

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CIVIL WAR

THE FORMATION OF THE RED ARMY

Perhaps the main reason why the Bolsheviks were able to come to power was by taking advantage of the great mutiny of the Russian army with promises to end the war and give out land to peasants returning to their villages. Order No. 1 symbolized the collapse of all authority in the Russian army, and the defeat of the Kerensky offensive in July 1918 solidified the disillusionment of the rank-and-file soldiers. But the Bolsheviks' precarious hold on power ensured that an army would be needed for survival. The decision to construct a new army was taken on 23 February 1918, even before the Brest-Litovsk treaty was signed with the Germans. In fact, it was precisely the continuing German advance prior to the final signing and the battles around Pskov (which changed hands twice) and defence of Petrograd that necessitated hasty preparations. Initially, the new army was based on volunteers, especially common criminals. Trotsky, the Commissar for War, wanted to build a worker army, but early results were not significant. The new recruits lacked training, discipline and weapons. Moreover, there were not enough of them.

Trotsky, with Lenin's backing, decided to recruit former officers of the tsarist army, a move that seemed tantamount to employing the class enemy. How were such officers to be trusted? First of all, the Bolsheviks restored army discipline and the stipulations of Order No. 1 were quietly shelved. Second, the Bolsheviks applied the harshest of tactics. The officers would find that their loyalty was necessary if their families were to survive. Only those with families living on Soviet territory were to be commissioned. Political commissars were recruited to keep watch for any signs of treachery or lack of diligence on the part of the officers. If officers refused to join the new Red Army, they would be given hard labour. In truth many were only too happy to join an army because they were lacking other means of subsistence. They fell under the jurisdiction of a Military Revolutionary Council that took orders from the Central Committee of the party. Once soldiers were on the battlefield, trenches of gunners were usually formed behind the

Soviet front to cut off the path of any who decided to retreat. The Red Army then was initially built on coercion and brute force, with the main recruitment campaign in the autumn of 1918 [106]. The vast majority of its officers came from the tsarist army, the numbers of which were between 50,000 and 75,000. At the peak of the civil war in 1919-20, the Red Army numbered some 5 million troops, a significant achievement that owed much to the organizational abilities of Trotsky.

OUTBREAK OF CIVIL WAR

The outbreak of civil war in Russia was made extremely likely by the dictatorial actions of Lenin's party. Its origins, however, are complex, and linked to the First World War, and the Entente's fear that military bases and supplies could fall into the hands of the Central Powers following the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk [116]. Accordingly, the event often cited as marking the first step in the war was the British decision to land troops at Murmansk in March 1918. This was not an attempt to remove the Bolsheviks from power. On the contrary, the Murmansk Soviet appears to have welcomed the arrival of the British and French. In early April, Japanese and then British troops landed in Vladivostok. The Japanese motives appear to have been predatory, namely to capture land in the Far East during a period of Russian weakness and allying themselves with local warlords operating in the Far Eastern territories. In contrast to the western powers, the Japanese were not suffering from war-weariness and posed a serious threat to Russian control over this region. In May, US troops reluctantly landed at Murmansk to join their allies, but with a mandate to take defensive measures only.

The situation changed dramatically because of the activities of the Czech Corps, some 60,000 well-trained troops who had initially been enlisted into the Austro-Hungarian army and captured during the fighting with the Russians. The Russians permitted them to form their own units in the allied cause, but prominent Czechs, particularly Thomas Masaryk, requested that the Corps should fight on the Western Front against the Germans, envisaging the troops as the foundation stone of the new state of Czechoslovakia that was to be formed after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. On 18 March 1918 the Bolshevik government agreed to the western allies' request that the Czechs could return home. The allies wanted the Corps to return via the northern port of Arkhangelsk, but the Bolsheviks ordered that they should travel by train across the country to Vladivostok, and by April, trains carrying the Czechs and Slovaks began the journey to the east.

