

## CHAPTER 23

# REVOLUTIONARY RUSSIA AND THE SOVIET UNION



When Nicholas II (1868–1918) was crowned tsar of Russia upon the death of Alexander III in 1894, he decided to hold a great public festival on a huge field outside of Moscow, considered the sacred center of the empire. Convinced that it was his duty to uphold the principles of autocracy, Nicholas was sensitive to the tsar's traditional role as the Holy Father of all his people. He wanted to reaffirm the ties that bound his subjects to him, and he to them. The festival attracted enthusiastic crowds numbering in the hundreds of thousands. It featured rides, fortune telling, and other staples of Russian popular festivals. But in the stampede to get free beer and coronation souvenirs, more than 1,200 people were crushed to death and between 9,000 and 20,000 injured. Celebration had turned to tragedy. And during the coronation itself, the heavy chain of the Order of Saint Andrew dropped from Nicholas's shoulders to the ground. Many people—perhaps even the superstitious tsar himself—saw these events as bad omens for the tsar's reign.

Not bad omens, however, but rather the failure to implement meaningful political reform brought down Nicholas II and the Russian autocracy in 1917. First, the Revolution of 1905 led to reforms but did not alter the autocratic nature of the regime. This revolution forced Tsar Nicholas II to grant increased freedom of the press and to create an elected Duma (assembly). These reforms had disappeared, for all intents and purposes, when the tsar regained the upper hand in the counter-revolution that began in 1906, yet the Revolution of 1905 demonstrated the vulnerability of even a police state to popular mobilization. In August 1914, the Russian Empire went to war, and the conflict itself encouraged those who demanded political reform. In February 1917, the tsar abdicated. Then, after six months of uncertainty and political division, the Bolshevik (October) Revolution overthrew the

provisional government. Russia withdrew from the Great War. The "dictatorship of the proletariat" became that of Vladimir Lenin's Communist Party. Upon Lenin's death in 1924, Joseph Stalin consolidated his personal authority in the Soviet Union, ruthlessly establishing state socialism (see Chapter 25).

The Russian Revolution of 1917, like that of 1905, was not the kind of revolution that the Russian populists or anarchists had predicted—massive uprisings of the peasant masses against lords and imperial officials—although peasant rebellion was an essential ingredient in both revolutions. Nor did it correspond to Karl Marx's prediction that a successful bourgeois revolution would be followed by a revolution undertaken by an industrial proletariat. War played a catalytic role in the Russian Revolution of 1917: Russia's shocking defeat in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) and, above all, the horror of the Great War created hardships that increasingly undermined the legitimacy of the tsarist regime.

## WAR AND REVOLUTION

Reformers were still biding their time when Russia went to war in 1914. However, Lenin (see Chapter 18) was dumbfounded when most socialists in other countries supported their nation's mobilization for war. Among Russian socialists, "defensists" (Mensheviks and most Socialist Revolutionaries) argued that Russian workers should defend their country against German attack. "Internationalists" (including Bolsheviks) opposed the war, viewing it as a struggle between capitalist powers in which workers were but pawns.

Lenin took the war as a sign that capitalism might be ripe for what he thought was its inevitable fall. "Imperialism is the last stage," he wrote, "in the development of capitalism when it has reached the point of dividing up the whole world, and two gigantic groups have fallen into mortal struggle." He believed that if revolution were to break out in several countries, the fall of Russian autocracy and capitalism could be near, even without the true "bourgeois revolution" Marx had predicted. Even if the Russian working class was less developed than those of Western nations, the corresponding weakness of the Russian bourgeoisie could facilitate a successful revolution. This revolution would be followed by the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat, that is, by a mobilized working class led by its most dedicated elements, his party, the Bolsheviks. The revolution would then spread to other countries, where the working classes would follow the example of the first successful socialist revolution.

### *Russia at War*

The Great War became a catalyst for demands for reform within Russia, first in the management of the war itself, and then in Russian political life.

The war had begun with an upsurge of patriotism and political unity, with the tsar blessing icons and the faithful kneeling before him. A Bolshevik noted bitterly that amid shouts of "'God Save the Tsar!' our class struggle went down the drain." Within a year, however, the war had shattered the "sacred union" that represented a patriotic consensus in 1914. Liberals renewed demands for political reform. Workers agitated for higher wages and better working conditions. By 1917, 15 million men had been drafted into the army, the vast majority of whom were poor peasants. It proved difficult to transform peasants who were more used to holding rakes than rifles into soldiers. Sent by high command into battle ill equipped, Russian losses were staggering.

