



Demonstrators against the Kerensky government being shot down in Petrograd, July 1917.

# REVOLUTION 1917-1920

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By 1917, protracted war was producing revolutionary strains in all the belligerent countries. Every war regime faltered in 1917. Some of them, such as Clemenceau's France and the Germany of Hindenburg and Ludendorff, were able to cajole or force their peoples to endure another year of struggle. Others, most conspicuously Austria-Hungary and Russia, could no longer contain the pressures of war weariness, social conflict, and national separatism. The two Russian revolutions of 1917 were merely the most explosive examples of discontents that affected all of Europe. At one time or another between 1917 and 1920, the red flag flew from the Clydeside of western Scotland to Siberia. It remained flying only in Russia. Those nearly universal revolutionary pressures and their relatively localized success are the subject of this chapter.

### THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONS, 1917

Tsarist Russia was particularly vulnerable to worker unrest. As a newcomer to industrialization, its workers were peasant stock undergoing their first generation of factory discipline, the stage of greatest turbu-

lence in every experience of industrialization. That turbulence, moreover, had unusual leverage, for Russian industry, stepping directly into the most advanced technological level, was highly concentrated in a few major cities. And the dark memories of the frustrated Revolution of 1905 poisoned Russian efforts at patriotic union.

Russia, like the other belligerents, might have survived worker discontent if the tsarist regime had enjoyed the support of any other major element of the population. But the middle classes and liberal aristocrats chafed at the revocation of even the minor democratic concessions of 1905; many of them still awaited Russia's 1789, the replacement of divine right autocracy by constitutional monarchy. Even conservative aristocrats were enraged at the bumbling and sycophancy that insulated the tsar and tsarina from efficient war government advisers. Finally, combat opened the eyes of the tsar's last naively faithful supporters, the peasantry. Russia went to war superior to its enemies in only one resource: sheer masses of men. The tsar threw the peasant mass of his people at German steel. Ill-equipped and poorly led, the Russian soldiers underwent the most wasting campaigns of any army in the first years of the war. By the spring of 1917, Russia is estimated to have lost 6 to 8 million dead, wounded, or captured.<sup>1</sup> The tsar mobilized the mass of his subjects into uniform only to see them radicalized. Under such conditions, what needs explaining is how the regime survived as long as it did.

### The "February Revolution"

Some historians have argued that the tsarist system was on the verge of revolution even in 1914, only to be granted two more years' respite by the injection of wartime patriotism. Others, to the contrary, feel that the dislocations and strains of war were fatal to a regime that might have limped along longer without war.<sup>2</sup> No one questions, however, that the first outburst came not from a planned revolution but from a spontaneous eruption of mass anger. Women began it, with demonstrations over the lack of bread and coal in the Russian capital of Petrograd<sup>3</sup> that began on March 8, 1917 (February 23 by the old Julian calendar still in use in Russia). The mass response to these demonstrations that welled up from a hungry and disgusted population took every political leader by surprise, even the socialists.

At first, these demonstrations seemed no more serious to the regime than similar unrest in other belligerent countries. The tsar ordered unquestioning repression. The death of forty demonstrators on March 11, when troops fired into a crowd, simply solidified the people in their

<sup>1</sup>William Henry Chamberlin, *The Russian Revolution*, vol. 1 (New York, 1935), p. 65.

<sup>2</sup>Leopold Haimson has argued the first view most trenchantly; George F. Kennan may serve as an example of the second. See the bibliography at the end of this chapter for these and other perspectives.

<sup>3</sup>The Germanic name of St. Petersburg had been Russified at the beginning of the war.

anger. The regime was fatally stricken when the troops sent to rout the demonstrators fraternized with them instead. Tsarist officials found that their ability to have orders obeyed simply evaporated.

Refusing an imperial order to disband, the Duma stepped into the vacuum and named a provisional government on March 12 from among its party leaders. The dominant group in this legislature, elected by increasingly restricted suffrage since the creation of the Duma had been forced on the tsar in 1905, would have preferred a constitutional monarchy. But even such constitutional monarchists as Professor Pavel Miliukov, the new foreign minister, came to see that only a totally new regime had any chance of restoring public order. They persuaded the tsar to yield to the inevitable. He abdicated on March 12, naming Prince George Lvov, the Duma's choice, to be prime minister.<sup>4</sup> Prince Lvov was an ineffectual but respected constitutional monarchist who had headed the Union of Zemstvos and Towns.

### Provisional Government and the Soviets

It was relatively easy to form a provisional government; to have its authority accepted and its orders obeyed was more difficult. The Provisional Government sprang from a legislature that had become less and less representative since its beginnings in the Revolution of 1905. In a country 80 percent peasant, it was a parliament of gentry, middle-class professional men, businessmen, and intellectuals. In essence, the Provisional Government's challenge was whether Russia's small liberal elite could succeed where the tsarist autocracy had failed: could it gird a backward and weary country to go on with the war effort?

That challenge was vastly complicated by the existence of another power in the land, the soviets. *Soviet* is simply the Russian word for council or committee. In 1917 the memory was still fresh of the St. Petersburg Soviet, the steering committee of militant workers formed to guide the general strike of 1905. A new Petrograd Soviet sprang into being at once in March 1917, led by workers' leaders who had already participated in a joint regulatory agency, the War Industries Committee. The executive committee of the Petrograd Soviet, receiving mass delegations and arguing all night about policy, became a kind of sounding board for mass feelings in the capital. More importantly, it issued its own orders and had some sway over hundreds of similar soviets springing up in army units, other factory towns, and even in the countryside. When an all-Russian congress of soviets met in Petrograd on April 11, it brought together delegates from 138 local soviets and soldiers' delegates from 7 armies, 13 rear units, and 26 front units.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>The tsar and the rest of the imperial family were subsequently put to death by their guards during the night of July 16, 1918, at Ekaterinburg, when it seemed likely that they might be rescued by counterrevolutionary troops.

<sup>5</sup>Chamberlin, vol. 1, p. 112.

Whereas the Provisional Government was dominated by liberals, most soviet members were socialists of one school or another. One important current was composed of Social Democrats, Marxists who believed that a growing proletariat of industrial wage earners would eventually succeed in replacing privately owned factories, farms, and stores with collectivized production and distribution. Most Russian Social Democrats, heavily influenced by Western European parliamentary socialism, believed that backward Russia would not be ripe for socialism until industry had become as predominant in the Russian economy as it was already in Britain and Germany. In the meantime, they urged Russia along the path already taken by the West, convinced that if they helped the middle class achieve industrial growth and constitutional reform in Russia, the eventual socialist stage would be brought that much nearer. These reformist Social Democrats, known as Mensheviks, wanted to form a mass electoral socialist party on the Western model.

A vigorous but small faction of Russian Social Democrats, the Bolsheviks,<sup>6</sup> agreed on orthodox Marxist goals but disagreed vehemently that electoral politics was the proper means to achieve them for Russia. Their exiled leader was Vladimir Ulianov (known by his underground name of V. I. Lenin), a public school official's son who had been radicalized at the age of seventeen when his older brother was implicated in an assassination attempt on Tsar Alexander III and executed in 1887. Lenin dismissed parliamentary tactics as incompatible with revolutionary organization and discipline. He believed that even before the proletariat was ready, its "vanguard" should form a tightly disciplined party of dedicated professional revolutionaries, fit for surviving tsarist police methods and for seizing any revolutionary opportunity that presented itself.

The most numerous socialists in the soviets were not Marxist at all but agrarians who believed that Russian peasants should follow their own non-Western path to socialism by expropriating the great estates and establishing a rural democracy on the basis of traditional village councils. These Socialist Revolutionaries, or SR's, were as impatient as the Bolsheviks for immediate revolutionary social and economic change. Unlike Lenin, however, they placed their hopes in peasants rather than urban workers, they were skeptical of disciplined organizations, and they were attracted to tactics of individual violence.

The nine months between the "February Revolution" and the second revolution in November 1917 (October, by the Russian calendar) are often summarized as a competition between two potential governments—the gentry and professional men of the Provisional Government

<sup>6</sup>The word *Bolshevik* means simply "majority" in Russian. At a time when all Russian Social Democrats were either underground or in exile, the Bolsheviks had won a majority in a 1903 convention of exiles in Brussels and London. Subsequently, although the reformist minority (*Mensheviks*) of 1903 grew larger than the Bolsheviks after a Russian parliament was established in 1905, the two factions kept their original nicknames.

and the radical lawyers and journalists with their working-class following in the soviets. It is well to qualify this neat picture, however, by pointing out that even the soviets fell far behind the spontaneous urges of city crowds and landless peasants. The first land seizures began in March, and army desertions swelled from a trickle to a flood after the Provisional Government attempted one more military offensive, the Brusilov offensive of July 1917. One's sense of the revolution is complete only if one looks beneath the organizations struggling for power at the summit to see millions of Russian farm laborers taking over estates and hundreds of thousands of soldiers walking away from the front.

The Provisional Government was not completely without resources. It was immediately recognized and welcomed by the Western Allies who expected a new democratic regime to fight more effectively than the decrepit tsardom (as in France in 1792). It had the support of the educated and skilled professional and business people. Its leaders were not without talent and idealism. They enacted such sweeping reforms as universal manhood suffrage and the eight-hour day. They established civil equality for all citizens: Jews were no longer required to live in the regions of the Ukraine and Poland called the "Pale of Settlement"; Polish independence was recognized. The Provisional Government promised that royal and monastic lands would be confiscated and redistributed. It summoned a constitutional convention to meet in the fall of 1917. Not least, it initially enjoyed explicit support from the soviets. Even Lenin, whose return from Switzerland in a sealed train was secretly arranged by the Germans in April 1917 in hopes of further impeding the Russian war effort, called Russia "the freest country in the world."<sup>7</sup>

Lenin's arrival at Petrograd's Finland Station, a favorite scene in modern Soviet iconography, opened a genuinely new phase of the revolution. Lenin's "April theses" (April 20, 1917) challenged the orthodox Marxist interpretation of the revolution. He argued that Russia was ripe to move at once beyond a bourgeois revolution toward socialism. Furthermore, Lenin presented a clear alternative program to the Provisional Government's mixture of democracy, eventual land reform, and continued war: immediate peace, land, and bread. He proposed to transfer "all power to the soviets," even though the Bolsheviks were still a minority in the councils.