At this time, there was no clear indication of a decisive break between the Bolshevik regime and the Entente. Indeed until mid-May it seemed quite

likely that the Bolsheviks and the western allies might find common cause against the Germans. Small-scale fighting had taken place in Ukraine and had seen the Bolsheviks and the Czechs Corps – based in Kyiv initially – fighting together against the Central Powers. Trotsky appears also to have envisaged that war with the Germans might continue, despite the stipulations of Brest-Litovsk. Lenin, on the other hand, decided that it was preferable to leave the Germans in control of Ukraine and make further agreements with them that would see extensive trade between the two countries. In this vein, Lenin's government made a decisive break with the western allies, rejecting any possibility of an alliance on 13 May 1918 [116]. From that point onward, the Entente's attitude to Soviet Russia changed, and the Czech Corps took on new importance, particularly as it constituted the only professional army on Russian territory at this juncture.

Once the Soviet regime had made its decision to maintain the link with the Germans, despite the latter country's virtual colonization of Ukraine, then both Trotsky and Stalin began to demand that the Czech Corps be disarmed. In Chelyabinsk, a skirmish broke out when the train carrying members of the Corps stopped aside a train carrying Hungarian prisoners of war. Several members of the Czech Corps were imprisoned by the local soviet, whereupon their fellow soldiers freed them and virtually took over the town. It became clear that Bolshevik control over the towns along the Trans-Siberian Railroad was fragile and Trotsky used this incident as an example to show that the Czech Corps could not be trusted. Yet by demanding that they relinquish their arms, Trotsky very much forced the issue, and the Czechs by June had begun to take over various towns, including Samara, Chelyabinsk, Omsk, Tomsk and Penza. They began to make common cause with disgruntled SRs, whose political outlook was not dissimilar to their own.

The Czech-Slovak rebellion fuelled the cause of the anti-Soviet activists, and soon several anti-Soviet governments were established in captured towns. The Bolshevik position in the summer of 1918 looked precarious. Soviet authorities were being removed from towns in quick succession. In June 1918 a government was formed in Samara called the Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly, composed mainly of SRs (as a consequence of which Lenin expelled all SRs and Mensheviks – who had not taken any steps against the Bolsheviks – from local governments held by Soviet Russia). In Omsk there was formed a Western Siberian Commissariat, which received some support from the Entente powers, who by this stage were debating which of the anti-Soviet forces should be officially backed. A Regional Government of the Urals was formed in Yekaterinburg that included members of the Kadets, SRs, and Mensheviks [114]. German and Turkish troops occupied Georgia and Armenia. An army under General P. Krasnov and made up mainly of Cossack troops was formed in the Don

region and began to march toward Tsaritsyn. Finally at the end of July, British troops entered Baku.

Though civil war had now broken out in earnest, there was no clear goal on the allied side. The Entente powers were anxious to maintain a viable force on the Eastern Front against the Germans, but there was for some time no consensus regarding which of the plethora of forces emerging against the Bolsheviks should receive their support with funds and arms. It was the North Caucasus, a Volunteer Army founded in late 1917 by General Mikhail Alekseev and General Lavr Kornilov, but led after their deaths by General Anton Denikin, initially received support. After November 1918 however, with an armistice in the First World War, the goal of an Eastern Front had become unnecessary. At this stage, the allies might most wisely have pulled out of Russia altogether. But there were some politicians, most notably Britain's Lord of the Admiralty Winston S. Churchill, who felt that the world could not allow the survival of the Bolshevik regime. They decided to give their backing to Admiral A. V. Kolchak once it became clear that left to themselves, the various forces among the Whites would be unlikely to unite of their own volition [112; 116].

Kolchak's army was based in western Siberia and numbered around 250,000. Because Kolchak acknowledged that the Russian government should not renege on its debts to the western allies, he was regarded as the most acceptable figure for the future Russian leader. The allies provided him with sufficient funds for a major campaign in the spring of 1919 Denikin, with French backing, marched northward through Ukraine at the same time. From Arkhangel'sk, where the British and Americans had established a base in August 1918, General E. K. Miller's army began to move southward, while a further army was located in Estonia under the command of General N. N. Yudenich. On paper these White armies looked formidable, but the question was how to coordinate activities. The Bolsheviks in turn operated their Red Army through a Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic (RMCR) formed in September 1918 and Soviet Russia was placed under martial law. The leading figure in the RMCR was Trotsky, who used his personal train to travel to various parts of the front.