In the interest of the war effort, the government allowed national organizations to exist that earlier had been forbidden. These groups became the organizational base for the liberal opposition. Liberal *zemstvo* representatives established a committee, the Union of *Zemstvos*, to organize relief for the sick and wounded; an organization of municipal governments, the Union of Towns, was also created.

In the spring of 1915, liberal Duma members began to express open dissatisfaction with the way the war was being run. Russia's factories experienced difficulties in meeting military needs; the army lacked sufficient rifles and artillery shells. The tsar permitted industrialists to form a War Industries Committee, to which delegations of workers were added, in order to expedite wartime production.

The war gradually transformed Petrograd (the new name given to Saint Petersburg, because it sounded more Russian), accentuating social polarization. By 1916, most of Petrograd's workers, who made up 35 percent of

Tsar Nicholas II, holding an icon, blesses his troops.



the population, were producing war materiel, swelling the ranks of metal, textile, and chemical workers. More peasants flocked to the capital, as did waves of refugees from the war zones of Russian Poland and the Baltic states.

As Russian society strained under the pressures of war, liberals demanded that the Duma be allowed to meet and that Tsar Nicholas dismiss a number of reactionary ministers. With military defeats—none more disastrous than that at Tannenberg (August 1914), where 100,000 Russian troops were captured—followed by humiliating retreats weighing on him, the tsar established a Council for National Defense. He summoned the Duma to meet in July 1915 and replaced four ministers. In August, some liberal members of the Duma formed a “Progressive Bloc” committed to working with the tsar in the hope of encouraging reform.

The melancholy, ineffectual tsar remained extremely superstitious. Seventeen was his unlucky number: on January 17, 1895, the day of his first speech as tsar, an elderly noble had dropped a traditional gift of bread and salt, a bad omen, and on October 17, 1905, he had been constrained to sign a constitution. But he retained the respect and distant affection of most of the Russian people. Tsarina Alexandra, in contrast, was loathed by many of her subjects. Born in Germany, she was the granddaughter of Queen Victoria and had been raised in England before marrying Tsar Nicholas in 1894. She had converted from Anglicanism to the Russian Orthodox Church. The illness of their only son, Alexei (1904–1918), a hemophiliac and the heir to the throne, increasingly weighed on the royal couple.

As she became ever more conservative, Alexandra extended her influence over her weak-willed husband. Nicholas dismissed ministers on the whims of the tsarina. (“Lovey, don’t dawdle!” she wrote her husband, urging him to fire one of them.) When he met in an emergency session with his Council of Ministers, the tsar followed Alexandra’s instructions to clutch a religious icon. Nicholas then dismissed his liberal ministers. Many Russians wrongly believed that Alexandra was actively working for the interests of Germany, although no German agent could have served Germany as well. In the meantime, Nicholas had assumed command of the army. Liberals feared this could lead to more military disasters, and would also take the tsar away from Petrograd, leaving imperial decision making even more subject to the influence of Tsarina Alexandra.



Tsarina Alexandra with Grigory Rasputin (center).

Alexandra's great favorite was Grigory Rasputin (1872–1916), a debauched "holy man." Claiming occult power and the ability to heal Alexei's hemophilia, Rasputin had moved gradually into the inner circle of court life. On one occasion, he predicted that one of Alexei's spells would shortly subside, and it did. To the consternation of the tsar's ministers, the influence enjoyed by the man the tsarina called "our friend" became a matter of state. In December 1916, noble conspirators, who feared Rasputin's influence on military operations, put what they thought was enough poison into his many drinks to kill a cow. When Rasputin seemed almost unfazed, they shot him repeatedly and smashed his skull in a protracted struggle.

Food shortages eroded the revival of the workers' patriotism that had accompanied the beginning stages of the war. The growth of public organizations, which opened up a larger public sphere for discussion and debate, helped mobilize opposition to autocracy. Cooperative associations formed by workers to resist high prices had 50,000 members by the end of 1916. Some workers on the War Industries Committee pushed for greater militancy. The Bolsheviks found support among industrial workers. Attacks on the management of the war rang out in the Duma, as well as in the Union of Towns and the Union of the *Zemstvos*. In December 1916 the latter passed a resolution calling on the Duma to stop cooperating with the tsar and demanded ministerial responsibility. Liberals remained paralyzed, however, cowed by tsarist repression amid increased worker militancy.