From July 16 to 18, 1917, the Petrograd crowd, still inadequately fed and opposed to the renewed military offensive, rose against the Provisional Government. The demonstrations were spontaneous, but in order not to let the Bolsheviks be left behind, Lenin had to support them publicly. The Provisional Government still had enough military force to crush the demonstrators, killing 200 people, and Lenin had to flee to Finland disguised as a locomotive fireman. The July Days showed

<sup>7</sup>Quoted in Robert V. Daniels, *Red October: The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917* (New York, 1969), p. 4.

that Lenin's hope of overthrowing the Provisional Government was still premature.

Only four months later, however, in November 1917, the Provisional Government was swept away almost as easily as tsardom had been swept away the previous February, and with fewer casualties than in July. Although its composition had shifted steadily leftward, the Provisional Government never caught up with the leftward course of mass opinion. Those constitutional liberals around Pavel Miliukov who wanted Russia to claim all its territorial war aims, such as the Straits of Constantinople, went out in May. Prince Lvov resigned after the July Days. By the fall of 1917, there were ten socialist ministers and six nonsocialist ones, with Aleksandr Kerensky, the only man of even the moderate left in the first Provisional Government, now as prime minister. The Provisional Government's reforms always fell behind rising expectations. The promise that the constitutional convention would eventually redistribute royal and monastic lands, for example, had little allure when peasants were already seizing land for themselves.

Continuing the war, above all, caught the Provisional Government between two irreconcilable demands. On the one hand, a unilateral peace was unthinkable to most politically sophisticated Russians as long as German and Austrian troops stood ready to overrun Russian soil. Even a Bolshevik could agree that

when an army faces an army, it would be the most insane policy to suggest to one of these armies to lay down its arms and go home. This would not be a policy of peace but a policy of slavery, which would be rejected with disgust by a free people.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, the Provisional Government had neither the skill nor the force to move enough men and matériel to wage war effectively. Lenin realized sooner than anyone else that merely to feed the population would require the Provisional Government to tamper with private property far more extensively than it was prepared to do. Caught in this vise, Kerensky ordered the offensive under General Brusilov in July, only to find it triggered the final dissolution of the Army. The Provisional Government could make neither peace nor war.

If parliamentary government could not solve Russia's problems in 1917, perhaps a military dictatorship could. That solution also was attempted and proven unworkable in 1917. General Lavr Kornilov tried to move troops into Petrograd to crush the rival power of the soviets in September. Kerensky's share in the "Kornilov affair" is probably forever clouded in mystery. The general's supporters asserted that it was Kerensky who asked for help; Kerensky claimed that his intentions had been misunderstood, and that he soon learned that Kornilov planned to sweep away democracy as well as the soviets. In any event, when Kornilov

<sup>8</sup>Lev Kamenev, in *Pravda*, March 17, 1917. See Edward Hallett Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-23*, vol. 1 (London, 1950), p. 75.



Aleksandr Kerensky, last head of the Provisional Government in Russia, studying a map shortly before the Bolshevik Revolution, November 1917.

lov's troops began to move toward the capital, Kerensky turned for support to the left, his enemies of the July Days. He released some Bolsheviks from prison and distributed arms to volunteer units raised by the Petrograd Soviet, the "Red Guards." The refusal of prosoviet railroad workers to transport Kornilov's equipment and the fraternization of his troops with Red Guards prevented Kornilov from even reaching Petrograd.

Kerensky thus thwarted a military takeover, but at the price of making his Provisional Government dependent on the soviets. As the desire for peace at any price spread rapidly within the soviets in the fall of 1917, Kerensky was left carrying on the hated war without any reliable sources of support.

### The "October Revolution"

When Lenin returned secretly from Finland on October 20, he believed that the situation had been transformed in two significant ways since July. Within Russia, his Bolshevik group had become a majority in the Petrograd and Moscow soviets. Outside Russia, reports of unrest in the German High Seas Fleet at Kiel convinced Lenin that a worldwide revolution was at hand. Lenin argued day and night to convince his



Bolsheviks march on the Winter Palace, headquarters of the Provisional Government, Petrograd, November 9, 1917.

fellow Bolshevik leaders that “we are on the threshold of a world proletarian revolution.”<sup>9</sup> To let that moment pass, Lenin maintained, would be the ultimate betrayal of Europe’s war-weary poor.

Lenin’s eloquence met formidable opposition. He expected nothing else from the Mensheviks, who continued to support Kerensky against him. But there was substantial opposition even among Lenin’s “old Bolshevik” colleagues. Lev Kamenev had been convinced by the bloody repression of the July Days that any Bolshevik insurrection would be premature. The Bolsheviks would be decimated and their historic chance lost. Their opportunity, argued Kamenev and other old Bolsheviks like Grigori Zinoviev, lay in awaiting the impending constitutional convention and fulfilling the role of militant opposition within a broader democratic regime. It would be wiser to grow within a democracy until the time was ripe than to attempt a premature coup and provoke counterrevolution. At the rate things were going, Kamenev contended, the time would be ripe soon.

Away with these “constitutional illusions,” Lenin retorted. With passionate conviction, he built up a majority within the Bolshevik Central Committee in favor of immediate insurrection against the Provisional

<sup>9</sup>Quoted in Daniels, p. 60. Lenin does not seem to have known about the French Army mutinies of May and June 1917, which might have strengthened his case.

Government, without waiting for the constitutional convention. He drew to his side Leon Trotsky, a brilliant young former Menshevik who had once opposed the "barracks regime" of the Bolshevik party organization, but who had been radicalized by opposition to the war. Other Bolsheviks acquiesced because they feared that Kerensky was about to make a preemptive move against the soviets. A number of younger, more militant agrarian revolutionaries (SR's), less committed to awaiting the historically ripe moment than many proper Marxists, also sided with Lenin.

This group turned the Petrograd Soviet into a base for Lenin's attempt to seize the central power. This was to be no spontaneous street demonstration by the hungry, as in March and in July. "Insurrection is an art,"<sup>10</sup> although it must have broad popular support to succeed. Lenin and Trotsky formed a Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet on October 22 and 23 to plan the seizure of the principal government and communications centers of Petrograd.

The Bolshevik forces acted in the night of November 9 (October 25, old style, hence "October Revolution"). They had the support of most soldiers of the Petrograd garrison, who had been angered at Kerensky's attempts to send them to the front. The garrison's support meant easy Bolshevik access to weapons. The sailors of the naval base at Kronstadt, who had always been radical, moved the cruiser *Aurora* up the Neva River to command the Winter Palace, seat of the Provisional Government. Unable to raise military support from outside the city, the Provisional Government began to defend the Winter Palace with military school cadets and a unit of 140 young middle-class women that Kerensky had formed earlier in an effort to shame Russian men into military service. Late in the night, when the *Aurora* had fired a few rounds (mostly blanks), these forces melted away, and the Provisional Government collapsed almost without bloodshed. Kerensky escaped from the city, and when he was unable to muster enough troops to retake Petrograd, he went into hiding. Kerensky fled overseas in the summer of 1918.

## THE BOLSHEVIK REGIME

It still remained for Lenin and his supporters to extend their control over Petrograd to the rest of Russia. It was a formidable task, which was not complete until after three more years and a bloody civil war, exacerbated by foreign intervention. That was a much greater achievement than overthrowing the moribund Provisional Government. In a sense, power in Russia had been up for grabs for nearly a year. It had eluded the tsar, constitutional monarchists, democrats, and moderate socialists. Lenin deserves to be known as a consummate revolutionary tactician,

<sup>10</sup>Lenin, quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 53.

but even more as a regime builder. He was the first Russian who managed to ride and govern the whirlwind unleashed in March 1917.

He accomplished this, to be sure, at enormous cost not only to his original program but to his people. He promised Russians peace, land, and bread. Under him, they had civil war, famine, and authoritarian rule by a single party. But almost alone among historical revolutionary leaders he succeeded in keeping permanently in power those whom the crest of revolution had carried to the top.

### Lenin's "Peace, Land, and Bread"

Land redistribution was Lenin's major trump card. By any normal head count, the SR's, or agrarian revolutionaries, stood closest to the mass aspirations of the land-hungry Russian rural population. Lenin's first step was to appropriate the SR program, while avoiding their inner divisions over how to apply it. In principle, as a good Marxist, he declared the land nationalized and turned its further distribution over to local rural soviets, which were supposed to keep the large estates unified as "model farms." In practice, he simply gave free rein to the peasants who were already seizing the land. Thenceforth, Lenin's regime was invulnerable to any force that seemed likely to try to restore the old landlords.

The promise of peace was more difficult to realize than that of land, for a separate peace with Germany meant accepting such humiliating terms that even leading Bolsheviks like Trotsky and Nicolai Bukharin wanted to pursue a "revolutionary war." It also meant acquiescing to the secession from the former Russian Empire of many non-Russian peoples, for whom revolution implied national independence.

In order to obtain peace, the Bolshevik leaders accepted harsh German terms on March 15, 1918. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk recognized German conquests and detached eastern Poland, the Ukraine, Finland, and the Baltic provinces from Russia. Not until 1940 was Stalin, with Hitler's help, able to recover most of the 1914 frontier. For the moment, Lenin silenced his opposition by promising that the spreading world revolution would soon make this treaty obsolete.<sup>11</sup> But even this "revolutionary defeatism" did not bring peace to Russia, for anti-Bolshevik Russians, aided by Allied troops, began to attack the Soviet regime in the summer of 1918.

