the streets were empty of demonstrators. Not until five p.m. did the MRC order the seizure of the telegraph office, and not until eight did it wire Helsinki to summon naval ships and sailors to the capital. Indeed it was only between nine and ten o'clock that the MRC finally took over the vital news wire service. Even as delegates to the Congress of Soviets were converging on Petrograd from all parts of the country, the Bureau was denying that an insurrection was occurring. The Bolshevik 'insurrection' was achieved with minimal mass participation and revolutionary fervor. The tempestuous clashes later depicted in Soviet movies and paintings, with raging masses and soldiers, are a myth; rather, the MRC executed a methodical, piecemeal, and surprisingly lethargic takeover of the government.

Isolated in Fofanova's apartment and cut off from the events, Lenin was beside himself with apprehension. Would his party carry out the task for which it had been formed fourteen years earlier? Would it seize state power under the best conditions it could ever have, in terms of military readiness, popular support, and governmental weakness? He did not know—and few Bolshevik leaders visited him, ostensibly to spare him the risk of being captured. But he gained the impression that even under these most auspi-

cious of circumstances, his fellow Bolsheviks were falling short of leading an insurrection.

Filled with despair, Lenin decided at around 10:30 p.m. to take a wild risk. He left his apartment, intending to make his way to the Smolny Institute. Disguised and accompanied by a bodyguard, Eino Rakhia, he traveled by a nearly empty streetcar to the Finland Station. The two men then walked on foot for nearly two miles through bitter cold to the Smolny. To cross the Liteinyi Bridge, they were obliged to pass through a mixed group of Red Guards and soldiers. Suddenly two mounted cadets stopped them and asked for their passes, which were merely poor forgeries. While Rakhia distracted the cadets, Lenin slipped by them unnoticed. 'On such chance escapes does the fate of nations and revolutions sometimes depend,' observes R.V. Daniels, in his vivid account of this precarious journey.<sup>9</sup>

Lenin and Rakhia finally reached the Smolny around midnight. There the Red Guards on duty refused to admit them. Rakhia had to create another distraction, allowing Lenin stealthily to slip inside the insurrectionary headquarters. After he removed his disguise, his astonished comrades duly informed him of the situation, whereupon he insisted that the MRC Bureau must drop its policy of passive resistance and aggressively take over the capital. Few historians deny that the shock of his arrival and the zealotry of his leadership galvanized a tremendous spurt of audacity among the Bolsheviks and spurred the Bureau into militancy. Between one and two o'clock on the morning of 25 October, after much delay, soldiers and Red Guards finally seized control of the telephone exchange, post office, railroad stations, power stations, and other major service facilities.

That day provincial deputies to the Congress of Soviets packed the Smolny, awaiting the opening session that had been scheduled for two o'clock in the afternoon. While they waited, the Bolsheviks and Left SRs were in the process of taking over Petrograd. During the morning hours the MRC dispatched troops and Red Guards to surround the Maryinsky Palace (where the Pre-Parliament met) and the Winter Palace (where the ministers were holed up). At around noon revolutionary troops seized the Maryinsky Palace, as planned, dispersing the Pre-Parliament in the process. At the Winter Palace the cruiser *Aurora* was positioned on the Neva River, ready to shell the palace if the ministers did not surrender, while Bolsheviks manning the guns in the nearby Peter and Paul Fortress stood on the alert. Kerensky, however, at around 11 a.m. slipped through the MRC lines at the palace and headed for the front, where he hoped to muster forces to defend his beleaguered government.

At 2:45 p.m., although the Winter Palace was still not taken, Trotsky opened a meeting of the Petrograd Soviet and informed the delegates that the Third Coalition Government 'no longer exist[ed].' Roars of approval and waves



of applause greeted this announcement, however premature it certainly was. Lenin followed him to the Soviet's podium, appearing in public for the first time since July, and called upon the delegates to endorse the insurrection. He closed his speech with the cry 'Long live the world socialist revolution!'<sup>10</sup>—to the lusty cheers of the Soviet delegates.

The Winter Palace, with the government's ministers still inside, was being defended by cadets, assorted trainees, Cossacks, and a women's 'Battalion of Death'. But these forces were quickly becoming demoralized, and their willingness to stand by the discredited regime was dwindling. At 6:15 p.m. a large group of cadets abandoned their posts and left the palace, followed less than two hours later by the Cossacks. At 9:40, from the Neva, the *Aurora* fired a blank shell at the palace, emitting an eardrum-shattering blast in the process but doing no damage to the building. Twenty minutes later half of the remaining cadets departed, and shortly thereafter the 'Battalion of Death' surrendered. To take the palace, the revolutionaries fought no heroic battles. Indeed, at around 10 p.m. small batches of armed Red Guards, soldiers, and sailors infiltrated the building, wandering through its immense and complex interior and searching for Kerensky's ministers. A few small groups of cadets tried feebly to block their path. At around eleven in the evening the artillery at the Peter and Paul Fortress began shelling the palace. Finally, at two in the morning, a group of MRC besiegers, led by Antonov-Ovseyenko, came upon the ministers and simply took them prisoner.

## THE SECOND CONGRESS OF SOVIETS

The October Revolution, as it entered into history, had little of the military splendor with which Communist propaganda was to endow it. Its real grandeur came in the Smolny, where the revolutionaries took the earliest steps to give reality to their socialist ideals.

The opening of the Congress of Soviets had been delayed because Lenin insisted that the Winter Palace must first be taken and the ministers arrested. But on the evening of 25 October, the delegates in Smolny's Great Hall were becoming restless. At around 11 p.m., while the attack on the Winter Palace was still under way, the Menshevik Fyodor Dan refused to wait any longer and officially convened the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.

Of the Congress's 670 delegates, about 300 were Bolsheviks and 193 were SRs. At least half the SRs were actually Left SRs and expressly supported the Bolsheviks. Together the two extreme-left groups thus had an absolute majority in the Congress. Of the rest, only 68 were Mensheviks, fourteen were

Menshevik-Internationalists, and the remainder were unaffiliated or affiliated with small groups. Dan, duly acknowledging the Bolshevik plurality, officially turned the podium over to Kamenev, who proceeded to open the session.

As artillery thundered from the Peter and Paul Fortress, Martov rose to propose that the Congress first try to prevent the use of force and establish a 'uniformly democratic power' consisting exclusively of the socialist parties. 'We should elect a delegation,' he urged, 'to negotiate with the other socialist parties and organizations for the purpose of putting an end to the strife.'<sup>11</sup> In an extraordinary gesture Anatoly Lunacharsky—a *mezhrayonts* who now spoke for the Bolsheviks—responded that this proposal was entirely acceptable to the Bolshevik Party. This astonishing act of conciliation had probably been engineered by the moderate and humanistic wing of the Bolshevik leadership, led by Kamenev. In any case, the Congress passed Martov's proposal unanimously. 'With much lingering sentiment in their ranks against a one-party dictatorship,' observes Daniels, 'the Bolsheviks were not yet prepared to repudiate such a gesture of coalition.'<sup>12</sup> Martov's proposal—and Lunacharsky's agreement with it—cleared the way for the creation of a soviet democracy, which might very well have been established against Lenin's wishes.

But immediately after the unanimous vote in favor of socialist unity, a series of moderate socialist speakers dissipated the amiable atmosphere by taking to the podium and bitterly denouncing the Bolsheviks. Speaking for the Mensheviks, one Lev Khinchuk indicted them for undertaking a military action against the Third Coalition Government without consulting the other parties, and for usurping the Congress of Soviets—a charge that was not baseless. The Mensheviks called upon the Congress to negotiate with the old government in order to form a new one. Rebuffed by the delegates, most of the Mensheviks and SRs then proceeded to make a self-defeating gesture of protest: they walked out of the Congress, accompanied by the Jewish Bund and other moderates. As they left the hall, the remaining delegates angrily shouted 'Deserters!' and 'Lackeys of the bourgeoisie!' By taking this fateful step, the Mensheviks and SRs left the Congress in the hands of the revolutionary extremists: the Bolsheviks, the Left SRs, and the Menshevik-Internationalists.

Martov, speaking for his fellow Menshevik-Internationalists, then made another proposal. Condemning the Bolshevik coup, he proposed that the Congress form 'an all-democratic government ... [and] appoint a delegation for the purpose of entering into negotiations with other democratic organs and all the socialist parties.'<sup>13</sup> But the Bolsheviks would have none of it. Trotsky responded that this proposal amounted to a surrender to the all-but-deposed bourgeois regime:



A rising of the masses of the people requires no justification. What has happened is an insurrection, and not a conspiracy. . . . The masses of the people followed our banner and our insurrection was victorious. And now we are told: Renounce your victory, make concessions, compromise. With whom?<sup>14</sup>

Martov, fuming, thereupon stalked out of the Congress, to the catcalls of the Bolshevik delegates.

Sukhanov, a close ally of Martov in the Menshevik-Internationalists, later ruefully admitted that all these parties had made an enormous mistake in removing themselves from participation in the Congress and hence in the new regime:

First of all, no one contested the legality of the Congress. Secondly, it represented the most authentic worker-peasant democracy. . . . Thirdly, the question was: *Where* would the Right Mensheviks and the SRs leave the Congress for? Where would they go from the Soviet? The Soviet, after all, was—the revolution itself. Without the Soviet it never existed, nor could it. . . . [The Menshevik-SR bloc] could not swallow its defeat and the Bolshevik dictatorship. With the bourgeoisie and with the Kornilovites—yes; but with the workers and peasants whom they had thrown into the arms of Lenin with their own hands—impossible.<sup>15</sup>

Motivated by petty spitefulness, the Menshevik-SR bloc performed an enormous historical blunder. 'By quitting the Congress,' Sukhanov later lamented, '... we gave the Bolsheviks with our own hands a monopoly of the Soviet, of the masses, and of the revolution. By our own irrational decision, we ensured the victory of Lenin's whole "line".'<sup>16</sup> The Bolsheviks and Left SRs were now free to establish the government they preferred and to decree whatever they chose. Unintentionally, the Mensheviks and SRs had contributed profoundly to the creation of a one-party dictatorship that would eventually destroy them.

Just as the Winter Palace was falling into the hands of its worker and soldier besiegers, then, the Congress at the Smolny fell into the hands of the Bolsheviks and Left SRs. At three a.m., upon being informed that the Winter Palace had been taken, Lunacharsky read a decree stating that supreme political authority in Russia had been transferred to the Second Congress of Soviets and to the local and provincial soviets. In short, he announced the formation of a soviet government. At five a.m. the Congress adopted the decree overwhelmingly, then adjourned, to reconvene later that day—on Thursday, 26 October—at eleven in the evening.

The proceedings of the 26 October session—the last one of the Second Congress of Soviets—are known only provisionally, since the stenographers

had walked out with the Mensheviks, but historians have tentatively pieced them together from various memoirs. According to the American Bolshevik sympathizer John Reed, when the Congress finally came together, 'a thunderous wave of cheers announced the entrance of the presidium with Lenin—the great Lenin—among them', in his first appearance before the Congress. Reed's adulatory tone probably reflected the reverence that many delegates from the provinces felt toward this man whom they may never have previously seen or heard but who had become a near-legend, variously celebrated and demonized, throughout the empire.

Now Lenin [appeared], gripping the edge of the reading stand, letting his little winking eyes travel over the crowd as he stood there waiting, apparently oblivious to the long-rolling ovation, which lasted several minutes. When it finished, he said simply, 'We shall now proceed to construct the Socialist order!' Again that overwhelming human roar.<sup>17</sup>

Lenin's first proposal was for 'the adoption of practical measures to realize peace. . . . We shall offer peace to the peoples of all the belligerent countries upon the basis of the Soviet terms—no annexations, no indemnities, and the right of self-determination of peoples.'<sup>18</sup> He then read aloud a 'Proclamation to the Peoples of All the Belligerent Countries' that offered a three-month armistice. The Congress adopted it unanimously. Thereafter, according to Reed, the entire Congress was gripped by a

common impulse [and] we found ourselves on our feet, mumbling together into the smooth lifting unison of the *Internationale*. A grizzled old soldier was sobbing like a child. Alexandra Kollontai rapidly winked the tears back. The immense sound rolled through the hall, burst windows and doors and soared into the quiet sky. 'The war is ended! The war is ended!' said a young workman near me, his face shining. And when it was over, as we stood there in a kind of awkward hush, someone in the back of the room shouted, 'Comrades! Let us remember those who have died for liberty!' So we began to sing the Funeral March, that slow, melancholy, and yet triumphant chant, so Russian and so moving.<sup>19</sup>

But much more remained to be accomplished. Lenin read aloud a land decree that abolished all private ownership in land, without compensation, and placed all landlord and church lands in the hands of land committees and peasant soviets, to be distributed to the peasantry according to need. The decree, adopted around two a.m. on 27 October, was a decided departure from the industrialized system of agriculture favored by the conventional



Marxists. The Bolsheviks, perhaps more than they understood, had given reality to the peasant dream of *volya*, the equitable distribution of land. For the first time land was to be disposed of according to hallowed principles of *usufruct*, equality, and need. The extent to which the Bolsheviks enforced the land decree would determine the extent to which their regime would enjoy the support of the peasantry—by far the majority of the Russian people.

Lastly, this session of the Congress also approved the formation of a provisional revolutionary government. The All-Russian Congress of Soviets would be the supreme power of the land. In between its sessions a Council of Peoples' Commissars\* (Soviet Narodnyk Komissarov, or Sovnarkom) would administer the country's affairs. The Sovnarkom would be responsible to the Congress. A constituent assembly would be convened in November to finalize the structure of the soviet government. The Congress expressed its assent to the new government by its applause. Three Left SRs were invited to join the Sovnarkom, but they postponed their decision to join the body, pending the possible formation of a government that included all the socialist parties, which they strongly preferred. As a result, all the commissars were initially Bolsheviks. Lenin was elected the Sovnarkom's chairman, and Trotsky its commissar of foreign affairs.

After the elections the Menshevik-Internationalist Nikolai Avilov and the Left SR Vladimir Karelin stood up and demanded that the government include wider socialist and peasant representation. The Bolsheviks, he said, could not run Russia alone: grain was lacking to feed the people of the city; peace would be difficult to obtain in view of Allied hostility to a Bolshevik soviet regime; and the European proletariat showed no signs of being in a revolutionary mood. Broader participation by socialists was therefore necessary. On behalf of the Menshevik-Internationalists and Left SRs, he then proposed the creation of a Central Executive Committee (CEC) to function as a supreme legislative institution to supervise the Sovnarkom. The proposal came to a vote and was adopted. The Congress then elected 101 CEC members, representing all the parties in attendance: 62 Bolsheviks, 29 Left SRs, six Menshevik-Internationalists, and four representatives of small groups. Kamenev was chosen as its chairman. The Congress finally adjourned at about eight a.m., and its delegates departed to scatter to all the provinces, cities, and villages of the former Russian Empire.

The October Revolution, as has been noted, involved no huge 'coming out' of the masses. No great public rallies were held; no large numbers of workers,

\* The term *commissar* was derived from *commissaire*, an official appointed by the French Revolutionary Convention of 1793–4.

soldiers, or even ordinary citizens filled the streets. Instead, the people of Petrograd went about their normal daily business. The uprising had so far been virtually bloodless; Lenin himself marveled that it occurred so easily. The seizure of the Winter Palace, to be sure, involved some sporadic shooting, but the 'storming' of the palace, as dramatized in Sergey Eisenstein's docudrama *October*, with its battles and heavy gunfire, did not occur. Only nine sailors and six palace guards were killed, some by accident. (The most dramatic event occurred when masses of soldiers and onlookers took over the palace's huge wine cellar and appropriated the tsar's vintage bottles until Red Guards and troops chased them off.) The government surrendered to the insurrection's detachments with remarkable docility. So feeble was its resistance—and so few the military forces at its command—that the MRC needed only about 30,000 Red Guards, sailors and soldiers to carry out the insurrection.

Nevertheless the Bolsheviks' 'seizure of power'—as Lenin, Trotsky and other party leaders called it—was one of the most significant events of the twentieth century. Even as a terrible war ravaged Europe, the Revolution startled the whole world. Bolshevik orators predicted with naïve certainty that the Revolution would spread rapidly to the rest of the world, abolish capitalism, and open the way to universal freedom, social harmony, and a moral and equitable distribution of the means of life. The age-old dream of a just society, in which human exploitation and oppression no longer exist, seemed on the point of realization. Lenin initially chronicled the day-by-day duration of the October Revolution against the two-month duration of the Paris Commune of 1871, often citing with satisfaction, as the weeks and then months went by, that the soviet regime remained in power longer than the Commune. For the Bolsheviks on the Sovnarkom (who were soon joined by seven Left SRs), it became a point of honor to make decrees as quickly as possible to show the world, in the event of a successful counter-revolution, how a workers' state would manage public affairs. Many of these decrees gave legal reality to living facts that the workers and peasants themselves had already accomplished; others resulted from Lenin's eagerness to show the world proletariat what a revolutionary socialist regime could accomplish before it was destroyed by a counter-revolution.

On 13 November 1917, for example, the Sovnarkom promulgated the 'Draft Statutes on Workers' Control' that introduced, in the words of the decree, 'workers' control of the production, warehousing, purchase and sale of all products and raw materials ... in all industrial, commercial, banking, agricultural and other enterprises employing not less than five workers and employees (together), or with a turnover of not less than 10,000 rubles per annum.' If an enterprise was small enough, workers could exercise control directly; if large, delegates elected at mass meetings could eventually take over



factory operations. The workers or their delegates were to 'have access to all books and documents and to all warehouses and stocks of materials, instruments and products, without exception.'\*

In the next months, when the Bolsheviks began to suspect that their October Revolution would not immediately be followed by a world revolution, they seemed to feel that they had nothing to lose by decreeing their most expansive utopian ideals into existence, however temporary or uncertain the outcome. The Sovnarkom rapidly issued decrees establishing a workers' militia, imposing a moratorium on house rents, nationalizing the banks, sequestering uninhabited dwellings, and establishing social insurance for workers. The regular hierarchical army was replaced by a proletarian militia in which ranks and privileges were abolished and the elections were instituted on a company level. Women gained rights equal to those of men, as well as the right to abortion on demand. Emulating the Paris Commune, the Sovnarkom limited the salary of government leaders, including its own members, to that of skilled Russian workers. Within their own party the Bolsheviks were intensely committed to maintaining egalitarian principles and rarely diminished individual rights without considerable debate and even bitter factional conflict.

## DEFEATING THE MILITARY RESISTANCE

Within Petrograd nearly all the established institutions and forces—the Mensheviks, SRs and other dissidents from the former Soviet Executive Committee, as well as the City Duma, and the bourgeois parties—were hostile to the Bolsheviks. They gravitated toward the so-called Committee for the Salvation of the Country and the Revolution, which considered itself the heir of Kerensky's government and became the main center for mobilizing anti-Bolshevik forces. Initially the committee called for passive resistance to the new government and urged white-collar and civil service employees to disobey

\* V.I. Lenin, 'Draft Statutes on Workers' Control' (Nov. 8–13 [Oct. 26–31], 1917), in *Selected Works* (Moscow: International Publishers, 1943), p. 6:410. But this decree undermined workers' control even as it was in the process of establishing it. Above all it provided that, while the decisions of factory committees were legally binding on factory owners, they 'could be annulled by trade unions and congresses.' In the defense industries, weapons production and any enterprises 'in any way connected with the production of articles necessary for the existence of the masses of the population' were placed under the supervision of the state, thereby opening the way to the establishment of an authoritarian bureaucracy. These loopholes made it possible for the party and the government gradually to annul the decree's effectiveness.

the new regime. Their call had a measure of success: nearly all the banks in Petrograd closed down, and widespread sabotage together with absenteeism undermined the Sovnarkom's attempts to manage the city's affairs. Many middle-class people simply went on strike, but either hunger or social pressure eventually induced them to return to their jobs, under the supervision of soviet commissars.

Kerensky, after his stealthy departure from the Winter Palace on 25 October, frantically rushed from one garrison to another in the Petrograd area, looking for troops willing to restore his government. Most of them ignored his appeals, except for General P.N. Krasnov, who commanded a number of Cossack detachments. These comprised about 700 men. The Russian military command in the Petrograd region telegraphed every front on Kerensky's behalf, in a pitiful effort to collect troops on his behalf, but few responded. Those who did try to make the journey to the capital found that the workers obstructed their rail passage and Bolshevik agitators undermined their scant resolve. En route to Petrograd, Krasnov's 700-man cavalry captured Gatchina on 27 October, and the next day they took Tsarskoe Selo, only 25 miles from the capital. As Chamberlin recounts:

With a few regiments of reliable troops Krasnov could probably have entered Petrograd. But the significant fact of the moment was that no such regiments made their appearance. Prominent political leaders ... turned up at the headquarters of Kerensky and Krasnov; but there were no fresh troops. The Cossacks, whose morale had already been lowered by the Kornilov fiasco, began to murmur, to declare that they could go no further without infantry.<sup>20</sup>

On 29 October cadets in Petrograd's military schools rose up against the soviet regime and seized the Central Telephone Station as well as several other facilities, but the Cossacks in the city refused to give them any aid. The Bolsheviks surrounded the cadets' schools and barraged at least one of them with artillery shells. Sailors and Red Guards soon quelled the cadets' revolt in a battle that, before it was over, claimed 200 dead and wounded on both sides. On 30 October Krasnov's forces reached the heights of Pulkovo, directly outside Petrograd's city limits, where they encountered a determined force of sailors, several thousand strong. Patently outnumbered, Krasnov tried to attack anyway, but the sailors fought back resolutely; others fraternized with the Cossacks, whose morale had evaporated with the morning mist. His ammunition nearly gone, Krasnov retreated back to Gatchina, where he was taken prisoner. Kerensky, after contemplating suicide, decided that flight was the preferable alternative. He made his way to Murmansk and left Russia, never to return.



In the days that followed the Bolshevik seizure of power, insurrectionary soviets throughout Russia established MRCs, following the model of Petrograd. By November local MRCs and soviets had taken over most of the industrial cities with little or no bloodshed, although Bolshevik rule was temporarily challenged in Kiev, Minsk, and a few other cities. From Helsinki in Finland to Krasnoyarsk in Siberia, however, the soviets or their MRCs replaced all the agencies of the provisional government with relatively little difficulty.

A crucial exception was Moscow, the old first capital of imperial Russia, which remained a center of anti-Bolshevik feeling. Here the Bolsheviks' opponents were relatively aggressive and self-assured; to prevent soviet power from encroaching into the city, Moscow's SRs organized a determined Committee of Public Safety. On 28 October the committee's general, Ryabtsev, informed the Kremlin garrison's Bolshevik leader, I. Berzin, that unless he surrendered the city's great fortress, with its stores of weapons and ammunition, several thousand military cadets would barrage the garrison with artillery. Alternatively, if Berzin were to surrender, Ryabtsev promised, his troops would be spared. Berzin surrendered, and the Reds, as they were called, laid down their arms—only to be massacred by the cadets, in the first of many atrocities to come. The remaining Bolshevik forces resisted, barricades were erected, and street fighting followed. Red Guards from Moscow's suburbs reinforced their beleaguered comrades, as did sympathetic troops from outside the city. Finally, on 2 November, Moscow fell to the MRC, and Russia's 'second' capital came under soviet control.

Other centers of resistance to the Bolsheviks included the Cossack areas in the south, which firmly rejected soviet authority, and the city of Saratov, where the SRs had their own 'Petrograd'. Non-Russian areas also tended to hold out against Bolshevik forces, such as Finland, which declared its independence; the Ukraine, where the nationalist Rada took power in Kiev; and Georgia, which the Mensheviks controlled. By the end of the year, however, nearly all of Russia had been brought under nominal Bolshevik control. These victories, however tentative, gave the Sovnarkom time to consolidate itself as the new government of Soviet Russia.

## DEMOCRACY AND THE VIKZHEL REVOLT

The Mensheviks opposed Lenin's seizure of power—not because they were reactionary or counter-revolutionary (as later Bolshevik propaganda had it), but because, in accordance with Marxist precept, they were convinced that Russia, with its population of untutored peasants and libertarian workers, was

as yet too backward materially and culturally to create a socialist society. The Bolshevik insurrection, they feared, would lead to civil war with devastating consequences, probably even a dictatorship. The German revolution upon which Lenin counted for aid seemed less in the offing than the Bolsheviks had expected—and even if a German revolutionary government were to come into existence, it would be hard pressed to assist the Russians, given the limited resources that it had at its disposal as a result of the war. Based on this assessment, the Mensheviks concluded that the Bolshevik insurrection had been nothing more than an opportunistic power grab. As Vladimir N. Brovkin has paraphrased the Menshevik view:

The masses were willing to follow those who offered ever more radical promises, even though such promises were, from the socialists' [Mensheviks'] point of view, unfulfillable. The Bolsheviks had promised the masses socialism, democracy, and prosperity as if by magic, if only all power was transferred to the soviets. The socialists were convinced that the Bolsheviks realized that there was no quick fix to Russia's problems and were throwing the country into chaos in order to gain power, instead of acting responsibly with other socialist parties.<sup>21</sup>

Hence the Mensheviks demanded that the soviet government should be a multiparty regime, minimally composed of all the socialist parties to assure it a broad base in the population.

The Left SRs, having remained at the Second Congress, were now open allies of the Bolsheviks, who needed them badly; without Left SR votes, they would not have been a majority in the Second Congress. Moreover, the Left SRs were gaining considerable influence among the peasants and soldiers, rapidly supplanting the influence of Chernov's SRs.

But the new party's leaders were very young: Pavel Lazimir, the Left SR chairman of the MRC, was only eighteen, while many of his comrades were in their twenties or early thirties. Worse, they were very inexperienced and unsure of themselves; Sukhanov dismissed them all as 'the children'. But they were highly principled, and their *narodnik* idealism potentially stood at odds with the Bolsheviks' hard pragmatism.

Moreover, the Left SRs strongly favored an all-socialist soviet government, as did the CEC, the regime's new 'parliament', to which the Sovnarkom was expected to be answerable. Even many Bolshevik leaders believed that the regime, if it hoped to survive, must be more inclusive: Kamenev, as the CEC chairman, decidedly supported an all-socialist government, as did Zinoviev and a number of 'soft' Bolsheviks. If the Bolsheviks tried to rule with the Left SRs only, the 'softs' asserted, the regime would not only suffer political



isolation but could very well turn Russia into a dictatorship. It was mainly Lenin and Trotsky's self-assurance that kept a large number of the Bolshevik leaders from making the government more democratic.

An all-socialist government, in Lenin and Trotsky's view, would amount to nothing less than a repudiation of the October insurrection. The Bolsheviks and Left SRs had been the ones to carry out the Revolution; they had the support of the workers and peasants; and they now bore the responsibility of ultimately creating a socialist society, if necessary through an authoritarian government led by Bolshevik 'hards'.