For the moment, the tsar and the liberals needed each other. Outright revolution or violent repression seemed equally dangerous to both. The state needed the continued participation of voluntary committees and agencies of local self-government in order to keep the state from collapsing into shortage-induced anarchy. Liberal-dominated committees and agencies required the centralized apparatus of the state to carry out their work.

Food shortages reached a peak during the harsh winter of 1916–1917. Peasants hoarded their grain. Police repression of strikes helped close the ranks of workers against the government. In Lithuania, nationalists demanded autonomy within the empire, and some nationalist agitation occurred in other Russian borderlands as well. In 1916 Muslims in Turkistan in Central Asia rose up in arms against Russian rule after the government attempted to move a quarter of a million people to factories near the front. Increasing anger at the continued arrival of Russian settlers in Turkistan also played a role in the unrest. These occurrences revealed the complexity of the problem of nationalism in the Russian Empire.

Alexander Kerensky, (1881–1970), a lawyer, and leader of the Socialist Revolutionaries (see Chapter 18), denounced the war in a speech whose daring rhetoric had never been heard in the Duma. Some loyal nobles now urged reforms. But Nicholas replaced members of the Progressive Bloc with uncompromising reactionaries. He and his family withdrew into retreat, leaving the government floundering like a rudderless boat in high seas.

The Russian Revolution that took place in Petrograd in February 1917 grew out of the massive discontent with hunger and deprivation, and amid mounting frustration at tsarist intransigence against reform. Like most large European cities, Petrograd's neighborhoods reflected social segregation. The upper- and middle-class residential districts and the palatial buildings of imperial government lay on and near a long street called the Nevsky Prospect. This central artery was lined with banks, hotels, restaurants, cafés, a giant department store, and offices. The streetcars did not run as far as the muddy streets of the workers' districts, nor in many cases did the city's water mains or electric power lines. Epidemics were still frequent in Petrograd, as in Moscow and other Russian cities, which were characterized by acute overcrowding and inadequate sanitation.

Revolutionary organizations prepared a massive general strike in early 1917, the anniversary of Bloody Sunday in 1905. During January and February, almost half of the capital's 400,000 workers went out on strike, including munitions workers at the Putilov factory—the largest factory in Europe with 30,000 workers. Yet the Petrograd garrison of about 160,000 soldiers still seemed adequate to the task of maintaining order, even though most were raw recruits. Demonstrators demanded that a provisional government be appointed with the power to enact major reforms. Food lines stretched longer in Petrograd, Moscow, and other cities in temperatures that reached forty below zero. Bread riots, in which many women and young people participated, became a daily occurrence.

On February 23 (all subsequent dates in this chapter refer to the Old Russian calendar, which was thirteen days behind the Western calendar), more determined demonstrators took to the streets. Workers in the Putilov munitions factory tore up factory rule books and created committees to represent their interests to the company. Female textile workers led the way out of the factories.

On February 25, a general strike closed down Petrograd. While Petrograd's Duma debated ways of dealing with severe food shortages, crowds of ordinary people poured into Petrograd's center. Military attention was focused on the front. Tsar Nicholas then ordered the commander of the garrison to suppress demonstrations. Street fighting began and spread in the city. The attitude of soldiers, most of whom were peasants or workers, now became crucial. Many were shocked when ordered to fire on insurgents. When a commanding officer tried to restore order by reading a telegram from the tsar, he was shot while trying to flee the barracks. Thousands of soldiers and some officers went over to the insurgent side, and a number of officers and soldiers who continued to resist were summarily executed after being captured.

Miserable conditions of war, the unpopularity of the officers (who addressed the rank and file as masters had spoken to serfs), awful food,



Bolshevik soldiers marching at the Kremlin in Moscow, 1917.

and empathy with the demands of the workers for “bread and peace” explain the massive defection of soldiers. Sailors mutinied on ships of the Baltic fleet. The capture of the Petrograd arsenal put thousands of rifles as well as ammunition into the hands of workers. The insurgents controlled Petrograd, the capital of Russia.