The promise of bread proved the most difficult of all. Giving free rein to peasant land hunger meant, as Lenin's less pragmatic Marxist critics like Rosa Luxemburg perceived, creation of a mass of small landholders jealously guarding their crops from the city. Peasant hoarding, com-

<sup>11</sup>Lenin did unilaterally denounce the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk when revolution broke out in Germany in November 1918, but it was the successor states (the states that succeeded Austria-Hungary) and not Russia that gained the disputed ground at the Peace Conference. See Chapter 6, pp. 185–93.

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Lenin addresses a crowd in  
Moscow's Red Square on  
May Day, 1918.

bined with the civil war that broke out in the summer of 1918, followed by poor harvests, led to years of food shortages and some periods of mass starvation, as in 1921.

### **The Establishment of a New Autocracy**

The Bolshevik Revolution produced neither the wider European revolution that Lenin expected, nor the new day of liberty that many of his followers expected. We shall discuss that first surprise later in this chapter; the second surprise needs fuller discussion here.

During 1917, the Russian people "threw themselves into a veritable orgy of democracy, carrying it far beyond their Western mentors into practically every area of life. . . . Power cascaded down like water from a broken dam, to every town and province, to every village and regiment, to every mob and every committee that would receive it."<sup>12</sup> In addition to the political councils, or soviets, that sprang up in Russian towns and villages, groups of soldiers formed committees in army units to elect their own officers, and groups of workers organized factory councils in the face of the frightened owners' attempts to lock them out.

<sup>12</sup>Daniels, p. 4.



Refugee children during the famine in Russia, October 1921.

This profusion of unplanned, often clumsy, grass-roots initiatives was replaced by centralized state administration under one party during 1918 and 1919 as the Bolsheviks consolidated their power. The soldiers' councils gave way to traditionally commanded troops. The factory councils gave way to centralized agencies and trade unions controlled from above. Loose association with the non-Russian border peoples was replaced by centralization under Russian domination thinly disguised as a federal state. This was the system known as War Communism that Lenin established in Russia by 1919.

Why did the promised liberty turn so quickly into authority after the Bolshevik Revolution? One standard answer has been the authoritarian character of Leninist political theory. From the time of the split in the Russian Social Democratic party in 1903, Lenin's followers were partisans of tightly disciplined party organization as opposed to those other Marxists who preferred to work more openly through a parliamentary party. The Leninist party's proven effectiveness in November 1917, and the necessity afterward of governing as a minority party, only heightened the importance of the party structure in Lenin's eyes.

The absence of any established tradition of self-government in Russia certainly hindered the germination of democratic institutions in 1918 and 1919. When the old autocracy was swept away, it exposed a void that

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<sup>13</sup>Carr, *vo*  
<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p.

the chattering profusion of local councils was ill-equipped to fill. Lenin's party was available to fill the vacuum.

The Bolsheviks never pretended to run their regime democratically. Universal suffrage in Russia under the conditions of 1917 could produce only some kind of rural small landholder majority. The Bolshevik regime was a dictatorship of the proletariat, or working class. If the Russian proletariat was still a minority, that anomaly would soon seem inconsequential when the world proletarian revolution spread from Russia to the more urban, industrialized states of Western Europe. Weighed against the possibility of the ultimate liberation of working people outside Russia, the necessity to govern against a majority in Russia seemed a small matter to Lenin and his followers.

Therefore the Bolsheviks dissolved the constitutional assembly after its first day, when that body, summoned by the Provisional Government and eagerly awaited by Russian democrats, finally met in January 1918. As expected, Russia's one historic exercise of universal suffrage had produced an agrarian majority. The constituent assembly contained 420 agrarian revolutionaries (SR's), as against 225 Bolsheviks. For a time, Lenin governed in coalition with the left wing of the SR's. They broke in June 1918. The left SR's, already opposed to the humiliating peace with Germany, resented Lenin's revival of central state administration. From that time on, Russia has been governed by authoritarian one-party rule.

There were also good pragmatic reasons for a new autocracy in Russia in 1918. One was the simple necessity to produce. Factory committees did not have the knowledge to revive production, nor always much interest in it. They resisted all outside efforts to coordinate their work with others. The intensely revolutionary railroad workers, for example, took over and operated the lines, but "for a long period set all external authority at defiance."<sup>13</sup> At issue was whether the new regime should limit itself to the coordination of the factory committees' local efforts or whether it should actually direct Russian industry in centralized fashion from above.

Lenin believed that the process of "trustification"<sup>14</sup> of industry, which capitalism had begun and which the war had intensified, must be carried through as the basis of a socialist economy. Each branch of industry, therefore, was not only nationalized but centralized into a single state trust. By the end of 1919, some ninety of these state trusts had been organized, all answering to a Supreme Council of National Economy at the top. The metallurgical industry, to take one example, was relatively easy to organize in this way since it had been highly concentrated before the war. By March 1918, it had been brought under a single state agency with a staff of 750, and its workers subjected to strict labor discipline through an official trade union. It did little good for partisans of the

<sup>13</sup>Carr, vol. 2, p. 71.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 176.

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recent experiments in workers' control to object that "the masses are being cut off from living creative power in all branches of our national economy."<sup>15</sup> Lenin was determined that socialist production could only be built on centralized organization.

### Civil War

Leninist authoritarianism was also a response to civil war. The Bolshevik regime had to fight for its life—against the armed opposition of anti-Bolshevik "white" armies ("white" as opposed to "red"), against border nationalities that declared their independence from Russia, against the intervention of Allied troops, and against the passive resistance of the peasants who kept up a "green revolution" to counter the "red revolution" that requisitioned their grain to feed the cities. The Red Army was engaged in active fighting on every Russian border at some time between 1918 and the end of 1920. At times, Bolshevik authority was reduced to the old Russian heartland. In the end, the Bolshevik regime survived to establish its rule over all the former Russian Empire except the western lands lost to Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and the Baltic States. But during the struggle the regime had been transformed into a bureaucratic, one-party, centralized state. And it emerged from the civil war deeply marked by hostility to the Allied powers that had actively supported its opponents.

Allied intervention began as an attempt to keep the eastern front in action against the Germans. Even during the Kerensky period, as early as July 1917, the Western Allies sought ways to bolster the eastern front. The Bolsheviks' public quest for a separate peace after November 1917 was a serious blow to the British and French, who could never quite rid themselves of the suspicion that Lenin was a German agent. They foresaw the Germans moving all their troops to the west for a one-front, knock-out blow. Some Western policymakers maintained contact with the Bolsheviks at first, in the hope that they would eventually reject the harsh German terms and fight on. Bolshevik acceptance of the German terms at Brest-Litovsk in March 1918, however, strengthened the case in Britain and France for intervention. The decision was made in June 1918 when the Germans, now freed in the east, broke through the Allied trenches and advanced to within thirty-seven miles of Paris, the closest since the First Battle of the Marne.

The British and French sent about 24,000 men to the northern Russian ports of Murmansk and Archangel in June 1918 to secure Allied supplies, to prevent German and Bolshevik troops (still believed to be secret allies) from joining forces there, and "to make it safe for [anti-Bolshevik] Russian forces to come together in organized bodies in the

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 97.



American soldiers in Vladivostok, 1918, marching in a parade organized to celebrate the arrival of the American expeditionary troops on Siberian soil.

north."<sup>16</sup> At about the same time, in Siberia, some 40,000 Czech troops (mostly former Austro-Hungarian soldiers captured by the Russians and now eager to fight on for Czech independence) revolted against the shaky local Bolshevik authorities and seized the Trans-Siberian Railroad in order to get out to the western front.

President Wilson, abruptly dropping his earlier reluctance to intervene in Russia, proposed a joint Japanese–American landing at Vladivostok to support the Czechs. The Japanese, who had stationed a few troops at Vladivostok as early as December 1917, now eagerly rushed in 72,000 more, far beyond the figures agreed on with Wilson. The American contingent there numbered about 7000. In addition, early in the winter of 1918/19, two British divisions were stationed on the oil-rich Russo-Turkish frontier, beyond the Caucasus, to hold the railroad line from Batum on the Black Sea to Baku on the Caspian. A French division, a French naval squadron, and a small Greek contingent were landed at Odessa, on the Black Sea coast of the Ukraine. In all, over 100,000 troops of fourteen countries—mostly Japanese, British, American, and French—were stationed at one time or another around the edges of Bolshevik territory.

<sup>16</sup>President Wilson's instructions, quoted in George F. Kennan, *The Decision to Intervene*, vol. 2 (Princeton, N.J., 1958), p. 418. At first reluctant, Wilson sent 5500 United States troops to join them only in September.

The Allies' first intention had been to keep the Germans from filling the vacuum left by the Bolsheviks' separate peace. The general armistice of November 11, 1918, made that purpose irrelevant, and the Allied forces that remained in Russia assumed a much more openly anti-Bolshevik function. Those forces were never very large or well equipped, and they never took direct combat roles in the developing Russian civil war. Nor were they ever united around any common Allied strategy in Russia. They gave moral and material encouragement to the anti-Bolshevik "white" Russian forces, however, and to secessionist border nationalities. Soviet Russians have always been taught—with much justification—that the Allied governments did their best to bring the Bolshevik experiment down.

Civil war raged in Russia for more than two years. The first serious threat to Lenin came from Siberia, where Bolshevik authority had never been established. In November 1918, Admiral Alexander Kolchak proclaimed himself "Supreme Ruler of Russia" in the western Siberian city of Omsk, and attacked westward, advancing almost to the Volga River by December. In the spring of 1919, the Red Army pushed Kolchak's forces back again.

The next serious threat came from the southeast, where the ethnically separate Ukrainians had gone their own way since November 1917. In mid-1919, General Anton Denikin advanced northward from the Black Sea, took all of the Ukraine, and threatened Moscow itself, while General Nicolai Judenich advanced eastward from the Baltic. Both were forced back in late 1919, and Commissar of War Leon Trotsky was able to turn again to Siberia where Admiral Kolchak's forces were defeated once more at the end of 1919. The admiral himself was captured and executed in February 1920.