On 29 October, while the Bolsheviks were still fighting the cadets in the military schools of Petrograd and Moscow, the national committee of the Union of Railway Workers, or Vikzhel, stepped into the picture. This essentially Menshevik committee announced that it would sponsor a conference that very day to create an all-socialist government. The Bolsheviks were enjoined to participate in the conference and negotiate with the other socialist parties; if they declined, the Vikzhel would call a nationwide railway strike—and thereby bring troop and supply transport to a standstill. At the moment when the Vikzhel's threat was presented, it so happened, Lenin and Trotsky were absent directing operations against the Krasnov's uprising, with the result that the Bolshevik Central Committee voted unanimously to send delegates to the conference and even throw its support to the formation of an all-socialist government.

At the conference the Menshevik-SR delegates, certain that the Bolsheviks' hold on power would soon collapse, overplayed their hand: no single party, they demanded, should be permitted to have a majority in the government. Moreover, the CEC should be enlarged to include representation from the dumas as well as the soviets. Almost spitefully they demanded that Lenin and Trotsky be excluded from the Sovnarkom. As Trotsky was later to complain, the Bolshevik negotiators passively stood by while the conferees repudiated the October Revolution.

On 1 November the Bolshevik Central Committee met again, this time with Lenin and Trotsky present. Krasnov's revolt had been vanquished, and Moscow's resistance to the soviet regime was crumbling. After hearing a report on the Vikzhel conference, Lenin—who was apoplectic about the Bolshevik leaders' surrender—adamantly refused to admit the 'petty bourgeois' parties (as he called them) into the government. Then on 2 November, when the Bolsheviks defeated the resistance in Moscow, the constellation of political forces swung back in their favor. Lenin was free to curtail the 'conciliators', and by applying considerable pressure on the Central Committee, he managed by the slimmest margin to get the Sovnarkom to include himself and Trotsky and to gain at least half of the ministries for Bolsheviks. A few days later, on 4

November, Lenin issued a blunt ultimatum to Kamenev and his supporters either to accept the will of the Central Committee or face expulsion from the party.

There can be little doubt that Lenin had cowed the Central Committee—as much by the force of his personality as by the power of his arguments. It had happened before, and it would happen again. Nonetheless, not all of the Bolsheviks gave in to his will. On 7 November five members of the Central Committee—Kamenev, Zinoviev, Rykov, Nogin and Milyutin—resigned from the body in protest, publicly accusing the Bolshevik leadership of trying to create 'a purely Bolshevik government, regardless of the sacrifices to the workers and soldiers', and ominously warning:

*We cannot assume responsibility for this ruinous policy of the Central Committee, carried out against the will of a large part of the proletariat and the soldiers who are most eager for an early cessation of blood-shedding by the different wings of the democracy.*

We resign from membership in the Central Committee so that we may be free to speak openly to the workers and soldiers and to ask them to support our slogan: Long live the government of the parties in the Soviet and an immediate understanding on these terms!<sup>22</sup>

These democratic Bolsheviks had good reason to resign from the Central Committee of a party that required them to support an important policy with which they entirely disagreed. But the Menshevik-Internationalists had no reason to withdraw in protest from the functional equivalent of a parliament, an institution that was potentially their most important forum for criticizing Lenin and Trotsky's increasing authoritarianism and that would have given them the ears of a nationwide public. Nevertheless, repeating the error committed by the Menshevik delegates to the Second Congress of Soviets in October, the Menshevik-Internationalists too withdrew from the CEC.

Kamenev resigned as that body's chairman. Eleven Bolsheviks resigned from the Sovnarkom, warning in a separate statement that the only alternative to an all-socialist government was 'a purely Bolshevik government which can maintain itself only by means of political terror.'<sup>23</sup> The Left SRs, who had not yet joined the Sovnarkom, withdrew their members from the MRC. A. Lozovsky, a leading Bolshevik in the CEC, protested against the MRC's institution of press censorship on 26 October.

But on the same day a cowed Zinoviev gave in to Lenin and was permitted to rejoin the Central Committee. And, still on 7 November, the CEC voted (29 to 23) to grant the still-all-Bolshevik Sovnarkom the power to rule by decree. A few weeks later, on 17 November, Lenin felt secure enough in power to admit



- the Left SRs into the Sovnarkom. In the negotiations they received several commissariats, including agriculture, justice, local government, posts and telegraphs, and two without portfolio. The admission of the Left SRs into the
- † Sovnarkom gave the government the appearance of being a coalition and deflated the arguments of remaining Bolshevik 'conciliators', who began to
- end their opposition. Kamenev and his allies retracted their resignations and asked to be reinstated to the party leadership; three months later they were readmitted into the Central Committee.

- The best chance that the new soviet government would become relatively
- democratic was now lost. Lenin and Trotsky had thrown democratic practices to the winds, but while blame for the failure of democracy rests greatly with them, it cannot be attributed to them alone. The Mensheviks and the SRs had walked out of the Second Congress of Soviets, leaving the new government to the Bolsheviks. At the Vikzhel conference the Menshevik-SR bloc had tried not only to exclude the two most popular Bolshevik leaders from the Sovnarkom but to include the dumas in an expanded CEC, which would have provided a parliamentary home for the bourgeoisie in the new regime. In effect, they had set conditions that the Bolsheviks could never have accepted and that, even had the Bolsheviks been more willing, would necessarily have prevented them from agreeing to a coalition government. Thus was lost the greatest opportunity to preserve a revolution from heading toward a totalitarian finale.

## THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

The new soviet government now found itself faced with the need to convoke the long-delayed Constituent Assembly. The Assembly had become the arena par excellence where the thorniest problems in Russian politics and society were to be resolved, notably land redistribution, the republic's governmental structure, the role of soviets and trade unions, the rights of oppressed nationalities, and Russia's participation in the war. Each of these issues had been repeatedly deferred to be handled by the Assembly—whose convocation had been repeatedly deferred. The Bolsheviks had gained considerable popular support for demanding that it be convened promptly. But once they were in power, they realized that it was impossible to foresee which party or bloc of parties would gain a majority of delegates to the Assembly. The election results might well go against them. Having seized power, they were obliged to set the election date within the two weeks between 12 and 26 November, if they were to gain the confidence of the masses and hold it.

When the elections took place, however, the results were not what the

Bolsheviks wanted. The SRs gained the most votes, albeit far short of an absolute majority. Out of 41.6 million votes cast, the SRs received 15.8 million, compared with 9.8 million for the Bolsheviks, 1.9 for the Mensheviks, and a pitiful 1.9 for the liberal Kadets.<sup>24</sup> The Bolsheviks did best in the cities: in Petrograd they received 424,000, while the SRs came in a poor third (152,000); the Mensheviks were reduced to a mere splinter party (29,000). Comparable results came in from Moscow. But in the countryside the SRs prevailed heavily. Generally, the more agrarian and remote the province, the higher the SR vote. (The Ukraine was the most important exception; here the Ukrainian SRs, a nationalist party, got by far the largest vote. Throughout the south, including Georgia, where the Mensheviks had a traditionally strong foothold, the voting results primarily reflected a desire for cultural autonomy, although not for separation from Russia.) The meaning of the large SR vote is difficult to determine. Most likely, as Oliver Radkey has concluded, it did not reflect a large and stable anti-Bolshevik constituency but rather strong support for local agronomists and educators who were usually SRs. Nor did the ballots distinguish between Left SRs and the parent party, so that those who wished to vote for the Left SRs could only cast their votes for the older SR party.

On 5 January 1918, the delegates to the Constituent Assembly finally made their way to Petrograd and assembled in the Tauride Palace—which they found 'guarded' by heavily armed soldiers. Inside the assembly hall Bolshevik supporters packed the galleries and raucously subjected anti-Bolshevik delegates to humiliating catcalls and whistles whenever they spoke—another instance of the decline in democratic procedures that had begun immediately after the 24–25 October insurrection. The SR majority elected Chernov as chairman, an indication of his party's strength. His speech was somewhat conciliatory to the Bolsheviks, emphasizing his Zimmerwaldian position during the war and his desire to give the land to the peasants. But these words failed to prevent the soldiers and sailors in the gallery from repeatedly interrupting his speech, as well as all others delivered by SRs, with jeers and hoots.

The Assembly went on during the day to declare that Russia was a federal republic; to reject Bolshevik attempts to negotiate a separate peace with the Germans (see Chapter 49); and to adopt a land law that closely resembled the land decree that the Second Congress of Soviets had approved. While Chernov was reading aloud the Assembly's land law, an anarchist sailor, one Zheleznyak, elbowed his way to the podium and told the delegates to disperse 'since the guard is tired.' The Bolshevik and Left SR delegates had already walked out. Chernov finished reading the land law hastily, whereupon what remained of the Assembly quickly adopted it. The delegates then left the hall, presumably intending to return the next day.



But such a return was not to be. The first day's session was also the last one. On the following morning the delegates who arrived at the entrance to the Tauride found it barred by soviet troops. The CEC had simply dissolved the Constituent Assembly, denouncing it as a 'cover' for counter-revolution. The delegates then dispersed to their homes in the provinces. There they tried to rouse support for the aborted Assembly, but its dissolution seems to have aroused little public concern. The Russian people seemed far more occupied with the question of what the Bolsheviks would do about land and peace than with the abortion of the remote Assembly.

Thus was the Bolsheviks' formal seizure of power completed. The questions that the new rulers now faced were whether they could hold on to that power and, if they could, how they would use it.

## NOTES

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## CHAPTER 49 The Emerging Dictatorship

### THE BREST-LITOVSK NEGOTIATIONS

In undertaking the October insurrection, the Bolsheviks had veered sharply away from the conventional Marxist rejection of revolutionary change in a predominantly agrarian, semi-feudal country. Mensheviks and Bolsheviks had long agreed that Russia was economically unprepared for a socialist revolution, despite Marx's own qualified support for *narodnik*-type land repartition in the early 1880s.

But the unique confluence of historical circumstances in 1917—the terrible years of wartime slaughter and hunger, coupled with the extreme radicalization of the Russian proletariat—had made the October Revolution, in Lenin's eyes, not only a historical gamble but a *historical imperative*. Western capitalism had been severely weakened by the war, which the Bolshevik leader emphasized was bringing Western workers to the threshold of a socialist-type insurrection. Russia was the weakest link in the chain of international capitalism. If the Russian workers' parties took the initiative in making a socialist revolution, they might well ignite socialist revolutions in industrially advanced countries that—unlike Russia—had numerous class-conscious proletarians and an economy sufficiently developed quickly to abolish material scarcity. They could, as it were, 'give history a push' and send the European continent careering into a socialist future. Thus, for the Bolsheviks, a large part of the *raison d'être* for the October Revolution in Russia was to spark a socialist revolution in Europe—or what was called rather loosely 'the world revolution'.

Even before October, Lenin's articles and speeches in 1917 were studded with appeals for a proletarian revolution in Germany. In his brief oration upon arriving at the Finland Station, it will be recalled, he heralded the Russian Revolution as the vanguard of the international proletariat and closed with the exclamation, 'Long live the world socialist revolution!' He repeated the same

cry at the close of his speech to the Petrograd Soviet, only hours before the October uprising took place. The ideological shift represented by his April Theses had been predicated on the assumption that a proletarian revolution in Russia would ignite a proletarian revolution in Germany. After October, in a number of public speeches, the name of Karl Liebknecht, an important leader of the German revolutionary movement, was often on his lips. In February 1918, he was sanguine enough to write, 'If Liebknecht is victorious [in Germany] over the bourgeoisie in two or three weeks (it is not impossible), he will get us out of all difficulties. That is beyond doubt.'

For the Bolsheviks, world revolution was not only a long-awaited ideal; it was also a matter of dire necessity. It was axiomatic for most Russian revolutionaries that without a socialist revolution in Europe, particularly in Germany, no socialist or even Jacobin-type revolution in Russia could hope to survive, let alone transform Russian society. Proletarian revolutions in the industrialized West were expected to provide the Russian revolutionary regime with the material assistance it needed to retain power. And without such aid, Bolshevik Russia was certain to be destroyed by capitalist invasions from abroad and by a civil war at home. Thus the Bolsheviks lived in continuous expectation of a more or less immediate proletarian revolution in Germany. Further to instigate such a revolution, they eagerly sought to end the war on Germany's Eastern Front by one means or another. As soon as possible Russia must negotiate and sign, separately from the other Allies, a peace treaty with the Central Powers.

In the autumn of 1917, bringing an early peace to Russia was indispensable to maintaining Bolshevik credibility as well. Hatred of the war pervaded the army. The peasants-in-uniform who were still at the front were eager to return to their villages and stake out their claims to the expropriated land that was waiting for them. Following the October Revolution, they deserted the front lines in even greater numbers than before. So massive were the desertions that, apart from Bolshevik agitators at the front and a few scattered forces, no real army remained to oppose the German army. In December 1917, while Trotsky, as commissar of foreign affairs, was traveling through Poland to negotiate a peace treaty with Germany, he observed 'that we were not in a position to go on fighting,' adding while crossing the front lines that 'the trenches were almost empty; nobody dared to utter a word about the continuation of the war under any conditions. "Peace, peace, whatever happens!"'

On 7 November—only a few days after the insurrection—the Sovnarkom ordered the commander-in-chief of the Russian army, General N. Dukhonin, to propose an armistice to the Germans, with a view toward opening peace negotiations. Dukhonin refused, whereupon on 9 November the regime



replaced him with Nikolai Krylenko, an ensign and long-time Bolshevik. A few days later Krylenko arrived at Moghilev, where the Stavko (or supreme headquarters) was located, to take up his new post. A Provisional Revolutionary Committee was established to assume control of the army; it radically democratized the entire army, going well beyond the provisions of Order Number One. All officers were thenceforth to be elected, titles were abolished, as was the wearing of officers' epaulets, and military authority was delivered over to elected army committees. On 11 December most of the fronts sent delegates to a conference at Moghilev, where they elected a Central Committee of the Operating Army and Fleet, with Krylenko as commander-in-chief. The new commander instructed all Russian soldiers to fraternize openly with the German troops and to initiate armistice agreements at the regimental level. Although these steps gave ordinary soldiers enormous control over their commanders and even over military strategy, they still did not keep the Russian army from melting away.

Finally on 9 December, with a cease-fire in effect, Soviet Russia began formal peace negotiations with the Central Powers at the eastern German headquarters in Brest-Litovsk. Adolf Joffe, an ardent Bolshevik, represented Soviet Russia, while the German foreign minister, Richard von Kühlmann, and General Max von Hoffmann (of the German High Command) were to function as the principal spokesmen for the Central Powers.

The German officers at Brest-Litovsk shrewdly cultivated an atmosphere of bonhomie with the members of the Soviet delegation, dining with them and praising the courage of their leaders. At the same time they milked the amiable Joffe for information about conditions in Russia and the Bolshevik leaders' intentions. This cordial atmosphere came to an abrupt end on 27 December, however, when Trotsky, the new commissar of foreign affairs, arrived on the scene to replace Joffe. Insisting on separate quarters for his colleagues, including separate dining areas, Trotsky replaced chatty conversations and pretended affability with direct, forthright, businesslike negotiations.

The Bolshevik leader's aims were to use the Brest-Litovsk negotiations as a stage from which to spread revolutionary propaganda to the international proletariat. From Trotsky's pen flowed a torrent of appeals and leaflets and even formal diplomatic documents, all in German, all addressed not to generals and statesmen but to 'the people'—especially to the German and Austrian workers—calling their attention to their governments' blatant imperialism. With unequivocal faith in the internationalism of the proletariat, he called upon German and Austrian workers to rise up in outrage and support their Russian brothers by establishing their own soviet states. So zealously did he and other Bolsheviks try to reach ordinary German soldiers that Karl Radek, a Bolshevik journalist and political strategist who accompanied the

Russian delegation, opened a valise packed with propaganda and, under the very eyes of the imperial officers, distributed revolutionary literature to German troops standing nearby. With characteristic irony, Trotsky called upon the German officers themselves to inform their troops about the activities of German revolutionary socialists:

I asked in our own papers if the German staff would not be so good as to tell the German soldiers something about Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg [two German Marxists who had been confined for their antiwar activity]. We published a special leaflet on the subject for the German soldiers.<sup>3</sup>

As Isaac Deutscher observes, 'Such was the unprecedented style [Trotsky] introduced into diplomacy. Even as Foreign Secretary he remained the revolution's chief agitator.'<sup>4</sup>

With these public forays Trotsky hoped to drag out the negotiations as long as possible, in the hope that his propaganda, coupled with outrage at German imperialism and at the brutality of war, would contribute to the outbreak of a European revolution. As he observed in his memoirs: 'We had not, of course, given up hope of some swift revolutionary developments.'<sup>5</sup> He also hoped that his behavior would induce the other Allies to participate in the Brest-Litovsk negotiations and share responsibility for the outcome. The Bolsheviks repeatedly requested adjournments, ostensibly for consultations with Petrograd, while inviting the Allied powers again and again to send their plenipotentiaries to Brest-Litovsk. France and England, needless to say, ignored them: they were eagerly awaiting the arrival of American divisions to replenish their front lines and provide the superabundant supplies that would finally bring them victory.

Trotsky's stalling tactics, however, were unnerving to the German General Staff, which angrily complained to Hoffmann about the delays. Ludendorff and Hindenburg, who were then preparing their last great offensive against Paris, pressed the Bolshevik leader to bring the negotiations to a speedy conclusion. Their need to shift German troops from the Eastern Front to the West had reached desperate proportions. Hoffmann and his fellow warlords, anticipating that the longer they waited, the more of Russia's resources they could exploit, felt no real need to end the war in the East. They knew full well that the Russian army had evaporated; indeed, a resumption of fighting could actually be a boon for Germany—it might allow the Reich to take over the Ukraine, whose rich agricultural resources could meet the needs of the hungry populations at home and in Austria. Vienna, which had depended upon Germany for food, was already on the verge of a famine.



On 5 January, Trotsky bluntly asked Hoffmann to indicate which territories the Germans planned to annex. Hoffmann thereupon proceeded to unroll a blue-penciled map that showed a huge area from the Baltic to the Black Sea. As Trotsky described it afterward:

Germany and Austria wish to cut off from the possessions of the former Russian Empire a territory comprising 150,000 square versts [approximately 100,000 square miles]. That territory includes the former Kingdom of Poland, Lithuania, and large areas inhabited by Ukrainians and White Russians. Furthermore, the line drawn on the map cuts in two the territory inhabited by the Letts and separates the Esthonians on the islands of the Baltic from the same people on the mainland. Within these regions Germany and Austria are to maintain a regime of military occupation to last not only until the conclusion of peace with Russia but also after the conclusion of a general peace.<sup>6</sup>

Later that same day Trotsky returned to Petrograd and reported on the negotiations. The Bolsheviks were by no means in agreement on how to proceed, and after much heated discussion, three alternative positions emerged.

Lenin insisted that the Bolsheviks must sign a peace treaty immediately on the Germans' terms, whatever those terms might be. A refusal could very well bring about a resumption of hostilities, which would undoubtedly lead to a devastating defeat: German troops could easily invade the Ukrainian heartland and overrun it as a *fait accompli*. They could even help remove the Bolsheviks from state power. But by signing a peace treaty, the Bolsheviks could gain a 'breathing space' in which to try to instigate Western revolutions that could then come to Russia's aid.

At the opposite extreme, the young Nikolai Bukharin and his Moscow comrades—the 'Left Communists'—bitterly condemned capitulation, especially at a time when revolutions, in their view, were about to sweep Europe. Along with the Left SRs and some leading Bolsheviks, they called on the Bolshevik leadership to wage a revolutionary guerrilla war against German imperialism, invoking the precedent of 1792 and the French Revolution, which greatly influenced their outlook.

Trotsky occupied an intermediate position, advancing the formula 'neither peace nor war'. The soviet regime, he contended, should not fight the Central Powers any longer; but neither should it sign their peace treaty. Rather, the Russian negotiators should try to extend the negotiations for as long as possible, in the hope that revolutions would quickly topple existing capitalist

governments in Western and Central Europe. Trotsky advanced his 'neither peace nor war' formula at a time when general strikes and peace demonstrations were taking place in key cities in Austria and Germany—which, the Bolsheviks hoped, could explode into a Central European revolution.

Lenin stood in a minority on the Central Committee, warning that Trotsky's position was too risky: revolutions were eventually possible in the West, he acknowledged, but Trotsky's position wagered the future of the soviet regime on their immediate outbreak. When the Central Committee took up the issue at a meeting on 11 January, the Bolsheviks voted (9–7) to accept Trotsky's position and authorized him to delay signing any peace treaty. Trotsky thereafter returned to Brest-Litovsk with this mandate.

The Brest-Litovsk negotiations were complicated by the eruption of armed conflict in the Ukraine. On 29 December a group of Ukrainian nationalists, hostile to the Bolsheviks, had surfaced in Kiev. Designating themselves the Ukrainian People's Republic, governed by a Central Rada (or National Assembly), this nationalist movement preferred the Ukraine to be subordinated to Berlin rather than to Petrograd, and they even asked the Central Powers to recognize the Rada as the sovereign government. The Germans were only too happy to comply. In signing the treaty with the Rada on 19 January, Hoffmann provided the Rada with German protection, in return for which he annexed a vast area of the Ukraine over which the Rada claimed to have sovereignty. Two days later Red Guards arrived on the scene and dispersed the Rada, proclaiming a soviet government over the entire Ukraine. The Central Powers obstinately refused to recognize the Bolshevik proclamation and continued to support the Rada. Indeed, on 25 January the Germans signed a peace treaty with the Rada, thereby gaining access to Ukrainian grain at Soviet Russia's expense.

In the meantime, Trotsky had arrived back at Brest-Litovsk and, on 28 January, delivered his 'Neither Peace nor War' statement to the German delegation. The soviet regime, he declared, was withdrawing from the war, issuing 'orders for full demobilization of all troops that now face the armies of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey, and Bulgaria.' Moreover, he flatly refused to 'sanction' Hoffmann's undisguisedly imperialistic demands by signing a peace treaty.<sup>7</sup> The Russian statement astonished all the emissaries of the Central Powers. 'Unheard of!' Hoffmann spat out and on 29 January broke off all further negotiations with the Bolsheviks.

Like most Bolsheviks, however, Trotsky had grossly underestimated what the ordinary German soldier would do on behalf of the Fatherland, even during the bitter winter of 1918 that descended upon the starving Fatherland. The German High Command and the Kaiser were in fact delighted by the 'Neither Peace nor War' declaration. Eager to get their hands on Ukrainian



grain, they decided that Trotsky's statement terminated the truce. On 17–18 February\* they launched an offensive along the entire Russian front, throwing 53 divisions against virtually empty Russian trenches. Apparently unmoved by Bolshevik propaganda, the German troops marched in perfect order against the paltry Soviet forces, who were ordered to offer them no resistance. Hoffmann cheerfully noted in his diary:

It is the most comical war I have ever known—it is almost entirely carried on by rail and motorcar. We put a handful of infantry men with machine-guns and one gun onto a train and push them off to the next station; they take it, make prisoners of the Bolsheviks, pick up a few more troops, and go on. This proceeding has, at any rate, the charm of novelty.<sup>8</sup>

So rapidly did the German army advance that in five days it bolted 150 miles into the country, eventually occupying Helsinki, Pskov, Kharkov, Kiev, Minsk, Rostov, and all the cities and towns in between.

Lenin, aghast, insisted that the Central Committee behave with a modicum of common sense and accept peace on the Germans' terms. This urgent demand did not deter the Central Committee, which as late as 18 February, while German troops were rolling unimpeded into Russia, voted (7–6) against Lenin's proposal. (Trotsky, it should be noted, was among those who voted against it.) Later that day news reached Petrograd that the Germans had taken Dvinsk, with its large stores of military supplies, and were moving effortlessly into the Ukrainian hinterland. This news seems to have shaken the Central Committee into its senses: it quickly convened a second meeting, where Lenin's motion—now supported by Trotsky—finally passed, albeit by a single vote!

The Bolsheviks hurriedly sent a telegram, in the name of the Sovnarkom, to Berlin wholly acceding to the Germans' terms. For three days the Germans made no response, while their troops moved farther into Russia, even threatening Petrograd. Finally, on 22 February, the Germans answered, laying down terms much harsher than those the Bolsheviks had previously spurned. Kühlmann demanded German control over all the territories that his troops now occupied, including those they had acquired since the collapse of the

\* On 1 February the Bolshevik government replaced the traditional Julian calendar, still in use in Russia, with the Western Gregorian calendar. Since the Julian calendar was thirteen days behind the Gregorian, 1 February became 14 February; the date on which the Germans launched their offensive was the same in Russia and Western Europe. All dates that follow are Gregorian, unless 'Old Style' (O.S.) or a slash is placed between two dates.

Brest-Litovsk negotiations (including much of the Ukraine, Finland and the Baltic provinces). The Russians were obliged to evacuate all their troops from this vast expanse of German-occupied territory and demobilize them; pay an indemnity; intern the Black Sea, Baltic, and Arctic fleets; and privilege the Germans with economic concessions. The Bolsheviks were to desist from propagandizing against the governments of the Central Powers and recognize the Ukrainian Rada as the legitimate government of the Ukraine. Finally, Kühlmann stipulated that the treaty had to be signed at once if the German army's advance into Russia were to be halted.

In Petrograd most of the Bolsheviks on the Central Committee and the Sovnarkom balked at these patently onerous terms (which had a growing effect on German workers). But Lenin once again threatened to resign from both bodies if they did not accept the German ultimatum. The Germans, he argued, had left the soviets intact and allowed the Bolsheviks to remain in power in Petrograd. On 23 February the Central Committee voted to accept the German conditions by a small plurality: seven gave their assent, four (Bukharin and his three Left Communist supporters) still called for a revolutionary war, and four (Trotsky and his colleagues) abstained. The four Left Communists immediately resigned from the Central Committee. That evening the CEC voted to accept the German terms by 116 to 85, with 26 abstentions. The many negative votes and abstentions reflected the pain and humiliation of the capitulation.

But the Russian acceptance of Kühlmann's ultimatum did not stop the advance of the German troops. Berlin declared that its army would continue to advance until the peace treaty was actually signed. On 3 March the angry Bolshevik delegation, now headed by Gregory Sokolnikov, arrived at Brest-Litovsk, signed the treaty without even bothering to read it, then departed at once for Petrograd. Not until one p.m. on 3 March did the German advance into Russia finally cease. Lenin, however, took no chances that the Germans might occupy Petrograd and hold the Bolshevik government captive. On the night of 10 March he secretly left the city and moved the government to Moscow, which thenceforth would be the seat of Bolshevik power and the capital of the Soviet government.

The Communists, as the Bolsheviks now called themselves, had wildly overestimated the readiness of the European proletariat for socialist revolution. Exhausted by the war, the German proletariat was by no means eager to carry out a revolution, and even if it had taken power, it decidedly would not have had the material means to help Russia. Nationalism and deeply ingrained habits of obedience to the state determined to a remarkable degree the behavior of all the European combatants, even those who had been influenced by socialist movements before the war. Until the collapse of the Western Front, they exhibited only an episodic and often uncertain belief in the



precepts of their socialist parties. Neither revolutionary propaganda, nor appeals to class solidarity with Allied workers, nor devotion to socialism was decisive in effacing the will of the German workers to fight in 1918; rather, what proved to be of primary importance in subverting Ludendorff's offensive in the spring and summer of the war's last year was the influx of American material and troops to the Allied side.

