

A PEOPLE'S TRAGEDY

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION
1891-1924

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could be killed. Why shouldn't they be killed? There are many people in Russia and plenty of murderers, but when it comes to prosecuting them, the regime of the People's Commissars encounters certain mysterious obstacles, as it apparently did in the investigation of the foul murder of Shingarev and Kokoshkin.* A wholesale extermination of those who think differently is an old and tested method of Russian governments, from Ivan the Terrible to Nicholas II . . . so why should Vladimir Lenin renounce such a simple method?

Steinberg, the Left SR Commissar for Justice, was another early critic of the Terror, although all his efforts to subordinate the Chekas to the courts proved to be in vain. When, in February, Steinberg first saw the Decree on 'The Socialist Fatherland in Danger!', with its order to shoot 'on the spot' all 'profiteers, hooligans and counter-revolutionaries', he immediately went to Lenin and protested: 'Then why do we bother with a Commissariat of Justice at all? Let's call it frankly the "Commissariat for Social Extermination" and be done with it!' Lenin's face lit up and he replied: 'Well put, that's exactly what it should be; but we can't say that.'⁸³

iv Socialism in One Country

Of all the Bolshevik decrees passed in their first days of power none had the same emotional appeal as the Decree on Peace. The revolution had been born of the war — or at least of the yearning that it would end. Russia had been brought to its knees after three long years of total war and its people wanted peace above all else. On 26 October, when Lenin made his immortal announcement to the Soviet Congress that 'We shall now proceed to construct the Socialist order!', the first thing he turned to was the question of peace. This had been the basis of his party's claim to power, the one demand which all the delegates brought with them from their barracks and their factories to the Soviet Congress. When Lenin read out the decree — a bombastic 'Proclamation to the Peoples

* The Kadet leaders, Shingarev and Kokoshkin, were arrested by the Bolsheviks and imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress after the demonstrations of 28 November in defence of the Constituent Assembly. They were transferred to the Marinskaya Hospital on 6 January after becoming seriously ill, and were brutally murdered there on the following night by a group of Baltic sailors, who broke into the hospital. The Ministry of Justice later revealed that the murders had taken place with the connivance of the Bolshevik Red Guard and the Commandant of the Hospital, Stefan Basov, who justified the murder on the grounds that there would be 'two less bourgeois mouths to feed'. Basov was brought to trial and convicted, but none of the murderers was ever caught and the Bolshevik leaders, who at first condemned the murders, later sought to justify them as an act of political terror.

of All the Belligerent Nations' proposing a 'just and democratic peace' on the old Soviet formula of no annexations or indemnities — there was an overwhelming wave of emotion in the Smolny hall. 'Suddenly', recalled John Reed, 'by common impulse, we found ourselves on our feet, mumbling together into the smooth lifting unison of the Internationale. A grizzled old soldier was sobbing like a child. Alexandra Kollontai rapidly winked the tears back. The immense sound rolled through the hall, burst windows and doors, and soared into the quiet sky. "The war is ended! The war is ended!" said a young workman near me, his face shining.'⁸⁴

But of course the war had not ended at all. The Decree on Peace was an expression of hope, not a statement of fact. It was one thing to call for peace, another to bring it about. The other belligerent powers had no intention of signing a general peace: both sides were more intent than ever on slogging it out to the bloody end. The Allies had been spurred on by the intervention of the United States, and the Central Powers by the prospect of transferring troops to the west as the Eastern Front was run down. There was no real reason why either should listen to Russia's appeals for peace, especially not now that her military position had been so weakened. She had lost her status among the Great Powers; and her calls for a general peace without annexations or indemnities sounded like the arguments of a loser.

As the Bolsheviks saw it, the peace campaign was inextricably linked with the spread of the revolution to the West. It was this that, in their view, would bring the war to an end — or rather transform it, as Lenin had predicted, into a series of civil wars in which the workers of the world would unite to overthrow their imperialist rulers. The belief in the imminence of a world revolution was central to Bolshevik thinking in the autumn of 1917. As Marxists, it was inconceivable to them that the socialist revolution could survive for long in a backward peasant country like Russia without the support of the proletariat in the advanced industrial countries of the West. Left to themselves, without an industrial base to defend their revolution, and surrounded by a hostile peasantry, the Bolsheviks believed that they were doomed to fail. The October seizure of power had been carried out on the premise, naive though it may sound today, that a worldwide socialist revolution was just around the corner. Every report of a strike or a mutiny in the West was hailed by the Bolsheviks as a certain sign that 'it was starting'.