The main threat in 1920 came from Poland. In the spring, the new Polish state set out to conquer parts of Lithuania, western White Russia, and the Ukraine that were not ethnically Polish but had belonged to the medieval Kingdom of Poland at its height. After initial Polish successes, a young Bolshevik commander, Michael Tukhachevsky, drove the Poles back to the very gates of Warsaw. For a moment, Lenin believed that his defeat of Poland might set off the long-awaited revolution in Western Europe on which his ultimate survival in Russia seemed to depend. Aided by French supplies and advisors, however, the Poles managed to push back their borders somewhat east of the ethnic frontier. The Peace of Riga in March 1921 established these borders, which remained until 1939.

Finally, at the end of 1920, Baron Peter Wrangel reactivated the southern front. Wrangel's defeat and the evacuation of about 100,000 anti-Bolshevik refugees from Odessa to Constantinople in Allied ships in November 1920 ended active military opposition to the Bolshevik regime.

The anti-Bolshevik armies failed partly because they took the offensive one by one, without any coordination. The Red Army, meanwhile, benefited from the talent for military organization revealed by Leon Trotsky. The Bolsheviks were aided by fighting on interior lines, and by the anti-Bolsheviks' lack of popular appeal. Finally, their widespread passive resistance to Bolshevik control notwithstanding, Russian peasants were even less eager to help the "whites," who threatened to evict them from their new lands.

Early Bolshevik support for the independence of all the minority nationalities was a casualty of the civil war. The dissolution of the old Russian Empire into new revolutionary nations was acceptable to Lenin only on the premise of the worldwide revolution that he had believed was at hand. If a revolutionary regime survived only in Russia, the border nationalities became possible avenues for counterrevolution.

The Ukraine was a major lesson. In November 1917, the Ukrainian nationalists had taken the Bolshevik revolution as a signal to assume the home rule that the Provisional Government, no less than the tsars, had denied them. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918 detached the Ukraine from Russia and made it an independent state under German supervision. At the defeat of Germany in November 1918, a pro-Allied Menshevik socialist regime governed the still independent Ukraine, which now became a base for Allied anti-Bolshevik movements. When the Bolsheviks retook the Ukraine, first from General Denikin in 1919 and then from the Poles in 1920, there was no further Bolshevik tolerance for Ukrainian self-determination.

After winning the civil war, the Bolshevik regime also reestablished direct control over separatist areas in the Caucasus: Georgia, Russian Armenia, and Azerbaijan. In December 1922, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was organized as a federal but unitary state. Its constituent parts (Russia, White Russia, the Ukraine, Transcaucasia, and—after 1925—a number of smaller ethnic regions like Uzbekistan, Turkestan, and Kazakstan) possessed substantial autonomy on paper, but the real power lay in the victorious central regime in the new capital of Moscow.

### REVOLUTIONARY STIRRINGS IN WESTERN EUROPE, 1917

The news from Russia rang like a fire bell through the other belligerent countries in 1917. Some observers, especially in France, believed for a time that a democratic Russia would fight with heightened patriotic energies, as the citizens of the French Republic had done after 1792. But for those disheartened Europeans who were witnessing the war enter its fourth winter, Russian developments made it possible to think seriously for the first time about a compromise peace. They also were an object

lesson in how easily autocracy could be overthrown. In fact, the Russian experience suggested that peace would not be possible until regimes had been changed. Finally, the Russians called serious attention to the question of war aims. In November 1917, the Bolsheviks published the texts of secret treaties that the tsar had concluded in 1914 and 1915 providing for territorial gains for Russia and France in the event of victory. These revelations suggested that Europeans had been dying and starving for the dynastic or commercial advantages of the few.

As we have seen, all the belligerents' war efforts reached their nadir during 1917. In Italy, forty-one persons were killed during the summer in a bread riot in Turin. Both Pope Benedict XV and Italian socialists called for a compromise peace. When relief on the Russian front permitted, the Austrian Army gave the Italians their most stunning defeat of the war at Caporetto in October 1917. They threatened to break out into the Po Valley. Morale was saved from a complete collapse only when the Italian Army finally stopped the Austrians on the Piave River, just north of Venice.

In France, the front-line armies themselves threatened to come apart in May and June 1917. After the Nivelle offensive<sup>17</sup> that spring had once more squandered thousands of lives in exchange for a few yards of terrain, reserve units refused to move up to the offensive. In addition to individual desertions, there were collective acts of mutiny. Some groups of soldiers commandeered trains and steamed for Paris. More than half of the 129 French divisions were affected, and 49 of them were probably unfit for action for several weeks. Although most of the agitation was directed specifically against the tactics of the mass offensive, the French General Staff was tempted to believe that repression of antiwar opinion was the best remedy for the mutinies.

The Germans were unaware that parts of the French line lay virtually open in May and June 1917, but even if they had known, they were preoccupied with problems of their own. Sailors' demonstrations over food and living conditions affected the pent-up German fleet during that same summer. German internal politics in the summer of 1917 were dominated by efforts to assert parliamentary influence over war government and to renounce territorial aims in the July "Peace Resolution." The Germans' major ally, Austria-Hungary, was openly seeking a compromise peace in 1917.

Surmounting the 1917 slump required a mixture of force and persuasion from each war government. Public war weariness and Lenin's revelation of the secret treaties obliged the Allied governments to explain their war aims more clearly. Why, after all, should their populations sacrifice their property and their sons indefinitely for the rulers' glory or for secret territorial deals? Now that the United States had entered the war, President Woodrow Wilson took the Allied lead in explaining the

<sup>17</sup>See Chapter 3, p. 89.

better world of democracy, national independence, and permanent peace that the ultimate defeat of the Central Powers would make possible. As for France, less needed to be said about war aims as long as German troops remained deep in the country. Confident that the vocal advocates of a compromise peace would remain a minority, Clemenceau resolutely jailed his opponents and closed their newspapers after he assumed the prime ministry in November 1917. Even when a renewed German attack was expected in the spring of 1918, Clemenceau kept four cavalry divisions in reserve for possible internal use.

The German solution to the 1917 unrest was both autocratic and expansionist. With the support of the kaiser and of nationalist opinion, Field Marshal Hindenburg and General Ludendorff proposed to exploit Russian weakness in a final effort toward an expansionist victory. By straining every nerve, the Germans would be rewarded with territory to east and to west. At home, this meant silencing the parliamentary opposition that had renounced annexationist war aims in the summer of 1917. The kaiser's support was one element in the generals' success. By persuading him to replace Bethmann Hollweg as chancellor with the inexperienced and docile Michaelis,<sup>18</sup> they reduced parliamentary majorities to a cipher. The other element in their success was the extent to which German centrists, even some of those who had voted for the "Peace Resolution," welcomed the major German gains in the east obtained in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, March 1918. The victory over Russia convinced most German leaders to support the generals' gamble on a final major offensive in the west in 1918.

General Ludendorff's all-out attack in the west in March 1918 came nearer to breaking through into a decisive war of movement than any campaign since the First Battle of the Marne. Highly conscious of the political dimension of modern warfare, Ludendorff struck at the British first, on the theory that the French would send their reserves to the British sector only reluctantly. Then if a gap opened between the two armies, he planned to strike for Paris. Five successive German offensives between March and July 1918 pushed the Allied front back nearly forty miles. German troops were at the Marne again, only thirty-five miles from Paris. But Ludendorff had never been able to open the decisive gap he sought. The Allies united their command under the French General Ferdinand Foch and drew heart from the American troops' arrival. It was the Allies who opened a hole in the overextended German line on July 18, in the Second Battle of the Marne. Having exhausted his reserves, Ludendorff could not prevent the initiative from passing for good into Allied hands. After July 1918 they advanced steadily toward the German frontier.

Ludendorff had made several serious errors. Determined to maintain enough troops in the east to hold the Germans' new territorial gains

<sup>18</sup>See Chapter 4, p. 105.

there, he failed to assemble sufficient force on the western front. He overestimated the exhausted Germans' willingness to fight on for territorial expansion. He underestimated the psychic and material impact of United States participation (over 2 million men by August 1918). Above all, by staking everything on a decisive expansionist campaign, he ruled out the more modest alternative of a fall-back position on a defensive line to cover the German border during the negotiation of a compromise peace. When Ludendorff finally turned to a defensive strategy, no reserves of men or morale were left to support it.

## THE GERMAN REVOLUTION, 1918–19

It was General Ludendorff himself who announced to his stunned government on September 29, 1918, that the German Army could not contain the Allied breakthrough and that the only way to defend German soil in the west was to make an immediate peace. In the next few weeks, he forced his incredulous government to ask President Wilson for a peace settlement based on the Fourteen Points, and then was dismissed by the kaiser when he refused to accept the conditions the Allies imposed. Since Ludendorff himself helped spread the legend after the war that the German Army had been “stabbed in the back” by revolutionaries at home, his initiatives in the first steps to an armistice must be emphasized.

### Steps Toward Revolution

When President Wilson refused to deal with the “arbitrary power” that had ruled Germany up to 1918, Ludendorff supported the resurrection of the parliamentary form of government that he had pushed aside in 1917. It suited him that civilian authorities should bear the responsibilities of defeat. He is supposed to have said, “They [the parliamentarians] made this soup. Now let them eat it.” In this way the first steps of a German revolution, a constitutional revolution, came down from above. Prince Max of Baden, a moderate member of one of the German grand ducal families, was made chancellor. He accomplished at last the two reforms that German reformists had sought in vain under the prewar monarchy: the responsibility of the chancellor to a parliamentary majority instead of to the kaiser, and an end to the three-class voting system in the state of Prussia. But it was too late to head off with overdue reforms the anger and frustration of the German people.