*Lost* The Communists' idealization of the German proletariat's revolutionary will cost them dearly: Russia lost almost 1.3 million square miles (roughly 25 per cent of her territory), an area that contained 62 million people (nearly 45 per cent of her population), a third of her crops, 80 per cent of her sugar factories, approximately three-quarters of her iron and coal production, and 9000 of her 16,000 industrial installations.

Although the Sovnarkom had signed the Brest-Litovsk treaty, the All-Russian Congress of Soviets had yet to ratify it. Lenin persisted in warning the Congress, which met on 14–18 March in Moscow, that Russia could not have withstood the German advance—'We have no army; we could not keep the army at the front'<sup>9</sup>—and the Communist/Left SR government needed a 'breathing space' to consolidate the still very fragile revolution. His warning carried no weight with the Left SRs, however, who bitterly opposed the treaty and mobilized their forces against its acceptance. As one Left SR leader argued:

By ratifying this robber treaty we admit that we are traitors to those parts of Russia that are being handed over to the Germans in order to save other parts. By the time we get our breath the revolutionary proletariat will be dead and Russia, cut off from her economic resources and loaded down with indemnity, will have no chance to recuperate or offer any resistance in the future.<sup>10</sup>

The All-Russian Congress of Soviets voted with Lenin, ratifying the treaty 784 to 261. But this 'victory' produced a fatal cleavage within the government. The Left SRs remained intransigently unreconciled to their defeat. On 16 March they repudiated the ratification as a 'betrayal of the international program and of the Socialist Revolution begun in Russia.'<sup>11</sup> They then resigned from the Sovnarkom, bringing to an end the soviet coalition government—and inadvertently, as the Mensheviks had done before them, facilitating the formation of a one-party state.

The Communists had achieved Lenin's aim of gaining a 'breathing space'. For four or five months after October, before bloody civil war swept over the country, they were able to consolidate the regime without significant interference from their opponents. But this 'breathing space' and the civil war that followed it saw vast readjustments in the Bolshevik policies that had been

decreed during the first flush of the Revolution—replacing the 'utopian' phase of the revolution with an increasingly authoritarian behemoth.

## THE DECLINE OF SOVIET DEMOCRACY

Lenin's views of democracy were infuriatingly ambiguous. His Menshevik opponents in 1917 saw him as the reincarnation of Mikhail Bakunin, while the anarchists themselves saw him as the reincarnation of Robespierre, the grave-digger of revolutionary democracy. Both views are simplifications. On the question of democracy, Lenin was above all a pragmatist. In his view all political ideas and structures, as well as democratic rights, were 'super-structural' products of economic realities, which had the only true history and whose progress lifted humanity out of animality and held the promise of culminating in social emancipation. Like morality, ideals, culture, and philosophy, democracy was basically the offspring of economic interests, a means for 'educating humanity' and effacing barbarism. It could be used or discarded, depending upon whether its existence or its abolition served the interests of 'the Revolution'. Democracy was not an end in itself; depending upon the practical needs that confronted the revolutionary party, democratic rights could be strategically expanded or attenuated in order to strengthen the self-anointed revolutionary party vis-à-vis its rivals in the struggle for political power. Lenin's views of democracy are expressed in his behavior, not in his writings. 'Leninism,' as Lenin's theoretical corpus was called after his death, should be conceived less as an expression of ideological precepts than as a record of techniques oriented toward the attainment and use of power. It is against this pragmatic background that the devolution of the relatively free soviet state into the Bolshevik dictatorship and finally the Stalinist autocracy must be understood.

The forceful dissolution of the Constituent Assembly in January 1918 meant that the government headed by the Bolsheviks (and, until March, their Left SR allies) would remain in place for the time being. It was not until 10 July 1918, that the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets adopted a new constitution for what was to be called the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic (RSFSR). The new constitution seemed to validate the direct democracy that was embodied in the plethora of soviets that had sprung up all over Russia in 1917. During the first six to eight months of the Revolution the local soviets, especially those in small towns and villages, had been exceptionally free to manage their own affairs and often ignored with impunity the directives emanating from Moscow. Indeed, the supreme power often rested in the



soviets' assemblies, rather than their executive committees. Power thus flowed not from the top down but from the bottom up. Hence the opening sentence of the Constitution read: 'Russia is proclaimed a Republic of Soviets of Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies. All central and local authority is vested in these Soviets.'<sup>12</sup>

The Constitution structured the soviets into a pyramidal hierarchy that consisted of district (*volost*), county (*uezd*), provincial (*guberniya*), and regional (*oblast*) levels and, in the cities, the urban and district levels. Article 53 laid out this structure and its congresses:

Oblast congresses [of soviets] consist of representatives of city soviets ... and of uezd congresses of soviets. ... Gubernia congresses consist of representatives of city soviets ... and of [representatives of] volost congresses of soviets. ... Uezd congresses consist of representatives of village soviets. ... Volost congresses consist of representatives of all the village soviets of the volost.<sup>13</sup>

At each level the congress of deputies elected not only an executive committee but deputies to the next higher level. The Constitution allocated a degree of power to local rural assemblies: 'In rural districts where it is considered possible, questions of administration shall be directly decided by the general assembly of electors of such districts.' (Article 57)

But the Constitution severely limited the jurisdiction of the local soviets. In addition to handling various local problems, they were empowered essentially to 'enforce all orders of the higher organs of the Soviet Government' (Article 61). This provision made it legally possible for the higher and less representative soviet bodies to nullify the decisions of the lower, more representative soviets:

The congresses of soviets and their executive committees have the right to exercise control over the acts of the local soviets (i.e., the oblast congress exercises control over all soviets of the oblast, the gubernia over all soviets of the gubernia, ... etc.). The oblast and gubernia congresses of soviets and their executive committees have in addition the right to repeal decisions of the soviets in their areas. (Article 62)

Thus even as the Constitution institutionalized the soviets and the institutions of the central government, it did so in such a way as to structure them into a highly centralized governmental pyramid that could eliminate the flow of power from the bottom up.

This immense structure culminated in the All-Russian Congress of Soviets,

which officially constituted the supreme legislative authority in Russia and was made up of representatives from the proximate lesser soviets. It was the equivalent of a parliament and included peasants' as well as workers' and soldiers' deputies. The Congress of Soviets, moreover, was to convene twice a year; its meetings were venues where even Communists could voice criticisms of governmental policy and propose changes in the state structure. As such, the Communist leadership treated the congresses 'as serious events,' notes T.H. Rigby, 'calling for the deployment of considerable resources of oratory, persuasion and manipulation.'<sup>14</sup> To handle matters that arose in between its biannual meetings, it authorized the much smaller CEC to function in its stead as an interim 'parliament'.

The Constitution of July 1918 legitimized not only the CEC but also the Sovnarkom, which was officially responsible to the Congress of Soviets and theoretically stood in relationship to the Congress—and its surrogate, the CEC—somewhat as the British Cabinet does to the House of Commons. But although the Constitution seemed to require that the Sovnarkom be accountable to the CEC, it gave it the legal authority to issue decrees (Article 38), which annulled the Sovnarkom's subordination to the CEC. Enactments and decisions of the Sovnarkom were to be subject to the CEC 'for [its] consideration and approval', but the constitution significantly allowed that 'emergency measures may be enacted on the sole authority of the Council of Peoples' Commissars [i.e. the Sovnarkom]' (Article 41), imparting to the Sovnarkom the power completely to bypass the CEC<sup>15</sup>—a patent breach of earlier democratic procedure. Presided over by Lenin, the Sovnarkom carried out day-to-day policy-making, heading a growing bureaucratic array of commissariats. It quickly became the principal means for concentrating power in ever-fewer hands, until only a small committee eventually began to rule the entire state.

When the Constitution vested such enormous power in the Sovnarkom, it was legitimizing a situation that had already existed. Soon after the October Revolution Lenin and some of the other commissars had begun to erode the authority of the CEC by issuing decrees entirely in the name of the Sovnarkom. On 26 November the Sovnarkom, on its own authority, created a Supreme Economic Council, centrally to manage economic and financial affairs (2 December), and it recognized only civil rather than religious marriage, established divorce on demand, and instituted the full juridical equality of men and women (5 December). The banking system was nationalized (14 December), and the stock exchange abolished (25 December). Church and state were separated (9 February), and the Russian government's debts repudiated (10 February). As desirable as many of these policies were, it must be noted, the way they were issued marked a flat violation of soviet legality and democratic procedures.



As early as 4 November, at a meeting of the CEC, eleven leading Left SRs demanded that Lenin explain '1. Why decrees or other [official] acts are not submitted to the Central Executive Committee and 2. If the government intends to give up this arbitrarily constituted and altogether illegal procedure of issuing decrees.'<sup>16</sup> The Bolsheviks on the CEC responded by flatly condemning democratic procedures as bourgeois: 'The Soviet parliament of the toiling masses has nothing in common with the procedure of bourgeois parliaments where different class and divergent interests meet and where the representatives of the ruling class use rules of procedure for the purpose of parliamentary obstruction.'<sup>17</sup>

As the months passed, the CEC's power and importance were steadily diminished. As the last venue in which socialist opposition movements could criticize the Bolsheviks, its steady loss of authority now constituted a steady loss of democracy within the regime. The Constitution also worked to shore up the power of the Communists. The suffrage for the election of representatives to the soviets was weighted heavily in favor of the urban proletariat (which also included an appreciable number of 'clerical workers', many of whom were simply party functionaries) at the expense of the peasantry. According to Article 25, the urban soviets were granted one deputy to the All-Russian Congress of Soviets for every 25,000 electors, while the *guberniyas*, in the countryside, were given one for every 125,000. As Oskar Anweiler notes, 'This unequal ratio clearly favored the proletariat and introduced a quota system within "soviet democracy", to compensate at least partially for the immense numerical superiority of the peasantry and to advertise the historic proletarian mission in establishing socialism.'<sup>18</sup> The Communists were badly in need of this 'advertisement': their party had sunk very few roots into the vast peasant masses of Russia.

As early as 28 October 1917, the Sovnarkom took a major step in abridging democracy by decreeing the shutdown of liberal and socialist newspapers, damning them all as bourgeois, including—the following July—Maxim Gorky's independent socialist periodical *Novaya Zhizn'*. Then five weeks later, on 7 December, a new and fateful power was created that cast all pretensions of soviet legality to the winds: a secret police. At Lenin's own instigation, the Sovnarkom established the Extraordinary Commission to Fight Counter-revolution, Speculation, and Sabotage, usually known by its infamous acronym, the Cheka. Felix Dzerzhinsky was appointed its head and Martyn Latsis, a Left SR, his deputy. Perhaps some dim scruples on the part of the Cheka's creators expected that the cultivated and sensitive Dzerzhinsky, a Polish poet who had suffered heavily under tsarist persecution, would be humane enough to prevent so powerful a body from becoming a pernicious institution. Prototypically 'spiritual', even monkish in appearance, as well as tubercular and ascetic,

Dzerzhinsky seemed an otherworldly type of inquisitor: at a later time he is reported to have deeply lamented and even wept over the number of lives the Cheka had claimed. But the network he created penetrated deeply into all aspects of Russian life, freely violating—with Lenin's decided approval—all legal and ethical standards, using many more powers and terrorist methods than had been exercised by the old regime. It is fair to say that the Cheka—as well as its later incarnations, like the GPU and NKVD—became immensely more important in establishing an authoritarian regime in Russia than any other governmental institution. As Soviet Russia became a police state, it was the Cheka, more than any other single institution, that carried the process along.

Another step in transforming the soviets from democratic bodies to instruments of control was taken when the Communists began to eliminate the socialist opposition parties. In the late winter and early spring of 1918, a Menshevik-SR electoral bloc participated—legally—in elections to many urban soviets. Adopting an economic program that departed from conventional Marxism, they called for a mixed economy rather than a fully nationalized one. Given the prevailing economic conditions in Russia, this was an eminently sensible proposal. It appealed to workers and peasants alike, winning majorities for the Mensheviks and SRs in many urban soviets. In the countryside SRs and Left SRs gained outright majorities in a number of provincial soviet elections.

But wherever Mensheviks, SRs, or Left SRs gained a majority, the Communists would step in and either disband the offending soviet or else expel the socialist deputies, delivering the soviet over to Communist Party members or functionaries, who thereupon reoriented the soviet's policies in conformity with government policy. 'This amounted to a coup d'état by the Bolsheviks against the system of soviets as institutions of popular sovereignty'—the very system they had demanded, as Vladimir N. Brovkin observes, only a few months earlier.<sup>19</sup>

On 14 June 1918, the Communists put an end to the Menshevik-SR electoral victories altogether. They expelled the Mensheviks and SRs from the CEC and all other governmental bodies (charging them with fomenting uprisings in Siberia and the south). All soviets throughout Russia were ordered to follow suit. Menshevik and SR newspapers were closed down wholesale or driven underground. Scandalously, among the Mensheviks expelled from the CEC was the highly respected revolutionary Julius Martov, who had once been Lenin's closest friend and comrade. As a Communist eyewitness, E. Drabkine, later recalled:

Martov, swearing at the 'dictators', 'Bonapartists', 'usurpers', and 'grabbers' in his sick, tubercular voice, grabbed his coat and tried to put it on, but his



shaking hands could not get into the sleeves. Lenin, white as chalk, stood and looked at Martov. A Left S.R., pointing his finger at Martov, burst into laughter. Martov turned round to him and said: 'You have no reason, young man, to be happy. Within three months you will follow us.' His hands trembling, Martov opened the door and left.<sup>20</sup>

The expulsion of the Mensheviks and SRs in June 1918, however, served only to enhance the status of the two parties in the eyes of the workers, most of whom wanted precisely what their bloc's program called for: freely elected soviets, free trade unions, and freedom of speech and assembly for all workers' parties. Members of the two parties continued to participate in trade unions, factory committees, and other non-governmental institutions, where they became far more popular than the Communists.

But the shift in sentiment came too late. No sooner did the workers begin to express a preference for the Mensheviks or SRs than the Cheka took immediate and forceful steps to block them. On 24 June 1919, when workers of several important railway lines went on strike, the Alexandrovsky railway workers angrily wrote that they regarded the authority of Whites (counter-revolutionaries) and Reds 'as equally shameful, because this authority is not the authority of the soviets because nobody other than the Communists,' they complained, 'can be elected there, and if [a non-Communist] is elected, he would wind up not in the soviet but in the Butyrk jail.'<sup>21</sup> This statement by politically conscious workers had no impact whatever on the regime, whose power now rested on the Cheka, not on the soviets.

For the next two years, after June 1918, the Communists harried the Mensheviks and SRs by turning the spigot of legality on and off as need arose, variously suspending their exclusion from the soviets and reinstituting it as need arose. Some party leaders were arrested, only to be released and then arrested again. Even Martov was not spared: he was briefly arrested in August 1918. The regime trotted out Mensheviks and SRs to appear at official functions where foreign visitors were present. Thus did the regime allow the socialist opposition a measure of democracy—only to force them back into semi-legality after the visitors had departed.

On 30 August 1918, Fanny Kaplan, a former anarchist turned SR, tried to assassinate Lenin, firing several bullets into him point-blank outside a Moscow factory where he had just given a speech. Although Lenin survived, he never fully recovered his health.<sup>22</sup> In response, on 5 September 1918, the Sovnarkom officially proclaimed the initiation of a 'Red Terror'. The Terror authorized the Cheka to 'shoot all persons associated with White Guard organizations, plots, and conspiracies'—that is, anyone the Cheka selected.<sup>23</sup> It legally removed all limits on the Cheka's powers to eliminate 'internal enemies'—that is, to

function as 'an apparatus for compulsion and purification.'<sup>24</sup> Large-scale roundups of opponents followed, and unknown thousands—including SRs, anarchists, a variety of socialists, as well as Kadets and monarchists—were executed for real or suspected offenses. Although the Cheka did not invent concentration camps for masses of prisoners (the British have that distinction, in the Boer War), it administered a large number of them and, as time went by, made them a permanent feature of Russian society. Many abuses of the Cheka were by no means institutionalized, however; often individual Cheka functionaries, drunk with power, took matters in their own hands and made careless, even heartless life-and-death decisions entirely on their own initiative.

By degrees, however, the Cheka and its secret police heirs became a state within the state, making the dictatorship ubiquitous and turning the revolution with all its emancipatory hopes into a chronic counter-revolution against the Russian masses, particularly the peasantry. As Angelica Balabanoff, a disillusioned former Communist, observed in her memoir:

The tragedy of Russia and, indirectly, of the revolutionary movement in general, began when terror became a habit rather than an act of self-defence. Even before I left Russia I had come to the conclusion that its leaders had become accustomed too soon to follow the path of least resistance—the extermination of opposition in any form.<sup>25</sup>

Similar views were expressed by other former supporters of the Communist Revolution who retained their socialist ideals. Victor Serge (one of the best-known ex-Communists who, after his break with the Communist International, remained a humanist socialist) was convinced that 'the formation of the Chekas' in the different provinces of Russia

was one of the gravest and most impermissible errors the Communist leaders committed in 1918, when plots, blockades, and interventions made them lose their heads. All evidence indicates that revolutionary tribunals, functioning in the light of day (without excluding secret sessions in particular cases) and admitting the right of defence, would have attained the same efficiency with far less abuse and depravity. Was it so necessary to revert to the procedures of the Inquisition?<sup>26</sup>

In late 1918 the Mensheviks dropped their demand for a new Constituent Assembly and accepted the October Revolution as an irreversible reality, a step that might well have brought them full legality. Indeed in January, as Admiral Kolchak's White Army marched westward toward Moscow (see Chapter 50), the Communists fully legalized the Mensheviks and the PSR in soviet territory,



opening the spigot and permitting them to participate in soviet elections. Owing to their usefulness in warding off the Whites, they were allowed to a limited degree to publish their newspapers. But this period lasted only a few weeks. On 31 March 1919, the government turned the spigot off and carried out mass arrests of Mensheviks. Movingly, Martov wrote in protest:

[The Chekists] close down our newspaper and then inform us that this closing-down is not unconditional and that we may receive a permit again, provided we guarantee that we will not undermine the 'resistance power of Soviet Russia against its enemies.' They seal our office, unseal it and then re-seal it. They arrest us under the pretext of checking our documents and announce beforehand in the press that five deserters have been found among us. They release us with apologies and arrest us again a week later. In between, the Praesidium of the Moscow Soviet declares that we are a legal party; a few days later the same Moscow Soviet declares us to be enemies of the working class and in its resolution sanctions mass arrests among our party members and the campaign of slander against us by the official newspapers.<sup>27</sup>

In March 1919 the government became still more authoritarian: the Communist Party's Central Committee took over the functions of the Sovnarkom and the CEC as the supreme authority in the country. As a subcommittee of the Central Committee, a new five-man Political Bureau (or Politburo) was created, whose members were Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Kamenev, and Krestinsky. As the Central Committee grew in size and unwieldiness, the Politburo became the supreme *de facto* policy-making body in the realm. The Bureau now made decrees and simply registered them with the Sovnarkom, thereby excluding all other party and soviet bodies from the state's decision-making process. Local party committees and members were no longer needed as anything more than executors of higher committee decisions. Finally, since the soviet executive committees consisted mainly of Communist Party members, all soviet personnel became mere functionaries of the higher party committees. In short, as early as March 1919 a one-party state began to rule the former tsarist empire, and Trotsky's insightful prediction as a young man—that Bolshevik policy would result in a one-man dictatorship—was less than a decade away from fulfillment.

The soviets, in effect, had become 'transmission belts' for party rule. In his survey of this monumental power shift, Orlando Figes appropriately observes:

The transformation of the VIKs [*volost* soviet executive committees] represented the central mechanism in the process of Bolshevik state-building in

the rural areas during the civil war. The VIKs were the kernel of the soviet administrative structure in the countryside. During the early period of the revolution the majority of the VIKs comprised up to a dozen or more peasants, and perhaps one or two rural *intelligenty*, who met on an amateur and nonpartisan basis to implement the resolutions of the *volost'* assembly. ... By the end of 1920, most of the VIKs had become bureaucratized state organs, run by three to five executive members, most of them in the Bolshevik party, and a team of salaried officials.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, popular soviet institutions met less and less frequently, leaving executive committees free to exercise power in their absence. Although the All-Russian Congress of Soviets was required constitutionally to meet at least twice a year, as we have seen, after the Sixth Congress in 1918 it began to convene more rarely. On 6 December 1919, at the Seventh Congress, the Mensheviks dared to point out that although the Constitution required the CEC to convene every six months, it had not met at all during the previous year. Elections to the Moscow Soviet had not taken place for eighteen months, in flat violation of soviet legality, and throughout Russia the executive committees of the local soviets were taking over the functions of the soviet assemblies themselves, rendering soviet democracy meaningless.

The Menshevik-Internationalists now began to play a heroic role in trying, against all odds, to preserve what they could of the rapidly dwindling authority of the soviets. The Communists, despite all their efforts since June 1918, still failed to rid the local soviets entirely of the socialist opposition parties. Although the Mensheviks and SRs were barred from the soviets and often persecuted scandalously, opposition parties remained at least technically legal: as late as 1920, 45 Menshevik delegates were elected to the Moscow Soviet, more than 225 in Kharkov, and sizable delegations surfaced in at least twenty-odd soviets elsewhere. They also greatly outnumbered the Communists within the trade unions in 1919–20. So popular were the Mensheviks and SRs becoming that the Communists were obliged to deal prudently with them lest they antagonize their principal—if already dwindling—social base, the working class itself.

Ultimately, however, the civil war hardened the Bolsheviks' resolve to eliminate all socialist opposition. Soon after the fighting was over, Mensheviks and SRs were repressed with a ferocity that far exceeded even Nicholas's reign. In August 1920, as the all-Russian Menshevik conference in Moscow began its deliberations, the Cheka rounded up and arrested the entire conference. Cities were swept clean of leading Mensheviks, who were arrested simply for being Mensheviks. As to the SRs of all kinds, the late summer of 1920 saw SR leaders either joining the Mensheviks in prisons and concentration camps or escaping



abroad. In a final assault during February 1921, 2000 Mensheviks were imprisoned, including their party's entire Central Committee. This time they were not released. Nearly every outlet for the expression of dissenting opinion was closed off, and thereafter, whenever a Congress of Soviets convened, it amounted to little more than a ceremonial gathering of functionaries obedient to their Communist leadership. Lenin and his party were obliterating all traces of democracy within the soviet system. By 1921 nearly all the utopian ideals of the October Revolution were fading political memories.

## NOTES

1. V.I. Lenin, 'A Painful But Necessary Lesson' (Feb. 25, 1918), in *Collected Works* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1963), p. 27:65; emphasis added.
2. Leon Trotsky, *Lenin: Notes for a Biographer*, trans. Tamara Deutscher (1924; rpt. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1971), p. 99.
3. Leon Trotsky, *My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), p. 364.
4. Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed—Trotsky: 1879–1921* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 352.
5. Trotsky, *Lenin*, p. 99.
6. Extract from Trotsky's Statement (Jan. 5 [Jan. 18], 1918), in James Bunyan and H.H. Fisher, eds., *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917–1918: Documents and Materials* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1934), p. 498.
7. 'No Peace and No War' (Jan. 28/Feb. 10, 1918), in Bunyan and Fisher, *Bolshevik Revolution*, p. 510.
8. Max Hoffmann, *War Diaries and Other Papers*, trans. Eric Sutton (London: M. Secker, 1929), p. 1:207.
9. 'The Fourth Congress of Soviets Ratifies the Treaty' (Mar. 1918), 'Summary of Lenin's Argument for Ratification', in Bunyan and Fisher, *Bolshevik Revolution*, p. 531.
10. 'The Fourth Congress of Soviets Ratifies the Treaty' (Mar. 1918), 'Summary of Kamkov's Argument Against Ratification', in Bunyan and Fisher, *Bolshevik Revolution*, p. 532.
11. 'The Socialist-Revolutionists of the Left Repudiate the Ratification' (Mar. 16, 1918), in Bunyan and Fisher, *Bolshevik Revolution*, p. 533.
12. 'Constitution (Fundamental Law) of the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic' (adopted Jul. 10, 1918), in James Bunyan, ed., *Intervention, Civil War, and Communism in Russia, April–December 1918: Documents and Materials* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1936), p. 507. All the following quotations from the Constitution are taken from this source.
13. Article 53, Constitution, in *ibid.*, pp. 517–18.
14. T.H. Rigby, *Lenin's Government: Sovnarkom 1917–1922* (Cambridge, London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 162.
15. Constitution, in Bunyan, *Intervention*, p. 514.
16. 'The Socialist Revolutionists Object to the Procedure of the Sovnarkom' (Nov. 4 [Nov. 17], 1917), in Bunyan and Fisher, *Bolshevik Revolution*, p. 188.

17. 'The Central Executive Committee Approves the Procedure of the Sovnarkom' (Nov. 4 [Nov. 17], 1917), in Bunyan and Fisher, *Bolshevik Revolution*, p. 189.
18. Oskar Anweiler, *The Soviets: The Russian Workers', Peasants', and Soldiers' Councils 1905–1921*, trans. Ruth Hein (New York: Pantheon, 1974), p. 225.
19. Vladimir N. Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War: Political Parties and Social Movements in Russia, 1918–1922* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 16.
20. *Novy Mir*, no. 9 (1958); quoted in Israel Getzler, *Martov: A Political Biography of a Russian Social Democrat* (Cambridge: Melbourne University Press, 1967), p. 182. The prediction was highly prescient: the Left SRs would themselves be expelled only three weeks later.
21. Quoted in Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines*, p. 65.
22. Angelica Balabanoff writes that the execution of Kaplan brought Krupskaya, Lenin's wife, to tears: 'I could see that she was deeply affected at the thought of revolutionaries condemned to death by a revolutionary power.' Such sensibilities still existed during Lenin's convalescence, but they died rapidly during the civil war. See Balabanoff, *My Life as a Rebel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 188.
23. 'Red Terror Legalized' (Sept. 5, 1918), in Bunyan, *Intervention*, p. 239.
24. Martyn Latsis, quoted in Bunyan and Fisher, *Bolshevik Revolution*, p. 296n.
25. Balabanoff, *My Life as a Rebel*, p. 185.
26. Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary: 1901–1941*, trans. and ed. Peter Sedgwick (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 80–81.
27. Quoted in Getzler, *Martov*, p. 189.
28. Orlando Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War: The Volga Countryside in Revolution (1917–1921)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 220.



## CHAPTER 50 The Russian Civil War

### THE POLARIZATION OF FORCES

Before the October Revolution most socialists were concerned that a Bolshevik seizure of power could lead to a civil war in Russia, as the various counter-revolutionary forces coalesced to suppress all the gains of February. Lenin tried to allay this fear by suggesting that insurrectionists in Russia could trigger an international socialist revolution and establish a soviet state so stable that the reactionary elements would not dare to challenge it. But in the spring of 1918 the worst fears of Kamenev, Martov, and Chernov came to pass: a brutal and lengthy civil war erupted, one that would last nearly four years.