Nicholas, who was away at his seaside resort with his family, now ordered the Duma to dissolve. Some of its members drawn from privileged society obeyed, but the majority simply moved to a new meeting place. They voted to remain in Petrograd—a move not unlike the Tennis Court Oath of the third estate during the first period of the French Revolution, a precedent of which they were keenly aware. The Duma then elected a provisional committee, whose mandate was to restore order. In the meantime, the liberals, who tried to walk a tightrope between a desire for reform and a fear of the masses, now were in the position of trying to contain the revolution they had helped set in motion.

The Russian Revolution of February 1917 was unplanned and its outcome uncertain. But the soil was fertile. Experienced in strikes, Socialist Revolutionary, Menshevik, and Bolshevik activists helped impart a sense of direction to the movement. Their goal, unlike that of the liberals, who wanted only reform, was the overthrow of the tsarist regime. Amid the turmoil of sudden change effected by groups who did not necessarily agree on what should happen next, the provisional committee began to function as a provisional government, organizing a food supply commission and a military

commission to try to bring the soldiers roaming through the city under some control.

On February 27, in response to calls in the streets, the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies was created—*soviets* were councils that had been established during the Revolution of 1905. Members of the organization included several hundred workers, some of whom the demonstrators had freed from jail (where they had been placed for their political or trade union activities), as well as soldiers. They elected officers, discussed ways to defend Petrograd against a possible German attack, and sent representatives to encourage the formation of soviets in other cities. Menshevik leaders took the lead in the Petrograd Soviet's creation as Bolshevik leaders held back, fearing that a large and effective soviet might make it more difficult for their party to direct worker militancy.

Hoping to overwhelm the rebellion with his presence, the tsar now decided to return to Petrograd. He spent almost two full days aboard his private train, critical moments in the February Revolution. On the train, the tsar received an erroneous report that insurgent troops held the next stations and that they would refuse to let his train through. Nicholas then went to the northern military front, hoping to find a loyal army ready to march on Petrograd. In disbelief, he learned that Moscow, too, had fallen almost overnight to insurgents. His generals made no effort to save the

Workers at the giant Putilov factory in Petrograd vote during a meeting of the Petrograd Soviet.





regime. They believed the tsar's cause lost and that only his abdication could prevent civil war, and perhaps military defeat at the hands of Germany as well.

Nicholas II abdicated on March 2, 1917, leaving the throne to his brother, Prince Michael. He did so with characteristic calm and fatalism—scribbling in his diary that day, “All around me—treason and cowardice and deceit.” A few hours in revolutionary Petrograd convinced Prince Michael to refuse to succeed his brother. The Soviet placed the tsar and his family under house arrest until the summer, when they were taken by train to a small Siberian town. The Russian autocracy had fallen in a matter of days, with only about a thousand people killed. No legions of faithful peasants had risen up from the land of the black earth to save the “Holy Father.”

### *The Provisional Government and the Soviet*

The provisional government and the Petrograd Soviet were left in the awkward position of serving as dual or parallel governments. The provisional government included Constitutional Democrats, liberals who had demanded only that the tsar initiate political reforms. The Petrograd Soviet, in contrast, consisted largely of workers and soldiers who had helped overthrow the tsar. The relationship between the moderate provisional government and the radical Soviet would ultimately affect the course of the Russian Revolution itself. For the moment, the Petrograd Soviet promised to accept the provisional committee's authority. Both the provisional government and the Soviet met in the same palace, with Kerensky, named minister of justice but also a member of the Soviet, running back and forth between the two bodies, trying to smooth relations between them.

On March 8, the provisional government granted civil liberties, including the right to strike, democratized local government, announced that it would convene a constituent assembly to establish a constitution, and amnestied political prisoners. The Petrograd Soviet, now with 3,000 members and an executive committee meeting virtually around the clock, demanded immediate economic and social reforms. The provisional government and the Soviet quickly became the focus of attention of competing political groups—Liberals, Socialist Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, and Bolsheviks—all of whom wanted to shape Russia's future.