The next step toward revolution in Germany came from below. It came this time from the armed forces. Ludendorff had changed his mind by late October in favor of continued fighting to hold the richest mining regions of Alsace-Lorraine. Although Ludendorff was forced out of the Army command by Prince Max, the kaiser aroused suspicions that he opposed an armistice by moving from Berlin to Army headquar-

ters on October 29. When units of the German High Seas Fleet at Kiel were ordered to put to sea to engage the British in a last major battle, the crews mutinied. The sailors' refusal to obey orders spread to the naval base ashore at Kiel on November 4, where sailors' councils were formed. From there the movement spread to the formation of soldiers' and workers' councils in military supply depots and war plants. Ludendorff had led Germans to believe in March 1918 that one final effort could win the war. When another war winter loomed in October 1918, the last links of loyalty that had bound German soldiers and civilians to extraordinary sacrifices simply snapped.

In early November the mass movement for peace took on revolutionary proportions. The federal German Empire seemed about to tear apart when the Kingdom of Bavaria tried to negotiate a separate peace on November 7. The antiwar parliamentary socialist Kurt Eisner led workers and the army garrison in Munich in an uprising that expelled the last Wittelsbach king; he then opened peace negotiations with the Allies. On the morning of November 9 thousands of Berlin workers went into the streets to demonstrate for peace. When it proved impossible to find reliable troops to move against them, the senior Army commanders themselves—Generals Hindenburg and Groener, Ludendorff's successor—persuaded Wilhelm II to abdicate as king of Prussia and emperor of Germany before the collapse of all authority affected even the officers' ability to march their troops home.

### The Socialist Struggle for Power

As in Russia a year earlier, the question in Germany on November 9, 1918, was who could pick up the pieces of a disintegrating nation. Along with the kaiser and the Army command, much of the German parliamentary center had been compromised by its support for a war of territorial expansion rather than defense in 1918. The most important organized opposition was the German Socialist party, and its leaders now stepped to the fore.

But which German socialists would prevail? The once highly organized German Social Democratic party (SPD) was passionately divided over all that had happened in August 1914 and after. A majority clung to its prewar reformist tendencies. They wanted to set up a parliamentary republic first, within which they believed social democracy would germinate. The SPD majority was deeply discredited on the left, however, by its support for war credits in 1914. The minority, which had seceded in 1916 to form the Independent Social Democratic party (USPD) in support of immediate compromise peace, was pulled in two ways in November 1918. Some members wanted to restore unity with the majority in this hour of peace and opportunity. Others were drawn to a small but militant antiparliamentary left, which demanded immediate social revolution through the soldiers', sailors', and workers' councils, on the

Russian model. This movement, led by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, called itself "Spartacus" after the Roman gladiator-revolutionary of the first century B.C.

The two tendencies produced two parallel authorities in Germany at the end of 1918. At 2:00 P.M. on November 9, Philip Scheidemann of the SPD majority proclaimed a parliamentary republic from a window of the *Reichstag* building. At 4:00 P.M., Karl Liebknecht declared a revolutionary socialist republic from a window of the royal palace, now held by delegations of the soldiers' and workers' councils. On one side emerged a provisional executive of six "peoples' commissars," elected by the Berlin soldiers' and workers' councils on November 10, but composed of majority SPD and reformist USPD leaders. Its dominant personality was Friedrich Ebert, a saddlemaker turned SPD functionary. A lifetime spent in the creation of the party's first paid permanent staff in the early 1900s predisposed Ebert to orderly administration. On the other side were the Spartacists in the councils, who wanted to bypass a constitutional assembly and proceed directly to workers' control of a socialist state through the German equivalent of soviets.

This conflict of parallel authorities was resolved during the winter of 1918/19 in the opposite direction from the Russian case. In Russia, Lenin's Bolsheviks had come to control the Petrograd Soviet by the end of August 1917. The German soldiers' and workers' councils remained primarily in the hands of followers of the majority SPD. When an

The barracks of the elite Uhlan Guards surrender to members of the workers' and soldiers' council, November 1918. The sign reads, "Brothers! Don't Shoot!"



all-German congress of soldiers' and workers' councils was held in December 1918, only 10 of the 488 delegates were Spartacists. No less than the majority SPD leadership, the councils called for political democracy first. They supported the provisional executive's call for a constitutional assembly to be elected in January 1919.

As for the Spartacists, Rosa Luxemburg rejected Lenin's strategy of firm party control in favor of spontaneity in revolution and direct worker control after revolution. Thus the Spartacists deprived themselves of one of Lenin's decisive advantages—a disciplined party structure. More importantly, there was no massive popular ground swell to bolster the Spartacists. Ebert preempted the mass peace movement by concluding on November 11, 1918, the armistice that Prince Max had already prepared. No immense land-hungry mass was burning manor houses and seizing estates in Germany. Of Lenin's three great issues—peace, land, and bread—only bread was seriously lacking in Germany in the winter of 1918/19, and Ebert could blame that on the Allied blockade.

### The Failure of the Social Revolution

During December 1918 and January 1919, the German social revolution was liquidated by two simultaneous processes: failure to seize power from below and repression from above. From below, militants among the soldiers' and workers' councils simply failed to take over the decisive political and economic institutions. The way in which the professional state administration and the traditional ruling families reestablished control of local government during the weeks following November 9, 1918, has been best studied in the old port city of Hamburg.<sup>19</sup> The councils attempted to govern the city, but in the very act of trying to revive administration they found they needed tax revenues. The old merchant families, which had long dominated the Hamburg Senate, offered the councils financial support in return for moderation. For lack of other leadership, the Hamburg soldiers' council fell into the hands of an energetic career officer. The reformist trade unions and SPD officials of Hamburg retained the loyalty of many workers. Thus normal administration revived in Hamburg. The same quiet revolution occurred in many German localities. Social and governmental structure had not dissolved in Germany as it had in Russia in 1917. Only very briefly was there any power vacuum at the grass-roots level.

From the top, the provisional executive repressed the Spartacists with the ferocity of sectarian warfare. Friedrich Ebert clearly feared the Spartacists and the radical minority in the soldiers' and workers' council movement more than he feared the German Empire's traditional state

<sup>19</sup>Richard A. Comfort, *Revolutionary Hamburg: Labor Politics in the Early Weimar Republic* (Stanford, Calif., 1966).

services and officer corps. During the few days when German institutions were genuinely malleable, Ebert turned his attention to restoring order instead of achieving basic social change. In a celebrated telephone conversation with General Groener on November 9, he agreed to leave intact the authority of the Imperial Officer Corps (all sworn to personal loyalty to the kaiser) in exchange for the High Command's help in controlling the soldiers' and workers' councils.

The decisive test came in early January 1919. When Ebert removed the Berlin police chief who had been installed by the councils, demonstrators began occupying public buildings. Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, who had just formed the German Communist party on December 30, 1918, incorporating the Spartacus movement and its supporters in the councils, felt they had to assume leadership, even though they feared that the time was not ripe for a seizure of power. Ebert was determined to crush these rivals to the reformist socialists' control. Having failed to set up an armed force directly loyal to the new regime, however, Ebert was obliged to rely on General Groener and the Imperial Officer Corps, and on groups of antirevolutionary volunteers known as *Freikorps* (free corps), which the officers had quietly formed to keep order while the regular Army was being demobilized. Although the SPD Minister of Defense, Gustav Noske, was nominally in charge of keeping order, it was the *Freikorps*, steeped in front-fighters' brutality and animosity toward workers, who actually broke up the Spartacist demonstrations. Officers murdered Luxemburg and Liebknecht while transferring them from one prison to another.

Hundreds were killed in Berlin in this Spartacist uprising, and a thousand in a second revolt in March. Noske said, "Somebody has to be the bloodhound" and thus earned the epithet of "the bloodhound of Kiel." Ebert was secure, but at the price of the left's bitter resentment and of the surviving independence of the old Imperial Officer Corps.

Restoring administration also meant arresting regional separatism. The revolutionary movement had gone furthest in the former Kingdom of Bavaria, which had never been fully reconciled to Prussian domination of the German Empire. When the new Bavarian socialist leader Kurt Eisner was assassinated in February 1919, his fellow reformist socialists were unable to hold the state together. During the week of April 7, 1919, members of a revolutionary workers' council and a group of intellectuals including the playwright Ernst Toller formed a communist republic in Munich. Again, Ebert in Berlin had no weapon except the Army and the *Freikorps*. The destruction of the Munich communist republic by the *Freikorps* was savage. Although the majority socialists were restored to nominal power there, real power lay with the Army and *Freikorps*. Ebert was unable to keep Bavaria within the German republic without delivering it over to his own enemies.

On the surface, Germany had accomplished its democratic revolution. The constitutional assembly elected in January 1919 met in Weimar, a



Spartacists fire from behind a makeshift barricade of rolls of newsprint, Berlin, January 1919.

provincial capital far removed from Prussian pomp, to found a parliamentary republic that would replace the German Empire's narrow oligarchy with true popular sovereignty. The Weimar Republic seemed to embody the most carefully planned democratic institutions, including women's suffrage. But in his eagerness to restore normal government in 1918 and 1919, Ebert had allowed the traditional bureaucracy and Army and the oligarchy of great corporations and Prussian estates to survive untouched. The Weimar Constitution was applied to the old imperial society, without making significant structural changes in that society. And it had come into being over the bodies of some of its natural supporters. The republic also bore the stigma of having to accept a harsh peace from the Allies. The nationalists, who hated the Weimar Republic for that, had plenty of leverage thereafter with which to fight it. Only the most successful operation would save the Weimar Republic from its internal enemies.

#### THE DISSOLUTION OF AUSTRIA-HUNGARY, 1918-19

The Habsburg Empire perished in the war it had provoked. The very nationalism that the imperial regime had tried to stifle by making war on Serbia in July 1914 was greatly magnified by the war, until by 1918 the various component peoples simply went their own way. The monarchy's

authority evaporated. Within the borders of the old empire, the revolutionary impulses of the war's last days were largely absorbed in the enterprise of carving successor states out of the former ethnic parts.