Counter-revolutionary or White armies emerged that blatantly fought to topple the soviet regime and reinstate as much of the old order as they could. Meanwhile on 15 January 1918, the Bolsheviks announced the establishment of a new army—the Red Army—under the command of Leon Trotsky, the commissar of war, who fashioned it into a viable force of 3 million rigorously disciplined troops.

In March 1918 British Royal Marines, American sailors, French artillerymen, and even Serbian infantry occupied Murmansk, Archangel, and other ports in the far north, where they deposited huge stores of Allied war material. Later that year, in the south, French troops occupied Odessa, while in November British troops landed in Novorossiysk on the shores of the Black Sea and Batum along the Caspian, even penetrating into the Caucasian Mountains. In April, American troops occupied Vladivostok, while the territorially acquisitive Japanese landed forces on northern Sakhalin Island and ports along the Russian coast of the Sea of Okhotsk. As it turned out, these occupations had relatively little effect on the civil war—except for the fact that through them lavish supplies of weapons entered Russia. Through raids and black market dealers, these weapons filtered into the population at large. By

1919, with arms in abundant supply, thugs as well as idealists could easily create a partisan band.

### THE SR REBELLION

Following the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly in January 1918, six SR deputies fled to Samara, the capital of the Volga region, which had been an SR stronghold for years. The SR delegates wanted to restore the Constituent Assembly as the 'soviet' of a 'united, independent, free Russia.' They established the Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly (Komuch, in the Russian acronym), asserting that it was the sole existing central government. The Komuch, composed of fourteen SR members and a lone Menshevik, called upon all the non-Bolshevik Assembly deputies to join it and succeeded in recruiting about 100 of them, mostly SRs.

Its essentially bourgeois program eschewed soviets in favor of municipal dumas, would restore private property, and repudiated all 'socialistic experiments', declaring 'that it is impossible to abolish capitalist forms of industry at the present time.' Indeed, 'capitalist forms of industry must exist,' declared the Komuch in the Volga region, where it established a viable government, 'and capitalists as a class must be allowed to direct them.' The Volga Komuch disempowered the factory committees and restored the factories and the banks to their original owners. Despite its opposition to Communist rule, however, the Komuch itself did not hesitate to suppress opposition parties and their presses.

In the spring of 1918 the authority of the Komuch was suddenly enhanced when it gained a major military ally of inestimable value. The Czech Legion, a well-armed and highly disciplined force of about 30,000 Czechs and Slovaks, had been traveling eastward through Russia on the Trans-Siberian Railroad. This force, recruited by nationalist leaders, was organized to fight alongside the Allies for a Czech and Slovak homeland. To travel from Russia to the front, they were obliged to travel eastward across Siberia, then to the United States and finally to Europe. The Legion had no quarrel with the Communists and were initially friendly to them. But in late May 1918, while crossing Siberia, the Legion encountered irresponsible and prickly Red Army troops who provoked an armed military clash. Inexplicably, Trotsky ordered them to surrender their arms—a blunder that turned the Czech Legion, a considerable military force, into an opponent of the entire soviet regime, driving them into the arms of the Komuch.

In mid-May 1918 the Czech Legion (aided by the Komuch's own smaller



force) succeeded in capturing Samara, the capital of the Volga region. Thereafter the Legion took one town after another, encountering little Communist resistance. By the late summer of 1918 it had gained control of most of the area between the Volga River and the Ural Mountains. The victories culminated on 8 August with the capture of Kazan, where the imperial gold reserve was still stored. At its peak in the summer of 1918, the Komuch governed an area inhabited by 14 million people and had mobilized (by conscription) a so-called People's Army of roughly 60,000 men. The British, impressed by the Legion's fighting ability—it had defeated the poorly organized Red forces in almost every engagement—were eager to keep it in Siberia as a regular army that could be deployed against the soviet regime.

The soviet government, faced with this series of defeats, instituted the 'Red Terror' (consciously emulating the Jacobins) by giving the Cheka unlimited authority to execute soldiers who refused to fight or showed insufficient zeal in battle, as well as peasants who hesitated to surrender their grain. It also set up concentration camps for 'enemies of the revolution'. The population, both civilian and military, lived in a state of continual fear of arbitrary imprisonment or summary execution.

Trotsky, as if to compensate for his error in alienating the Legion, imposed a formidable regimen of discipline on the hitherto relatively democratic Red Army. In September he assembled 70,000 newly disciplined troops and set out to retake the lost Volga towns, including Samara and Kazan. Meanwhile Czechoslovak independence was declared on 28 October 1918, and the Legionnaires, weary of fighting, ceased to function as an organized military force. They were eager to return home. In their absence the Red Army succeeded in defeating the Komuch, whereupon the SRs dissolved it and fled eastward to Ufa.

A full-scale civil war was now under way. Initially at Ufa and then more permanently at Omsk, another group of SRs established a 'Provisional Government of Autonomous Siberia'. The Omsk SRs were more right wing in their political orientation than their compatriots in the Komuch. Unlike most socialists, they were prepared to enter into a working relationship not only with the Kadets but also with outright monarchists and anti-Semites. In fact, even before the collapse of the Komuch, reactionaries from the Volga region flocked to Omsk and set up a government that was soon dominated by rightists and monarchist officers. The Omsk government nullified all Communist laws and formed its own army, composed of brutal Siberian conscripts and notoriously murderous Ural'sk and Orenburg Cossacks. In September, at the behest of the Allies, the Omsk government was obliged to merge with the remaining Komuch, thereby forming a new government whose executive arm consisted of a five-man Directory that claimed to be the only legitimate gov-

ernment in Russia. The more liberal Komuch members, defeated by the Red Army, went along with this new reactionary, even dictatorial regime.

On 17–18 November, however, a clutch of Cossacks and army officers staged a coup against the Directory, which they apparently found too liberal for their taste, and invited Admiral Alexander Kolchak to become military dictator or, more formally, 'supreme ruler'. Kolchak, who had commanded the Black Sea Fleet under the tsar, was a dyed-in-the-wool monarchist whose favorite reading was reportedly the anti-Semitic forgery, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The admiral accepted the invitation and formed a military government, whereupon he quickly abolished the moderate local dumas and arrested and deported the SR leaders in his region. Britain, influenced by Winston Churchill's unrelenting anti-Bolshevism, eagerly recognized Kolchak's sovereignty and gave him massive quantities of rifles, machine guns, and ammunition, as well as sufficient clothing and equipment for more than half a million men, making the 'supreme ruler' the most important counter-revolutionary leader in Siberia.

## REDS VERSUS WHITES

During its next stage, which lasted from 1919 into 1920, the White armies—located in the outer portions of the empire—marched from their various locales toward Moscow and Petrograd. The White armies were led, respectively, by Kolchak in the east; General Anton Denikin in the south; General Nikolai Yudenich in the Baltic region; and Baron Pyotr Wrangel, who succeeded Denikin in the south. The single greatest threat that the Communists faced was the possibility that these amply supplied White armies might unite into a single military force and jointly destroy the Revolution.

In the south the so-called Volunteer Army (which had been pieced together in the winter of 1917–18 in the Don Cossack region) was headquartered at Novocherkassk, near the Sea of Azov, whose supply ports were accessible to the Black Sea. The Don Cossacks detested the Communists, and on 20 November 1917, their assembly declared the region's independence from the soviet regime. The architect of the Volunteer Army, however, was the short-lived, cancer-ridden General Mikhail Alexeev, who had formerly been chief of staff of the tsar's army and supreme commander under Kerensky. On 15 December Alexeev helped the Cossack chieftain, Hetman Alexey Kaledin, recapture Rostov from the Reds and placed himself and his still-small Volunteer Army in the service of Kornilov, who had escaped from prison and made his way to the Don region, together with a group of reactionary officers.



In February 1918, however, the Red Army overran the Don area, including Novocherkassk and Rostov. Fleeing the Red advance, Kornilov took his force of around 4000 men southward over the icy wastes of the eastern Don region into the almost empty but safe Kuban steppes, a journey that lasted 80 days. Kornilov himself never made it to the Kuban; he was killed during a futile attack on Ekaterinodar (10–13 April 1918). Still, the 'Ice March'—and the hallowed memory of Kornilov—catalyzed the Volunteers into mobilizing themselves and coalescing into a major White movement.

Thereafter the Volunteer Army fell under the command of General Anton Denikin, whom the Allies regarded as the authentic leader in the south. Denikin built up his Volunteer Army with a formidable supply of mostly British armaments. Between March and September 1918 he is alleged to have received as many as 7000 machine guns, a thousand field guns, a quarter of a million rifles, hundreds of millions of cartridges, 200 airplanes, and a hundred tanks. But he was able to rally very few troops; the Allies' small deployments of war-weary soldiers were insufficient to give Denikin's army a serious chance to win.

On the Eastern Front, in March 1919, Kolchak began his own march toward distant Moscow with an army of 100,000 men. His huge mobilization advanced rapidly, pushing close to Samara and Kazan. Then, in late April 1919, his forces were stopped by a Red counter-offensive led by Mikhail Frunze—incredibly, an ordinary Communist worker who had virtually no military experience. Frunze and the region's Communists had mobilized a powerful and ideologically committed force, stiffened by zealous Young Communists and other supporters of the Communist cause. On 28 April the worker-commander attacked Kolchak's troops. To the astonishment of Kolchak's Allied admirers and suppliers, the White army, despite its massive resources, began to retreat. At one point, to be sure, the Whites launched a counter-attack and fought furiously, even stopping Red forces for a time, but on 14 October Frunze and the brilliant Red commander Mikhail Tukhachevsky forced Kolchak into a strategic retreat. The White offensive collapsed, mainly as a result of its failure to gain mass popular support.

The Reds retook the Ural cities, and by November 1919 Kolchak's army—now only 15,000 strong—had turned into a rabble. Panicked, they fled toward Omsk, overly burdened with loot, even furniture, not to speak of mistresses. The Cossack forces among them split off into marauding bands that pillaged the countryside, massacring Jews and raping women. Even considering the Whites' egregious proclivity for plundering and killing, Kolchak's officers deserve the palm for unconscionable corruption, enriching themselves by selling military supplies on the black market, living in high style, and loitering at the rear of their troops at cafés and luxurious hotels—while the conscripts

were sent into battle ill-fed and clothed in rags. In January 1920 Kolchak was handed over to the Reds in Irkutsk, where they tried and executed him. But before he was taken, he bestowed the title of 'supreme commander' on Denikin, the southern White leader, who now became the nominal head of all the major White forces.

Meanwhile in Rostov in mid-May 1919, Denikin had used a large, well-equipped force to sweep northward into the Donbass region and into southeastern Ukraine. By late June his Volunteer Army had captured Karkhov and Ekaterinoslav. White rule in the Ukraine was exceptionally reactionary: Denikin suppressed Ukrainian nationalism in favor of Great Russian chauvinism; he banned the use of the Ukrainian language from all state institutions and returned worker-controlled factories to their owners and expropriated lands to their former landlords. His rule was marked by frequent atrocities: the towns and cities under his control were drenched with the blood of Jews and of workers who failed to fulfill White quotas for coal and other materials. The flourishing black market that followed in the wake of the White armies was constantly replenished by huge quantities of Allied supplies, which every White soldier and officer sold for personal gain. When the Allies became aware that the resources they supplied were being put up for sale, they cut off the supplies; the Whites thereafter simply looted the local populace. Ukrainians loathed Denikin's rule, with the result that he and his supporters were attacked by partisans of the Ukrainian anarchist chieftain, Nestor Makhno, and by those of the Ukrainian nationalist Simon Petliura, as well as lesser local partisan bands.<sup>2</sup>

In the meantime Denikin continued to drive northwest toward Moscow. With artillery, airplanes, tanks (manned by British soldiers), and a sufficiency of small arms and munitions, he pushed on until, on 31 August, his troops occupied Kiev. With more than 100,000 men, nearly 60,000 cavalry, and more than 500 artillery pieces, the Volunteer Army pushed northward toward Kursk. His advance brought him within striking distance of Orel, only 250 miles from Moscow. On 20 October, Denikin took Kursk and ordered his army to advance on the old Russian capital.

The Reds, however, with 200,000 troops in the southern front, now significantly outnumbered Denikin's 100,000 Whites, especially since Trotsky had allowed many peasant deserters to return to the ranks—which they were willing to do if only to defend their farmland against the Whites. Led by elite Latvian brigades, the Red Army sliced through the Volunteer Army's lines, threatening to cut off its supply route to the Black Sea ports. The Whites, once again significantly overextended, were forced to abandon Orel. Precisely at this time Semen Budenny's Red Cavalry tore into the Don Cossacks on Denikin's left flank, sending the horsemen reeling toward Voronezh and threatening to



separate Denikin's army from the Don region itself. Neither the Reds nor the Whites gave any quarter: both sides freely tortured and shot captives as well as civilians.

Once the Red Army recaptured Orel on 20 October, the Volunteer Army retreated southward. As it neared the Black Sea, the retreat turned into a rout, pursued mainly by Makhno's ostensibly anarchist partisans and Petliura's nationalists. The British, pressed by their angry domestic labor movement, which threatened to call a general strike in support of the soviets, now ceased to support the Whites. The often-hysterical Whites thought only of escape, often fighting one another to board the trains to Novorossiysk, then, in May 1920, pouring into that port in the hope of finding a place on Allied ships. Denikin's chosen associates—Russian notables, and the still effective troops at his disposal—were permitted to board the ships, but the rest of his followers were left on the quays to the mercy of the unforgiving Reds. The ships sailed off, taking Denikin's favored few to Constantinople and exile.

Outraged by this and countless earlier malfeasances, Denikin's own staff forced him to resign. He was replaced by Baron Pyotr Wrangel, a more competent officer, who took over what was left of the Volunteer Army. Wrangel's commanders made a last but hopeless effort to establish a White stronghold in the Crimea. Although the baron showed more wisdom in his relationship with the population than Denikin, he was leading a doomed fight. In October 1920, after some ten months, strong Communist forces were thrown against his army, and he was forced to evacuate the peninsula. Wrangel's defeat in April 1920 marked the definitive end of the so-called 'White Tide'. A few guerrilla bands remained in other parts of Russia, but they were soon wiped out.

The one notable White campaign that remains to be mentioned was the campaign of General Nikolai Yudenich, who in October 1919, while Denikin was advancing northward toward Orel, tried to seize Petrograd from his base in the Baltic states. Yudenich crossed from Estonia into Soviet Russia and by 20 October pushed a poorly organized Red Army back to the Pulkovo Heights outside Petrograd. With strong British naval and air support, the White general's 14,000 troops (equipped with 50,000 rifles) seemed to constitute a serious menace to Communist rule. The Red troops were panicked by his tanks and airplanes; Zinoviev, Petrograd's party boss, underwent a panic attack, which spread fear like a contagion to many of his subordinates. The Reds fell back so rapidly that many Communist leaders, even Lenin, viewed the fall of Petrograd as unavoidable.

In reality, the Red Army had a very strong numerical superiority over the Whites, and Trotsky flatly refused to accept Lenin's suggestion that the city be evacuated. Rushing from another front to the former capital, he arrived in

Petrograd on 16 October and instantly began to prepare the city for a house-to-house resistance against Yudenich's forces. Barricades were built in the city's streets, key apartment houses were strongly fortified, and armored vehicles were manufactured at the Putilov works. The Red troops were stiffened by thousands of committed Communists, including the indefatigable Kronstadt sailors.

Finally, when the Red troops began to retreat in panic from Yudenich's menacing tanks, Trotsky personally rode on horseback into their midst, rallying them with rousing commands and the example of his personal courage. Yudenich's army, which was anything but solid in its own commitment to the White cause and had been steadily melting away, fell back and surrendered the field to the Reds. Their retreat did not end until Yudenich and what remained of his army crossed the border into Estonia.

The remaining White forces, which were decomposing into scattered bands, were mopped up by the Reds in only a matter of weeks. Some larger forces consisted of mere adventurers, such as Nikofor Grigorev, a former tsarist officer who switched sides as need arose, aligning himself first with Petliura, and then with the Communists. He finally turned against the Red forces and spent much of his remaining time looting while wearing the mantle of a Ukrainian liberator. In May 1919, this obvious opportunist perpetrated some of the most horrendous massacres of defenseless Jews in the Ukraine. Nearly 150 pogroms were attributed to Grigorev and his bands, until Makhno finally killed him in July 1919.

Attached or unattached Terek, Don, Kuban, and Ussuri Cossack bands were to be found almost everywhere in Russia, fighting for the Whites—and, in a number of cases, even for the Reds. Especially in 1919–20 in the Ukraine they persistently looted civilians and, together with Ukrainian nationalists, conducted deadly pogroms against the Jews. Even Budenny's Red Cavalry included Cossacks—the 'Red Cossacks', as they were called—who engaged in pogroms despite Communist attempts to outlaw anti-Semitic behavior and propaganda, although the Communists seldom took punitive action against 'Red' pogromists. The often-repeated cry 'Save Russia and kill the Jews!' was so deeply embedded in the Russian mind, no less among workers and peasants than among Whites and tsarists, that brutal anti-Semitic rampages were discreetly tolerated on both sides. In fact, estimates place the total number of Jews slaughtered during the civil war at close to 200,000 men, women and children.



## DEVASTATING EFFECTS OF THE CIVIL WAR

The civil war continued into a third stage, in which the Communists fought the 'Green' peasant rebellion, which we will examine in Chapter 52. For now it should be said that the government's war against the peasants was brutal, destabilizing and self-destructive. Few, if any, Bolshevik leaders in 1917 had sincerely believed in the *narodnik* agrarian program that they had borrowed from the Left SRs, and they were eager to discard it as soon as they could. The opportunity came as famine hit Russian cities in the winter of 1917–18. The system for supplying the cities with food had broken down, as a result of the loss of Ukrainian grain and because the Bolsheviks had abolished private trade between town and country. Meanwhile, urban industry collapsed, which meant that cities were no longer producing manufactured goods that rural dwellers wished to obtain. Having no reason to trade, the peasants withheld the grain from the cities, producing what the Bolsheviks called a 'scissors crisis'.

The Bolsheviks solved the problem by force. Beginning in May 1918, they dispatched squads of armed workers to the countryside for the express purpose of confiscating grain from the peasants, especially the better-off kulaks, whom they accused of hoarding. The act of selling grain became a criminal offense. Peasants were ordered to supply the squads with target amounts of grain. Food requisition squads, aided by Red Guards and even merciless Chekist troops, went to work to expropriate grain from the countryside—indeed, methodically to pillage it. When a peasant household lacked sufficient grain to meet its target, the squad would search the premises and seize even the next season's planting seeds. Suspected kulaks were summarily executed. Whole villages that failed to fill requisition quotas were designated as 'hoarders' and their members subjected to mass whippings (a method employed by the tsarist Cossacks). In June the regime set up 'committees of the poor' (*kombedy*)—or groups of poor, landless peasants—to help the requisition squads confiscate grain from ostensibly rich kulaks. The poor peasants, in effect, were induced to expropriate food from their better-off fellow villagers.

The government dignified this system of outright plunder with the name 'war communism' and continued it through most of the civil war. But even as the Communists alleged that it portended the emergence of a truly Communist society, it amounted to little more than a war against the peasantry itself.

The costs of the civil war were staggering. Between January 1918 and July 1920 more than 7 million people died from food shortages and disease alone, quite apart from military casualties. All told, the conflict claimed an estimated 10 million lives from combat, disease, and famine. It left the Russian economy in debris, fulfilling the Mensheviks' direst pre-war predictions. The country's

overall industrial and agricultural output fell to roughly one-fifth of its 1913 level, and the transportation and factory systems were in ruins. The famine that swept over Russia in 1920–21 reduced peasants and urban dwellers alike to starvation and, in the countryside, even to cannibalism.

At the same time the civil war stripped Russia of its richly textured civil society, leaving the social landscape barren. Needless to say, the nobility, traditional military strata, bourgeoisie, middle classes, and old bureaucracy disappeared; but so did the cooperatives, guilds, peasant unions, *zemstva*, and the like. Russia's liberal and revolutionary culture went by the board, not to speak of popular institutions like factory and shop committees, trade unions, and professional organizations. Most definitively, the Communists' response to the war divested the Russian Revolution of its humanistic intentions and its emancipatory features. The possibilities of a 'Commune state', workers' control of industry, a democratic political structure, a free federation of nationalities, a popular militia, and freedom of expression were jettisoned. The soviets survived only as passive instruments of the Communist Party.

Russia's barren social landscape was eventually filled by hierarchical structures necessary for waging war: the Red Army, the ubiquitous and centralized Communist Party, the Cheka, and a multitude of large and small bureaucratic commissariats. As early as 1919 the party itself—as a result of internal discipline, centralization, and Cheka intervention in political disputes—had evolved into a mass institution, dedicated to prosecuting the civil war, and a one-party state dedicated to assuring Communist control of Russia. Once seen as temporary, this transformation was eventually accepted as a permanent outcome of Bolshevik dogma and the degeneration of the Revolution itself.

Moreover, the Communists who emerged from the civil war were no longer the same people, psychologically and politically, as the idealists who had joined the party before and during 1917. The civil war profoundly hardened them. The atrocities committed during the Red Terror; the heightened cruelties that needlessly worsened battles and famines; the genocidal tendencies of White commanders against Jews and their slaughter of captured Communist Party members, often with the support of right-wing SRs—all immensely eroded the moral fiber of the Revolution. Both sides in the Russian civil war committed moral as well as physical and political atrocities after as well as during battles. The conflict had brutalized nearly everyone who fought in it, regardless of their place on the political spectrum—not only Lenin but also Tseretelli, and not only Trotsky but also Chkheidze.

But in 1922, when Communist power was secure, the party was finally in a position to introduce a freer atmosphere. But in reality it did the very opposite. It suppressed its critics even more ruthlessly than it had in the heat of



domestic conflict. No governmental agency epitomized this transformation more than the Cheka. Initially intended, as we have seen, to be a temporary or 'extraordinary' institution whose function was to stamp out anti-soviet military conspirators, terrorists, and saboteurs, the Cheka during the civil war proliferated throughout Communist-controlled areas, establishing its own branches, special military forces, and a vast network of agents who terrorized even remote villages and districts. It would be no overstatement to say that under a variety of different names it eventually became the main cudgel of the totalitarian state.

Nonetheless, the Communist Party's turn toward totalitarianism did not occur entirely as a result of the brutalization produced by the civil war. Personality also played a role in the creation of a ubiquitous and repressive government. The official declaration of the Red Terror in September 1918, for example, was largely caused by Fanny Kaplan's attempt to assassinate Lenin.

Lenin, to be sure, had long fostered a mentality of sternness and ruthlessness, which the brutality of the civil war greatly reinforced. The assassination attempt, however, inflicted a psychological wound from which the Communist leader never recovered. During the Red Terror Lenin, in fact, went out of his way to praise the work of Felix Dzerzhinsky, the Cheka chief.

Following the attempt on his life, Lenin's limited popularity was vastly enhanced throughout Russia, including its most remote reaches. Russian peasants made him an object of veneration, even regarding him as their new tsar. However much Lenin professed to eschew personality cults, power increasingly came to be identified with his own person. Despite his expressed indifference to such reactions, as far back as his *Iskra* days he had subtly cultivated his own high standing by designating himself as *starik* (the old man). Communists generally came to regard him as a fount of infallible wisdom and, especially after his death, as the physical embodiment of Marxism reduced to a quasi-religious dogma.

Bolshevism, in Lenin's person, had mutated from an arguable Marxist theory of revolution into an iconic ideology of social redemption. With the Cheka as its most important inquisitory instrument, the Communist state became dangerously messianic in its influence. Although the October Revolution had opened the existential vista of world revolution, the practices of the Russian Communists, partly the result of wartime exigencies but partly also the result of ideological dogmatism, stained the socialist ideal indelibly with bloodshed and tyranny.

## NOTES

1. Quoted in W. Bruce Lincoln, *Red Victory: A History of the Russian Civil War* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster, 1989), p. 100.
2. For more on Makhno's activities, see Chapter 52.



## CHAPTER 51 Bolsheviks Against the Proletariat

### A WORKERS' PARTY IN A PEASANT COUNTRY

Notwithstanding 'war communism' and the devastation wrought in its name, the Russian peasantry emerged from the civil war very much intact, if not greatly strengthened. Contrary to conventional socialist opinion at the time, the land seizures that peasants had undertaken since the February Revolution had led to a remarkable growth in the traditional village commune. Amid the social chaos and destruction that prevailed during the civil war, the *obshchina* became for many peasants a source of collective support—such that even 'separators', those who had previously split off from the commune, now returned to seek safety in numbers. By the end of the civil war village collectivism had actually increased as a proportion of the Russian agricultural economy. To the Communists, this unanticipated outcome stood stunningly at odds with the dogmatic Marxist conception of a historically progressive revolution. The basic desire of this Russian peasantry—the preservation of the village commune—was in fact wholly antithetical to Marxist ideas.

The very notion of a proletarian revolution in Russia, however, was no less antithetical to conventional Marxism (as distinguished from the ideas of Marx himself). Russia was still a largely peasant country in 1917. Given the objective conditions that existed in post-revolutionary Russia, a viable economic program for the country would have been something like a combination of *narodism* and syndicalism. In the countryside the encouragement and support for land repartition based on the *obshchina* might well have preserved the gains that the peasantry had made; while in the factories a stable industrial democracy based on workers' control, co-ordinated by trade unions, would have preserved the basis for a socialist society in the cities. This plausible

program, however, stood markedly at odds with Marxist dogma. Lenin, riddled with pragmatic bourgeois ideas, thought mainly in terms of one-man management of factories and large state-controlled farms that would be managed like mechanized industrial enterprises. As Alexander Shliapnikov, the first worker-Bolshevik commissar of labor, was ironically to recall, his party became 'the vanguard of a non-existent class.'<sup>1</sup> In the absence of a viable proletariat, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' palpably became a fiction.

Lacking a numerically large industrial proletariat and isolated amid a massive traditional peasantry, the urbanized Communist leaders—who had been Europeanized by their long exile outside Russia—found themselves sharply pitted against the majority of the population in the country they ruled. It was not the peasantry alone that objected to their policies; it was the workers as well. The civil war took a far greater toll on the workers—in whose name the victorious Communists had fought—than on the peasants. The dearth of raw materials and power shut down the factories in which they worked; indeed, between 1918 and 1920 Petrograd lost three-quarters of its population, mainly skilled workers, to famine and conscription. At major factory centers that once provided key Bolshevik support, such as the New Lessner and the Erikson plants, the workforce declined from 7000 each to perhaps 200 between them. As for Moscow, approximately three-quarters of the population fled to their plots in the countryside.