UKRAINE AND OTHER NON-RUSSIAN TERRITORIES

On 9 February 1918 the German High Command and the Austro-Hungarian Empire had signed a separate treaty with the Ukrainian People's Republic, which recognized Ukraine as an independent republic. The disputed Kholm territory, which was claimed by Poland, was given to the new Ukrainian state, while the western regions of Galicia (Halychyna) and Bukovyna were to be given special language privileges within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Ukraine, in return, was to serve as the granary of the German army, and

was ordered to place all surplus food supplies at the disposal of the armies of the Central Powers. In reality, the supplies demanded cut into the subsistence needs of many farmers, and the decision-making authority for the amount of food allotted to the armies lay with the German High Command. It was promptly set at no less than one million tons.

Because they had achieved such a strong position in the east, and particularly in grain-rich Ukraine, the German High Command was not willing to take a neutral role in the political events of the time. In particular, the Germans were opposed to a Bolshevik takeover of Ukraine. After the signing of the Brest-Litovsk treaty on 2 March, the 'Soviet Ukrainian' government at Kharkiv was forced to dissolve itself on 14 April 1918. The Central Rada took advantage of the situation to return to Kyiv accompanied by a Sich Sharpshooters military group that had been organized by Evhen Konovalcs and Andriy Melnyk. The German leadership, however, had become opposed also to the Rada, which it did not consider strong enough to guarantee continued grain supplies to the German army, and which was opposed by many sectors of the rural community.

On 28 April, therefore, on the orders of the German omnipotent in Ukraine, General Wilhelm Groener, the Central Rada was abolished. The Sharpshooters offered some token resistance, but generally the order was effectively carried out. The Germans already had a replacement regime in mind. Four days previously, Groener had met with Lieutenant-General Pavlo Skoropadsky, a prominent landowner, and the two had made plans to establish a new Ukrainian government. The general would be backed by the conservative group, the League of Landowners, a mainly Russophile group opposed to any manifestations of Ukrainian nationalism, and his government had the guarantee of the occupying military force, the German army. On this same day, Hetman Pavlo Skoropadsky was proclaimed the head of state.

The new regime had little real authority. The Ukrainian army was to be strictly limited in size. Any acts committed against German or Austrian soldiers were to be investigated in military courts. The Germans also had considerable influence over official appointments in the civil service, land commissions and other institutions. All Cabinet positions had first to be approved by the occupiers, who also performed jointly the function of border control of the new state. Ukraine was allowed to export grain or other raw materials but once again the needs of the German High Command took priority. Private landholding was decreed by law, a stipulation that earned the Skoropadsky regime the immediate antagonism of the majority of Ukrainians.

On 29 April 1918 Skoropadsky was proclaimed Hetman of Ukraine at an impressive ceremony at the St Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv. The title itself had not been used for 150 years, and no doubt through its usage the

Germans hoped to legitimize what essentially was a puppet regime. But was there an alternative government for Ukrainians? One should recall the relative weakness of the Ukrainian national movement and the fact that – as far as one can tell – the Central Rada had never commanded majority support among Ukrainians. Had this been the case, then Ukraine might have defended itself more ably against its external enemies. A situation of near anarchy had prevailed in the city of Kyiv, and the Central Rada had appeared powerless to control the situation. Moreover, Ukrainians constituted only a minority in almost all the municipal councils of Ukraine, and faced powerful anti-Ukrainian forces. The latter included both non-Ukrainians and those people who had been subjected to the processes of Russification under the tsarist regime. Such sentiments, as the present Ukrainian government has found, could not be eradicated overnight.

In addition, the city of Kyiv was somewhat isolated from what was happening elsewhere in Ukraine. What authority the Central Rada possessed, nonetheless, was based mainly in this city. Many laws issued in Kyiv could not be put into practice in the provinces because of strong opposition. Further, there were serious disagreements between the leaders of the Central Rada, particularly among the two principal Social Democratic figures, Vynnychenko and S. Petlyura, over what sort of Ukrainian state should ultimately be created. There were also divisions between the various political parties, and between Ukrainians and non-Ukrainians who lived in Ukraine. One can say therefore that there was no solid leadership of Ukraine. Where as in Russia at this time, the political leaders were seasoned and mature individuals – Lenin, for example, was 48 – the leaders of the Central Rada were comparatively youthful and inexperienced. Even Vynnychenko was only 37; his successor Holubovich was 32; Doroshenko 35; and Petlyura 36. The noted historian Mykhailo Hrushevsky was more experienced at 51. The Ukrainian Social Revolutionaries were led by students. Many of them would indulge in endlessly protracted intellectual debates. What was lacking were leaders with organization or administrative skills during a period of crisis.