After the disillusioning later history of these successor states, the victors of the First World War, and especially United States President Woodrow Wilson, have frequently been accused of sacrificing a useful federal system in the Danube basin to the principle of national self-determination. In reality, the old monarchy could no more have been put together again in 1918 than Humpty Dumpty. Even without the war, one wonders how much longer dynastic loyalty could have held that linguistic patchwork together. One of the more optimistic of the monarchy's recent historians thinks that "in 1914 the future of the monarchy was at best problematical."<sup>20</sup>

Those who believe the old empire was salvageable rest their case on dreams of greater federal autonomy. Habsburg federalists proposed to grant the most vocal unsatisfied minorities, the Czechs and South Slavs, the same local self-rule already enjoyed by the Germans of Austria, the Magyars of Hungary, and, to a more limited extent, the Poles of Galicia and the Croats with their own parliament (*Sabor*) in Hungary. Younger members of the Habsburg dynasty, notably the heir to the throne himself, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, were known to be sympathetic to this approach.

Evolution toward a federal solution was blocked, however. Neither Czechs nor South Slavs could be satisfied without lands taken from both halves of the dual monarchy, Austria and Hungary.<sup>21</sup> The Hungarians held a veto over any such compromises. Ever since the first "compromise" of 1867 had elevated the Kingdom of Hungary to parity with the Empire of Austria in a dual monarchy, no further compromise had been possible since it would have had to take place at the Magyars' expense. No new ethnic groups could be satisfied without alienating those already satisfied. Having moved toward a federal solution by becoming a dual monarchy, the Habsburgs were prevented from moving on to becoming a triple or quadruple one. Even if the Central Powers had won the First World War, the problem of absorbing more Poles from, say, Russian Poland into a new Habsburg Kingdom of Poland in a triple monarchy, would have fatally unbalanced the empire's delicate ethnic standoff of 1914.<sup>22</sup>

It is difficult to avoid an air of fatality in any detailed account of the wartime evolution of the Habsburgs' subjects from federalist goals to goals of outright independence. Through 1916, it must be admitted, dynastic loyalties still showed astonishing vitality. Many Polish national-

<sup>20</sup>C. A. Macartney, *The Hapsburg Empire, 1790–1918* (New York, 1969), p. 810.

<sup>21</sup>See maps, p. 51 and inside front cover.

<sup>22</sup>Lewis Namier, "The Downfall of the Habsburg Monarchy," in *Vanished Supremacies* (New York, 1958), p. 127.

ists supported the Austro-Hungarian cause because they still thought that defeat of Tsarist Russia with its large Polish minority offered the best chance of reconstituting the Polish national state, as a Habsburg Kingdom of Poland. The Catholic Croats were loyal, and even the most advanced Czech nationalists were still either federalists or discreetly silent. The Czecho-Slovak National Council, set up in early 1915 in Paris by a professor from Prague, Thomas G. Masaryk, had as yet little direct influence at home. The same can be said for the Yugoslav Committee established in London in May 1915.

### The Breakdown of Dynastic Loyalties

The first major change in the attitude of the Habsburg minorities followed the entry into the war of additional states whose ethnic brothers lived within the Austro-Hungarian realm. The Italian declaration of war on Austria-Hungary on May 23, 1915, and the Romanian declaration in August 1916, won two Habsburg minorities over to the Allied cause: the Italians along the Adriatic coast, and the Romanians of Transylvania. This meant that an Allied victory must now entail territorial losses for Austria-Hungary. Then, at the end of 1916, Emperor Franz Josef died at the age of eighty-seven, snapping a personal link on which the empire depended. Even more influential was the Russian Revolution of February 1917. Now the Poles could perceive more hope for a revived national state on Allied terms than on German-Habsburg terms.

The Bolshevik "October Revolution" in 1917 had a mixed effect on Habsburg solidarity. In the short run, by taking the pressure off the eastern front, the Bolsheviks allowed the Austro-Hungarians to turn all their resources to defeating the Italians at Caporetto. In the long run, however, the Bolsheviks brought home to the war-weary Habsburg subjects how fragile an ancient autocracy was, and gave them an object lesson in self-determination.

War weariness in the Habsburg Empire, therefore, took the form of ethnic polarization. Not only did the minorities come to despair of Habsburg federalism, the dominant German and Hungarian nationalities became even less willing to grant concessions. The first meeting of the Austrian parliament (*Reichsrat*) on May 20, 1917, only gave a public forum to demands for extensive ethnic autonomy. The Czech and South Slav delegates called for "a federal state of free national states with equal rights."

When the imperial government tried to buy off secessionist feelings in 1918 with promises of cultural autonomy that might have been welcomed before 1914, it was too late. Furthermore, the last Habsburg struggles exposed the final flaw: the disaffection of the dominant nationalities, the Germans and Magyars. When the young Emperor Karl's secret peace feelers to the Allies were revealed to the world by Clemenceau in the spring of 1918, many German nationalists began to

perceive that Habsburg dynastic interests (peace) diverged from German national interests (victory for Berlin). Magyar leaders became even more disaffected with a dynasty that threatened to buy off the minorities with concessions at Hungarian expense.

These developments show that the Allies were not the principal agents in the destruction of the Habsburg Empire. They hastened its dissolution, however, by propaganda for independence of subject peoples in 1918. During the early years of the war, allied to multinational and autocratic Russia, the British and French had said nothing about self-determination. The Russian Revolution, combined with American entry into the war, put democratic reform forward as a major Allied war aim. Woodrow Wilson favored some kind of federal solution for Austria-Hungary in his Fourteen Points speech given in January 1918; later the Allies supported the full independence of subject peoples. In June 1918, the United States promised the South Slavs "complete freedom," even though there were difficulties with Italian claims to the lands at the head of the Adriatic. During the summer, the Allies recognized the full sovereignty of the Polish and Czech national committees located in Paris.

The end came, militarily, in October 1918. An Allied army, mostly French, moving north from Greece forced Bulgaria out of the war at the end of September 1918. Bulgaria's request for an armistice on September 26 opened the Habsburg forces to a threat from the south. At the same time, the Italians began a new campaign at the end of October and defeated the Austrians at Vittorio Veneto. When the Habsburg regime asked for an armistice on November 4, much of its territory was already under the control of *de facto* Polish, Czech, and South Slav governments.

### Nation-Building in the Successor States

Would national successions lead to social revolution? Eastern Europe, at the Soviet borders, was in chaos. Like Russia, much of Eastern Europe had a huge land-hungry peasantry. Seizure of the great estates seemed likely to provide revolutionary fuel. Starving urban workers and land-grabbing peasants might well mix the same brew as in the Russia of 1917.

In all the emerging successor states except one, however, Social Democrats and peasant (or agrarian) parties, rather than Bolsheviks, managed to harness these discontents. Potential class conflicts were neutralized among many Eastern European peoples by ethnic pride and by the excitement of creating or reviving a nation. Ethnic revival aroused strong emotions in the poor as well as in the educated middle classes of Eastern Europe, contrary to Karl Marx's assertion in 1848 that workers have no country. Socialist leaders were well aware before 1914 that international working-class solidarity faced exceptional obstacles in the Austro-Hungarian climate of sharpening ethnic identity. German skilled workers excluded Czechs from their trade unions in Bohemia, for example, while across the frontier in Polish-speaking parts of the German

Empire, patriotic Polish workers withdrew from the SPD to form their own Polish Social Democratic party in 1903. The Austrian socialist intellectual Otto Bauer<sup>25</sup> warned that independence for every ethnic group, however small, was a retrograde step unless it followed the creation of an international socialist world economy. His views carried little weight with ordinary workers, however, among whom nationalism was a more vital loyalty than socialism. When the chance for ethnic self-determination came in 1918, workers danced in the streets of Prague, Warsaw, and Belgrade alongside the nationalist middle class.

Peasants, too, could submerge their revolutionary energies in nation-building in many parts of the Habsburg lands. In Czechoslovakia, for example, where the big landlords were mostly German in the Czech areas and mostly Hungarian in the Slovak areas, expropriation of estates seemed more a national than a class act.

The passions for change and reform in Eastern Europe were channeled mostly into the heady excitement of building new nations that would be reformist and democratic but not socially revolutionary. This was true of most of the successor states, whether they were new states (Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia), expanded nineteenth-century states (Romania), or revived long-eclipsed states (Poland).

The major exception was Hungary, where national independence brought no satisfaction. The Magyar leaders decided in 1918 that they could better defend their historic borders as a separate state than as one subject to the frantic last-minute ethnic reorganization proposed by Emperor Karl. Hungarian independence thus began as a conservative reaction to preserve the Magyar predominance and the limited suffrage of the old Kingdom of Hungary. The wartime Magyar leaders declared their independence of all but the personal Habsburg tie on October 16. But they were unable to reach a separate armistice through President Wilson without internal reforms. On October 31, therefore, they handed over power to Prince Michael Karolyi, a maverick reformist aristocrat who had led the small wartime pacifist opposition. Karolyi declared Hungary an independent republic on November 16.

Prince Karolyi's October Republic rested on the calculation that a new, democratic Hungary that accepted the universal suffrage and minority language rights the old oligarchy had always resisted would be rewarded by the Allies with retention of the historic Hungarian borders. That calculation was mistaken. The Allied commander in chief in southeastern Europe, the French General Franchet d'Esperey, did not prevent Hungary's new neighbors from seizing their ethnic areas. Romanian armies advanced into the rich grain-growing plain of Transylvania, where a majority of the peasants spoke Romanian. The Slovaks joined

<sup>25</sup>Otto Bauer's *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie* (Vienna, 1907) was the most notable "Austro-Marxist" effort to find a place for nationalism within the Marxist values of world economic system and class loyalty.

the new Czechoslovak state that had been proclaimed on October 21. The South Slavs of both Austria and Hungary proclaimed the new state of Yugoslavia on October 29.