Even under these conditions, many factories run by committees (in the system of workers' control legitimized by the decree of 3 November 1917) acted co-operatively, coming to the aid of workers in similar enterprises, sharing not only food but fuel, raw materials, and even semi-finished goods and finished products in a remarkable spirit of class solidarity. As goods became more scarce, however, and economic conditions worsened, all too many committee-run factories were obliged to hoard raw materials and compete with one another. Hungry workers performed shoddy work and spent their workdays surreptitiously making goods that they could barter on the black market in order to obtain the bare necessities of life. Commonly they used the huge leather belts that turned machines' wheels to make boots and shoes for personal use or sale. The theft of tools and materials was ubiquitous. In time, large segments of Russian industry became all but useless, leading to the widespread erosion of Russia's industrial plant.

That many workers behaved like self-interested capitalists once they obtained control of their factories should not be surprising; under conditions of material scarcity, they were obliged to satisfy their own and their families' compelling needs. Communist poster art of workers striking heroic postures deceived no one, least of all the workers themselves. The Russian masses had never known anything but economic scarcity, and war and revolution had



undermined their meager material base disastrously. Nor did they have an adequate idea of how to co-ordinate their factory committees on a scale necessary for running the relatively complex Russian economy. Many Russian workers had little understanding of the operations of the modern factory, let alone economic planning and co-ordination; others, recent arrivals from villages, were unfamiliar with modern industrial practices altogether. Under all these circumstances, it is doubtful that workers' control could have been very successful in Russia in 1917, even if it had been given free rein.

But the Communists did not give it free rein. Scarcely had the 3 November decree been promulgated than Lenin began to turn against the factory committees in principle as well as for pragmatic reasons. In January 1918 he argued vigorously that the factory committees had wrongly understood 'workers' control' to mean that workers in each individual factory would enjoy complete control over their individual plant. Factories under committee management, he wrote, stating the obvious, were not creating socialism but were competing with one another, indeed operating more like capitalist enterprises than socialist ones. What Lenin feared most, in fact, was that the factory committees would generate workers' organizations that existed independently of the party, outside its control—and hence would constitute a potential threat to the party's exclusive authority.

A new system of trade unions was needed, he argued, one organized industrially rather than on an individual-factory basis. Trade unions could implement greater co-ordination and more effective administration; under their guidance, workers could be induced to give up control of the factories and accept trade union sovereignty. At the First All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions (7–14 January 1918) a Bolshevik 'Resolution on Workers' Control' was adopted that radically redefined the function of trade unions in the soviet economy. In a dizzying example of pure sophistry, Lenin contended that the new state was already a 'workers' and peasants' state'—hence workers were no longer in need of organizations to work on their behalf. In short, the workers already enjoyed complete power over the economy through the state; hence the primary responsibility of the trade unions was to 'become instruments of the state authority and as such ... work in coordination with other instruments of the socialist state for the realization of new principles in the organization of economic life.'<sup>2</sup> As for the factory committees, they 'must become the local branches of the corresponding trade unions'<sup>3</sup>—that is to say, subordinate themselves to the trade union bureaucracy.

Another Bolshevik resolution, this one adopted by the Fourth Conference of Trade Unions (12–17 March 1918), declared that trade unions were expected to give up their adversarial position in relation to management and change 'from purely fighting organizations to more and more economically productive

associations of the proletariat.'<sup>4</sup> It was still impossible in 1918 to enforce this utterly bizarre resolution, which denied the need for any organization that was committed to the defense of workers' rights, but it paved the way for the transformation of trade unions into government-controlled spearheads for achieving higher (or more exploitative) production levels in the factories.

The new trade unions were created, and the factory committees were subordinated to them with relative ease. Lenin was patently ready to borrow all bourgeois methods to place the proletariat under authoritarian control and even celebrated bourgeois methods of labor exploitation. In 'The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government', published in *Pravda* on 28 April 1918, he advanced an appropriate 'socialist' style of factory management: one-man management, or economic 'dictatorships', as he frankly called them. Henceforth single managers were expected to make all decisions about the structure of factories and the production process they followed. Factory committees were to be demoted to the function of enforcing labor discipline, and trade unions were forbidden to 'interfere directly in the management of undertakings.' Instead they were to carry out the strictures of one-man management as 'components of the apparatus of the Soviet state.'<sup>5</sup> Strict systems of accounting and administrative control were necessary in production, Lenin argued; accordingly the Taylor system should be introduced in order to intensify and quantify the labor process. He made a case not only for a one-man dictatorship in the factories but for a one-party dictatorship in the state:

That in the history of revolutionary movements, the dictatorship of individuals was very often the expression, the vehicle, the channel of the dictatorship of the revolutionary classes has been shown by the irrefutable experience of history. ... There is ... absolutely *no* contradiction between Soviet (*that is*, socialist) democracy and the exercise of dictatorial powers by individuals.<sup>6</sup>

This was a remarkable confession of Lenin's authoritarian proclivities. Not only ordinary workers but also trade union officials resisted this grotesque perversion of socialist ideals from the moment it was proposed; but their favored alternative was a proposal for management by a board or *collegia*, in which they, together with technicians and administrators, would have an influence—a modest enough demand—on economic life. Thereafter for two years trade union officials were able to prevent Lenin's proposal from being accepted at party congresses. Indeed, as late as January 1920, at a trade union conference, the proposal was again turned down.

Nonetheless, a new bureaucracy was saddling itself on Russian industry. On 23 April 1918, the Sovnarkom nationalized internal trade, placing the



market in the hands of the state. This was followed by a decree on 28 June that nationalized all large industrial enterprises. On 2 November a massive tax of 10 billion rubles was levied on all propertied classes in the cities and villages, expropriating and economically obliterating whatever the government decided to call the 'bourgeoisie' and 'nobility'. An immense commissariat, larger than the tsarist bureaucracy, invaded even remote towns and villages, as well as the army, civil service, and educational system, essentially placing all aspects of economic and social life under government surveillance.

The workers did not take these changes passively. Starting in early 1918 the Petrograd workers created a serious opposition to the Bolsheviks. In May and June an independent Workers' Assembly of Plenipotentiaries (or Delegates) led a number of important political strikes to protest against anti-democratic practices in soviet elections, notably the ban on individual exchanges of produce between town and village; grain confiscations by the Red Guards in the countryside; inequality of food rations between workers and Red Army soldiers; and the personal privileges accorded to party members and commissars. The workers who carried out these strikes were often those who had carried through the October Revolution a few months earlier and whom Communist propaganda continued to depict as its principal supporters. According to Vladimir Brovkin:

Strikes affected the largest, primarily metal industry, enterprises: metallurgical, locomotive, and armaments plants. The myth that metalworkers were the backbone of Bolshevik support during the civil war has to be finally cast aside. If anything metalworkers were the main force in anti-Bolshevik strikes.<sup>7</sup>

The Communists, in fact, met these strikes with savage repression. The Workers' Assembly was banned, and the Cheka arrested its leaders. In June 1918, when workers went on strike at the Obukhov plant (once a Bolshevik stronghold), the Communists first locked them out, then shut the plant down completely and fired the workers. Afterward the workers sounded an alarm:

We are strangled by hunger. We are mangled by unemployment. Our children are dropping from lack of food. Our press has been crushed. Our organizations have been destroyed. The freedom to strike has been abolished. And when we raise our voices in protest, they shoot us or throw us out, as they did with the Obukhov comrades. Russia has again been turned into a tsarist dungeon.<sup>8</sup>

Workers in other industrial cities joined the fight. On 2 July workers in Yar-

oslavl, Tula, and Nizhny Novgorod worked with their Petrograd fellows in organizing a general strike. About 80,000 workers heeded the strike call, but despite this large turnout, the strikers failed to extract any concessions from the Communists. On the contrary, the Communists showed themselves to be impervious to the pressures of strikes. Calling the strike 'counter-revolutionary', the government denounced its organizers as 'White Guards' and forcibly repressed it. Further protests led to even more repression. Finally in the autumn, after the onset of the Red Terror, workers who tried to organize against the regime were arrested or, in unknown numbers, executed.

In March 1919, during the period when the socialist opposition parties were briefly legalized and their press freedom temporarily restored, Petrograd was again swept by a wave of strikes. On 2 March, Zinoviev tried to address the workers in the once pro-Bolshevik Erikson plant, but the workers unceremoniously drove him off the podium. Sparked by mass arrests of Left SRs (whose party had just left the government over the Brest-Litovsk treaty), strikes broke out in plants that had recently been indispensable supports for the Communists. At length the Putilov workers, in a protest rally on 10 March, adopted a remarkable resolution:

We, the workmen of the Putilov works and the wharf, declare before the laboring classes of Russia and the world, that the Bolshevik government has betrayed the high ideals of the October revolution, and thus betrayed and deceived the workmen and peasants of Russia; that the Bolshevik government, acting in our name, is not the authority of the proletariat and peasants, but the authority of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, self-governing with the aid of Extraordinary Commissions [Chekas], Communists and police.

We protest against the compulsion of workmen to remain at factories and works, and attempts to deprive them of all elementary rights: freedom of the press, speech, meetings, and inviolability of person.

This extraordinary resolution, by workers in what was once the capital's proletarian *sanctum sanctorum*, made seven political demands:

1. Immediate transfer of authority to freely elected Workers' and Peasants' Soviets.
2. Immediate re-establishment of freedom of elections at factories and plants, barracks, ships, railways, everywhere.
3. Transfer of entire management to the released workers of the trade unions.
4. Transfer of food supply to workers' and peasants' cooperative societies.



5. General arming of workers and peasants.
6. Immediate release of members of the original revolutionary peasants' party of Left Socialist Revolutionaries.
7. Immediate release [from prison] of [Left SR leader] Maria Spiridonova.<sup>9</sup>

Of the 10,000 present at the rally, only 22 opposed the resolution. A few days later, in mid-March, workers at the Putilov and fourteen other large plants in Petrograd went on strike in support of the resolution. They included most of the metalworkers in the city—railcar builders and machine builders—as well as electrical, textile and chemical workers, totaling 50 per cent of the Petrograd labor force. Indeed, in preparation for the coming struggle, the workers even erected barricades at the factories.

But the Communists responded ruthlessly. Labeling the strike a Left SR insurrection, the government stormed the Putilov with 18,000 troops equipped with 250 machine guns. Anyone found carrying a weapon was summarily shot. Zinoviev personally ordered the execution of 200 workers. These punitive measures all but silenced the Petrograd and Moscow workers. In the provinces general strikes broke out in Tver, Tula, Bryansk and Astrakhan, all of which called for free elections to the soviets (or for convening a constituent assembly) and the release of political prisoners. But these movements too were repressed with extreme violence; as Brovkin observes, 'The Bolsheviks were getting used to applying military solutions to social and political problems.'<sup>10</sup>

In December 1919, Trotsky made an explicitly authoritarian proposal to apply a military solution to Russia's economic problems. Giddy with his military success against the White armies and persuaded of the virtues of extreme military centralization, the commissar of war turned his attention to civilian problems and proposed that the Russian workforce be militarized outright. Martial law should be imposed throughout the economy, and the Russian workforce should be organized into an industrial army. The workforce was to be commanded by a centralized quasi-military authority, an industrial officer corps. According to his adulatory biographer Isaac Deutscher:

He proposed that the machinery for military mobilization should be employed for the mobilization of civilian labour. . . . Its detachments were to be organized on the basis of productive units. On the other hand, civilian labour was to be subjected to military discipline; and the military administration was to supply manpower to industrial units.<sup>11</sup>

Militarizing the Russian working class, however, would be tantamount to conscription. Workers would be subjected to compulsion and punishment, as were Red Army soldiers, moved at will by the state, and court-martialed for

infractions. This proposal put 'war communism' on a permanent and comprehensive military footing, not as a set of temporary and extraordinary measures. It would become a normal condition for a presumably collectivist society, indeed the fulfillment of the logic of 'war communism'—a barracks communism. When Trotsky—joined by Lenin—presented the militarization of labor to a trade union conference on 12 January 1920, almost everyone in attendance rejected the plan. Aware that the policy was not workable on a broad scale, Trotsky tried to institute it partially and experimentally, in a few areas, transforming a number of military units into industrial armies. On 15 January he mobilized Red Army units that had defeated Kolchak in the Urals into the First Revolutionary Labor Army and put them to work on so-called economic 'fronts' in fields, forests and mines. In the end, however, Trotsky was obliged to abandon the program because of intense working-class resistance.

By comparison, Lenin's proposal for one-man management seemed to the party comparatively reasonable. At its Ninth Congress in March 1920, the Communist delegates finally passed the resolution. Thereafter party leaders tried to soften trade union hostility with promises that union officials could function as assistants to the 'specialist' managers, whereupon one-man management was introduced throughout most of the economy, from the large-scale directorates that governed the various industrial sectors, to the individual factories. Non-proletarian 'specialists' were given ever-greater positions of responsibility, while workers played a diminishing role in factory affairs. By November 1920, Lenin's system of factory 'dictatorships' existed in four-fifths of all large enterprises. By now it would require the utmost sophistry to argue that the Communist-controlled government was a 'workers' state'.

## THE LEFT SRS

Unlike the Marxists, who believed that a socialist agriculture must be industrial in its structure and operations, the Left SRs, as revolutionary *narodniki*, understood that Russian peasants were generally supporters of a traditional ideal of egalitarianism and mutual aid. Their party had emerged from a split with the PSR in mid-1917. The Left SRs were led by the young theorist Boris Kamkov and by the venerable Mark Natanson, whose long *narodnik* career dated from the previous century. Natanson, an ardent revolutionary, had bitterly opposed the world war, held vehemently revolutionary views, and flatly rejected PSR participation in the various coalition governments.

The Left SRs' most popular leader, however, was Maria Spiridonova, who



had entered the populist movement at the age of 21, at the turn of the century, and seemed to embody all the self-sacrificing dedication that had marked the *narodniki* from their inception. In January 1906, horrified by the brutality committed by a certain general against the peasants of her native Tambov, she had assassinated him. Her bold act, and the abuses to which the police and Cossacks subjected her afterward, aroused such strong public sympathy that at stops on her journey into Siberian exile, crowds greeted her reverently, much as if she were a living saint.

Following the February Revolution Spiridonova was freed from exile and traveled to Petrograd, where she joined Natanson and Kamkov in joint opposition to Chernov's conciliatory behavior toward the bourgeoisie, especially his acceptance of a portfolio in the Provisional Government. At a PSR party congress in May 1917, these populist radicals subjected Chernov to bitter criticism for having 'garbled and mutilated our party programme';<sup>12</sup> and they advanced their own program calling for the outright seizure of the land by peasant communes, workers' control of industry, an all-socialist government, and an immediate peace. No revolutionary program was more suitable for Russia at this time. Accordingly, as the months passed, the party's Left grew and even gained majorities at PSR conferences at a dizzying pace.

The Left SRs had first openly revolted against the PSR during the Pre-Parliament, when they refused to vote in favor of the war and decamped from the party in a single unified body. In the weeks preceding the October Revolution the Left SRs and the Bolsheviks, ostensibly sharing a similar program, steadily drew closer together. In fact, the Military Revolutionary Committee, as we have seen, was initially headed by a young Left SR, and many of its most active members were also Left SRs. Immediately upon taking power the Bolsheviks cannily appropriated the Left SRs' land decree, abolishing private ownership of land and calling upon the peasants to redistribute the landowners' property communally along lines akin to the *chernyi peredel*. The Bolsheviks' temporary adoption of the Left SR orientation, together with Left SR votes, played a decisive role in winning the peasantry to the soviet regime.

At the Second Congress of Soviets, when the official SR and Menshevik delegates walked out to protest against the Bolshevik coup, the Left SRs remained in the hall. Not unexpectedly, the PSR thereupon expelled them from the party, after which they formally established their own party. As we have seen, after initially rejecting the Bolsheviks' offer to share power in a two-party coalition soviet government, they decided to share the power with the Bolsheviks on 17 December. This coalition proved shaky, especially when Lenin and his supporters began to shed their libertarian ideas in favor of a crude bourgeois pragmatism.

It did not take long for major quarrels to break out between the two parties.

Firmly committed to soviet democracy, the Left SRs vigorously supported the legality of all socialist opposition parties and their presses. They vehemently condemned the arbitrary punitive decisions made by the Communists, particularly the use of capital punishment, which the new government had banned in word, albeit not in deed. In the Sovnarkom the Left SR commissar of justice, Isaac Steinberg, bitterly criticized the Cheka's arbitrary arrests, demanding an investigation of its behavior in February 1918. Nevertheless, other Left SRs did not hesitate to enter the Cheka and work zealously alongside Dzerzhinsky.

Although they themselves were often notoriously slipshod with respect to their principles, the Left SRs were particularly outraged by 'war communism' and the wholesale expropriation of peasant produce. These policies, the Left SRs saw quite clearly, would greatly worsen rather than ease the cities' food problems. By organizing 'committees of poor peasants' to confiscate the harvests of moderately well-off peasants, the Communists were igniting a savage class war among the peasants that was based on a specious interpretation of rural conditions; it was needlessly alienating the peasants from the soviet regime, often irrespective of their class status. Indeed, the 'committees of the poor' impelled the peasantry as a whole to view the Reds as new exploiters and, as we will see, create the last, bloody agrarian front against Communist power.

What nearly sundered the governing coalition between the Left SRs and the Communists, however, was the signing of the Brest-Litovsk treaty. The Left SRs saw the treaty as a gross capitulation to imperialism and opposed it intransigently. They demanded, instead, that Soviet Russia continue its fight, invoking the tradition of the French revolutionaries in 1792, and conduct a revolutionary war against the advancing German army. When the Communists ratified the onerous treaty at the Fourth Congress of Soviets, the Left SR commissars angrily withdrew from the Sovnarkom, thereby abandoning the entire government to the Bolsheviks. (Spiridonova, as a 'party elder'—she was in her thirties—opposed the party's withdrawal from the Sovnarkom, but to no avail.) Although the Left SRs continued to participate in the Central Executive Committee of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, further Bolshevik capitulations to opportunistic policies widened the cleavage between the two parties. The Left SRs abhorred the ruthless suppression of soviet democracy, as well as Lenin's April 1918 proposal for one-man management of factories and stringent labor discipline. Moreover, they were appalled on 16 June, when the government officially restored the death penalty, only to exercise it shortly afterward.

Gradually the consequences of the Brest-Litovsk treaty soon became shockingly apparent. The 'shameful peace' had allowed the Germans to take over the Ukraine—and to subject millions of peasants to German occupation. Ukrainian peasants were obliged to provide 300 truckloads of grain to the



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Germans daily. When they fell short of meeting this requirement, the Germans seized the grain by force. Not surprisingly, the outraged peasants rose in revolt, burning bridges, destroying railroad lines, and attacking German troops and army posts. In April, citing its inefficiency in collecting grain, the Germans overturned the relatively liberal Kiev government and installed a monarchist-landlord regime under their own puppet, Hetman Skoropadsky. Skoropadsky, a notorious reactionary, went on a bloody rampage, claiming the lives of thousands. Throughout all this fighting, the soviet government stood by and did nothing. So shocked were the Left SRs by the soviet government's inaction that, from their platform in the CEC, they demanded that the government officially abrogate the Brest-Litovsk treaty.

After the Communists refused, the Left SRs decided publicly to call for a revolutionary war against Germany at the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets, which was scheduled to be held in the Moscow Opera House on 5 July. Had the Congress's delegates been elected democratically, it is generally believed, the Left SRs might well have had a majority of delegates. But the Left SR leaders were too immature to outfox the Bolsheviks as organizers—and too scrupulous morally to match Lenin's capacity to manufacture majorities once he had his hands on the levers of power. With 40 per cent of the vote, their hopes of winning a majority depended on persuading the Left Communists to break with their party and form a coalition with them. Addressing the delegates, both Kamkov and Spiridonova appealed for the abrogation of the treaty and for a revolutionary war against the Germans. Denouncing 'those who look spiritlessly on while German imperialists oppress the Ukraine peasants,' Kamkov asked: 'Do you believe that our peasants in soldiers' uniform are going to look on while their brothers are murdered before their eyes?' Then he exclaimed, 'Down with the murderers!' looking up at the box where Count Mirbach, the German ambassador to Russia, was seated as an observer. But their calls produced no positive response among the other delegates in the theater, and no reaction among the Left Communists. The Congress had been patently stacked against them. Even a Left SR-proposed resolution affirming the right of Ukrainian soviet delegates to be seated at the Congress was rejected. Lenin, following a disquisition on the soundness of his own policies, demagogically called for a crackdown on 'agents-provocateurs and hirelings of imperialism', unquestionably meaning the Left SRs.

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Having failed to persuade the Congress, the Left SRs now turned to terror, the tactic with which they, as *narodniki*, were most familiar. The next day, on 6 July, while the Congress was still in session, two Left SR Cheka agents, Yakov Blyumkin and Nikolai Andreyev, entered the German embassy and assassinated Count Mirbach. Once the assassination was completed, the two men fled to the Cheka's Pokrovsky barracks for refuge. Dzerzhinsky personally

demanded that the assassins be delivered to him—threatening to shoot the entire Central Committee of the Left SRs if they were not surrendered—but his own troops took him prisoner and placed him under detention.

Could have  
The Left SRs had made no plans for an uprising, but events were conspiring to turn the Pokrovsky barracks into an insurrectionary headquarters. For at least a day or so the military advantage lay with the Left SRs, who were reinforced by some 2000 soldiers and a number of Baltic sailors—all of them highly disciplined and well armed. The commanders of Left SR troops could easily have seized the Kremlin and taken Lenin hostage; it is conceivable that they might even have held Moscow long enough to rally enough sympathetic soldiers and workers to support a Left SR uprising and remove the Communists from power.

Lenin, in turn, could count only on some 700 troops to defend his regime: the Lettish riflemen, commanded by Colonel I. Vatsetis. These troops, however, were detained in the outskirts of Moscow, and inclement weather prevented them from returning to the capital. As Vatsetis later recalled: 'Besides the Lettish riflemen, there were few military formations on whom the Bolshevik Party could rely. Hunger made the morale of the troops bad. Propaganda against the Bolsheviks had so much influence that the Russian regiments declared their neutrality. The mass of the Moscow workers maintained a neutral position too.'<sup>13</sup>

With no professional military forces on hand, the Communist government was decidedly at the mercy of the Left SRs. Lenin went into a rare panic and at midnight summoned Vatsetis to the Kremlin. 'Comrade, can we hold out till morning?' he asked. After surveying the scene for several hours, Vatsetis promised the Communist leader: 'We shall be in control of Moscow by about midday.'<sup>14</sup> Vatsetis, as it turned out, made good his promise. He was finally able to bring his troops back to Moscow, and at five in the morning of 7 July they surrounded the Left SR troops and bombarded them with artillery until they finally surrendered. Dzerzhinsky had a dozen of them shot immediately and purged the Cheka of Left SRs.

Meanwhile, on 6 July, in a classical *narodnik* moral gesture, Spiridonova had returned to the Congress of Soviets to accept full responsibility for the assassinations, which in all likelihood she personally disapproved of. But the congress did not meet that day. She and the 450 other Left SR delegates waited in the hall through the night; then on the next day, after Lettish troops surrounded the building, they were taken into captivity. Moreover, the party's entire Central Committee was arrested. The defeat of the Left SRs was definitive: the party thereafter ceased to be a major force in the Russian Revolution.

Had the irresolute Left SR leaders shown the least strategic and organizational ability, they might well have succeeded in toppling the Communist



regime and dramatically changing the course of the Russian Revolution. In July 1918 the Russian masses may well have been ready for a Left SR government, and their *narodnik*-syndicalist program might have yielded a democratic soviet order that enjoyed wide popular support. The strikes in Petrograd and elsewhere showed that the workers' animosity toward the Communist regime was rising. The Left SRs, to be sure, would have had to accept the fact that most Russian peasants were not eager to wage a revolutionary war against the Germans; they wanted peace at almost any cost. The Left SRs would have also required a more disciplined and responsible political organization systematically to propagandize the workers and army regiments.

With a resolute organization, careful planning, and enough boldness to attack the Kremlin, the Left SRs might well have staged a third revolution in Russia. The Left SR Isaac Steinberg insisted that such a successful outcome was possible: 'If the [Left SR] Party had wished to overthrow the Communist government and seize political power for itself,' he wrote in retrospect, '... there is no doubt that at that time it would have had reasonable prospects of success.' But, he adds, 'the party was not concerned at that moment with seizing the apparatus of government; it was concerned with bringing about a radical alteration of Soviet policy.'<sup>15</sup> As Orlando Figes remarks, the Left SRs

were much less interested in seizing power themselves than they were in calling for a popular uprising to force the Bolsheviks to change their policies. The Left SRs had no idea where this uprising would end up: they were happy to leave that to the 'revolutionary creativity of the masses.' They were the 'poets of the revolution' and, like all poets, were anarchists at heart. At every stage of their relationship with the Bolsheviks, the Left SRs had been outsmarted by them; and even now, when they had them at their mercy, they soon lost the upper hand.<sup>16</sup>

As 'anarchists of the heart', they fumbled a rare historic opportunity. Inexperienced with public life and accustomed mainly to protest, they were unprepared to provide institutional alternatives to the existing social order. Taken by surprise, the Left SR troops and sailors made virtually no effort to arrest Lenin, let alone take over the strategic points of Moscow. A number of them had occupied the Lubyanka prison and secret police office; others had taken the telegraph office and announced to the rest of the country that the Communists had been overthrown. But they did little else. Thus did the last action in Moscow that had any possibility of unseating the Communist regime, while still retaining the promise of Red October, come to its tragic end.

## THE MOSCOW ANARCHISTS

The anarchists living in Russian cities cut an even more ineffectual figure than did the Left SRs. In March 1918, after the capital was moved from Petrograd to Moscow, the largest collection of the country's anarchist groups assembled in Moscow to form the Moscow Federation of Anarchist Groups. The Federation housed itself in the spacious Merchants' Club, which had been renamed the House of Anarchy in the spring of 1917. Most of its members professed to be anarcho-communists, and their main activity could loosely be called 'educational', spiced with bohemian lifestyle antics. The Federation's daily newspaper, *Anarkhia*, reflected a wide spectrum of contradictory anarchist and pseudo-anarchist views—individualist, Communist, more doubtfully syndicalist, and various composites thereof—who argued among themselves incessantly.

Initially the Bolsheviks, especially Kamenev, seemed quite conciliatory toward the anarchists; many of them had been allies of the party during the October Revolution. Like the Left SRs and the Left Communists, however, the anarchists were outraged by the Brest-Litovsk treaty, which they regarded as a surrender to German imperialism. Soviet Russia, they insisted, should form partisan bands, organized locally, and wage a guerrilla war against the German advance. To prepare for such warfare, the Federation began to organize assorted anarchist elements—some dedicated, some quasi-criminal—into units of armed urban guerrillas who designated themselves as Black Guards. Their authorized tasks were to propagandize and—amply equipped with rifles, pistols, and hand grenades—to 'requisition' private property, especially houses. They soon began to engage in widespread 'expropriations', ostensibly to finance the Federation's activities but often in reality for personal gain. This problem became so serious that on 16 March 1918, the Federation had publicly to condemn 'seizures for personal gain or for personal profit in general' and required Black Guards to get authorization before undertaking any expropriations.<sup>17</sup>

Such 'authorizations', however, were not always solicited, and the Communist-Left SR government felt that its erstwhile anarchist allies were imparting an unsavory reputation to the Revolution. On 9 April the anarchists gave the regime the excuse it needed to rid itself of anarchist clubs and periodicals in Moscow, when a group of Black Guards expropriated the car of an American representative of the Red Cross; in fact, the representative was actually a diplomatic contact sympathetic to the soviet regime. On the night of 11–12 April, Chekists raided 26 anarchist headquarters, most of which surrendered without a fight. But at least two—the House of Anarchy and the Donskoi Monastery—fought back so vigorously that a dozen Chekists and 40



anarchists were killed or wounded. Once the Cheka finally vanquished the resistance, it imprisoned more than 500 Moscow anarchists and shut down anarchist operations in Petrograd and the provincial cities as well.