As long as this expectation remained alive, the Bolsheviks did not need a foreign policy in the conventional sense. All they needed to do was to fan the flames of the world revolution. 'What sort of diplomatic work will we be doing anyway?' Trotsky had said to a friend on hearing of his appointment as Commissar for Foreign Affairs. 'I shall issue a few revolutionary proclamations to the peoples and then shut up shop.' The basic aim of the Soviet peace campaign

was to serve as a means of revolutionary propaganda; and in this sense it was not a peace campaign at all. The Decree on Peace was a popular summons to revolution. It called on the peoples of the belligerent countries to revolt against the war and to force their rulers into peace talks. 'This proposal of peace will meet with resistance on the part of the imperialist governments — we don't fool ourselves on that score,' Lenin had warned the Soviet Congress. 'But we hope that revolution will soon break out in all the belligerent countries; and that is why we address ourselves to the workers of France, England and Germany.' As George Kennan once observed, this was the first example of what was later to become known in Soviet foreign policy as 'demonstrative diplomacy' — diplomacy designed not to promote agreements between mutually recognized national governments within the framework of international law, but 'rather to embarrass other governments and stir up opposition among their own people'.^{**5}

But what if the world revolution failed to come about? The Bolsheviks would then find themselves without an army, having encouraged its revolutionary destruction, and would be defenceless against the threat of German invasion. The revolution would be defeated and Russia subjected to the Kaiser's imperial rule. As time passed and this scenario became more likely, the Bolsheviks found themselves split down the middle. To those on the left of the party, such as Bukharin, a separate peace with imperialist Germany would represent a betrayal of the international cause, killing off all hopes of a revolution in the West. They favoured the idea of fighting a revolutionary war against the German invaders: this, it was argued, would galvanize the Russian workers and peasants into the defence of the revolution, thereby creating a Red Army in the very process of fighting, and their example would in turn inspire the revolutionary masses abroad.

Lenin, by contrast, was increasingly doubtful both of the chances of fighting such a war and of the likelihood that it might spark a revolution in the West. Though he himself had put forward the idea of a revolutionary war in his April Theses, he now began to doubt that the workers and peasants, who had so far been reluctant to defend Russia, would prove any more willing to defend the Socialist Fatherland. Without an army, the Bolsheviks had no choice but to conclude a separate peace, for if they tried to fight on, the remnants of 'the peasant army, unbearably exhausted by the war, will overthrow the socialist workers' government'. A separate peace with Germany would give the Bolsheviks the 'breathing spell' they needed to consolidate their power base, restore the economy and build up their own revolutionary army. This of course meant giving priority to the policy of strengthening the revolution at home over that

* The Soviet anti-nuclear propaganda of the 1970s and 1980s, which was applauded by the anti-nuclear movement in the West, was the last, and in some ways the most successful, example of this 'demonstrative diplomacy'.

of stirring revolution abroad. 'Our tactics', wrote Lenin, 'ought to rest on the principle of how to ensure that the socialist revolution is best able to consolidate itself and survive in one country until such time as other countries join in.' Moreover, in so far as a separate peace in the East would enable the Central Powers to strengthen their campaign in the West and thus prolong the war, such a policy could in itself be seen as a means of *increasing* the chances of a European revolution. For it was surely the continuation of the war, rather than the prospect of a peace, which would intensify the revolutionary crisis, and, although Lenin himself never said so, it was in his party's interests to prolong the slaughter on the battlefields of France and Belgium, even at the risk of helping to bring about a German victory over the Western democracies.

Lenin's view, it must be said, was a much more accurate appraisal of the situation than the naive internationalism of the Bolshevik Left. The Russian army was falling apart, as the peasant soldiers, encouraged by the Bolsheviks, demobilized themselves and went home to their villages to share in the partition of the gentry's land. Even Kerensky's Minister of War, General Verkhovsky, had come to the conclusion that it was impossible to continue the war and Russia had no choice but to sue for peace. There was no reason to suppose that the national consciousness of the peasants had grown any stronger now that Mother Russia had been painted Red. These, after all, were the same people who had failed to see why they should be called up in 1914 because their own particular village had no quarrel with the Germans and, in any case, was not likely to be invaded by them. If anything, such parochial views had been reinforced by the uncertainties of 1917. The peasant and indeed the whole of the social revolution had been largely driven by this petty localism. The Red Guards, who were to become the basis of the new Red Army, were really no more than badly organized partisan units for the defence of the revolution in the separate villages and the separate factories; they were extremely reluctant to leave their own locality and were quite incapable of anything more than petty guerrilla tactics. It was a romantic left-wing fantasy — shared by the Left SRs and Left Communists — to suppose that these guards might sustain, let alone win, a revolutionary war against the German war-machine.

Yet most of the Bolshevik leaders continued to resist Lenin's iron logic. It was hard for them to give up the ideal of a world revolution, especially since so many of them had been drawn to Bolshevism in the first place as a sort of international messianic crusade to liberate the world. For those like Bukharin, and to some extent Trotsky too, who had spent much of their lives in exile in the West, the revolution in Russia was only part — and a minor part at that — of the worldwide struggle between imperialism and socialism. To limit the victory of socialism to one country, let alone a backward one like Russia, seemed to them an admission of defeat. As the prospects of a general peace receded,

the Bolsheviks were increasingly divided between the two opposing policies of a revolutionary war or a separate peace with Germany. It was without doubt one of the most critical moments in the history of the party.