Hence one can assert that the Central Rada was doomed to failure in the same way as the Provisional Government of Kerensky in Russia. This period, nevertheless, provided a strong historical legacy, and the experience of the Central Rada was recalled during the events of August 1991. The reality, all the same, is that the Rada collapsed more from its own internal weaknesses than from the actions of any outside force such as the Bolsheviks. It was a bold attempt to govern Ukraine during a period of international upheaval. The events of the war and the October Revolution both assisted and impeded the progress of the Rada: its existence derived from the collapse of authority and army mutiny in Russia; while its fall was inevitable given its lack of mass support and the proximity and eventually dominant position in Ukraine of the German army.

Hetman Skoropadsky was a historical anomaly, a man who probably belonged in an earlier historical period. He was a direct descendant of Hetman Ivan Skoropadsky, who had been the chief of the Zaporizhzhyan Cossacks in the period 1709–22. He had also worked for the Russian monarchy as a personal aide to Tsar Nikolay II. The re-established Hetmanate proved short-lived and lasted only until the end of 1918. As the First World War came to an end, the German army began slowly to leave Ukraine. Without its support it was clear that Skoropadsky's tenure as head of state was limited. Yynychenko and others feared that Skoropadsky was about to renew federal ties with Soviet Russia, and decided to make another bid to take over the country.

Their first step was to create a five-member Directory (reminiscent of Napoleonic France), which would rule a revolutionary government to replace the Hetmanate. Yynychenko was appointed the president, and represented the Social Democrats, while Petyura was also a member, as the representative of the Sich Sharpshooters. The pretext for the takeover by the Directory was the restoration by the Hetmanate of a regime that tolerated and supported the great landowners and which constituted a counter-revolutionary, reactionary regime. The Directory first met in Bila Tserkva, but initially found its path to Kyiv cut off by German troops. Until they left Ukraine, the Germans also regarded Petyura and his troops with suspicion, and considered him a potential future dictator. Until they finally departed from Ukrainian territory, Skoropadsky was able to cling to power.

By 12 December, however, the Germans realized that there was little justification for remaining in Ukraine. Declaring themselves to be neutral in Ukrainian politics, they moved out of Kyiv. Two days later a Social-Democratic-inspired uprising ended with the establishment of a military government by the troops of Konovalts. Skoropadsky beat an ignominious retreat from the capital disguised in German uniform and made his way with his wife to German territory. The reasons for the collapse of the Hetmanate are clear. It was a weak regime that depended upon the military backing of the German army and lacked significant support among both the Ukrainians and non-Ukrainians in the proclaimed state.

Ukraine therefore had yet another government in the shape of the Directory. Though, as noted, there were technically five members of this organ, two of them effectively held power, and in their outlook and aims lay fundamental incompatibilities. Yynychenko was an intellectual by nature, a socialist of profound humanitarian bent. By contrast Petyura, with the backing of the Sharpshooters, exhibited strongly Russophobic tendencies and was determined to establish a Ukrainian state no matter what the cost. Russian-language signs were to be replaced with Ukrainian ones within three days, for example. This anti-Russian sentiment ruled out any possibility of cooperation with Soviet Russia. In fact, the Bolsheviks had

begun to step up their own activities *vis-à-vis* Ukraine. On 17 November they had established a 'Provisional Workers' and Peasants' Government of Ukraine under Yury Pyatakov. The most influential figure in this planned regime was Kristian Rakovsky, a Romanian by birth, but a Bulgarian by citizenship, who had been a member of the first abortive Bolshevik government in Ukraine. To make the new regime a reality, the Bolshevik army began to advance into Ukraine in December 1918, led by Antonov-Ovseenko, Stalin and Zatonksy. In order to look at the background to this operation, let us look briefly at the position of the Bolsheviks in Ukraine in the year 1918.

