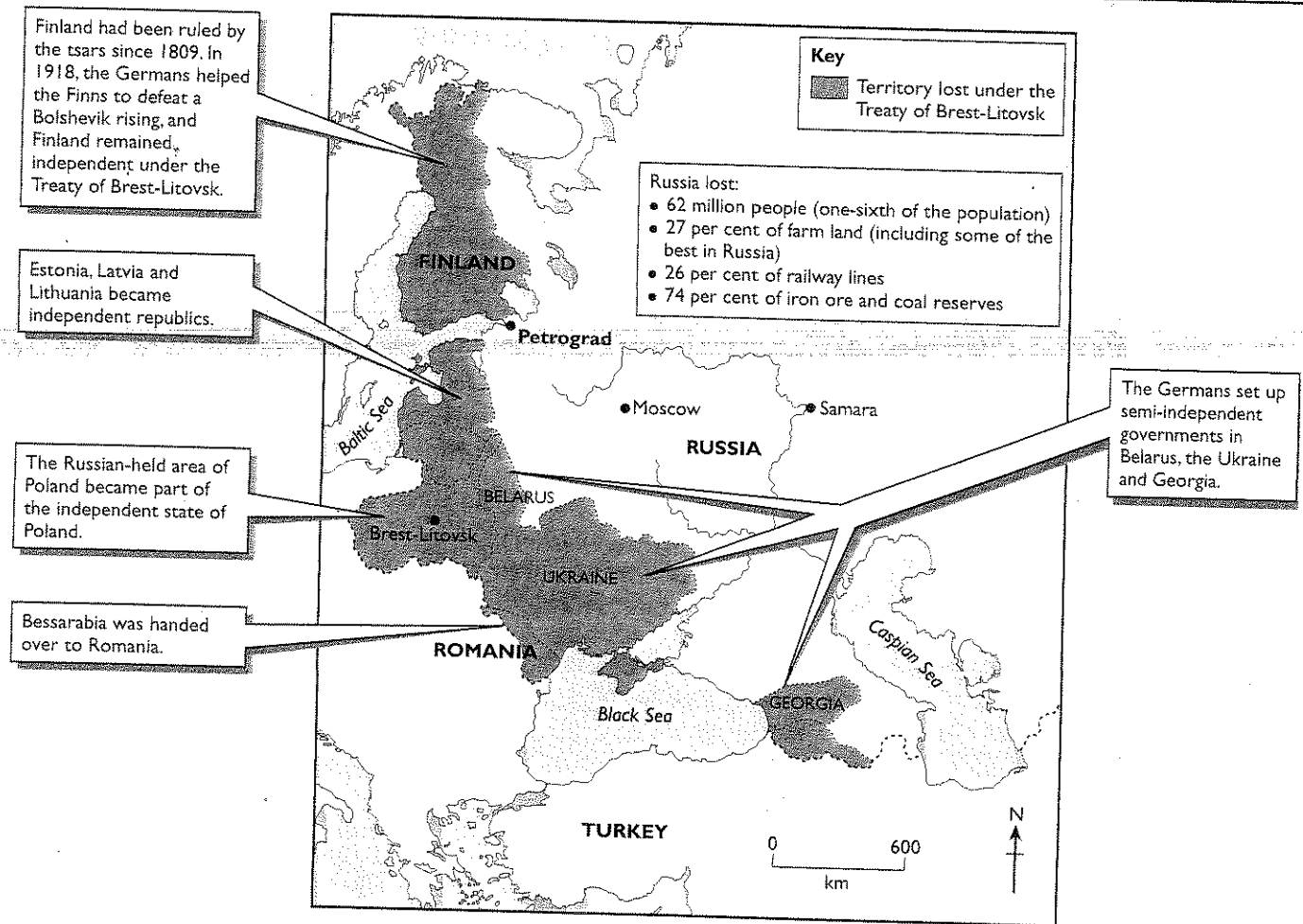


HOW DID THE BOLSHEVIKS SURVIVE THE FIRST FEW MONTHS IN POWER?



PEACEMAKING AND THE PEASANT

The Bolsheviks were keen to show the Germans they were a revolutionary democracy by including a representative from the soldiers, sailors, workers, women and peasants in the delegation. On their way to the railway station they realised they did not have a peasant. When they saw a likely looking old man they stopped and whisked Roman Stashkov, a simple village man, into the car. He was not a Bolshevik but as 'Left a SR as possible', which was good enough for the Bolsheviks and despite his initial protest they took him straight to Brest-Litovsk. His primitive table manners stood out at the lavish diplomatic banquets, but he soon began to thoroughly enjoy himself - his response when asked whether he preferred claret or white wine with his main course was, 'which one is the stronger?'

Consequences of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk

Brest-Litovsk was seen throughout Russia as a 'shameful peace'. No other political party would have acceded to such terms; indeed no leading Bolshevik was prepared to put their name to it. Half the human, industrial and agricultural resources of Nicholas II's empire were lost. This encouraged patriotic Russians to join anti-Bolshevik forces and made civil war almost inevitable.