During the summer of 1918, some of the Black Guards remaining in Moscow advocated 'seizing' the city.<sup>18</sup> But as they discussed the prospects for such a plan among themselves, they realized the difficulties of trying to make a libertarian revolution in a time of great hunger. In one discussion two influential anarchists, Daniil Novomirsky and Alexy Borovoy, confessed, 'We would not know what to do about the famine. . . . Let it exhaust the Bolsheviks and lead the dictatorship of the Commissars to its grave. Then our hour will come!'<sup>19</sup> What they would do even after the Bolsheviks were unseated is conspicuously unclear; Russian anarchists, like many of their compatriots abroad, were not given to long-range strategic thinking.

After abandoning plans to topple the Bolsheviks, the anarchists resorted to the tactic they knew best—terrorism. Anarchist-engineered bombings and expropriations took place sporadically in the following year. Incendiary leaflets recklessly called upon the 'people' to 'rise' (without saying where, how or when) and create a new 'commune' (by means unstated). In Rostov and Ekaterinoslav they invaded local jails, freed prisoners (many of whom were outright criminals), and caused general mayhem. The working class, however, was engaged in its own struggle with the Communists and gave them no perceptible notice. Finally on 15 September 1919, anarchists, in collusion with a number of Left SRs, dynamited the Communists' Moscow City Committee headquarters during a plenary meeting, killing twelve committee members and wounding 55 other Communists. This fatuous act became the pretext for severe Communist retribution: all suspected anarchist-terrorists were rounded up, and thereafter anarchists ceased to be a noticeable presence in Russian cities.

Kropotkin's death in February 1921 brought out an estimated 25,000 mourners in Moscow, marching to the gravesite under the black banner of anarchy. Clearly not all of these mourners were anarchists; more joined the demonstration to protest against Communist rule than to honor Kropotkin's memory. Nor were black flags symbolic of anarchy at a Russian funeral. Nonetheless, anarchists of all persuasions attended, and some anarchist prisoners were released from jail for a day in order to attend the patriarch's funeral. This funeral procession was to be the last public demonstration in which Communists tolerated denunciations of their regime. Anarchists who did not work with the Communists were thereafter arrested and were sent either to Siberia or into exile abroad, usually depending upon how many foreign visitors protested against their imprisonment. Others fled to the Ukraine, where they joined Nestor Makhno, the libertarian partisan leader. As

the civil war came to an end, the urban areas fell completely under the control of the Communists, and hopes for a third revolution to restore soviet democracy in the cities faded away.

The anarcho-syndicalists, by contrast, were made of sterner and more responsible stuff, but they returned from exile too late to exercise a major influence on the Revolution. Committed to organization, workers' control of the economy, and a modicum of centralization, they were forced to remain on the sidelines while the Bolsheviks pillaged their better ideas. In the end they were of little consequence in the events that followed the October Revolution and eventually became functionaries in the soviet government and trade unions or else fled abroad.

Lacking an effective movement, a coherent ideology, and a strategy for dealing with a determined state, anarchism simply faded away—except for the Ukrainian guerrilla forces in southern Russia led by Makhno, whose struggles with both the Whites and the Reds acquired legendary proportions.

## THE WORKERS' OPPOSITION

As the civil war raged on for four years, the Communist Party remained a major arena of internal struggle as factions formed to protest against Lenin's new concept of trade unions and his efforts to subordinate the factory committees to authoritarian management. As we have seen, Lenin and his more obedient associates were eager to reduce trade unions to mere instruments for disciplining labor and brutally suppressed the widespread strikes that erupted to resist this development. Older worker-Bolsheviks were particularly embittered by the bureaucratization of the economy and the state; they vigorously opposed one-man management in industry and the subordination of trade unions, the last legal bastion of proletarian authority, to the growing party apparatus. In 1919–20, in defiance of Communist rule, they formed a new opposition—within the Communist trade unions and the Communist Party—to restore the libertarian utopianism of 1917 and some degree of soviet and workplace democracy. Their ideas were basically syndicalistic: they demanded the full participation of relatively independent trade unions in the administration of economic life. Instead of the state and the party, argued the faction, the trade unions should govern the country's economy while the party limited its activities to political affairs.

In 1920–21 their efforts crystallized into a loosely organized Workers' Opposition (the name Lenin sardonically imposed upon it). It was almost entirely proletarian in composition and gained considerable support from



many established trade unions—particularly the militant Metallurgical Union, which was led by Alexander Shliapnikov, the old worker-Bolshevik and first commissar of labor in the Sovnarkom. It also had the support of many party cells in the Donets basin and the industrial regions of the Ukraine. In 1921 the Opposition controlled the entire party organization in Samara province and managed, despite unrelenting Cheka harassment, to acquire about a quarter of the party's delegates in Moscow province.

The conflict between the Workers' Opposition and the Communist Party leadership opened at the Ninth Party Congress in 1920. There Shliapnikov, speaking for the Opposition, demanded that the trade unions oversee the production and distribution of goods in a democratic and collectivistic economic system. He boldly called for a threefold separation of power in Russia that would radically divest the party of its suffocating authority: control over economic life in Russia would thus be vested entirely in the trade unions, through a new All-Russian Congress of Producers; political life would be guided by the Communist Party, while the administration of governmental affairs would be handled by the soviets. The trade unions would thus be given ascendancy over the party in economic life, radically reversing the existing economic and political structure. As R.V. Daniels observes, Shliapnikov's proposal would have 'created a party within the party, a semiautonomous body embracing a substantial proportion of the party's membership, if not a majority.'<sup>20</sup>

The trade unions' management of industry, in turn, was to be entirely democratic, based on elections, as Cathy Porter describes it:

At factory level, control would be with the factory committees; control over high-level economic decisions would lie with the unions, which would ratify every economic appointment—not a single person was to be appointed to any administrative/economic post without their agreement. Separate unions would elect managers for the various branches of the economy at regular national congresses; local trade-union conferences would elect local managers. The culmination of this bold program, which envisaged transforming industrial organization from below, was the demand for an All-Russian Producers' Congress, to be convened so that the central management of the entire economy could be elected.<sup>21</sup>

This proposal would have been a powerful antidote to the sweeping bureaucratization of economic, state and political power, embodying a proletarian version of village *volya* and the lost ideals of 1917. The Workers' Opposition made its proposal within the framework of the Communist Party, but it plainly spoke for far more worker-Communists than dared openly to adhere to it.

Despite Shliapnikov's long party experience, the Workers' Opposition lacked a compelling ideological spokesperson until Alexandra Kollontai joined the faction in January 1921. Kollontai, who had been a member of the first Sovnarkom, was a brilliant speaker and theorist who lent her talents to the faction, especially in a pamphlet called 'The Workers' Opposition'. Written in February 1921, just before the Tenth Party Congress convened, the pamphlet not only expanded on Shliapnikov's ideas; Kollontai castigated the privileged specialists who now exercised dictatorial authority under the system of one-man management. Industry must be managed collectively, she insisted, which was essential to the formation of a Communist society. The trade unions must play the all-important role of administering the economy. Far from subordinating or eliminating factory committees, they must foster and co-ordinate them: 'it is necessary to . . . prepare factory and shop committees for running the industries.' She rejected 'workers' management' of production, which might be conducted through the agency of the state or by trained specialists, and distinguished it from 'workers' control', in which the workers directly exercised power to make technical and administrative decisions and explored 'new forms of production'.<sup>22</sup> Kollontai's pamphlet also launched a broad attack on the ills afflicting the Communist regime. Workers might well feel 'ardent affection and love' for Lenin and admire the 'incomparable and flowery eloquence of Trotsky and his organising abilities,' she affirmed, with perhaps some irony, but these sentiments should be reserved for the two men as political leaders, not as wise men capable of organizing the workplace. 'Instead of finding the means to encourage the mass initiative which could fit perfectly into our flexible Soviet institutions,' she scoffed, 'our Party leaders suddenly appear in the role of defenders and knights of bureaucracy.'<sup>23</sup> Turning to internal democracy, Kollontai declared that the party had chosen to suppress dissent instead of fostering it, warning that it must return to 'democracy, freedom of opinion, and criticism within the Party.' Notably, she did not criticize one-party rule; such a criticism would have verged on the criminal in 1921. Nor was she trying to create an alternative to the Communist Party; rather, she was diagnosing the ills of the existing party and prescribing a 'cure' within its accepted framework.

For the Tenth Party Congress, the Workers' Opposition leaders prepared a resolution containing three principal recommendations for restoring the party's social and political health. First, all party members should be required to do manual work at a workbench for three months out of each year, ostensibly to keep them in touch with workers' needs. Secondly, the party apparatus should be purged of careerists and opportunists. And finally, party members should have full freedom to discuss, even critically, all issues facing both the party and the country.



If the Workers' Opposition took quite literally Marx's formulation that only workers can make a proletarian revolution, Leninism had vested the achievement of socialism in the hands of professional revolutionaries and specialists. It is not surprising, then, that Lenin and his supporters viewed the proposals of the Workers' Opposition as outright anathema, constituting an intolerable infringement of the Central Committee's economic and social supremacy, and it heaped upon the Opposition a degree of abuse that was intense even for polemical tradition that had long been nourished on bitter vituperation.

## THE TENTH PARTY CONGRESS

The Tenth Party Congress was a turning point in the history of Bolshevism, in both form and content. After months of factional debates in the party press, the Congress convened in Moscow on 8 March 1921. It was anything but a representative body. Victor Serge, who was on close terms with some of the party principals, wrote that in the months preceding the conference, the delegates had been chosen by scandalously undemocratic procedures:

The Party steamroller was at work. I took part in the discussion in one of the districts of Petrograd, and was horrified to see the voting rigged for Lenin's and Zinoviev's 'majority'. That way would resolve nothing: every day in Smolny the only talk was of factory incidents, strikes, and booing at Party agitators. This was in November and December of 1920.<sup>24</sup>

At the Congress, Lenin (who had never worked in a factory) anointed himself the spokesman for the 'conscious' Russian working class and demagogically denounced the Workers' Opposition as a 'syndicalist and anarchist deviation' that threatened the 'party's unity'. Somehow it was also the product (incredibly) of 'an influx into the Party of former Mensheviks, and also of workers and peasants who have not fully assimilated the communist world outlook.'<sup>25</sup> Against this 'deviation,' he declared, the party must wage an 'unswerving and systematic struggle.'<sup>26</sup> He cast aspersions on Kollontai, the dedicated comrade who almost alone had supported his April Theses in 1917, — denouncing her as 'the Party's worst enemy,' as Angelica Balabanoff recalls, and

a menace to its unity. He went so far in his attack as to make allusions to certain episodes in Kollontai's intimate life [her earlier romantic involvement with Shliapnikov] that had nothing whatever to do with the issue. It

was the kind of polemic which did no credit to Lenin, and it was on this occasion that I realized the lengths to which Lenin would go in pursuit of his strategic aims, his opposition to a party opponent.<sup>27</sup>

Not surprisingly, the carefully selected delegates to the Congress voted down the resolution of the Workers' Opposition and gave their support to Lenin's policy of endowing party bureaucrats with control over the trade unions.

At the very end of the Congress, after many of the delegates had already departed, Lenin introduced a resolution that condemned the Workers' Opposition as an 'anarcho-syndicalist deviation', which the overwhelming majority of the remaining delegates adopted. He then introduced a resolution on 'party unity', that castigated the existence of all intra-party groups that had 'separate platforms'—in short, factions. It called for their dissolution on pain of immediate expulsion from the party. As the resolution stated:

All class-conscious workers must clearly realise that factionalism of *any kind* is harmful and impermissible, for no matter how members of individual groups may desire to safeguard Party unity, factionalism in practice inevitably leads to the weakening of team-work and to intensified and repeated attempts by the enemies of the governing Party, who have wormed their way into it, to widen the cleavage and use it for *counter-revolutionary* purposes.<sup>28</sup>

This was a historic and fateful resolution. Passed only by the rump of the Congress, it banned factional opposition as such. Unknown even to those who voted for it, the resolution also contained a secret provision that gave the Central Committee the authority to expel any party member by a two-thirds vote with the consent of the local unit to which the member belonged. This article was kept secret from the party membership for two years and was never abrogated. In later years Trotsky alleged that Lenin had been reluctant to ban factions and had done so only as a temporary emergency measure. Lenin himself later said the resolution had been 'an extreme measure ... adopted specially, in view of the dangerous situation'<sup>29</sup>—that is, the existence of the Workers' Opposition. But there is nothing in Lenin's writings or his behavior to show that he ever intended to abrogate the resolution. And the consequences of the entire provision lasted long after the Workers' Opposition was effectively banned.

The Congress not only banned factions—it did so enthusiastically. By hysterically denouncing 'repeated attempts by enemies of the party' who supposedly used 'factionalism' for 'counter-revolutionary purposes', the resolution anticipated the language and brutish mentality of Stalin.<sup>30</sup> Karl Radek, the Bolshevik journalist who played a major role in the German as well



as the Russian Communist movements, left no doubt that, by voting for the anti-faction resolution, he was surrendering his intellectual and political freedom of expression to the orders of the Central Committee. 'In voting for this resolution,' Radek declared,

I feel it can well be turned against us, and nevertheless I support it. . . . Let the Central Committee in a moment of danger take the severest measures against the best party comrades, if it finds this necessary. . . . Let the Central Committee even be mistaken! That is less dangerous than the wavering which is now observable.<sup>31</sup>

Afterward, in practice, the resolution banned not only the Workers' Opposition but all organized criticism of the party. Internal democracy came to an end. Stalin did not have to invent top-down reassignments of party officials and purges to mute oppositionists and critics; Lenin's anti-faction resolution had laid the groundwork. Workers' Opposition members were banished to places far from Moscow. Alexandra Kollontai was dispatched on diplomatic missions to Norway, Mexico and Sweden; Shliapnikov was ultimately expelled from the party and, in the 1930s, was executed by Stalin's police. Moreover, the resolution eliminated most of the dwindling freedoms for non-Bolshevik parties in Russia. The remaining Mensheviks, who had been trying to live within the parameters established by the Bolsheviks for 'loyal socialists', were banned, as was every organization that had previously enjoyed a legal if harried existence. With this resolution the Bolsheviks established not only a one-party state but one that endowed the party's Central Committee with enormous powers. The single most important person in creating the October Revolution—Lenin—had now become that Revolution's executioner, usurping it with a totalitarian state.

Leninist immorality, in fact, not only destroyed the October Revolution in Russia, it poisoned the socialist movement internationally and, together with the different but chronic pathologies of Social Democracy, deprived the revolutionary tradition of its moral high ground. Communist literature regressed from a vital body of theory into mechanical formulas. Argument was replaced by *ad hominem* attacks and ideological vulgarity. 'Criticisms', if such they could be called, made reckless use of highly charged epithets such as 'petty bourgeois', 'kulak', and even 'counter-revolutionary' in lieu of reasoned analysis, and critics were accused, not of dissent, but of social crimes. In Soviet Russia, honestly expressed views were not rebutted but criminalized; accusations of 'deviations' from the party 'line' turned dissent into a felony, to be resolved by the political police. While Lenin soon fell ill and then into silence, the party steadily descended into totalitarian repression.

The program of the Workers' Opposition was limited by its acceptance of the single-party Communist regime and was woefully lacking in a program for the peasantry. But it had been the last best chance within the Communist Party to restore its relatively libertarian program of 1917—assuming that trade unions controlling economic life could avoid bureaucratization, foster industrial democracy, and function in tandem with factory committees. Had it been able to break with the Bolsheviks and work with the Left SRs (and perhaps made common cause with the so-called Greens), a broader movement might well have emerged. How far it could have reversed the party's rapid movement toward a bureaucratic dictatorship and ultimately Stalin's autocracy, however, will never be known. But the dissolution of this libertarian tendency drove the final nail into the coffin of party democracy and opened the door to personal rule. Authority would be vested in the Central Committee, then in the smaller Politburo, and finally in the person of the party's general-secretary, Josef Stalin.

## NOTES

1. Quoted in Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: A History of the Russian Revolution* (New York and London: Viking, 1996), p. 610.
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3. 'Subordination of Factory-Shop Committees to the Trade Unions', resolution of the First All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions (Jan. 27 [Jan. 14], 1918), in James Bunyan and H.H. Fisher, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917–1918: Documents and Materials* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1934), p. 642.
4. 'End of Trade-Union Independence', resolution of the Fourth Conference of Trade-Union Leaders (Mar. 12–17, 1918), in Bunyan and Fisher, *Bolshevik Revolution*, p. 644.
5. Quoted in Leonard Schapiro, *The Origin of the Communist Autocracy: Political Opposition in the Soviet State, First Phase, 1917–1922*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 233.
6. Lenin, 'Immediate Tasks', pp. 267–8.
7. Vladimir N. Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War: Political Parties and Social Movements in Russia, 1918–1922* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 86.
8. Quoted in Vladimir N. Brovkin, *The Mensheviks After October: Socialist Opposition and the Rise of the Bolshevik Dictatorship* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 245.
9. Quoted in full in Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines*, pp. 67–8.
10. Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines*, p. 72.
11. Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky: 1879–1921* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 491–2.
12. Quoted in I. Steinberg, *Spiridonova: Revolutionary Terrorist*, trans. and ed. Gwenda David and Eric Mosbacher (London: Methuen & Co., 1935), p. 179.
13. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 214.



14. Quoted in *ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
16. Figes, *People's Tragedy*, p. 634.
17. Quoted in Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 184.
18. See Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, trans. and ed. Peter Sedgwick (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 75.
19. Serge, *Memoirs*, p. 75.
20. Robert Vincent Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution: Communist Opposition in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 126.
21. Cathy Porter, *Alexandra Kollontai: A Biography* (New York: Dial Press, 1980), p. 369.
22. Alexandra Kollontai, *The Workers Opposition* (London: Solidarity Pamphlet, n.d.), pp. 11, 13.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 19; emphasis added.
24. Serge, *Memoirs*, p. 123.
25. V.I. Lenin, 'Preliminary Draft Resolution of the Tenth Congress of the R.C.P. on the Syndicalist and Anarchist Deviation in Our Party', in *Collected Works* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1963), p. 32:245.
26. V.I. Lenin, 'Report on Party Unity and the Anarcho-Syndicalist Deviation, March 16, 1921', in *Collected Works*, p. 32:255.
27. Angelica Balabanoff, *My Life as a Rebel* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1938), p. 252.
28. V.I. Lenin, 'Preliminary Draft Resolution of the Tenth Congress of the R.C.P. on Party Unity', in *Collected Works*, p. 32:241; emphasis added.
29. V.I. Lenin, 'Summing-Up Speech on Party Unity and the Anarcho-Syndicalist Deviation, March 16', in *Collected Works*, p. 32:258.
30. Lenin, 'Preliminary Draft Resolution', p. 32:241.
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## CHAPTER 52 The Third Revolution

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### THE MAKHNOVSHCHINA

That Russia underwent a first revolution in February 1917 and a second revolution in October is self-evident. Did Russia have the potential for a third revolution? The Left SRs and the Workers' Opposition were not revolutionary, because both worked within the parameters of the existing authoritarian regime. Although the Left SRs challenged one-party Communist rule, they did not challenge the existing government; the Workers' Opposition, for its part, did not challenge one-party Communist rule. But several other movements did arise during the civil war that support the notion that the Russian Revolution, like those that preceded it, possessed the potential for a major third revolution. 7 Noted

The most sustained and dramatic of these movements were the Ukrainian guerrillas led by Nestor Makhno, who called himself an anarchist and variously united with or fought against the Bolsheviks for some three years. The *makhnovshchina* (as this movement was called) developed within the social chaos of wartime Ukraine, in which semi-feudal and bourgeois nationalists competed with socialists, peasants and warlords to carve out fiefdoms and an independent Ukrainian state. As Bruce Lincoln observes,

No region of the Russian Empire witnessed more violence, more destruction, and more unvarnished cruelty of man and man during Russia's Civil War than the Ukraine . . . Its lands repeatedly torn by German occupation, Bolshevik expansionism, Ukrainian nationalism, peasant anarchism, and Polish invasion, the Ukraine became a battleground over which armies fought without respite between the fall of 1917 and the summer of 1920.<sup>1</sup>

On 4 March, in the wake of the February Revolution, a nationalist government based on the Rada (or Ukrainian supreme council) was established in Kiev to rule the Ukraine and thereafter to move gradually toward achieving greater autonomy for the region. At the end of November 1917 the Rada declared the

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Ukraine an independent state. The privileged strata of the population, especially the landlords who had forfeited their lands following the Soviet Land Decree, turned to Germany for protection against Soviet Russia and in February 1918 abetted the invasion of German troops in their eastward march. Under the terms of the Brest-Litovsk treaty (signed on 3 March), Germany annexed the Ukraine. But several months later, when the Rada proved dilatory in collecting grain for export to Berlin, the Germans abandoned the Rada and established in its stead a puppet government headed by Hetman Skoropadsky.

Nestor Makhno, a semi-literate Ukrainian peasant and onetime foundry worker, began his political life in an anarcho-communist group in 1906, at the age of seventeen. Several years later he was arrested for engaging in a terrorist plot that led to the death of a district police officer and was sentenced to be hanged. Because of his youth, however, his death sentence was commuted to imprisonment, starting in 1910, in the Butyrk prison in Moscow. There he befriended Pyotr Arshinov, an anarchist who had been jailed for smuggling anarchist literature into Russia. Arshinov systematically taught Makhno the basic doctrines of Bakunin and Kropotkin, transforming the unschooled peasant into a committed anarchist.

Both Arshinov and Makhno were freed by the February Revolution's amnesty of March 1917, after which Makhno quickly made his way back to the town of his birth, Guliai-Pole, in southeastern Ukraine.\* There he formed a Peasant Union to defend the lands that the peasants had seized; by August, when the Peasant Union became the local soviet, he became the chairman of its executive committee. He also organized a small band of guerrillas whose avowed aim was 'to expropriate ... the people's wealth: the land, factories, plants, printing shops.'<sup>2</sup>

In the spring of 1918 Skoropadsky's forces and the advancing German and Austrian troops reached Makhno's home province, Ekaterinoslav. Faced with the likelihood of capture by the invaders, Makhno, on the advice of local anarchists, made his way into Soviet Russia, partly to escape capture and partly to make contact with anarchists in Russian cities and gain their support for his efforts in the Ukraine. Making his way through the river towns, he surfaced in Moscow in June, where he met with the city's anarchists. Their relative inactivity and lack of fighting spirit disappointed him, and when he visited Kro-

potkin, the sedate anarchist elder was 'not very taken with Makhno.'<sup>3</sup> By contrast, when Makhno was obliged to deal with Lenin in order to obtain documents for his return to the Ukraine, the Bolshevik leader was apparently quite taken with the outspoken and feisty young anarchist and gave him the assistance he requested. Upon his return Makhno organized another guerrilla force to engage the Austrian occupiers of his town and their reactionary Ukrainian allies, who still held large areas of the region.

Makhno had never received any formal military training and knew nothing of military strategy, but he proved to be a brilliant tactician, fighting Cossack style, with a hit-and-run mobility that gave him an incomparable advantage over his conventionally schooled opponents. His military prowess lay partly in his extraordinary tactical audacity: on several occasions he and his men dressed in their enemies' uniforms, boldly infiltrated their lines, learned of their plans, and then attacked them where and when they least expected it. But perhaps the most distinguishing feature of Makhno's guerrilla force—called the Revolutionary Insurgent Army—was its remarkable mobility. His troops could dash as much as 50 miles in a single day over the open steppelands between the Sea of Azov and the Dnieper River. Armed with sabers as well as rifles, the cavalry and infantry rode with machine guns on speedy light carts drawn by two horses each, allowing them to appear or vanish in a matter of hours. They could weave around, dodge, outpace and conquer opposing forces that were greatly superior to them in both numbers and armaments. Speed gave them the element of surprise: the *makhnovtsy* could suddenly surface as if from nowhere and outflank the astonished enemy. If seriously challenged, they could quickly demobilize, bury their weapons, and disappear into the general peasant population, after which, when summoned, they could remobilize as an organized military force. These tactics were deeply rooted in their native Cossack tradition of a free-wheeling and democratic fighting force.

Joined by eager volunteers, Makhno's army peaked at 20,000 men, fighting openly as populist agrarian revolutionaries under an anarchist black flag that bore the slogan 'Liberty or Death' and later 'Land for the Peasants and Factories for the Workers'.<sup>4</sup> Charismatic and daring, Makhno earned the deep respect of his followers, who bestowed upon him the respectful title *batko*, or 'little father'.

Following the German capitulation to the Allies in November 1918, German troops retreated rapidly from the Ukraine, and the by-now universally loathed Skoropadsky was deposed in short order. In December the vacuum he left was filled by Simon Petliura's Ukrainian nationalist government (the so-called Directory). It lasted only a few months, until February 1919, when the Reds drove Petliura out of the Ukraine. But the Bolsheviks' own hold on the Ukraine was weak, and the country quickly fell into chaos. During the next few years, Makhno's army fought the whole range of nationalist and counter-

\* Contrary to some accounts, Guliai-Pole was not a village but a sizable commercial, administrative and industrial center of about 30,000 residents. It supported two churches, three schools, a hospital, a post office, and a synagogue. It contained two factories that manufactured agricultural machinery, numerous craft shops, a grain market, many stores, distilleries, steam mills, and dozens of windmills. The town was known in the area for its large fairs.



revolutionary military forces in the area, but aside from the loose detachments of the hetman, Petliura, and various warlords and Rada Cossacks, Makhno's most serious enemies were General Denikin's well-organized Volunteer Army and the Bolsheviks' sizable Red Army.