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On 13 November Trotsky applied to the German High Command for an armistice with a view to opening talks for a democratic peace. Three days later a Soviet delegation set off from Petrograd for 'the war-ruined town of Brest-Litovsk, where the German Headquarters were situated, to negotiate the armistice. The purpose of the delegation was propaganda as much as peace: alongside the Bolshevik negotiators, led by Yoffe, Kamenev and Karakhan, it included symbolic representatives from the soldiers, the sailors, the workers, the women and the peasants of Proletarian Russia. The whole preposterous idea was designed to give the impression that the Bolshevik government was filled with elements from the revolutionary democracy.

Actually, the peasant had almost been forgotten, which says a great deal about the peasantry's real place in the Bolshevik schema of the revolution. On their way to the Warsaw Station, Yoffe and Kamenev suddenly realized that their delegation still lacked a peasant representative. As their car sped through the dark and deserted streets of Petrograd, there was consternation at the omission. Suddenly, they turned a corner and spied an old man in a peasant's coat trudging along in the snow with a knapsack on his back. With his long grey beard and his weathered face, he was the archetypal figure of the Russian peasant. Kamenev ordered the car to stop. 'Where are you going, *tovarishch*?' 'To the station, *barin*, I mean *tovarishch*,' the old peasant replied. 'Get in, we'll give you a lift.' The old peasant seemed pleased with this unexpected favour, but as they neared the Warsaw Station, he realized that something was wrong. He had wanted to go to the Nikolaevsky Station, where trains left for Moscow and central Russia. This would not do, thought Kamenev and Yoffe, who began to question the peasant about his politics. 'What party do you belong to?' they asked. 'I'm a Social Revolutionary, comrades. We're all Social Revolutionaries in our village.' 'Left or Right?' they queried further. 'Left, of course, comrades, the leftest you can get.' This was enough to satisfy the Russian peace delegation of the diplomatic credentials of their latest recruit. 'There's no need for you to go to your village,' they told him. 'Come with us to Brest-Litovsk and make peace with the Germans.' The peasant was at first still reluctant, but once he was promised some remuneration quickly changed his mind. Roman Stashkov, a simple villager, was duly recorded in the annals of diplomatic history as the 'plenipotentiary representative of the Russian peasantry'. With his primitive peasant table manners, not unlike Rasputin's, he was to be the centre of attention at the lavish banquets that were laid on for the diplomats. He soon got over the initial embarrassment of not knowing what to do with his fork and began thoroughly to enjoy himself.

What a story he would have to tell when he got back to his village! He particularly enjoyed the fine wines and, on the first night, even drew a smile from the frozen-faced German waiter, when, in response to his question about whether he preferred claret or white wine with his main course, he turned to his neighbour, Prince Ernst von Hohenlohe, and asked: 'Which one is the stronger?'⁸⁶

The first task of the negotiations — the conclusion of a separate armistice — was simple enough. The three main warring parties each had reason to want one: the Germans to release troops to the west, where Ludendorff was pressing for a final 'gambler's throw'; the Austrians to relieve their tired army and civilian population, which were showing signs of growing discontent under the burdens of the war; and the Russians, likewise, to gain a respite as well as time for their peace campaign to spark a revolution in the West. To begin with, the Russian delegation stood firm on the principle of a general armistice: Lenin was hopeful that such a stand might bring the Entente Powers, dragged by their people, to the negotiating table. The Bolshevik policy of encouraging their own soldiers to fraternize and negotiate local armistices at the Front had a similar propagandistic purpose. It was both a means of undercutting the authority of the old (and potentially counter-revolutionary) Russian commanders and of spreading pacifist sentiments among the enemy troops. The Bolsheviks published an enormous quantity of anti-war propaganda in German, Hungarian, Czech and Romanian which they distributed behind enemy lines. General Dukhonin, the acting Commander-in-Chief and a sympathizer with Kornilov, did what he could to oppose these peace initiatives. He even refused to carry out the orders of N. V. Krylenko, the Bolshevik Commissar for War, to open negotiations for a general armistice along the whole of the Front. But Dukhonin, like the old command structure in general, was effectively without power. Krylenko dismissed him and went out to Stavka to replace him. But before he arrived at Mogilev the troops had arrested Dukhonin and savagely beat him to death. It was their revenge for the release of Kornilov from the Bykhov Monastery, and his subsequent flight to the Don, which they believed Dukhonin had ordered. Once Krylenko had gained control of the General Staff, the soldiers continued to negotiate their own local armistices at the Front; but their example failed to spread to the troops in Europe, and on 2 December, with the Entente Powers as determined as ever to continue the war, the Russian delegation was finally forced to accept a one-month separate armistice on the Eastern Front.