Since the Allies, and particularly the French, who had the only Allied armed force in the area, favored Romania and Czechoslovakia as building blocks of the new Eastern Europe, Karolyi could not keep Hungary intact by dealing with the Allies. Instead, the Allies treated Karolyi's Hungary as a defeated enemy. When General Franchet d'Esperey ordered Hungarian troops on March 20, 1919, to withdraw behind a line that Hungarians feared would be the new border, Karolyi abandoned power. It was grasped by Béla Kun, a Hungarian journalist who had been in Moscow in 1917 and who returned now to lead the Hungarian Bolshevik movement. Kun managed to gain command of the rising tide of strikes and demonstrations in hungry Budapest during the spring of 1919. There was no other alternative to the left of Prince Karolyi, for the Hungarian Social Democrats had been a major component of the October Republic.

### The Béla Kun Regime

Béla Kun's soviet regime governed in Budapest for 133 days, from March 20 to August 1, 1919. It was the only soviet regime of Eastern Europe between Berlin and Moscow and the longest-lived soviet government outside Russia. It controlled Budapest and those parts of the countryside not occupied by Romanian troops, the French, or the counterrevolutionary Hungarian movement that soon formed in southern Hungary under Allied protection.<sup>24</sup>

Kun attempted to proceed immediately to the establishment of socialism in Hungary, assisted by the Marxist philosopher Georg Lukacs as Minister of Culture and by earthier figures such as Tibor Szamuely, Minister of the Interior, whose "Red Terror" produced about fifty deaths. Rumors of a much larger figure swept the Hungarian upper classes. Kun's decisive enemies in agrarian Hungary were not bourgeois, however, but peasants. Unlike the Russian soviet regime, the Budapest Soviet alienated the peasantry from the very beginning. Less pragmatic than Lenin, Kun nationalized the great estates rather than distribute them to small landholders. Furthermore, caught in the classic city-country conflict of any urban regime short of food, he paid for the crops he requisitioned in inflated paper currency. The countryside responded with the traditional peasant reactions of hoarding and crop destruction. Kun was unable to deliver peace, land, or bread.

Some Hungarian patriots had supported Kun's regime, believing that Russian aid would help preserve Hungary's historic frontiers against the Allies. Kun's Russian gamble worked no better than Karolyi's Allied

<sup>24</sup>See Chapter 7, pp. 211–12.



A revolutionary demonstration in the streets of Budapest shortly before the establishment of the Budapest Soviet in March 1919.

gamble. Lenin was occupied at home with civil war and Allied intervention. The Allies saw the Budapest Soviet as an unacceptable extension of Bolshevism westward, since it helped inspire the Munich Soviet, a revolutionary uprising in Austria, and widespread simultaneous strikes in Italy and France. When Kun rashly attacked the Romanians in July 1919, therefore, the Allies helped them roll over Hungary. They captured Budapest in early August 1919. Kun fled. Since the Social Democrats and constitutional republicans had been discredited earlier in the October Republic, Hungary was delivered over to the reactionary former commander in chief of the Austro-Hungarian Navy, Admiral Miklós Horthy. His “White Terror” took ten times as many lives as had Szamuely’s “Red Terror” in the preceding spring.<sup>25</sup>

### BRITAIN, FRANCE, ITALY: THE UNREST OF 1919–20

The postwar revolutionary wave was not merely a matter of throwing out defeated régimes. Accumulated war weariness and social bitterness burst out in the victorious countries, too. Wartime resentments there

<sup>25</sup>See Chapter 7, p. 213.

were compounded by postwar unemployment as demobilization began. In Britain, the traditional “red” areas, especially the Clydeside area of Scotland, experimented with workers’ councils under the wartime rebel shop steward leadership. British workers, led by Ernest Bevin’s dockers, struck against ships carrying supplies to anti-Bolsheviks in Russia. In France, an extensive general strike on May 1, 1919, and a somewhat smaller one in May 1920 marked the historic high-water mark of the syndicalist tactic of sponsoring one great insurrectionary day. There was considerable labor militancy even in the United States, culminating in the Seattle general strike of 1920. Italy came close to real social dissolution in the months following war. It came closer perhaps even than Germany, where the revolutionary pressures were more easily channeled into mere constitutional democratization.

Postwar yearnings for fundamental change took more irrepressible form in Italy than in the other victor nations because, first of all, few Italians felt any sense of victory. Italy’s limited territorial gains, compared with its wartime dreams of control over the whole Adriatic area and southern Asia Minor, seemed a poor recompense for the war’s cost in men, effort, and material. Second, ineffective war government had sharpened social conflict in Italy. In a nation already divided between an industrial north and a virtually feudal south, social antagonisms were too raw to bear wartime pressures well. Third, Italy suffered the worst inflation of any victor power. The cost of living quadrupled during the war, with wages trailing behind, and then doubled again in the two immediate postwar years. To make matters worse, wartime regimes had encouraged postwar hopes. Premier Antonio Salandra had promised in 1916 that returning veterans would receive land. At the war’s end, three virulent protest movements—industrial strikes, agrarian land seizures, and nationalist demonstrations—carried Italy to the brink of revolution.

The strike movement of 1919 and 1920 exceeded anything in prior Italian experience. Whereas an average of 200,000 Italian workmen went out on strike each year in the immediate prewar decade, five times that many (about 1 million) went out on strike in 1919 and six times that many (about 1.2 million) in 1920. About 320 persons were killed in 140 clashes between police and demonstrators between April 1919 and September 1920.

One strike motive was support for the Soviet Union against Western intervention. A general strike was called for July 19 and 20, 1919, after the Italian government had extended diplomatic recognition to the “White” Russian regime of Admiral Kolchak. A more immediate spur was the rapid rise in the cost of living, which soon outran all wage settlements. Worker-elected factory councils, which had acquired a kind of unofficial existence under war government, now claimed a larger role in plant management and a future position as Italian soviets.

The northern industrial cities of Milan and Turin were the centers of worker militancy. At Milan, long negotiations over wages between factory owners and the leading metalworkers' union (FIOM) were sharpened by worker slowdowns. The exasperated employers locked the workers out of the Alfa-Romeo automobile works on August 30, 1920. In response, FIOM occupied all the factories in the Milan area, then in Turin, and eventually in fifty-nine cities. Some 500,000 strikers were involved. Factory councils maintained production in the plants as a demonstration of the soviet principle, under the intellectual leadership of Antonio Gramsci of Turin, the chief theoretician of communism in modern Italy.

The occupation of the factories in August and September 1920 was the end, rather than the beginning, of the workers' revolutionary wave in postwar Italy. Premier Giovanni Giolitti understood far more clearly than the factory owners that the workers did not know what to do next. He insisted on negotiation rather than the use of armed force. After three weeks, the workers, their *élan* broken, evacuated the factories on the basis of a quite traditional wage raise and an essentially meaningless recognition of the principle of workers' councils, which was soon forgotten.

Meanwhile, a wave of land seizures during 1919 frightened rural farm and estate owners. Wartime promises of land to veterans coincided with long-felt peasant resentments against the owners of uncultivated lands of great estates and hunting preserves. In the spring of 1919, bands of rural day laborers and sharecroppers simply occupied fallow lands in many parts of Italy, as they had done in many earlier periods of unrest. The innovation of 1919, however, was the degree of organized support that these land seizures received. Veterans' movements, radical Catholic movements (*Popolari*) in the south and in Lombardy and Tuscany, and socialist agricultural labor unions in the traditionally "red" rural areas around Bologna, all provided organized support for rural militants. In some areas, the landless marched out to fallow lands with bands and banners to dig and plough, encouraged by legislative proposals to grant squatter's rights on uncultivated lands. Farm laborers were organized for wage settlements and for "estate councils," the counterpart of factory councils. Little land actually changed hands by force in the north, although some did in the center and south. In the north, however, many landowners found they could not hire farm labor except on the terms demanded by socialist and Catholic rural unions and peasant cooperatives.

The third kind of postwar direct-action movement was the nationalist seizure of territories claimed by Italy but denied it at the Peace Conference. With the disintegration of the Habsburg Empire, Italian troops had established themselves further east around the head of the Adriatic than wartime promises had provided for; notably, they occupied the

port of Fiume (or Rijeka, as the Yugoslavs called it). The Peace Conference's orders for the withdrawal of Italian forces led to angry protests in Italy. The bombastic poet and war hero Gabriele D'Annunzio led 8000 volunteers, mostly war veterans, to seize the area in September 1919. While the Italian government played for time, D'Annunzio set up the "Republic of Carnero," which displayed many of the themes and postures of later fascism on a comic opera scale. Neither rhetoric nor appeals to Lenin and the Sinn Fein could save him, however, when the Italian government reached agreement with the Yugoslavs to make Fiume an international free city. Italian troops expelled D'Annunzio and his legionnaires in December 1920. But the incident established a lasting resentment among many veterans, and the precedent of nationalist direct action to trouble later Italian politics.

Postwar insurrectionary pressures were clearly diminishing in Italy by the fall of 1920. In retrospect, the impression of imminent revolution was misleading. It is true that the great majority of organized Italian socialists were committed to revolution and supported the position known as "maximalism": they refused any alliances with "bourgeois parties" and assumed a revolutionary posture, flying the red flag rather than the tricolor in areas they controlled and encouraging worker intransigence.<sup>26</sup> As good social democrats, however, they expected to gain political power by winning an electoral majority. Moreover, the socialist movement was divided among the "maximalists"; a "reformist" minority, powerful in the trade unions, that wanted to form alliances with liberals against the right; and a small abstentionist minority that wanted to have nothing to do with electoral politics. The maximalists, who controlled the party machinery, divorced themselves from the most widespread popular ground-swell movement for change by condemning the land seizures as a petty bourgeois movement toward small property. The land seizures, in their turn, were divided among socialist, radical Catholic (*Popolari*), and veterans' leadership.