Fighting almost continuously during these years, Makhno seldom had the opportunity to put his constructive ideas into practice. But between December 1918 and June 1919, a relative peace existed in an area around Guliai-Pole; there was also a hiatus in organized governmental rule. It was at this time that the Makhno movement tried to put its libertarian ideas into practice. It established at least four free agricultural communes, numbering 100 to 300 participants each, in which 'everyone . . . had to work, each to the extent of his ability.'<sup>5</sup> Food and other goods were distributed in accordance with need, in a traditional Communist fashion. The movement also called for the creation of soviets—not the party-controlled Bolshevik version that already existed, but 'free soviets' from which political parties were reduced to observer status in a socially egalitarian system. The Makhnovists demanded:

The overthrow of the monarchist, coalition, republican and Social-Democratic Communist-Bolshevik party governments, which must give place to a free and independent soviet order of toilers, without rulers and their arbitrary laws. For the true soviet order is not the rule of the Social-Democratic Communist-Bolsheviks which now calls itself the soviet power, but a higher form of anti-authoritarian and anti-statist socialism, manifesting itself in the organization of a free, happy, and independent structure for the social life of the toilers.<sup>6</sup>

Michael Palij observes that Makhno's 'partisans and the peasants understood the slogan "free anarcho-communes" to mean free individual farms, and decentralized democratic self-government. This was a spontaneous manifestation of the Ukrainian peasants' anarchism.'<sup>7</sup> Makhno's anarchism, in short, was the old peasant *volya*, recast—with modifications—in anarchist terminology.\*

\* Notoriously, Makhno disliked cities. When urban workers came to him for advice on how to organize, he was unable to offer them coherent suggestions. In October and November 1918 his forces occupied two large Ukrainian cities, Ekaterinoslav and Aleksandrovsk, where he tried to apply his anarchist principles to urban situations. But 'Makhno's utopian projects . . . failed to win over more than a small minority of workmen,' notes Paul Avrich, 'for, unlike the farmers and artisans of the village, who were independent producers accustomed to managing their own affairs, factory workers and miners operated as interdependent parts of a complicated industrial machine, and were lost without the guidance of supervisors and technical specialists. . . . [Moreover, Makhno] never understood the complexities of an urban economy, nor did he care to understand them. He detested the "poison" of the cities and cherished the natural simplicity of the peasant environment into which he had been born.' Quoted in Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 219.

A number of urban anarchists, most notably Voline, Arshinov and Aron Baron, found their way to the Ukraine, where they functioned on Makhno's propaganda and educational committees; but other urban anarchists inflexibly denigrated the *makhnovshchina* as an elemental peasant movement with the traits of a military command—no less! Precisely how they expected Makhno's force to fight successfully in strictly a libertarian manner is difficult to determine. Makhno's movement, in fact, approximated libertarian socialist practices as closely as any effective militia army could have done under the circumstances. During lulls in the fighting the partisans were permitted to elect junior commanders and discuss battle tactics, but no force of 20,000 men can hope to function along strictly libertarian lines. And no scattered, 'spontaneous', and poorly equipped bands of peasants could have hoped to prevail against the trained, organized, and well-armed White and Red armies. 'War anarchism', if such it can be called, required troops to accept a stern measure of military discipline. Nor is it likely that ordinary troopers would have wanted it any other way, for the *makhnovtsy* trusted the *batko* implicitly and answered only to him. With the aid of his most trusted officers (whom he appointed), Makhno had to make both tactical and strategic decisions if he hoped to prevail against his opponents.

Meanwhile, in March 1918, soon after the Bolsheviks had driven out Petliura's Directory, Denikin's White Army advanced into southeastern Ukraine and ousted the Reds. The White offensive continued during the summer of 1919, capturing Kiev in August, whereupon soviet power in the entire Ukraine crumbled. Fortunately for the Bolsheviks, Makhno's Revolutionary Insurgent Army continually harassed the Whites, but the Insurgent Army's relations with the Red Army were marked by precarious on-off alliances. The Communists were fundamentally hostile to Makhno: in May 1919 the Cheka, before it realized that the Reds could use him, tried to assassinate the *batko*. In June Trotsky, who openly forbade the *makhnovtsy* to call their fourth regional congress, demagogically denounced them as 'counter-revolutionary' and 'kulaks' and outlawed their leader.

When circumstances demanded it, however, the *makhnovtsy* and the Communists were able to join forces against the Whites. In the late summer of 1919, when Denikin began his all-or-nothing northward drive toward Moscow, Makhno's army was accepted into the Red Army as a semi-autonomous force and in the Ukraine played a decisive role in crippling Denikin's offensive. Attacking the Whites near Uman in September 1919, they cut Denikin's supply lines to the Black Sea ports, from which he received most of his weapons and supplies, and seized other key points as well, especially White supply bases. In October, just as Denikin was launching his final attack on Orel in the hope of taking Moscow, Makhno's partisans destroyed a White supply depot that



contained 60,000 artillery shells. Denikin's drive toward Moscow was aborted, and his troops fled pell-mell toward the Black Sea. According to a *Le Temps* correspondent in Moscow, 'There is no doubt that Denikin's defeat is explained more by the uprisings of the peasants who brandished Makhno's black flag than by the success of Trotsky's regular army.'<sup>8</sup>

The Communists, needless to say, displayed little gratitude to Makhno for his assistance. Shortly after the destruction of Denikin's offensive, Trotsky ordered Makhno to debark for the Polish front, a command that the anarchist leader recognized as an effort to remove him from his most supportive region, the Ukraine. He refused to leave, whereupon the Communists outlawed his army, and for eight months the *makhnovtsy* were compelled to fight them again. In October 1920, however, during Wrangel's march from the Crimea into the Ukraine, the Communists and Makhno reached another brief truce, based on a Communist promise to amnesty anarchist prisoners and guarantee all Russian anarchists freedom to propagate their views. The Reds and *makhnovtsy* then resumed their joint operations against the Whites, during which the Insurgent Army again played a vital role.

Not surprisingly, as soon as Wrangel's forces were defeated, Trotsky and his aides reneged on their promise, and on 25 November they seized Makhno's commanders—who had just helped them defeat Wrangel—and summarily executed them. The Cheka raided Makhno's headquarters and murdered most of his staff. Makhno himself, together with a small force, managed to elude capture. Although his militia force still numbered in the thousands and employed extraordinary fighting methods, it could not withstand the organized assault that the Communists now mounted against it. Finally in 1921, wounded and ill, Makhno led 80 of his followers across the Romanian frontier, and after several years of imprisonment in Romania and Poland, he made his way to permanent exile in Paris in 1925.

In exile, Makhno and Arshinov evaluated the realities that the *makhnovtsy* had had to face in the Ukraine and concluded that if the anarchist movement were to succeed against its well-organized opponents, it needed a co-ordinating center and a coherent program. Almost the entire anarchist establishment—from Errico Malatesta to Alexander Berkman—turned against him, impugning him with arguments drawn from the basically individualistic core of their ideology. Maligned and subjected to insults of every kind, a bitter Arshinov finally returned to Russia, where he fell victim to the Stalinist purges of the 1930s. Makhno—the only anarchist to play a significant role in the Russian Revolution, and a heroic one at that—died in 1935, lonely, ill, penurious, and abandoned by most anarchist purists. After his death, he was elevated to high status in the anarchist pantheon—although his assertion of the need for a well-organized libertarian movement was virtually ignored.

## THE KRONSTADT REVOLT

About 25 miles due west of Petrograd, in the Gulf of Finland, lies Kotland Island, on whose eastern end Peter the Great built a naval base known as Kronstadt. In 1917 the sailors based at Kronstadt were zealous supporters of the Bolsheviks; Trotsky repeatedly described them as the 'pride and glory of the Revolution', and years of shared struggle during the civil war seemed to wed the Kronstadters indissolubly to the Bolsheviks. At the end of February 1921, however, Russia was stunned by an event that constituted a historic tragedy. On the night of 28 February, recalls Victor Serge, a former anarchist who had become a Communist Party member, 'I was awoken by the ringing of a telephone. . . . An agitated voice told me: "Kronstadt is in the hands of the Whites. We are all under orders."'<sup>9</sup> The description of the uprising as 'White' was a scandalous fabrication: the sailors at the Kronstadt base had risen against Communist rule for reasons that had no connection with any counter-revolutionary forces in the civil war.

Since the February Revolution, Kronstadt had been substantially more than a naval base: its sailors regarded it as a 'commune', notably a unified revolutionary municipality composed of thousands of workers as well as military personnel. In May 1917 the Kronstadt Soviet had defied the Provisional Government and proclaimed itself 'the sole power in the city'<sup>10</sup>; thereafter it exercised overall political authority in the island through its general assemblies, which were held almost every day in Anchor Square, Kotlin Island's public meeting area. (One local Bolshevik approvingly called these assemblies 'Kronstadt's *veche*', referring to the medieval popular assemblies of Novgorod and Pskov.<sup>11</sup>) The citizens of Kronstadt were consciously creating a new social order based on a mixture of *narodnik* and socialist ideas, drawing on the directly democratic institutions and practices of the Russian village assemblies. The sailors rallied militantly against Kornilov and in October helped seize the Winter Palace. Kronstadters were in the forefront of the defense of Petrograd against Kerensky's troops at the beginning of the civil war and against Yudenich's at its end. Throughout the conflict the Bolsheviks used the sailors repeatedly to cope with serious trouble spots. Regarded as the praetorian guard of Bolshevism, the sailors were relatively privileged: their food rations were higher than those of skilled workers in Petrograd, and their living conditions were better than those of many party officials.

Kronstadt's faith in Bolshevism, however, had been slowly deteriorating since early 1918. Many Kronstadters had opposed the Brest-Litovsk treaty and protested against the Cheka's attack on the anarchists. (Contrary to myth, however, very few Kronstadters were themselves anarchists, regarding them as irresponsible and adventuristic.) In July 1918 quite a few Kronstadters had



joined the short-lived Left SR uprising; and as former peasants, they loathed the food requisition squads. In the fall of 1920, after Wrangel was defeated, many sailors went back to their home villages on the mainland and learned from their families and neighbors about the suffering of their relatives, friends, and neighbors under 'war communism'. 'When we returned home,' one sailor later wrote, 'our parents asked why we fought for the oppressors [the Bolsheviks]. That set us thinking.'<sup>12</sup> The hunger and Red Terror that had swept through the countryside incensed them. The very qualities that had made the sailors 'the pride and glory of the Revolution'—their outrage at injustice—now worked against the regime. Between August 1920 and March 1921, half of the Kronstadt Communist Party's 4000 members either left the party or were purged.

Meanwhile on the mainland the unusually severe winter of 1921 had brought the Petrograd and Moscow proletarians' endurance to a breaking point: they now had had all they could take of 'war communism', with its near-starvation rations, its shortages of coal and oil, its scarcity of warm clothing, shoes and fuel, and above all its abusive commissars, who seemed to live in relative comfort. Almost every aspect of daily life had become intolerable. Food prices were soaring: between January and February 1921 the price of potatoes and rye bread increased almost threefold—and on 22 January the government cut the already inadequate bread ration by a third. Cold and hungry workers left their workplaces to walk, poorly shod if not barefoot, into the countryside to forage for wood and food for their families. When they tried to bring even their desperately paltry supplies back to the city, they were stopped by government roadblocks, searched, and their goods confiscated.

The workers were left with no choice but to take mass action: February saw a new wave of factory rallies, demonstrations and strikes. Despite their physical exhaustion, thousands of workers in Petrograd, Moscow, and other cities took to the streets with placards that called for 'free trade' between town and country, higher rations, and an end to grain requisitioning. In Petrograd the remaining Mensheviks spurred on these demonstrations with leaflets calling for an end to Bolshevik decrees, the liberation of all imprisoned socialists, freedom of speech and the press, and free elections to factory committees and soviets. Despite heavy Cheka repression, the remaining SRs also participated in this agitation, calling above all for the restoration of the Constituent Assembly. On 25 February a general strike swept through Petrograd, starting at the Trubochoy metalworks and spreading through many plants and shops in the city, even encompassing the much-reduced number of Putilov workers.

The government responded with lockouts and Cheka terror. The Cheka raided the Menshevik headquarters, eventually netting 3000 real or suspected members of the party throughout Russia as well as its entire Central Com-

mittee. Select troops were posted on almost every street corner in Petrograd. The old center of the Revolution looked like an occupied city. On 27 February Zinoviev, the Petrograd party boss, tried to soften the terror by conceding to several of the strikers' demands. An extra food ration would be provided, he announced; the detested roadblocks between town and country would be removed; and plans were under way to put an end to 'war communism'. Between these concessions and Cheka intimidation, the Bolshevik leadership ended the strike after a week.

Kronstadt, 25 miles away, knew little of the workers' February demonstrations. The government feared that if news of the protests reached Kronstadt, the sailors would rise in solidarity with their long-standing allies, the Petrograd proletariat, and present a formidable threat to the regime. The government thus ordered all news of the strike to be censored—so tightly were the press and radio controlled by the Communist regime, in fact, that it largely succeeded in preventing it from reaching the sailors. Even so, rumors of demonstrations in Petrograd filtered from the city to the island. On 26 February sailors held emergency general crew meetings on the base's largest battleships. Finally the crews of the dreadnoughts *Petropavlovsk* and *Sevastopol* decided to send a 26-man delegation to Petrograd to observe the situation there and report back to their comrades.

Led by Stepan Petrichenko, an old rebel and former Communist Party member, the observers found the city's factories surrounded by troops and the workers patently fearful of speaking openly. One of the more courageous workers told the Kronstadters:

We have no shoes and no clothes. We are physically and morally terrorized. Each and every one of our requests and demands is met by the authorities with terror, terror, endless terror. Look at the prisons of Petrograd and you will see how many of our comrades sit there after being arrested in the last three days.<sup>13</sup>

Returning to the island on 28 February, the indignant sailors reported their findings to the two ships' crews. The outraged sailors thereupon drew up a resolution that contained fifteen basic demands: new elections by secret ballot to free soviets; complete freedom of speech and press for all workers, peasants, Left socialist parties, and anarchists; freedom of assembly for trade unions and peasant organizations; liberation of all socialist political prisoners and all worker, peasant, soldier, and sailor political prisoners; a review of the cases of all prisoners in concentration camps; abolition of privileges for specific parties; removal of the roadblocks that impeded individual trade between city dwellers and peasants; abolition of 'special' or select Communist fighting units; equal



rations for all citizens; the right of peasants to full access to their land (but not the right to hire labor); the end of food requisitions; and the right of craftsmen freely to sell their goods. The resolution was signed by Petrichenko (as chairman of the squadron meeting) and G.P. Perepelkin (as secretary). The Kronstadters still believed in the utopian ideals of the October Revolution for which the Bolsheviks had ostensibly once stood, especially the slogan 'All power to the soviets!': a government of free soviets, representing the 'toilers' of Russia, to replace the increasingly one-party Communist regime.

The next day, 1 March, in Anchor Square, a general meeting of 15,000 people heard the delegation of observers repeat their report on Petrograd to the general public. Petrichenko read the *Petropavlovsk* resolution, which was greeted by enthusiastic cheers. The Communist representative in attendance tried to defend the government, but his arrogance infuriated the crowd, who drove him from the podium. The assembly then voted to endorse the resolution and to send a second delegation of sailors to Petrograd, to inform the workers about the resolution. As soon as this 30-person delegation reached Petrograd, the Cheka arrested them, and nothing more was ever heard of them.

The following day 300 local delegates assembled for a conference to organize new elections for the Kronstadt Soviet. Nikolai Kuzmin, the Communist commissar of the Baltic Fleet, grimly warned the delegates not to form a dual power against the government: 'if the delegates wanted an armed struggle,' he threatened, 'they would get it.'<sup>14</sup> This warning was received with open hostility, and the Kronstadters proceeded to arrest Kuzmin. The Kronstadters had now openly defied the regime. While the conference was still in session, a message arrived that fifteen truckloads of heavily armed Red troops were at that moment crossing the ice in order to disband the meeting. This information was in fact erroneous, but the conference, not knowing this at the time, decided on the advice of Petrichenko to establish a five-man Provisional Revolutionary Committee to administer the city until a new Kronstadt Soviet could be elected. By forming this clearly military body, the naval base had passed the point of no return: it was now in a state of insurrection, and an armed conflict with the Communist state was inevitable. A new periodical, the *Kronstadt Izvestia*, proclaimed, 'All power to the soviets, not to political parties' and 'victory or death.'<sup>15</sup>

The mainland authorities' greatest fear, again, was that the uprising might spread—first to the Red Army conscripts garrisoned in the Petrograd area, then to the relatively subdued workers. The Communist press went to work, vigorously denouncing the Kronstadters as dangerous counter-revolutionaries—knowingly shrieking false charges of a White Guard plot to unseat the government and return Russia to a tsarist monarchy. The panicked Zinoviev formed a Petrograd Defense Committee whose express purpose was

to contain and suppress the uprising. On 5 March this committee warned that the insurgents would be 'shot like partridges' if they refused to surrender within 24 hours. On the same day Trotsky issued an ultimatum demanding that the mutinous sailors surrender immediately and unconditionally.

The waters of the Finnish gulf between Kronstadt and Petrograd freeze over for four months during winter, and the ice ordinarily does not melt until the end of March. During these months the ice is thick enough to sustain a substantial infantry force. On such ice, troops that set out on foot could cross the gulf and likely take the fortress. Although the fortress's main defense, the dreadnoughts—the largest and the most sophisticated warships in the Red Navy—would be able to fire on them, the ships would be immobilized by the ice and incapable of maneuvering around the gulf. During the first week of March 1921, however, the ice was beginning to melt in several areas, and if the melting continued sufficiently, the base, with its fortresses and artillery, would become virtually impregnable, and the two dreadnoughts would be able to maneuver around the gulf and bombard Red troop concentrations at will. They could also enter the Baltic Sea and obtain ammunition and supplies for the base from sympathetic depots along the coast. Those supplies were in fact much needed. The winter of 1920–21 was a very harsh one, and the sailors were suffering from insufficient food and clothing as well as a dearth of oil reserves. Kronstadt was not stocked sufficiently to withstand even a moderately extended siege; the sailors could only hope that the ice would break up early enough to spare them from a repressive and bloody Communist victory.

To retain its advantage, the Communist government acted at once. It brought in the singularly brilliant Red general, Mikhail Tukhachevsky, to plan and command the attack. On 7 March Tukhachevsky's preparations were complete, and his troops opened artillery fire on a chain of forts in the gulf that linked Kronstadt to the coast. The Kronstadters returned fire, both from the dreadnoughts and from the fortress itself. That night a severe blizzard buried the ice around the fortress in huge drifts. The fog was so dense that visibility was zero. Nonetheless in the early morning hours of 8 March the Reds began their advance, but the Kronstadters opened fire and easily repulsed them, leaving about 500 dead and 2000 wounded strewn on the ice.

On 8 March the sailors proclaimed a radically new goal in an article called 'What We Are Fighting For': Kronstadt, they announced, was moving beyond the February and October revolutions: 'Here at Kronstadt the first stone of the third revolution has been laid.'<sup>16</sup> The sailors were confident that their uprising would trigger a nationwide uprising against the 'commissarocracy' and create a more libertarian society. Strategically they were counting on a rebellion by troops and workers on the mainland to sustain their cause. But the Petrograd workers were too exhausted to respond to their call: seven years of war, four



years of hunger, continuous shortages of the necessities of life, and above all Cheka terrorism had all taken their toll. Now socially inert, they were pre-occupied with the pursuit of the immediate means of life. As Emma Goldman, a witness to the events, was grimly to recall:

The Petrograd strikers ... were weakened by slow starvation and their energy sapped. ... They had no more fight nor faith left to come to the aid of their Kronstadt comrades who had so selflessly taken up their cause and who were about to give up their lives for them. Kronstadt was forsaken by Petrograd and cut off from the rest of Russia.<sup>17</sup>

The Bolsheviks used every device at their disposal to forestall a mainland revolt. On 8 March the Tenth Party Congress (the Congress that would reject the Workers' Opposition's program of trade union hegemony and ban factions) was just convening in Moscow. One action of that Congress would be to declare the end of 'war communism' and abolish forced grain requisitions; peasants would henceforth have to turn over to the government only one-quarter of their harvest, after which they were free to dispose of the rest—even to sell it on the open market. Freedom of trade for small-scale industry as well as agriculture was to be restored. These changes would shift Russia to a less restrictive economy, thereby reducing much discontent and, hopefully, allow the people finally to get enough to eat.

Meanwhile Tukhachevsky's forces were too demoralized by the failure of the first assault to repeat their headlong rush, over open ice, under Kronstadt's artillery fire. Tukhachevsky, gloomily watching the ice begin to break up, had to act quickly and urgently called for massive reserves and material. Fresh troops were brought in from distant Russian cities, and on 10 March he ordered another attack upon the base, which failed, followed two days later by still another charge on the ice, which also failed.

To all appearances the Kronstadt sailors and soldiers were victorious. But in fact their straitened circumstances forced them to live on a daily ration of a quarter-pound of rye bread and a potato biscuit, with fragments of horsemeat and a few handfuls of oats. They issued appeal after appeal for proletarian and troop support from the mainland, but to their increasing disgust their appeals received no response—not even from Petrograd.

By 15 March Tukhachevsky had marshaled a formidable force: airplanes, massive guns, the ablest officers, and 45,000 soldiers, including cadets and Chekists. A large proportion of the troops were Communist Party members, including many delegates from the Tenth Party Congress, who had been rushed from Moscow to Petrograd to battle the Kronstadters (leaving the firm Leninists at the congress free, on 16 March, to ban the Workers' Opposition

and all factions). The delegates also brought the masses of Petrograd the news that the congress had abolished food requisitions and would now permit free trade between city and countryside. The news of these reforms produced such feelings of jubilation that even the Communists themselves were startled. Observes Bruce Lincoln: 'Not even Lenin could have anticipated how quickly the abolition of one of the most despised programs of War Communism would rally the Russians behind the Bolsheviks and against Kronstadt.'<sup>18</sup> After four years of debilitating civil war, workers and peasants rallied behind the government and turned their backs on the Kronstadt sailors.

It was in this new setting that, on the afternoon of 16 March, the Reds began their attack on Kronstadt. Artillery struck the *Petropavlovsk* and the *Sevastopol*, and aircraft bombarded the fortress. Tukhachevsky then launched a massive attack on the base, originating from three points on the coast. About 50,000 well-armed, relatively well-fed troops were pitted against 15,000 hungry insurgents. In the darkness of the morning of 17 March shock troops inched forward on all fours over the ice, which was thawing and pocked with treacherous holes that swallowed up many besiegers in the icy waters of the gulf. Just as the Red troops reached the perimeter of the base, searchlights and flares from the island suddenly illuminated the night, exposing the attackers to heavy machine-gun fire, grenades and artillery. At daylight, however, the next wave of attackers breached the perimeter of the base, and day-long street fighting raged throughout the island's streets. One by one the Reds captured the peripheral forts. Shortly before midnight the two dreadnoughts fell to the assault, and the Reds used the ships' radios to send out victory messages to their commanders on the mainland. They were premature: not until noon on 18 March—ironically, the 50th anniversary of the Paris Commune—did Kronstadt's resistance come to a final end.

On the evening of the 17 March, when it was clear that all was lost, some 800 Kronstadters, including eleven members of the base's Revolutionary Committee, escaped across the ice to safety in Finland, followed by 700 defenders of the base. Had they surrendered to the government, they undoubtedly would have been executed, as all the prisoners were. During the fighting the Reds took no prisoners; captives were shot summarily. Capturing Kronstadt probably cost the Red troops some 10,000 dead, wounded and missing. The number of Kronstadt sailors and their supporters who lost their lives is not known: at least 600 are believed to have been killed, 1000 were wounded, and 2500 were taken prisoner. The government later promised the sailors who had fled to Finland amnesty if they returned; those who believed this false promise and accepted the offer found themselves in Russian concentration camps.

For their part, the Kronstadters felt betrayed by the workers and peasants,



They had hoped their 'third revolution' would sweep across Russia and restore soviet democracy. When the Menshevik leader Fyodor Dan met Kronstadt sailors awaiting execution in jail, they expressed bitter resentment toward the Petrograd workers, who 'would not support them and sold them down the drain for a pound of meat.'<sup>19</sup> Israel Getzler observes that 'some captured sailors, when transported in chains on trucks through the streets of Petrograd to the place of execution, are reported to have sworn at groups of workers whom they passed.'<sup>20</sup>

The blood of the captured Kronstadt sailors, who were murdered with a vindictiveness that beggars description, proved to be the blood that had once given vitality to the revolution itself. For a century, as we have seen, a vital political culture of critical thought, rebellion and self-sacrificing dedication had struggled to undermine the tsarist autocracy, successfully bringing it down in February 1917. This century-old culture was now ruthlessly stamped out, not only in Kronstadt but throughout Russia, by a 'Leninism' based on political opportunism and repression, even of once-unimpeachable socialist militants.

In fact, the revolutionary socialists, no less than the Kronstadters, had overestimated the inherent revolutionary potential of the working class. The broad mass of Petrograd workers—the most class-conscious in Russia—were motivated by their desire for better living and working conditions, not for seeming abstractions like a socialist society, let alone world revolution. Such cries came primarily from the quasi-proletarian revolutionary intelligentsia. The astonishing shift in loyalties by the large majority of Russian proletarians during the Kronstadt uprising suggests that they could very well have been won over to capitalism if it offered a livable income and improved living standards. No sooner did the Bolsheviks abandon 'war communism' in 1921 and replace it with the New Economic Policy (or NEP, which allowed for free trade and income differentials, including the making of profit), than the workers ceased to demand workers' control of the economy and trade unions and to support the Workers' Opposition.

Following the Tenth Party Congress and the defeat of Kronstadt, the vital political culture of 1917 came to an end. Whatever political life remained in Russia existed at the summits of the Communist Party, with little or no echoes among the workers. When at length Trotsky initiated his struggle against Stalin's nationalistic chauvinism and the concept of 'socialism in one country', he gained virtually no support from the once-revolutionary workers and even intelligentsia who had at one time been so responsive to even the most extremist elements among the Russian masses. The Revolution had all but come to an end.

## THE GREEN REVOLT

But not entirely so. Ironically, it was in the countryside, among the peasantry, that attempts to achieve the egalitarian ideal of *volya* persisted into 1922. During the civil war the food requisition squads, while onerous, had not been sufficient to provoke a peasant war against the soviet government. Following the defeat of Denikin and Wrangel in 1920, however, the peasants saw no reason for requisitions to continue. When they did indeed continue after the Whites were gone, peasant anger at the Communists flared up with a fury that brought Russia to the point of a major agrarian uprising.

The authentic center of the peasant war emerged in the province of Tambov, long an SR stronghold, which had suffered heavily during the civil war: Denikin's troops had laid waste to much of the land and aroused bitter peasant resistance. The principal organizer of the last great uprising was an SR member, Alexander Antonov, who had broken with the PSR to join the Left SRs. Following the repression of the Left SRs in 1918, he had gone into hiding in the woods, where he covertly gathered a band of 150 zealous peasant guerrillas. When food requisition squads arrived in the fall of 1918, Antonov fought them as best he could; nevertheless he lay low for two years as the civil war raged around his band. Finally, and quite suddenly, in the summer of 1920 he emerged to fight the Bolsheviks—this time with a well-organized force of 6000 committed villagers.