The Russians would have much preferred a six-month armistice, as they had suggested. Their strategy was based on playing for time in the hope that the peace campaign might spark a revolution in the West. This was the reason why they had insisted on negotiations for a general peace — not so much because they thought that the Allies might be persuaded to join the talks on these terms (which was extremely doubtful), but because they knew that the effort to

persuade them to do so would spin out the talks for a much longer time, giving them the pretext they required to pursue their revolutionary propaganda in the international arena. In replacing Yoffe with Trotsky at the head of the delegation in mid-December, Lenin acknowledged that, without the immediate prospect of a revolution in the West, it was essential to drag out the peace talks for as long as possible. 'To delay the negotiations,' he had told Trotsky on his appointment, 'there must be someone to do the delaying.' And Trotsky, of course, was the obvious choice. With his brilliant rhetorical powers, both in Russian and German, he kept the foreign diplomats and generals spellbound as he subtly switched the focus of the talks from the detailed points of territorial boundaries, where the Russian position was weak, to the general points of principle, where he could run rings around the Germans. Baron Kühlmann, the head of the Kaiser's delegation, who had a typically German weakness for Hegelian philosophizing, was easily drawn into Trotsky's trap. Several days were wasted while the two men crossed swords on the abstract principles of diplomacy. At one point Trotsky halted the talks to give the Baron what he called 'a class in Marxist instruction for beginners'. As they went through the draft treaty's preamble, he even held things up by objecting to the standard phrase that the contracting parties desired to live in peace and friendship. 'I would take the liberty', he said tongue in cheek, 'to propose that the second phrase [about friendship] be deleted... Such declarations have never yet characterized the real relations between states.'⁸⁷

By the end of December, the German High Command, which had never been keen on Kühlmann's policy of negotiating a general peace, was finally losing patience with the diplomats. The peace talks had broken down in stalemate over Christmas when the Germans had refused to return to Russia the disputed territories of Courland, Lithuania and Poland, where they had important military bases. There was still no sign, moreover, of the Entente Powers coming round to the idea of a general peace. Ludendorff and Hindenburg were both convinced that the Bolsheviks were trying to spin out the negotiations for as long as possible in the hope of stirring a German revolution (there were signs that the loss of spirit which would cripple Germany in 1918 was already beginning to take root). They persuaded the Kaiser, who was also losing patience with Kühlmann, of the need to get tough with the Russians and enforce a separate peace in the east. The prize of this, they stressed, was the chance to transfer troops to the west, where Ludendorff was convinced the war could be won in the spring with enough reinforcements, while opening up the prospect of turning Russia into a German colony.

Eastward expansion, *Der Drang nach Osten*, had long been a central aim of German *Weltpolitik*. Without a colonial empire to challenge Britain or France, Germany looked towards Russia for the resources it needed to become a major imperial power. To Germany's bankers and industrialists, the vast Eurasian

landmass was a surrogate Africa in their own backyard. The achievement of Germany's eastern ambitions depended on keeping Russia weak, and on breaking up the Russian Empire. Most of the German leaders had welcomed the Bolshevik seizure of power, despite the Kaiser's dynastic links with the Romanovs. They believed that the Bolsheviks would lead Russia to ruin, that they would allow the break-up of the Empire, and that they would sign a separate peace with Germany. But the German policy of carving up Russia relied even more on the Ukrainian nationalists. The Ukrainian independence movement opened up the prospects of a separate peace with Kiev and the redirection of the Ukraine's rich resources (foodstuffs, iron and coal above all) to the armies of the Central Powers. The Germans had been talking with the would-be leaders of the Ukraine since 1915. During the Christmas recess in the peace negotiations a delegation from the Rada arrived at Brest-Litovsk. Ukrainian nationalists saw the economic subjugation of their country to Berlin as a lesser evil to its political subjugation to Petrograd. Since the end of November, when the Rada had declared the Ukraine independent, the Bolshevik forces had rallied in Kharkov, an industrial city in the eastern Ukraine where the ethnic Russians were in the majority, in preparation (or so, at least it seemed, to the Ukrainian nationalists) for the invasion of Kiev. The Central Powers were the only real force willing to stand by the Rada. They recognized it as the Ukraine's legitimate government, and on 9 February, when the Bolshevik forces — partly in reaction to this — seized Kiev, they signed a separate treaty with the Rada leaders. This treaty effectively turned the Ukraine into a German protectorate, opening the way for its occupation by the Germans and the Austrians, and forcing the Bolsheviks to abandon Kiev after only three weeks and flee eastwards back to Kharkov.

With the Ukrainians detached from the Russians, the Germans greatly strengthened their position at the Brest-Litovsk talks. The prospect of the Ukraine's occupation gave them a powerful military threat that could be used to impose a dictated peace on the Russians; and when peace talks with Russia recommenced at the end of December, they advanced a number of new territorial demands, including the separation of Poland from Russia and the German annexation of Lithuania and most of Latvia. Trotsky called for an adjournment and returned to the Russian capital to confer with the rest of the Bolshevik leaders.