### *The Army*

In the meantime, the army was the last functioning imperial institution. On March 1, the Petrograd Soviet issued Order Number One, which claimed for the Soviet the authority to countermand orders of the provisional government on military matters and called for the election of soldiers' committees in every unit. In fact, such elections had already widely occurred, a remarkable attempt to democratize army life. In some places

on the front, soldiers had refused to obey officers and, in a few cases, beat them up or even shot them. The soldiers wanted peace. Yet the danger that the military front might collapse against German pressure seemed quite real. Desertions increased in the first month of the Revolution. For the moment, however, the Bolshevik promise of "land and peace" seemed a distant prospect. As soldiers put it, "What good is land to me if I'm dead?"

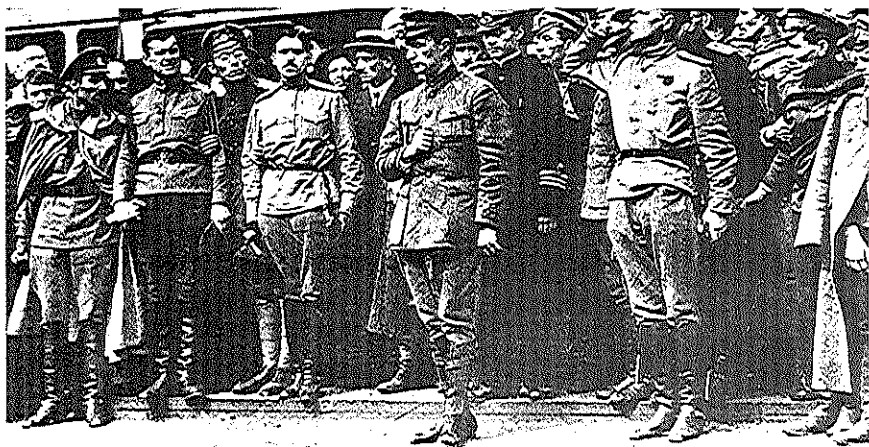
The United States, first, and then Great Britain, France, and Italy quickly gave diplomatic recognition to the provisional government, hoping that the Revolution would not drastically affect the Russian military commitment to hold the eastern front. But in a few places on the front, Russian troops fraternized with astonished German and Austro-Hungarian soldiers.

### *The Revolution Spreads*

As news of the Revolution and the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II spread, ordinary people in the vast reaches of what had been the Russian Empire attacked and disarmed police stations, freed political prisoners, and created provisional governing bodies. Yet it sometimes took weeks for "commissars of the revolution" to arrive. In some industrial regions, workers had already occupied factories, demanding higher wages, an eight-hour day, and control over production. But in most places, the situation remained unclear. One Russian reflected: "We feel that we have escaped from a dark cave into bright sunlight. And here we stand, not knowing where to go or what to do."

With Petrograd and much of European Russia caught between war and revolution, some of the minority peoples of the empire began to demand more favorable status. Their demands were as myriad and complicated as the old Russian Empire itself. Among the nationalities, some nationalists sought only cultural autonomy; others wanted some degree of political freedom within the context of a federal structure; still others demanded outright independence. Such demands soured relations in regions where ethnic and religious tensions had persisted, sometimes for centuries. In the steppes of Central Asia and in the northern Caucasus, fighting broke out between Russian settlers and the Cossacks (who had begun to settle the regions in large numbers following the emancipation of the serfs in 1861), the Kazakh-Kirghiz, the Bashkirs, and other Turkish peoples. Thousands of people perished in these struggles. In the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, nationalist movements grew rapidly.

The provisional government's goal was to hold the empire together until a constituent assembly could be elected to establish the political basis of the new state. Its declaration of civil rights for all peoples had made each nationality in principle equal. In some places, representatives of the new regime immediately turned over administrative responsibility to local committees or individuals. But elsewhere, local peoples set up their own institutions of self-rule in the hope of maintaining order. In some places,



Alexander Kerensky (front center) head of the provisional government, with troops in Petrograd, 1917.

nationalist movements competed with Socialist Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, and Bolsheviks for allegiance.

Kerensky's provisional government announced that Poland, which had been an independent state until the Third Partition by Russia, Prussia, and Austria in 1795, would again become independent, in the hope of undermining German and Austro-Hungarian troops who occupied most of Poland. In neighboring Belarus—like Poland, a battleground—a national committee led by Socialist Revolutionaries demanded autonomy and established a Rada (council).