The Bolsheviks in Ukraine had remained a tiny party that was uncertain over its future policy directions. In April 1918 an important party conference was held in Tahanrith. There, the Kyiv delegation of Bolsheviks, led by Mykola Skrypnyk, gained ascendancy over the Russian delegations, and established the Communist Party of Ukraine (CP[b]U) as an independent political party that was to have no organizational affiliation with the Russian Communist Party (RCP[b]). Yet two months later, when the First Congress of the CP[b]U was held in Moscow, this policy – perhaps inevitably given the geographical circumstances – was reversed. The Kyiv group found itself in open dispute with other factions, most notable of which was the Kharkiv-Katernoslav group. Eventually the pro-Russian line was successful, but a strong nationalist opposition emerged within the Ukrainian Communist Party. It is important also to keep in mind that in the summer of 1918 only 7 per cent of party members were ethnic Ukrainians. In the meantime, the Directory was clearly divided in January 1919. One month later, the city of Kyiv had fallen to the Bolshevik forces. Yynychenko had fled abroad and Petyura took over the presidency of the Ukrainian National Rada (UNR) Directory. Over the next ten months a series of battles and skirmishes took place between nationalist and Communist forces.

The situation was complicated further by the situation in western Ukraine. There, on 1 November 1918, as a result of the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Galician and Bukovynian Ukrainians declared the formation of a Western Ukrainian People's Republic (WUPR). Under the leadership of Yevhen Petrushevich, it included territories of Galicia east of the San River, the Lemko region of the far west, and Ukrainian-populated parts of northern Bukovyna and Transcarpathia. The WUPR troops fought against both the Red Army and subsequently the Russian White Army of General Anton Denikin. The situation was confused further by the presence of significant Anarchist forces under Nestor Makhno, a colourful figure, who supported the UNR in most instances but was not averse to changing sides from time to time and fighting on behalf of the Bolsheviks.

Eventually the army of the UNR was trapped between the Bolshevik army to the east and the Polish army to the west. Consequently, it ended

regular military functions on 4 December 1919, and resorted to guerrilla-type warfare. In April 1920 the Poles and the UNR made common cause against the Bolsheviks. Petlyura offered his assistance to a Polish invasion, and on 7 May Kyiv fell to the Poles and the Ukrainians. What was known as the Polish-Soviet war featured several dramatic turns. The Bolsheviks were able to reorganize their armies under S.M. Budenny and M. Tukhachevsky, and the Soviet counter-offensive took them across the entire territory of Ukraine to the outskirts of Warsaw. At that point, the French sent military advisors to the aid of the fledgling Polish state and the Polish army then once again occupied large sections of Right-Bank Ukraine. A truce was reached between Poland and Soviet Russia on 18 October 1920, one that could only augur badly for the UNR and its Directory, which now was once again trapped between two stronger powers. On 21 October UNR troops ended their conflict and were interned inside Poland.

The Russian Revolution fed a tide of separatist and independence movements among other former subjects of the Russian Empire. Russia's military defeat and the downfall of the monarchy, and the emergence of a Bolshevik regime that – officially at least – supported self-determination among nations, led to the loss of substantial territories. Finland, which had been part of the empire for over 100 years, was smarting over the Russification policies of the late nineteenth century, and was the first area to declare independence. After the end of the First World War, all three Baltic states – Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia – became independent. Early in 1918, Armenia and Georgia had done the same, though as noted, these states were subsequently occupied by the Georgian and Turkish armies. Perhaps the most contentious case of all was that of Bessarabia, which contained a substantial portion of Romanians, but had long been part of the Russian Empire. Initially, Bessarabia declared its independence early in 1918, but later in the year was joined with Romania, an action that the Russians never forgave and for which Stalin was to exact revenge in the summer of 1940.