Three clear factions emerged at the decisive meeting of the Central Committee on 11 January. The Bukharin faction, which was the biggest, with 32 votes out of 63 at a special meeting of the party leaders on 8 January, and the support of both the Petrograd and the Moscow Party Committees, favoured fighting a revolutionary war against Germany. This, it was said, was the most likely way to spark an uprising in the West, which was what really mattered. 'We have to look at the socialist republic from the international point of view,' Bukharin argued in the Central Committee. 'Let the Germans strike, let them

advance another hundred miles, what interests us is how this affects the international movement.' The Trotsky faction, which was the second biggest, with 16 votes at the meeting on 8 January, was equally concerned not to give up hope of a revolution in the West (there were already signs of a sharp upturn in strikes in Germany and Vienna) but doubted that the peasant guerrilla bands, upon which Bukharin was calling, could seriously withstand a German invasion. Trotsky thus put forward the unusual slogan of 'Neither war nor peace', which was basically designed to play for time. The Soviet delegation would declare the war at an end and walk out of the talks at Brest-Litovsk, but refuse to sign an annexationist peace. If the Germans invaded, which the Bolsheviks could not prevent in any case, then at least it would appear to the rest of the world as a clear act of aggression against a peaceable country.

From Lenin's point of view, at the head of the third and smallest faction, Trotsky's slogan was 'a piece of international political showmanship' which would not stop the Germans advancing. Without an army willing to fight, Russia was in no position to play for time. She had no choice but to sign a separate peace, in which case it was better done sooner than later. 'It is now only a question of how to defend the Fatherland,' Lenin argued with what was for him a rather new tone of patriotic pathos. 'There is no doubt that it will be a shameful peace, but if we embark on a war, our government will be swept away.' There was no point putting the whole of the revolution at risk on the chance (which he himself was now beginning to doubt) that a German revolution might break out. 'Germany is only just pregnant with revolution, but we have already given birth to a completely healthy child.' The reconstruction of Russia and the demands of the civil war both demanded an immediate peace, or as Lenin put it with his usual bluntness: 'The bourgeoisie has to be throttled and for that we need both hands free.'⁸⁸

With only Stalin, Zinoviev and three others behind him in the Central Committee, and a mere fifteen votes at the broader party meeting on 8 January, Lenin was forced to ally with Trotsky against the Bukharin faction. The risk of losing socialist Estonia to the Germans, or of being forced to give in to their demands at the point of a gun, which he saw as the likely outcome of Trotsky's international showmanship, still seemed a price worth paying to prevent what he saw as the suicidal policy of a revolutionary war. Trotsky's mischievous slogan of 'Neither war nor peace' was endorsed by the Central Committee, and Trotsky himself sent back to Brest-Litovsk with orders to spin out the talks.

For three more weeks Trotsky played for time, while the German High Command became more impatient. Then events finally came to a head on 9 February, when a telegram arrived from the Kaiser in Berlin ordering Kühlmann to present the German demands as an ultimatum. If it was not signed by the next day, the German and Austrian armies would be ordered to advance. The

Kaiser had finally been convinced by the German High Command that the peace talks were a waste of time, that the Russians were merely using them to stir up revolt among his troops, and that the treaty with the Rada, signed on the same day as the Kaiser's telegram, opened the door to a military imposition of a separate peace on the Russians through the occupation of the Ukraine. There was clearly no more room for procrastination — and Trotsky was forced to lay down his hand. The next day he told the astounded conference that Russia was 'leaving the war' but refused to sign the German peace treaty. Nothing quite like it had ever been heard before in diplomatic history — a country that acknowledged defeat and declared its intention not to go on fighting but at the same time refused to accept the victor's terms for an end to the war. When Trotsky finished speaking the diplomats sat in silence, dumbfounded by this *coup de théâtre*. Then the silence was at last broken by the scandalized cry of General Max von Hoffman: 'Unerhört!'⁸⁹

Once the initial shock passed, it was clear to the German High Command that Trotsky's bluff had to be called. Since no peace treaty had been signed, Germany was still at war with Russia, the armistice had come to an end and the way was now open for the German invasion of Russia. Despite his own growing fears of a revolution in Berlin, Kühlmann was forced by pressure from Ludendorff to announce on 16 February that Germany would resume hostilities against Russia on 18 February. Back in the Smolny, on the 17th, the Central Committee met in panic. Lenin's demand that the German treaty should be accepted at once was defeated by six votes to five. Trotsky's policy of waiting for the Germans to launch their attack before signing the peace was adopted instead in the desperate hope that the sight of their troops attacking the defenceless people of Russia might at last inspire the German working classes to rebel.⁹⁰

Sure enough, on the 18th the German troops advanced. Dvinsk and Lutsk were immediately captured without resistance. The last remaining Russian troops fell apart altogether — they were quite indifferent to the call of a revolutionary war — and by the end of the fifth day Hoffman's men had advanced 150 miles. It was as much as the whole German army had advanced in the three previous years of fighting. 'It is the most comical war I have ever known,' Hoffman wrote in his diary. 'It is waged almost exclusively in trains and automobiles. We put a handful of infantry men with machine-guns and one gun on to a train and push them off to the next station; they take it, make prisoners of the Bolsheviks, pick up a few more troops, and go on. This proceeding has, at any rate, the charm of novelty.'⁹¹