With the collapse of the occupation of the factories in September 1920, dispirited workmen dropped away from unions, whose membership declined rapidly. The beginnings of postwar unemployment further weakened the will and the bargaining position of what was left of organized labor. Electorally, Marxist parties fell away from their high point of November 1919 (156 seats out of 508 in the national legislature), losing 18 seats in the election of May 1921. The revolutionary surge had passed, but the panic it provoked in the Italian middle and upper classes had only begun, as we shall see in a subsequent chapter on the rise of fascism.

<sup>26</sup>Under the guidance of the maximalists, led by Giacinto Serrati, the Italian Socialist party was the only major Western European socialist party to join the Third International bloc in October 1919.

## AFTERMATH AND RESULTS

By late 1920, the tide of revolution was receding everywhere in Europe. In Germany in 1923 the socialist–communist coalition state governments in Saxony and Thuringia and an abortive uprising in Hamburg were only the last remnants of insurrection. Even before then, it was apparent that Soviet Russia, instead of becoming the trigger for revolution in the more advanced countries, as Marxists had anticipated, had survived alone as a socialist regime.

### Success and Failure: A Comparative Look

Why had the revolutionary pressures generated by the war produced a new regime in Russia and nowhere else? The question has not ceased to reverberate through the rest of this century. Marxists and counterrevolutionaries alike have based their plans since 1923 on their respective analyses of this unexpected turn of events.

A few conclusions seem obvious. Losing a major war proved fatal to every regime; indeed, no modern European state has survived even the loss of a minor war in which the population felt that national prestige was deeply involved.<sup>27</sup> However, the converse was not true. Being on the winning side was not enough to assure social stability, as Italy's postwar social explosion showed.

It appears that relatively homogeneous societies in industrially advanced countries, with a tradition of democratic institutions, such as Britain and France, withstood the social pressures of total war far better than less homogeneous, less industrialized, more autocratic societies. Certainly revolutionary pressures were greater in southern and Eastern Europe than in Western Europe. This observation has had profound repercussions among the theoreticians of revolution. Marxist thinkers, who had held earlier that socialist revolution could not succeed in a backward country like Russia without simultaneous revolution in Western Europe, had to admit in 1919 that revolution had broken out first in agrarian Russia, Hungary, and Bavaria. As Trotsky noted: "History has moved along the line of least resistance. The revolutionary epoch has made its incursion through the least barricaded gates."<sup>28</sup>

Even if revolutions begin at the "weak link" of established society, that still does not explain why some succeeded in the face of armed counter-attack while others quickly collapsed.

Revolutionary pressures certainly carried further against autocratic regimes because there was a broader coalition of discontent. Govern-

<sup>27</sup>Consider the French Fourth Republic, overthrown in 1958 after losing Indochina and failing to hold Algeria.

<sup>28</sup>Leon Trotsky, "Reflections on the Course of the Proletarian Revolution," in Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky, 1879–1921* (New York, 1965), p. 455.

ments that still denied elementary political liberties faced many layers of challenge, ranging from liberal aristocrats and middle-class liberals to socialists. The old regime in Russia was swept away in the first instance by all of these oppositions combined. The German monarchy, too, was destroyed by simultaneous democratic and social revolutions. The Germans stopped short at constitutional change, however, so still other factors must be sought to explain successful social revolution.

One of the most important preconditions of successful revolution was the existence of a land-hungry peasant mass. Most of industrially advanced Europe had few people on the land (as in England) or had many small family farms (as in France). When urban unrest appeared in such societies, the countryside was inert, if not actually hostile to workers' demands. That had been the lesson of nineteenth-century Western European revolutions, too. But where urban demonstrations have coincided with a tidal wave of land seizures of large estates, it has usually proved impossible to resist these twin forces. France in 1789, Russia in 1917, China in 1948, and Cuba in 1958 all vouch for this observation. The areas of strongest revolutionary stress after the First World War fit rather well, although not perfectly, with areas of simultaneous urban discontent and rural land seizures.

Among socialists, the land issue had been an awkward one. If the peasants were granted their own land, they then became small farmers and a bulwark of the *status quo*, as in France. That is the reason for Marx's bitter denunciation of peasant conservatism in 1848. Thereafter, socialists remained divided on the land question. Reformist socialists in small-farming areas, like Jean Jaurès in France and Georg von Vollmar in Bavaria, accepted the necessity of wooing small-family farmers as the only way to get rural votes; Rosa Luxemburg, by contrast, considered such tactics a sellout to rural propertyholding conservatism, and insisted on the goal of nationalizing rather than distributing land.

That debate had its echoes in the years 1917 to 1921. Lenin, always more concerned for power than dogmatic purity, officially "nationalized" the land but in fact acquiesced in its direct seizure by peasants. Thereafter, he was largely immune from any counterrevolutionary movement, however well armed or financed, that threatened to restore the old landlords' property. By contrast, the Budapest Soviet of Béla Kun attempted to transfer land directly from estates to state farms. His city-based regime foundered, in part, on peasant animosity to his orthodox socialist land policy.

Nationalism also affected revolutionary regimes' chances of survival. As a general rule, revolutionary regimes that offended national pride were quickly swept aside. In Hungary, both Prince Michael Karolyi and Béla Kun paid dearly for their inability to keep the Romanians from taking Transylvania. The Bavarian Soviet threatened to divide Germany into minor states. However, those Eastern European successor states that

gratified national feelings—Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia—satisfied their peoples' clamorings even without substantial social change or impressive economic success. The Russian case was more complicated, for the humiliating Treaty of Brest-Litovsk drove even some Bolsheviks into opposition. During the civil war, however, the Bolshevik regime drew added strength from its claim that Leon Trotsky's Red Army was effectively defending the national soil against foreign intervention.

### The Third International and the Division of the European Left

Lenin remained convinced throughout 1920 that the Russian Revolution would trigger socialist revolutions in the more industrialized countries. He did his best to encourage them. In March 1919, optimistic over the situation in Hungary and Germany, he summoned the socialists of the world to Moscow to form a new global organization. It was called the Communist International, or Third International, to distinguish it from the prewar socialist leadership of the Second International (formed in 1889), which had, in Lenin's eyes, made fatal compromises with middle-class patriotism and parliamentarism.

The first response to Lenin's appeal among Western European socialists was enthusiastic. The thirst for renewed unity on the left was intense. The Second International was in general disrepute because of its failure to stop war in 1914 and because of the participation of many of its leaders in wartime governments. The first socialist regime in history held power in Russia, and Western European socialists were eager to prevent their governments from crushing it. If the great moment were really at hand, to hold back would be treasonous. The Italian, Norwegian, and Bulgarian socialist parties adhered en masse in 1919 to Lenin's new International, and the parties of Germany, France, and Britain sent sympathetic observers.

Lenin did not want general support or sympathy, however. He wanted committed followers who would emulate the Russian Bolsheviks by forcing revolution on the more cautious parliamentary socialists through the will and discipline of a minority party. Lenin set stringent conditions for admission to the Third International at its second congress in July 1920. Convinced that Russian success in the war with Poland would soon carry revolution into Germany, Lenin demanded that all candidate parties assent to Twenty-One Points. Would-be member parties must purge their reformist elements, restructure themselves "in the most centralized fashion," support the "Soviet Republics" (sic) in their fight against foreign intervention, prepare for a violent seizure of power, and fight by all possible means the rival power of reformist Social Democrats.

Lenin's provocative challenge and the Western European socialists' ambiguous response divided the European left permanently and pas-

sionately after 1920. The feasibility of revolution divided them. While Lenin was convinced that world revolution was at hand, many Western European socialists were reluctant to gamble away their previous gains for an uncertain outcome. The cost in liberty and in material comfort of a Leninist seizure of power also divided them. Up to 1914, the German SPD, with its elaborate legal organization, its massive electoral success, and its vision of widening human freedom, had been the preeminent model for other socialists. In 1917, Lenin had introduced a rival model, incompatible with the values of many Social Democrats but incontestably more successful than the SPD in seizing power. Most Social Democrats still preferred to achieve socialism under conditions that would not require dictatorship. Leninists accused them of sabotaging an historic opportunity. The breach remains intensely bitter to this day.

Every mass socialist movement outside Soviet Russia was split in 1920 and 1921. Lenin accepted no partial adherence to the Twenty-One Points. He specified by name the reformist leaders whom each party must purge, along with their followers. The British Labour party and some powerful Social Democratic parties, such as the Austrian and the Swedish, lost only a fraction of their members to the Third International. After Lenin rejected the enthusiastic adherence of Serrati's Italian "maximalists" unless they would purge their own ranks of reformists, only about a third of them finally joined the new Italian Communist party in January 1921. On Christmas Day 1920 a majority of the French SFIO voted to accept the Twenty-One Points, taking the party machinery and newspaper (*Humanité*) with them. The old German SPD had been split over the war since 1914, but even that ardent Spartacist Rosa Luxemburg had, before her death, questioned the applicability of Lenin's methods to Western Europe. Only about a third of the Independent Social Democrats (USPD), went over to the Third International in December 1920. The rest returned to the majority SPD fold or left the movement in disillusion.

Even these moderate successes of the Third International were further weakened as the revolutionary perspective faded in Western Europe after 1920. As the Russian leaders attempted to bring Western European Communist parties under tighter Bolshevik control from Moscow in the 1920s, they discovered that Lenin had recruited enthusiasts for immediate revolution but not disciplined followers. The largest new Communist party in the West, in France, was filled with anarcho-syndicalists who had always opposed parliamentary socialism but who dropped away from communism as soon as its centralized governance became clear. The Norwegian Labour party, which had rushed eagerly into the Third International in 1919, withdrew in 1923. So there remained in the West minority Communist parties and larger Social Democratic parties, frozen in permanent opposition to each other around the issue of whether revolution had been possible in 1919 and 1920.

One more result of the revolutionary movements after 1917 became clear only later. Even as the revolutionary pressures subsided, a panicky reaction to them began. Many frightened middle-class Europeans began abandoning the nineteenth-century liberalism of their fathers for some stronger bulwarks against revolutionary socialism. We shall look more closely at those bulwarks in Chapter 7, after first examining the peace settlement of 1919.

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