REASONS FOR THE RED VICTORY

White Armies = rebellions / nat'l list

On paper, the advance of the various White armies in the spring and summer of 1919 would seem to have presented a formidable threat to the Bolshevik regime, particularly given western support, and with the formation of anti-Bolshevik governments in Asiatic Russia. The initial advance was that of Kolchak, who crossed the Ural Mountains in the spring with the intention of capturing Moscow. His advance was halted on the Volga, however, by the Red Army, which had superiority in numbers in this area. After the defeat, Kolchak's forces dissipated and he was captured by the Czech Corps, who passed him to the Bolshevik government in Irkutsk,

where he was executed in February 1920. Denikin's forces in the south meanwhile advanced through eastern Ukraine in July 1919 and marched to within 250 kilometres of Moscow at Orel. The Bolsheviks desperately resisted this assault, and succeeded largely because Denikin had advanced faster than his supply bases in an effort to reach Moscow before the onset of winter. Once the attack had been repulsed, the defeat of Denikin turned into a rout. His forces retreated southward and ultimately came under the leadership of Baron Petr Wrangel in the Crimea, who was forced to evacuate the peninsula after some bold assaults on the mainland, only in November 1920. Wrangel is widely recognized as the most capable of the White Army commanders, but came on the scene too late to make a significant difference to the course of the war.

In the north, General Yudenich, armed with a few British tanks, came close to Petrograd in September 1919. The local party organization was led by Zinoviev, who appealed frantically for reinforcements, and the latter pushed back Yudenich's forces. Miller's attack also came to nothing. At crucial moments the Bolsheviks were able to rush reinforcements to the various fronts. They succeeded through a combination of organization and terror. Gradually the Bolsheviks began to recapture crucial strongholds of the former Russian Empire, including some of the territory that had been occupied by the Germans. In January 1920 both Tsaritsyn and Rostov-on-the-Don were reoccupied. By August 1920, a Bolshevik Southern Front, led by M.V. Frunze, had driven back the armies of Wrangel, whose forces were evacuated by French and British ships and taken to the Balkan countries in mid-November 1920. Almost simultaneously a truce was declared in the Polish-Soviet war (described above), followed by the Treaty of Riga, signed on 18 March 1921.

How were the Bolsheviks able to win the civil war? Perhaps the main reason was their control over the central heartland of Russia. They had a better system of communications, and controlled a considerable part of the industrial territories of the former empire. Factories in Petrograd and Moscow that had been harnessed to the war effort against the Central Powers could easily be redirected to the needs of the civil war. The Bolsheviks had better organization and, crucially, leadership [Doc. 18]. It is generally agreed that Stalin, the representative of the RCMR on various fronts, was more of a hindrance than a help and usually got involved in fractious disputes with local commanders and his nominal supervisor Trotsky. But Stalin's blundering did not entirely offset the general efficiency of Trotsky and his generals. In Budenny, Frunze, Tukhachevsky, and others, the Bolsheviks had an array of talent that was not matched by the White side.

The Whites in turn were divided as to overall leadership and goals. The armies of Denikin (especially) and Kolchak alienated the mass of peasants in their regions by their support for the former landowners. To many

observers they represented the forces of the past. The White leaders had few political goals other than personal power, which would have resulted in a military dictatorship in some form or other. Their armies were plentiful but they were widely scattered over a vast territory. It was impossible for Kolchak, for example, to communicate effectively with Yudenich or Miller, separated from him by some 5,000 kilometres of territory. The troops of Denikin, who achieved some initial success, had conducted wholesale slaughter of the population (especially Jews) in the territories that they occupied. They were also impeded by the Anarchist troops of Makhno. Lastly, the support of the western allies was half-hearted, especially after the collapse of the Kolchak campaign. Both the French and the British faced a wave of domestic opposition to their involvement in Russia. France's only significant commitment was to the survival of an independent Poland.

The Bolsheviks ultimately had two additional advantages. The Whites could only be supplied by foreign powers and once that support was reduced, their armies faded away. Second, the civil war became at least in part a national struggle. Bolshevik propaganda emphasized the need to preserve Russia from outside enemies. The Bolshevik campaign for world revolution was temporarily subsumed by a rally to Russian patriotism. Even those who had little sympathy for the cause of the Bolsheviks could support such a campaign. The mass of peasantry, alienated by the disdain of the Whites for their goals, was thus happy to throw its support behind Soviet Russia. Lenin's regime was on a martial footing and the suffering of the population was acute. The casualties suffered during the Russian Civil War may have been three times as high as those during the First World War, though famine and disease caused many more deaths than the conflict itself. The highest estimate of the casualty toll is around 30 million.