As news came in of the German advance, the Central Committee convened in two emergency sessions on 18 February. Lenin was furious. By refusing to sign the German treaty, his opponents in the Central Committee had merely enabled the enemy to advance. Lenin clearly feared that the Germans

were about to capture Petrograd and oust the Bolsheviks from power — and this necessitated sending a telegram accepting the peace at once. When Trotsky and Bukharin proposed to delay this, Lenin was beside himself with rage. But he still lacked enough votes to enforce his policy, which was defeated by seven votes to six at the morning session of the Central Committee. The Bolshevik leadership seemed on the brink of a fatal division as it stared defeat in the face. But during the afternoon, as rumours came in of a German advance into the Ukraine, Trotsky moved round towards Lenin's view. At the evening session of the Central Committee he proposed to ask the Germans to restate their terms. As Lenin rightly saw it, this was a foolish game to play. It was too late now for diplomatic notes, which the Germans would in any case soon dismiss as a ploy for time; only the firm acceptance of their terms for peace would be enough to halt their advance. After three further hours of heated debate the crucial vote was taken on Lenin's proposal to send the Germans an immediate offer of peace. It was passed by the slenderest of margins, by seven votes to five, with Trotsky switching to Lenin's side at the final moment.⁹² Though we will probably never find out what went on behind the scenes, it seems that Trotsky's crucial change of mind was largely influenced by the need to avert what could otherwise have turned out to be a fatal division within the party. If Trotsky had joined Bukharin in opposing the peace, Lenin would probably have resigned from the Central Committee, as he had threatened to do, and rallied support from the Bolshevik rank and file. The party would thus have been split and Trotsky, as the leader of its faction against peace, much the weaker for it. Without Lenin, Trotsky's place at the top of the party was extremely vulnerable — as events would later prove.

At midnight, after the crucial vote in the Central Committee, Lenin personally sent a cable to Berlin accepting the German terms for peace proposed at Brest-Litovsk. For several days, however, the enemy's troops continued to advance deep into Russia and the Ukraine without an acknowledgement of Lenin's telegram being made. It seemed quite clear that the Germans had decided to capture Petrograd and overthrow the Bolshevik regime. Lenin now decided to fight — completely reversing his earlier position — and called for volunteers. Military help was sought from the Allies, who were much more concerned to keep Russia in the war than they were with the nature of its government and readily came up with an offer of military aid.* On Lenin's orders, the Bolsheviks

* The refusal of the Allies to regard the situation in Russia from anything but the perspective of the war no doubt helped to keep the Bolsheviks in power at this critical moment. The decision of the French government to give the Bolsheviks military aid coincided with its cancellation of support for the Volunteer Army, which was formed to overthrow the Bolshevik regime. The Allied governments were all badly informed of the true situation in Russia, and placed too much faith for far too long in the hope of getting revolutionary Russia to rejoin the war.

prepared for the evacuation of the capital to Moscow, which threw Petrograd into panic. The railway stations were jammed with people trying to escape, while thousands left every day on foot. Law and order broke down altogether, as armed gangs looted abandoned shops and houses and angry workers, faced with the evacuation of their factories, tried to recoup weeks of unpaid wages by pilfering from the factory stores. It was at this point, with the capital sliding into anarchy, that Lenin issued his Decree on 'The Socialist Fatherland in Danger!' which did so much to fuel the Red Terror.

On 22 February the Central Committee reconvened to discuss the question of accepting military aid from the Allies. With the support of Trotsky and Lenin (*in absentia*), the motion in favour of doing so was passed — though only just, for Bukharin and the other advocates of a revolutionary war were violently opposed to taking aid from the imperial powers. When the vote was taken, Bukharin threatened to resign from the Central Committee in protest. 'We are turning the party into a dung-heap,' he complained to Trotsky and then burst into tears.⁹³

As it turned out, the question of Allied aid was irrelevant. On 23 February the Germans at last delivered their final terms for peace. Berlin now demanded all the territory which its troops had seized in the course of the war, including those they had occupied in the last five days. This meant, in effect, the German annexation of the Ukraine and most of the Baltic. The Central Committee reconvened at once. Lenin threatened to resign if the peace terms were not accepted. Draconian though the new terms were, they at least left the Bolsheviks in power. 'It is a question', Lenin warned, 'of signing the peace terms now or signing the death sentence of the Soviet Government three weeks later.' Trotsky was not convinced of this, but knew that a divided party, which would result from Lenin's resignation, could not fight a revolutionary war, and on this basis he abstained from the crucial vote on Lenin's proposal, which thus passed by seven votes to four with four members abstaining. Only the Bukharin faction, which was prepared, in the words of Lomov, to 'take power without Ilich [Lenin] and go to the Front to fight', remained in opposition right to the end and resigned from the Central Committee in order to free themselves for a campaign against the peace both among the party rank and file and in the country at large. Later that night Lenin presented the peace proposals to the Soviet Executive, where they were duly passed by 116 votes to 85. Throughout his speech Lenin was heckled with cries of 'Traitor!' and 'Judas!' from the Left SRs and many on the left wing of his own party. In the early hours of the following morning he sent to Berlin an unconditional acceptance of the German terms.⁹⁴