The Left SRs favoured a revolutionary war and resigned from Sovnarkom in protest at the treaty. In July they assassinated the German ambassador in Moscow in order to provoke a resumption of the war against Germany and attempted to seize power. The situation was serious. Dzerzhinsky, head of the Cheka, was captured and Lenin asked Vatsetis, the commander of the Latvian riflemen, the only reliable troops available to the Bolsheviks, if the regime could last to the following day. The uprising was crushed and mass arrests and reprisals followed. The Left SRs were broken as a party. Vatsetis later became commander of the Red Army.

There had been a short period of intense and quite free debate within the party. However after Brest-Litovsk had been ratified at the Seventh Party Congress, the Left Communists faded and a potentially disastrous split in the party was prevented. The Party Congress resolved that a general tightening up was essential. In the historian Mawdsley's view, 'never again would such a major issue be fought out in public, never again would Lenin be so deeply challenged'.



How did Lenin deal with the problems posed by ending the war?

1917	
October	26 Decree on Peace
November	13 Trotsky applies to the German High Command for an armistice 19 Armistice negotiations begin at Brest-Litovsk, deep behind German lines in occupied Poland
December	2 One month armistice signed at Brest-Litovsk 9 Negotiations for a peace settlement begin
1918	
January	8 On Trotsky's return to Petrograd, 63 leading Bolsheviks meet: • 32 favour a revolutionary war • 16 favour Trotsky's position of no war but no peace on German terms • 15 favour Lenin's policy of peace at any price 11 Bolshevik Central Committee vote 9-7 to accept Trotsky's policy 'neither war nor peace' 17 Negotiations resume at Brest-Litovsk 28 Trotsky tells the Germans that Russia is leaving the war but refuses to sign an annexationist peace. Soviet delegates leave
February	1/14 Adoption of Gregorian calendar 18 German troops resume their advance Central committee vote 7 - 5 to sign the original German terms and request fresh negotiations. (Trotsky abstains) 23 In five days the Germans advanced 150 miles - further than in the previous three years of fighting. Harsher peace terms accepted only after further debate and Lenin's threat of resignation. Trotsky resigns as Foreign Commissar
March	3 Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed

(When writing about pre-revolutionary Russia, historians cite dates according to the calendar of the time. Russia adopted the Western (Gregorian) calendar in February 1918. Before that they used the Julian calendar.)

The promise that had brought so many people to the Bolshevik banner was the pledge to end the war. The Decree on Peace, the first signed by the Bolsheviks on 26 October, was a plea to other nations for an immediate truce and a just peace with 'no annexations, no indemnities'. Lenin was convinced that revolutions in Europe would ensure that equitable peace settlements would be reached.

But the practical resolution proved more difficult. The Russian army at the Front disintegrated rapidly; the soldiers had no desire to die in futile last-minute fighting and wanted to get back home. This represented both good and bad news for the Bolsheviks. The good news was that Russian generals could not use the army against them. The bad news was that the German army was free to walk into Russia and take what it wanted.

The Western allies ignored the Decree on Peace and Lenin now faced the fiercest struggle of his career. Most Bolsheviks and Left SRs, relentlessly hostile towards the imperialist powers, felt that to make a separate peace with 'the German bandits' would be to stain the banner of Bolshevism and undermine revolution abroad. Lenin was in a minority and it took all his powers of persuasion and the renewed advance of the increasingly impatient German army to achieve reluctant agreement (see the timeline left).

The Bolsheviks were split three ways

- Lenin believed that he had to have peace at any price to ensure the survival of the regime. There was no army to fight the Germans and when they began to advance into the Ukraine, Lenin feared that they might move on to Petrograd and throw the Bolsheviks out. 'Germany is only pregnant with revolution and we have already given birth to a healthy child. In Russia', he continued, 'we must make sure of throttling the bourgeoisie, and for this we need both hands free.' In January Lenin had few supporters, but one of them was Stalin. He argued, 'There is no other way out: either we obtain a breathing space or else it's the death of the revolution.'
- Bukharin and the Left Communists wanted to turn the war into a revolutionary war to encourage a European socialist revolution. Bukharin believed that the majority of the party supported him and that Lenin's policy was 'fatal for the revolution'. He was not thinking of a conventional army but (unrealistically) of 'a partisan war of flying detachments' with irregular guerrilla forces encircling and defeating the German troops. Even if the revolutionary war failed, militarily it would rouse the proletariat to revolution in the west.
- Trotsky, the Bolshevik negotiator, kept negotiations going as long as he could, hoping that revolution would break out in Germany and Austria. When the Germans grew impatient, he withdrew from the negotiations saying there would be 'neither war nor peace', meaning that the Russians would not fight the Germans but would not sign the treaty either. Lenin saw Trotsky's slogan as 'a piece of international political showmanship', which would not stop the Germans advancing. Stalin said, 'Comrade Trotsky's position is not a position at all.' It was his first major disagreement with Trotsky.

■ Learning trouble spot

The Bolsheviks and world revolution

The Bolsheviks were sure that other countries in Europe would follow their lead. They believed that the war would collapse into a series of civil wars in European countries as the working class fought with the bourgeoisie. They also believed that revolution in Russia could not survive without the support of workers' revolutions in advanced capitalist societies. This is why Lenin's pleas for a separate peace with Germany were vigorously opposed. Revolutions did not materialise and Lenin's decision to put the international revolution on hold and save his revolution in Russia proved to be a realistic one.