WAR COMMUNISM

The period 1918–21 saw the imposition of a system known as War Communism. In part it fulfilled the objectives of the most ideological Bolsheviks, who felt that they could develop an economic system that was true to their Communist ideals. The system involved the nationalization of industry at a much more rapid rate than had originally been envisaged as a result of the civil war situation. About 80 per cent of all large industrial enterprises were in government hands by late 1919, and before the end of the following year the state had acquired most of the smaller industrial enterprises as well. The result was the creation of a vast bureaucracy under the auspices of the Supreme Economic Council, which simply lacked the means to run such a system and the officials of which had little experience. It has been noted that in Petrograd in 1918, one in four adults was a state official. Under workers' control, factory production plummeted. But the system was



1 Tsar Nicholas II and family.

expanded further. By 1920, it was forbidden to own private property. House owners were dispossessed or forced to share their homes with several families. The state confiscated personal riches, and sums of cash were deposited by obligation into the state bank.

For the most part the state turned on the former privileged classes, the bourgeoisie. Wages and salaries were increasingly paid in kind, and money became increasingly superfluous. Some Bolsheviks anticipated that the state would be able to run a moneyless economy and that this was a natural progression from the establishment of a socialist regime. Money could be printed if and when it was needed. The key issues were twofold: the collapse of industrial output and the food question. As the government sought a reliable means of providing food for the workers, it turned on the peasantry. In the militant fashion that characterized his actions after taking power, Lenin introduced the concept of a class war in the countryside. His logic was that the most important grain-growing regions in the summer of 1918 were under the control of the Bolsheviks' enemies. The state therefore would ally with the poorer peasants against the rich.

In practice, this signified the formation of the Committees of the Poor Peasants (*Kombedy*) [Doc. 16], the goal of which was to requisition surplus grain from the rich peasants (*kulaks*) and middle peasants (*serednyaks*) [Doc. 15]. In May 1918 Lenin launched a 'crusade for bread' [Doc. 17] and the most serious assault began in the countryside in January 1919. The victimized peasants were quickly reduced to helplessness. Since many were paid their wages in kind rather than in rubles, the requisition of surplus grain took away their livelihood. The amount of land cultivated fell sharply, and the food supply to the towns began to fail. In turn, thousands of hungry workers flooded back into the countryside. City workers could find neither food nor jobs. Not all parties suffered. So-called 'bagmen' flourished: people who would bring food supplies to the cities and sell it on the black market. The Bolsheviks began to advocate the formation of cooperatives and collective farms, but very few were actually established. The grain requisitions, on the other hand, were brutally imposed [111].

The system of War Communism led to the almost total collapse of the Soviet Russian economy. Trade had ended and only the black market operated with any success. Yet to many peasants the alternative remained even worse: that of a return of the former landowners. Thus they were prepared to suffer War Communism as long as the civil war lasted and the future of Russia was in the balance. After the defeat of the Whites, however, Russia saw a series of peasant revolts on a massive scale. The largest was in Tambov, where some 50,000 peasants took part in an SR-led revolt, but there were also significant revolts in Ukraine, the Don and Volga regions, and others. Overpopulation in the villages and a dramatic fall in grain output led to widespread starvation that affected over 5 million peasants. In



1920-21 the Bolsheviks were obliged to appeal for outside help to offset the effects of famine, and the US Relief Administration led by Herbert Hoover responded.

As with the onset of civil war, much of the blame for the ills of War Communism lay with the Bolsheviks. Whereas Trotsky had used the skills of former tsarist officers in the new Red Army, the same practice was not applied to industry, where former managers and specialists were simply excluded from the production process. Similarly, those peasants who were most productive found themselves the victims of a regime that had characterized them as the class enemy. Though Stalin would take the assault on the kulak to new heights in the period 1929-33, the model was already in place under War Communism. Soviet Russia was in chaos, a starving country with no jobs, industrial production at a level that was less than half of that prior to the First World War, and in some industries (coal and steel are two examples) less than one-tenth. The towns were virtually depopulated. By March 1921, even Lenin had realized that changes had to be made and the system that embodied the ideals of many Bolsheviks ended.