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The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was finally signed on 3 March. None of the Bolshevik leaders wanted to go to Brest-Litovsk and put their name to a treaty

which was seen throughout Russia as a 'shameful peace'. Yoffe flatly refused; Trotsky put himself out of contention by resigning as Commissar for Foreign Affairs; Sokolnikov nominated Zinoviev, whereupon Zinoviev nominated Sokolnikov. In the end, the delegation had to be made up of secondary party leaders, including G. V. Chicherin, the grandson of a nobleman and prominent tsarist diplomat who succeeded Trotsky as Commissar for Foreign Affairs.

By the terms of the treaty, Russia was forced to give up most of its territories on the continent of Europe. Poland, Courland, Finland, Estonia and Lithuania were all given nominal independence under German protection. Soviet troops were to be evacuated from the Ukraine. All in all, it has been calculated that the Soviet Republic lost 34 per cent of her population (fifty-five million people in all), 32 per cent of her agricultural land, 54 per cent of her industrial enterprises and 89 per cent of her coalmines.⁹⁵ As a European power, Russia, in economic and territorial terms, had been reduced to a status on a par with seventeenth-century Muscovy.

As a direct consequence of the treaty, Germany was able to push on unopposed towards the fulfilment of her imperial ambitions in the east. The Ukraine was immediately occupied by half a million German and Austrian troops. On the whole, they were welcomed by the urban propertied classes; most of whom were Russians and fed up with the nationalist and socialist policies of the Rada government. They looked forward to the cities being run by the 'orderly Germans'. But in the countryside, where the troops were engaged in ruthless requisitioning of foodstuffs for the hungry citizens of Austria, the Ukrainian peasants were bitterly opposed to the German presence. To begin with, the responsibility for collecting the grain had been left to the Rada. It was to despatch 300 truckloads of grain per day — a sort of tribute to Berlin, agreed under the Peace Treaty of 9 February, in exchange for the German troops' protection of the Ukraine's independence against Russia. The Ukrainian peasants had been generally supportive of the Rada parties during 1917; but their nationalism did not include the export of Ukrainian grain to a foreign country. They gradually reduced their sowings and concealed their grain from the Rada agents. As the Rada fell behind with its payment of this tribute, the German troops took it upon themselves to go into the villages and collect the grain. They did so indiscriminately, taking vital stocks of food and seed from many peasant farms and, without the approval of the Rada, punishing the peasants who refused to pay the levy in their military courts. Millions of acres of unsown peasant land were turned over to the former landowners with the aim of punishing the peasant saboteurs. The result was a wave of peasant revolts and guerrilla wars designed to disrupt the German requisitions: bridges and railway lines were destroyed and German units were attacked from the woods. The Ukrainian countryside was thrown into chaos. Most of these peasant activities

were organized by the Left SRs — both the Russians and the Ukrainians (who were soon to break away from the Ukrainian SRs and form the Borotbist or SR Fighters' Party). But the Germans blamed the Rada for failing to control the situation. At the end of April, in a coup supported by the Russified landowners, who were equally opposed to these peasant wars, they arrested the Rada government and replaced it with their own puppet regime under Hetman Skoropadsky, a general in one of the first Ukrainianized army corps and one of the Ukraine's richest landowners who had been an aide-de-camp of Nicholas II. He was now to perform an equally servile role for the Ukraine's new masters in Berlin.

Within Russia the treaty guaranteed a privileged status for German economic interests. German property was exempt from nationalization — even land and enterprises confiscated after 1914 could be reclaimed by their German owners. It was also possible under the treaty for Germans to buy up Russian assets and thus exclude them from the Bolshevik decrees of nationalization. Hundreds of Russian enterprises were sold to German nationals in this way, thereby giving them a dominant hold over the private sector. The words *nemets* (German) and 'trader', which had always been linked (and confused with 'traitor') in the minds of the ordinary Russians, were now virtually the same in reality.