The local Tambov SRs (in defiance of the more conservative PSR leadership) were heavily preoccupied with preparing for the uprising and drew up a statement of purpose that, in turn, was adopted by a provincial peasants' congress in May 1920. Clearly influenced by populist thinking, the statement made classic SR demands, including the convening of a new constituent assembly, but with recallable representatives; socialization of land; and broad civil liberties and rights. In reality, however, the movement was motivated less by ideology than by a desire to avenge Bolshevik abuses. Participants in the various scattered *bunty* that made up the uprising had several common goals: to end grain requisitions; to restore free trade with the cities; to overthrow the Communist government; and to re-establish peasant self-rule and defend *volya* in the form of free local soviets.

Many of their goals, in effect, closely resembled those of the Left SRs rather than the SRs. In truth, the Left SRs were involved in many of the Green revolts, as the uprisings were called, especially in the various combat units and the unions that the villages formed. Oliver Radkey, in his account of the uprising of the Tambov Greens, notes that the Left SRs were 'a major factor'. Documentation is scarce, but what we have 'leaves not the slightest doubt that Antonov made and sustained the operation that bears his name, assisted at



every turn by [Peter] Tokmakov as the chief Left SR representative on the scene.<sup>21</sup>

*Tambov revolt*  
The Tambov rising began in August 1920, when a requisition squad arrived in the village of Kamenka to appropriate grain. Although the harvest had been poor that year, the Reds had imposed a very steep grain levy on Kamenka. If the peasants had turned over as much grain as the squad demanded, they would have starved simply for lack of planting seed. Seeing no alternative, the Kamenka peasants killed seven members of the requisition squad and then armed themselves with guns and pitchforks. Joined by peasants from neighboring villages, they formed a small militia and prepared for more such actions against requisitioners. Kamenka and its neighboring villages proceeded to overthrow their official soviets—which were stacked with Communist Party members and provided them with no outlet for political expression—and replaced them with Peasant Unions (or STKs). Local SRs and Left SRs had played a great role in organizing these unions, which soon became peasant-elected local governmental bodies and formed a widespread network throughout rural Russia.

*repression*  
The rebels thereupon decided to march on Tambov, but no sooner had they come within ten miles of the city than the Bolsheviks attacked them in force and drove them off. The Reds then inflicted a widespread terror campaign on the countryside, burning villages, executing peasants, and commandeering their herds. This repression served only to incite further peasant revolts. Rebellion now spread rapidly into the southern half of the province, then rolled in wave upon wave throughout much of rural Russia, sweeping from Saratov to Voronezh and Penza; to Smolensk, Belorussia, Novgorod and Tver; to the Ukraine, the middle Volga, the northern Caucasus and western Siberia.

In November 1920 Antonov was elected military chief of the rising, and deservedly so; as Radkey observes, he was 'an organizer of the first magnitude, converting bands of deserters and rustics into a regular army—the most formidable of all the Green forces—and mounting a system of communications and espionage that was the envy and—for long—the despair of his enemies.'<sup>22</sup> By the end of 1920 Antonov had built up the Greens into a militia-army of about 20,000 uniformed men, mainly deserters from the Red Army as well as ordinary peasants. They were organized into various subsections (for machine guns, intelligence, communications, economics, supplies, and even a kind of peasant Cheka) that might be found in any sizable Red contingent. As Radkey observes, the Greens 'were constituted as a regular army and everywhere could be detected the skilled hand of military specialists. Though often operating in small detachments, Green forces were grouped in regiments, in brigades, and in two armies.'<sup>23</sup> In short, they now constituted a formidable threat to the Bolshevik regime.

Almost intuitively using tactics very similar to those of Makhno, Antonov's detachments were everywhere, appearing and disappearing at will. Like the *makhnovtsy*, they were largely horseborne and hence highly mobile, carrying on guerrilla operations that could vanish into a friendly village. Most of the peasant population supported them. In each village the STK—or simply the *obshchina* mobilized—fed and equipped the Green troops, gathered intelligence for them, helped with communications, and provided aid for the troops' families.

By end of 1920, the Greens had driven the Reds out of large parts of Tambov, and by March 1921 soviet power had ceased to exist in much of the province. Early in 1921, once the White armies were defeated, some 2.5 million Red Army soldiers were demobilized; many of them, on arriving home, joined up with the Greens. In a number of provinces Red Army soldiers mutinied and joined Green bands. These forces combined swelled the ranks of the Greens to a peak of 40,000.

Armed with crude weapons, the Greens waged what Orlando Figes calls 'a savage war of vengeance against the Communist regime' and 'what Lenin himself acknowledged was the greatest threat his regime had ever had to face.'<sup>24</sup> Waging a cruel guerrilla war, the Greens murdered—and often tortured—thousands of Bolsheviks, ransacked soviet and party offices, razed police stations and courts, looted schools, and especially destroyed grain collection centers. The grain they recovered was often duly carted back to the plundered villages. In midwinter of 1920–21 the Cheka reported that there were 118 peasant uprisings in the country, most notably in Saratov, Samara, Simbirsk, Penza and western Siberia.

But the fiercest struggle was waged in Tambov, where the Left SRs had sunk their deepest roots. In the spring of 1921 the Communist government was finally able to concentrate all the troops at its disposal against the Tambov insurgents—amounting to 50,000 battle-hardened soldiers, as well as abundant military equipment. These assets were placed, again, under the command of Tukhachevsky, who was fresh from suppressing the Kronstadt revolt. The Red commander launched a decisive assault on Antonov's forces and waged a campaign of mass terror against the villages that supported the uprising. Captured rebels and their families—in some cases, entire villages—were interned in concentration camps and later either executed or deported to the Arctic. About 100,000 in all were rounded up for imprisonment or deportation, and 15,000 were shot. Within a month the Reds—aided by a new famine—succeeded in suppressing the revolt.

Green detachments continued to roam parts of Tambov well into 1922, but they were eventually hunted down, and on 23 June 1922, Antonov was cornered and killed in a desperate gun battle. With Antonov's death—and with



the NEP in full gear—significant peasant resistance came to an end. The defeat of the Kronstadt uprising, in conjunction with the ban on factions at the Tenth Party Congress, had already brought the Russian Revolution to a definitive end. The 'third revolution' that had been attempted by a wide range of groups—the Workers' Opposition, the Left SRs, the Makhno movement, the Kronstadt sailors, and the Greens—had failed. After the fall of Kronstadt, any hope of restoring the all-too-brief accomplishments of 1917—free soviets, factory committees, independent unions, and democracy—was definitively vanquished. The defeat of the third revolution in Russia scarred the revolutionary tradition itself, contributing to the myth that revolution as such is inherently destructive and that what exists is always far preferable to ideals of what could be.

The most radical notions of social revolution had run their course in Russia to an extent that Bolshevik leaders before 1917 could never have anticipated. Marxian theory notwithstanding, revolution had occurred not in the most advanced capitalist country but in the least, under conditions that could not provide the material base for a socialist society. Lenin's gamble with history rested on his hope that a proletarian revolution in the East would be decided by a successful revolution in the West.

In the next few years, to be sure, the Russian Revolution shed sparks that blew westward and ignited in Europe. It was there that the proletariat produced flames of varying intensity—especially in Germany, the most industrialized country on the Continent with the most seemingly secure socialist tradition. But it would also be there that notions of proletarian hegemony and class solidarity were put to the ultimate test, with results that had decisive consequences for the rest of the twentieth century.

## NOTES

1. W. Bruce Lincoln, *Red Victory: A History of the Russian Civil War* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster, 1989), pp. 302–3.
2. Quoted in Michael Palij, *The Anarchism of Nestor Makhno, 1918–1921: An Aspect of the Ukrainian Revolution* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1976), p. 71.
3. Martin A. Miller, *Kropotkin* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 239.
4. Quoted in Lincoln, *Red Victory*, p. 326.
5. Voline, *The Unknown Revolution, 1917–1921*, trans. Holley Cantine (New York: Free Life Editions, 1974), p. 575.
6. 'Who Are the Makhnovists and What Are They Fighting For?' (Apr. 27, 1920), reprinted in Paul Avrich, ed., *The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution*, Documents of Revolution series (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1973), pp. 135–6.
7. Palij, *Anarchism of Nestor Makhno*, p. 60.
8. Quoted in Lincoln, *Red Victory*, p. 321.
9. Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 124. In retrospect Serge was particularly troubled that the party had lied so brazenly, not only to the people but to its own membership. 'It had never happened before that our Party should lie to us like this,' he lamented, mourning the passing of the Revolution and its self-styled Bolshevik 'vanguard' (p. 125). The statement, however naïve, reveals how much party members still expected of their leaders even as late as 1921.
10. Quoted in Oskar Anweiler, *The Soviets: The Russian Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers Councils, 1905–1921*, trans. Ruth Hein (New York: Pantheon, 1974), p. 138.
11. Ivan Flerovsky, quoted in Paul Avrich, *Kronstadt 1921* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 57.
12. Quoted in Lincoln, *Red Victory*, p. 495.
13. Quoted in Israel Getzler, *Kronstadt 1917–1921: The Fate of a Soviet Democracy* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 212–13.
14. Quoted in Lincoln, *Red Victory*, p. 498.
15. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 500.
16. Kronstadt Provisional Revolutionary Committee, 'What We Are Fighting For' (Mar. 8, 1921), in Robert V. Daniels, ed., *A Documentary History of Communism in Russia* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1993), pp. 136–8, at 138; emphasis added.
17. Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (1931; rpt. New York: Dover, 1970), p. 2:884.
18. Lincoln, *Red Victory*, p. 506.
19. Getzler, *Kronstadt*, p. 243.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Oliver H. Radkey, *The Unknown Civil War in Soviet Russia: A Study of the Green Movement in the Tambov Region 1920–1921* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1976), p. 128.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
24. Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: A History of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 1996), pp. 755, 757.



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## Bibliographical Essay

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Within the massive literature on these revolutions, the following English-language books were of particular interest to me in writing volume three of *The Third Revolution*.

### PART VIII: THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION OF 1905

Among general histories of Russia, Michael T. Florinsky's two-volume *Russia: A History and an Interpretation* (New York: Macmillan, 1947) is somewhat dated but nonetheless comprehensive, covering Russia from its very beginnings to 1945. Above all, the book is very readable. Nicholas V. Riasanovsky's, *A History of Russia* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), surveys Kievan, Muscovite, Imperial, and Soviet Russia. Bernard Pares's *A History of Russia* (New York: Random House, 1965), examines a wide range of factors—economic, political, clerical, military, and cultural—for each major period. Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552–1917* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), focuses on imperial Russia, from its beginnings up to 1917.

Several excellent books bring the reader directly into the workplace and the rural commune of prerevolutionary Russia. Donald Mackenzie Wallace, *Russia on the Eve of War and Revolution* (1877; rpt. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), written by a Briton who lived in Russia in the 1870s, describes prerevolutionary Russia based on personal experiences, interviews, and local documents. Olga Semyonova Tian-Shanskaia's *Village Life in Late Tsarist Russia*, trans. and ed. David L. Ransel and Michael Levine (Indianapolis, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1993), is based on the author's four years of study of peasant life in the Russian village of the 1890s. Henri Troyat's *Daily Life in Russia*, trans. Malcolm Barnes (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1961), examines many aspects of daily life in Moscow in the year 1903.



Dorothy Atkinson, *The End of the Russian Land Commune, 1905–1930* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1983), examines the traditional agrarian commune with remarkable acuity, tracing it from its origins through the Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, the civil war, and various Soviet agrarian policies up to 1929. It refutes the Marxist myth that the commune was an archaism in its death throes under the assault of large-scale capitalist agriculture.

On the emergence of Russian populism in the nineteenth century, Franco Venturi's *The Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia*, trans. Francis Haskell (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1960), is the indisputable classic, surveying in exhaustive detail Herzen, Bakunin, Chernyshevsky, Tkachev, and Lavrov, as well as populist groups culminating in the *Narodnaya Volya*. Avrahm Yarmolinsky's *Road to Revolution: A Century of Russian Radicalism* (London: Cassell, 1957) also focuses on the rise of that movement, starting in the 1830s. James H. Billington's *Mikhailovsky and Russian Populism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958) highlights the life and work of Nicholas Mikhailovsky, a populist theorist and leader active from the 1860s to about 1905, who edited several radical periodicals and was involved in the Chaikovsky circle. Robert Payne's *The Fortress* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957) traces the story of individual nineteenth-century revolutionaries, from the Decembrists to Bakunin and Chernyshevsky and later insurgents. The title refers to the Peter and Paul Fortress, where major Russian rebels under tsardom were long imprisoned.

On the emergence of the Russian labor movement, Semen I. Kanatchikov's *A Radical Worker in Tsarist Russia: The Autobiography of Semën Ivanovich Kanatchikov*, trans. and ed. Reginald E. Zelnik (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1986), is the memoir of a peasant who participated in the *kruzhok* or study circle milieu of the 1890s and transformed himself into an author; the memoir ends in 1905. Victoria E. Bonnell's *Roots of Rebellion: Workers' Politics and Organizations in St Petersburg and Moscow, 1900–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), examines in detail the emergence of rebellion among workers who participated in trade unions and other voluntary associations in the last decades of tsardom. Richard Pipes's *Social Democracy and the St Petersburg Labor Movement, 1885–1897* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), gives a rich and vivid—albeit sometimes arguable—description of the early labor movement, including the *kruzhky*.

On the rise of the Social Democratic Party, Allan K. Wildman's *The Making of a Workers' Revolution: Russian Social Democracy, 1891–1903* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1967) ably traces the early development of tendencies within Social Democracy that would emerge as Bolshevik and

Menshevik at the Second Party Congress. J.L.H. Keep's *The Rise of Social Democracy in Russia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963) emphasizes the party as an institution, as distinct from the individuals who led it, from its formative years up to 1905. Bertram D. Wolfe's *Three Who Made a Revolution: A Biographical History* (New York: Dial Press, 1961) recounts the activities of Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin in almost novelistic fashion; this eminently readable history is nonetheless full of important information and insights. Leonard Schapiro's *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (1959; New York: Random House, 1960) traces the rise of the Bolshevik (later Communist) Party from the 'economist' controversy around 1900 to Stalin's death in 1953, with particular emphasis on Bolshevik conflicts with the Mensheviks before the Revolution and the creation of a totalitarian party-state afterwards.

On the origins and early development of the Socialist Revolutionaries, Maureen Perrie's *The Agrarian Policy of the Russian Socialist-Revolutionary Party: From Its Origins Through the Revolution of 1905–1907* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), addresses the party's emergence out of populism; its program for the socialization of land, which was intended to embody the values of the *obshchina*; and its efforts to organize the peasantry as a revolutionary force comparable to the working class.

The Russian Revolution of 1905 is well covered in Sidney Harcave's *The Russian Revolution of 1905* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1970). This relatively brief book has an appendix of important documents related to the Revolution. Abraham B. Ascher's *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988) is a comprehensive account, emphasizing the Revolution's complexity. Solomon M. Schwarz's *The Russian Revolution of 1905: The Workers' Movement and the Formation of Bolshevism and Menshevism*, trans. Gertrude Vakar (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1961), examines how the Revolution heightened the contradictions between Bolshevism and Menshevism and accelerated their separation. Walter Sablinsky's *The Road to Bloody Sunday: Father Gapon and the St Petersburg Massacre of 1905* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), confines itself to the Revolution's opening phases, with particular emphasis on the ideas and activities of Father Gapon. Leon Trotsky, *1905*, trans. Anya Bostock (New York: Random House, 1971), is characteristically brilliant if seldom read. Gerald D. Surh's *1905 in Petersburg* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1989) focuses specifically on the capital, while Laura Engelstein's *Moscow, 1905: Working-Class Organization and Political Conflict* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1982) is an excellent overview of the Moscow insurrection, emphasizing the various workers's institutions—factory and strike committees, popular assemblies, trade unions, and local councils—as well as workers's participation in the general strike.



## PART IX: THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONS OF 1917

A comprehensive and authoritative account of the February Revolution is Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *The February Revolution: Petrograd, 1917* (Seattle, Wash. and London: University of Washington Press, 1981), which focuses intensively on the days between 23 February and 3 March, 1917, when tsardom collapsed and popular discontent erupted. On the July Days, the popular uprising of the following summer, the events are thoroughly explored in Alexander Rabinowitch's highly readable *Prelude to Revolution: The Petrograd Bolsheviks and the July 1917 Uprising* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1968). An outstanding eyewitness account of the events from February to October is N. N. Sukhanov's *The Russian Revolution 1917*, ed. and trans. Joel Carmichael (London: Oxford University Press, 1955). This memoir by a Menshevik Internationalist was published in the Soviet Union in 1922 but banned a few years later by Stalin because of its critical attitude towards the Bolsheviks.

On the October Revolution, E.H. Carr's three-volume *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917–1923* (1952; rpt. New York: W.W. Norton, 1985) remains highly informative. Nor has time eroded the importance of William Chamberlin's two-volume *The Russian Revolution, 1917–1921* (1935; rpt. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1965), which is still an important source, narrating the events of the Revolution and civil war, with invaluable appendices. While both Carr and Chamberlin were sympathetic to the Soviet Union, neither book is so burdened by ideology as to be tendentious. More recently, Orlando Figes's *A People's Tragedy: A History of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1996) is an award-winning history of the entire revolutionary period from the 1890s to 1924; its discussion of the radical intelligentsia is particularly fascinating. Edward Acton, Vladimir Iu. Cherniaev, and William G. Rosenberg, *A Critical Companion to the Russian Revolution, 1914–1921* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1997) is a valuable collection of essays on the Revolution, its various political parties, institutions, personal biographies, and social tendencies.

Several recent accounts of the Bolshevik seizure of power are so vivid that they bring the reader into the streets. R.V. Daniels's *Red October: The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1967) is also a dramatic narrative that goes beyond the myths and looks at the days immediately before, during, and after the Revolution; it was criticized by Marxists for showing that accident played a role in those crucial days. Alexander Rabinowitch's *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976), takes a somewhat wider focus, tracing the behavior of the Bolsheviks in Petrograd from the July uprising through the seizure of power in October. Rex A. Wade, *Red Guards and Workers' Militias in the Russian Revo-*

lution (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1984), explores the armed proletarian revolutionary forces in Petrograd in 1917.

On the working class during the revolutionary period, David Mandel's *The Petrograd Workers and the Soviet Seizure of Power: From the July Days 1917 to July 1918* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1984), reconstructs the revolution from below in Petrograd's working-class districts; their behavior, he argues, was driven not by unrealistic hopes but by rational responses to grim social realities. J.L.H. Keep's *The Russian Revolution: A Study in Mass Mobilization* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976) ably examines the role of both workers and peasants in the Revolution and the social conditions that contributed to their political behavior.

Several important works concentrate on workers's control in 1917 and afterwards. Frederick I. Kaplan's *Bolshevik Ideology and the Ethics of Soviet Labor, 1917–1920: The Formative Years* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1968), examines the labor movement—including workers's control, factory committees, and trade unions—from its efflorescence after the February Revolution until its subjugation by the Communists. S.A. Smith, *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories, 1917–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), discusses the Petrograd working class just before the February Revolution, as well as factory conditions under the tsarist regime; changes produced by the February Revolution; the factory committees and trade unions; workers's control; the structure of the labor movement; the October Revolution and its effect on the organization of industry; and the fate of workers's control up to June 1918. Maurice Brinton's *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control: The State and Counter-Revolution* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1975) is an outline of the Bolsheviks's cynical appropriation of the concept of workers's control and their suppression of its institutions once they were in power. J.B. Sorenson's *The Life and Death of Soviet Trade Unionism, 1917–1928* (New York: Atherton Press, 1969) provides a comprehensive account of the Bolshevik takeover of the labor movement.

On the soviets, the best source to my knowledge is Oskar Anweiler's *The Soviets: The Russian Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers Councils, 1905–1921*, trans. Ruth Hein (New York: Pantheon, 1974). This major historical contribution examines the antecedents of the soviets in both theory and practice, analyzes their popular role in the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, and shows how they were transformed into top-down administrative units thereafter. T.H. Rigby's *Lenin's Government: Sovnarkom, 1917–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), examines the Council of People's Commissars, through which the rule of the Communist Party was institutionalized during the first years of Soviet Russia, and explains its structure and operations.



On the civil war, W. Bruce Lincoln's *Red Victory: A History of the Russian Civil War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), is a lively yet authoritative narrative of the many campaigns, forces, and phases of this very complex event. Vladimir N. Brovkin's *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War: Political Parties and Social Movements in Russia, 1918–1922* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994) masterfully presents the political struggles within and among the various political parties during the civil war. This fascinating and groundbreaking book presents the civil war itself as an interaction of Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, SRs, Left SRs, Whites, Greens, Ukrainians, anarchists, and other groups and movements.

Orlando Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War: The Volga Countryside in Revolution, 1917–1921* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), with useful tables, maps, and glossary, shows how the developments in the Russian countryside made possible the Bolshevik victory in the civil war. On the 'Green' revolt, Oliver H. Radkey's *The Unknown Civil War in Russia: A Study of the Green Movement in the Tambov Region, 1920–1921* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1976) is pioneering and remains immensely informative.

On the oppositional tendencies to Bolshevism, both from within and outside the party, the reader should consult Leonard Schapiro's *The Origin of the Communist Autocracy: Political Opposition in the Soviet State, First Phase 1917–1922*, 2nd ed. (1954; rpt. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977). This comprehensive study of Lenin's political opposition covers both individuals (like Martov, Trotsky and Bukharin) and groups (the PSR, the Left SRs, the Left Communists, the Mensheviks, the Workers's Opposition, and others). Robert Vincent Daniels examines left oppositional tendencies within Russian Communism in his immensely readable *The Conscience of the Revolution: Communist Opposition in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), covering oppositional groups and events from the Bolshevik factions of 1917 to the condemnation of Bukharin in 1929.

Oliver H. Radkey's *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism: Promise and Default of the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries, February to October 1917* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958) cuts through the many mystifications surrounding the PSR to examine its populist roots, its internal conflicts, and its behavior during the Revolutions of February and October. Its sequel, Radkey's *The Sickie Under the Hammer: The Russian Socialist Revolutionaries in the Early Months of Soviet Rule* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1963), discusses the PSR and the Left SRs after the Revolution, in the Constituent Assembly events, and into the civil war. I. Steinberg's *Spiridonova: Revolutionary Terrorist*, trans. and ed. Gwenda David and Eric Mosbacher (London: Methuen, 1935), is an elegiac biography of the Left SRs's foremost leader, written by a Left SR member of the Sovnarkom soon after the October Revolution.

On the Mensheviks in the revolutionary period, Vladimir N. Brovkin, *The Mensheviks After October: Socialist Opposition and the Rise of the Bolshevik Dictatorship* (Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 1987); Leopold H. Haimson, ed., *The Mensheviks: From the Revolution of 1917 to the Second World War*, trans. Gertrude Vakar (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974); and Ziva Galli, *The Menshevik Leaders in the Russian Revolution: Social Realities and Political Strategies* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), are all invaluable. Israel Getzler's *Martov: A Political Biography of a Russian Social Democrat* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967) recounts the Menshevik Internationalist leader's political ideas and activities in the revolutionary movement.

On the anarchists in the revolutionary period, Paul Avrich's *The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution* in the Documents of Revolution series (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1973), contains documentary materials of historical importance to the libertarian movement. Michael Palij's *The Anarchism of Nestor Makhno, 1918–1921: An Aspect of the Ukrainian Revolution* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1976), is a comprehensive account of the life of Makhno, the partisan military campaigns he led against both Whites and Bolsheviks, and the peasant movement that followed him. From an anarchist standpoint, Peter Arshinov's *History of the Makhnovist Movement, 1918–1921*, trans. Lorraine and Fredy Perlman (Chicago: Solidarity, 1974), which might well be subtitled 'a study in war anarchism,' suffers from the same overpowering ideological bias as Voline's history of the Revolution, mentioned below.

Much insight can be gained from biographies of the Russian revolutionary leaders. Robert Service's definitive three-volume account of Lenin's political career, *Lenin: A Political Life* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1985), and the same author's absorbing one-volume *Lenin: A Biography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000) are both invaluable sources. Service's work is unique in being free both of the reverential view held by Lenin's admirers and the demonic view held by his opponents. Of exceptional interest is Leon Trotsky's *My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography* (New York: Pathfinder, 1970), which offers informative accounts of the classical socialist movement before the Great War through the author's expulsion from Russia by Stalin, with remarkable vignettes of individual figures in the revolutionary movements.

On the Kronstadt revolt, Paul Avrich's *Kronstadt, 1921* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970) is an excellent account; the author is invaluable in fathoming the motives of the rebellious sailors. Israel Getzler's *Kronstadt, 1917–1921: The Fate of a Soviet Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) is another immensely important history, placing a special focus on Kronstadt of 1917–18 as a 'forgotten golden age of Soviet democracy.'



Many useful collections of documents have been published over the years. For a collection that is highly comprehensive but not overly burdened with secondary material, I would recommend James Bunyan and H.H. Fisher, eds., *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917–1918: Documents and Materials* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1934). It is an indispensable compilation, as is James Bunyan, ed., *Intervention, Civil War, and Communism in Russia, April–December 1918, Documents and Materials* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins, 1936). F.A. Golder, ed., *Documents of Russian History, 1914–1917*, trans. Emanuel Aronsberg (1927; rpt. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1964), is an excellent compilation of material drawn primarily from the Bolshevik newspaper *Izvestia* and the Kadet newspaper *Riech*.

By far the best Bolshevik-inspired account of the Revolution is Leon Trotsky's three-volume *The History of the Russian Revolution*, trans. Max Eastman (1932; rpt. New York: Pathfinder, 1980). Interpreting a historic event in which he played a major role, the author makes no pretense that his account—stylistically sparkling, rich in detail, and theoretically insightful—is not tendentious. A major weakness is that it all but ignores the popular movement itself—except in a few colorful chapters, the workers, peasants, and soldiers are dim figures. Moreover, parties and groups apart from the Bolsheviks play no constructive role, and revolutionaries's concerns about the emergence of an autocracy are understated or ignored. A conservative view of the Revolution is Richard Pipes's *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991). This exhaustively researched account, which might have been a compelling history, is marred by the author's unmitigated aversion towards the Bolsheviks.

Voline's *The Unknown Revolution, 1917–1921* (1954; rpt. New York: Free Life Editions, 1974) is a valuable source of neglected aspects of the popular movement in the Revolution but is permeated by ideological bias. Voline was a pseudonym for the anarchist V.M. Eichenbaum. The book, originally published in 1947 in France, portrays the Bolsheviks as hypocrites who never err but only 'betray' (a view that leaves the left opposition within Bolshevism, including worker-militants like Shliapnikov and Kollontai, poorly represented). Voline endows popular spontaneity with almost mystical qualities and oversimplifies very complex social developments.

Victor Serge's *Year One of the Russian Revolution*, trans. and ed. Peter Sedgwick (1972; rpt. London: Bookmarks and Pluto Press, 1992), originally published in French in 1930, reflects the idealism and the high hopes of the early months of the Revolution. Serge's *Memoirs of a Revolutionary, 1901–1941*, trans. Peter Sedgwick (London: Oxford University Press, 1963) is a first-person account of pre-World War I era socialism and the idealistic summits to which socialism ascended, in a cause that was as ethical as it was insurrectionary; a theme which will be further explored in volume four.

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