THE KRONSTADT REVOLT

The rigours of War Communism and the food shortages had repercussions everywhere, including among the most fanatically pro-Bolshevik element in November 1917, the sailors of the Kronstadt naval base on Kotlin Island in the Gulf of Finland. By early 1921, few of these sailors had maintained their allegiance to the Bolsheviks, since the latter in their view had reneged on many of their promises. The sailors' views had become closer to anarchism. Rather than increased centralization of the economy and nationalization of industry, they preferred a federation of autonomous communes. They were also far from happy with the autocratic manner of Trotsky, the Commissar for War [Doc. 20]. But the spark that set off the revolt was the imposition of a new bread ration in March 1921. The crews of two warships mutinied and drew up a list of demands known as the Petropavlovsk Resolution, and began to form a breakaway republic that lasted for two weeks.

The demands of the sailors demonstrated their frustration with the 40 months of Bolshevik rule. Having founded their own newspaper, they also established a Provisional Revolutionary Committee and demanded that the socialist parties be accorded the rights they had had in 1917, such as the freedom of assembly and to issue their own publications. They opposed also Trotsky's mobilization of labour, which had decreed that workers be limited to specific jobs and locations. Above all, they wanted the removal of the grain requisition squads who had caused such problems in the countryside. The Bolshevik regime was also accused of failing to live up to the 1918

Constitution. Under their leader, S.P. Petrichenko, the sailors took over the Kronstadt base with the sort of euphoria not seen since the pre-civil war period. The Communist Party in Kronstadt became a powerless nonentity [109].

The Bolshevik regime immediately recognized the danger posed by this new revolt. With the civil war over, there was no longer any fear of foreign intervention, but the revolt of the sailors, whose exploits in the November Revolution had become legendary, was a serious embarrassment to the government. Trotsky delivered a high-handed ultimatum to the sailors, demanding that they at once give up all their weapons and surrender to the Soviet government. Not only did the sailors refuse, but the first Bolshevik assault over the ice from Petrograd was turned back with ease. Further assaults also failed. Only on 16-18 March, after 12 days of fighting, did the Red Army, with about 50,000 troops, succeed in subduing the rebel garrison. Once the base had been taken, the Bolsheviks acted ruthlessly, executing the leaders to a man. According to Trotsky, the Bolsheviks had put down a counter-revolution led by drunkards and hooligans. Lenin's reaction was more astute. He recognized that the regime had alienated those who had put it into power [Doc. 21]. The Kronstadt Revolt occurred in the aftermath of the civil war, but it symbolized the cruelty of the young regime that had begun on a wave of popular emotion but had constantly rejected compromise and moderation.

On 15 March 1921, as the final assault on the Kronstadt fortress was about to begin, the Tenth Party Congress meeting in Moscow introduced a complete reversal of economic policy. War Communism would be replaced by a new system that replaced grain requisitions on the peasantry by a tax in kind. Eventually this tax would be imposed in the form of money, and the result was that the peasants were free to dispose of their surplus grain once this flat tax had been paid. The new system was known as the New Economic Policy, a reversal seemingly of all that the Bolshevik regime had stood for. Capitalism would be returned to the village and even among small-scale industry. Those scholars and statespersons of the Gorbachev era who were sympathetic to Lenin maintained that this policy represented Lenin's real beliefs, and that War Communism had only been imposed as a result of warfare and the immediate need to preserve the Bolshevik regime.

The reality was precisely the opposite. War Communism had simply failed. Lenin recognized that if the Soviet regime were to be maintained, it would face a continuing and growing revolt in the rural regions [Doc. 21]. The Kronstadt Revolt was perhaps the crucial factor in the decision to change policy. The New Economic Policy had its supporters – the former Left Bolshevik Nikolay Bukharin was its chief advocate – but many of Lenin's associates were unhappy with what seemed like the relinquishment of true Bolshevik ideals. With the end of War Communism

ism, the period of revolution came to an end. In December 1922 the four republics of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Transcaucasia would form a Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The increasingly feeble Lenin – he would suffer a series of strokes beginning in 1922 – was at least able to prevail over his Commissar for Nationalities, I.V. Stalin, who had advocated federation of Soviet states within Russia. In theory, Russia was but one of four equal republics of the new USSR, but with the majority of the population and 75 per cent of the territory, this was never the case.

PART THREE

ASSESSMENT