For Russian patriots, who had long been obsessed by the thought of the Slavs being subjected to the economic domination of the Teutons, the Brest-Litovsk Treaty was a national catastrophe. Prince Lvov, who was living in Tiumen' at the time, became almost suicidal and, according to his aunt, would not get out of bed for several days. General Brusilov, a stalwart of the pan-Slav cause, was thrown into deep depression by the news. It was uncharacteristic of this great optimist, who had always managed to keep his spirits up, even at the darkest moments of the war. With his leg in plaster, still recovering from the wound inflicted on it during the fighting in Moscow, he lay in bed for days bemoaning Russia's ruin. His wife later claimed that he found solace in religion: God took up the space vacated by the Fatherland in his mental world. It also made him more accepting of what he now saw as 'Russia's tragic destiny'. He was certainly not inclined to join the civil war against the treaty, although the Cheka, which could not understand why such an aristocrat would not join the Whites, later imprisoned him on the assumption that he had done just that. Brusilov's refusal to take up arms against the Soviet regime was based on the conviction, as he put it in a letter to his brother, that 'the people have decided Russia's fate'. Although Brusilov's heart was no doubt with the Whites, he knew only too well that their cause was doomed because they supported the resumption of the war. If there was one thing that Brusilov had learned from the experience of 1917, it was that the Russian people wanted peace at any cost, and that

all the talk of the patriotic parties about defending Mother Russia and its borders was entirely alien to them.⁹⁶

Opposition to the treaty was not limited to anti-Soviet circles. The Bukharin faction and the Left SRs were thrown together by their rejection of the 'shameful peace' and combined to form a powerful opposition in the Soviet Executive. The Left SRs resigned from Sovnarkom in protest at the treaty, and later took up terrorist measures, including the assassination of the German Ambassador, in the futile hope of wrecking it and reviving the revolutionary war. The emergence of the Bukharin faction, the Left Communists, grouped around the journal *Kommunist*, split the Bolshevik Party down the middle. Many of these young idealists, if not so much Bukharin himself, linked their support for a revolutionary war with their opposition to the *rapprochement* with the bourgeoisie which Lenin called for in the spring under the programme of 'state capitalism'. They were opposed to the idea of any let-up in the war against the bourgeoisie — either in the form of peace with the imperialists abroad, or of a compromise with the capitalists at home. They saw the revolution as an international crusade against capitalism and, unlike Lenin, believed that this could be sustained through the revolutionary energies of the peasants and the workers within a genuinely democratic and decentralized system of Soviet power.

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The peace of Brest-Litovsk marked the completion of Lenin's revolution: it was the culmination of October. In his struggle over the treaty, as in his struggle for power itself, Lenin had always been uncompromising. There was no sacrifice he was not prepared to make for the consolidation of the revolution on his own terms. As a result of his intransigence, the Bolsheviks had been isolated from the rest of the revolutionary parties and split down the middle on several major issues. The seizure of power, the closure of the Constituent Assembly and the signing of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, all of which had been carried out on Lenin's instigation, had plunged the country deeper and deeper into civil war. Russia itself had ceased to be a major power in the world. It was forced to retreat from the continent of Europe, to turn in on itself, and to look towards the east. After the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk there was no real prospect of the revolution spreading to the West. Lenin was quite adamant about this, and all his talk of the 'inevitable revolution in Germany' cancelling out the losses of the treaty was no more than bluff for the sake of party morale and propaganda.⁹⁷ True, during 1919 and 1920, Lenin would flirt with the idea of exporting Communism through the Comintern; but this did not amount to much. To all intents and purposes, the 'permanent revolution' had come to an end, and from this point on, in Lenin's famous phrase, the aim of the regime would be limited to the consolidation of Socialism in One Country.

The removal of the capital to Moscow symbolized this growing separ-

ation from the West. Petersburg had always been a European city, 'Russia's window on the West'; Moscow, by contrast, was a physical reminder of its Asiatic traditions. The imprisoned Tsar no doubt would have found the move somewhat ironic, for he had always preferred the old capital to Petersburg. The retreat of the Bolsheviks eastwards, into the heartland of Muscovite Russia, had been largely forced on them by the continuation of the German advance after the ratification of the treaty. On 2 March German planes dropped bombs on Petrograd. Lenin was convinced the Germans were planning to occupy the city and remove the Bolsheviks. Allied aid was once again called for — Kamenev was sent to London and British troops landed at Murmansk — whilst the Bolsheviks fled to Moscow.

Lenin and Trotsky soon moved into the Tsar's former quarters in the Kremlin. The musical clock on the Spassky Tower, through which their motor-cars entered the Kremlin, was rebuilt so that its bells rang out the tune of the Internationale instead of 'God Save the Tsar'. Most of the Tsar's former servants were kept on at first. One of them, the aged Stupishin, had served several emperors in his time, and he soon became firmly attached to both Lenin and Trotsky in turn, no doubt having observed, as Trotsky later wrote, 'that we appreciated order and valued his care'. During meals, the neat little manciple would move 'like a shadow behind the chairs' and silently turn the plates this way or that so that the double-headed eagle on the rim was the right side up. Trotsky thought the Kremlin, 'with its medieval wall and its countless gilded cupolas, was an utter paradox as a fortress for the revolutionary dictatorship'.⁹⁸ But in fact it was a highly fitting building, even a symbolic one, and not just because the Bolsheviks behaved like the new 'tsars' of Russia. For the civil war regime on which they now embarked was set in many ways to take Russia back to the customs of its Muscovite past.