The situation in Ukraine was particularly complicated. The provisional government feared that if it granted Ukrainian autonomy, other nationalities would demand similar treatment. Shortly after the tsar's abdication, Ukrainian socialists had formed a soviet. On March 4, 1917, nationalists and socialists established the Ukrainian Central Council. Centuries-old resentment of Russia, based on cultural and linguistic differences, rose to the surface. As more radical nationalists gathered in Kiev, the Rada convoked a Ukrainian National Congress, which began to draft a statute for autonomy. Ukrainian soldiers formed their own military units. Serving as a *de facto* provisional government in Ukraine, the Rada broadened its social and national base by including non-Ukrainian residents. In the meantime, nationalism began to grip Ukrainian peasants, and many of them occupied lands owned by Russian or Polish landlords.

In regions with sizable Muslim populations, national movements were divided between religious conservatives, Western-looking liberals, and leftist Socialist Revolutionaries. The first All-Russian Muslim Congress, which began on May 1, 1917, reflected these divisions. Islamic conservatives attempted to shout down speakers advocating rights for women, but

Westernizers predominated, passing the measure. The congress announced the future formation of a religious administration that would be separate from the state.

Besides the enormous challenge of assuring the food supply—by ordering the army to curtail the unpopular requisitioning of grain—the provisional government had to make sure that the military front held. At the same time, the provisional government faced increasing pressure from the Soviet for economic and social reforms, above all, land reform. The provisional government authorized the formation of local food supply committees and “land committees,” which were charged with gathering information in order to draft a land reform measure for the Constituent Assembly. Liberals also wanted land reform, but insisted that it be carried out in a deliberate, legal manner. Peasants, however, wanted action, not committees.

An All-Russian Congress of Soviets began at the end of March 1917 in Petrograd. Bringing together representatives of other soviets that had sprung up after the Revolution, this congress transformed the Petrograd Soviet into a national body, establishing a central executive committee dominated by members of the Petrograd Soviet.

A groundswell of opposition to Russia's continued participation in the war gradually drove a wedge between workers and soldiers and the provisional government. Nonetheless, at the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, the Bolsheviks' call for an immediate end to the war was easily defeated. Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries were willing to continue the war, but on the condition that the provisional government work for peace without annexations of land from Russia's enemies.

The issue of the war led to the provisional government's “April Crisis.” The minister of foreign affairs, a leader of the Kadets (Constitutional Democratic Party), added a personal note to an official communication to the Allies that called for “war to decisive victory,” evoking Russia's “historic right” to take Constantinople. Protests by the Petrograd Soviet and demonstrations against the war led to his resignation from the government at the beginning of May. The April Crisis led to the formation of the first coalition government, which reflected the push to the left. The provisional government now accepted the Petrograd Soviet's demand that “peace without annexations” be henceforth the basis of Russian foreign policy.

Worsening material conditions radicalized many workers, particularly in trade unions that had sprung up since February 1917. Workers organized factory committees and strikes. In the countryside, the poorer peasants operated on the simplest principle of all: those who work the land ought to own it. Many children or grandchildren of former serfs began to occupy the land of the lords for whom they had worked, sometimes killing landlords or former imperial officials in the process. Indeed, the percentage of landless peasants may have fallen by half during the 1917–1920 period. Soviets sprung up in the countryside as civil authority disappeared. In some villages, the Orthodox Church could no longer compel obedience. A priest

reported, "My parishioners will nowadays only go to meetings of the soviet, and when I remind them about the church, they tell me they have no time."

### *Lenin's Return*

The German government expedited Lenin's return to Russia from Switzerland, where he had been in exile since 1900. The Bolshevik leader's return might exert further pressure on the provisional government to sue for peace, allowing the German army to concentrate its efforts on the western front. After passing through German territory in a sealed railway car to assure that he had no contact with the German population, Lenin arrived in Petrograd in early April 1917.

Lenin gradually rallied the Bolshevik Party around his leadership, based on the following propositions: (1) Russian withdrawal from the war, the continuation of which he viewed as a serious obstacle to a Bolshevik victory; (2) no support for the provisional government; (3) a call for revolution in the other countries of Europe; and (4) the seizure of large estates by the peasantry.

In his "April Theses," Lenin argued that wartime chaos had allowed the bourgeois and proletarian revolutions to merge in a dramatically short period of time. The overthrow of the autocracy had suddenly and unexpectedly handed power to a weak bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie, holding power through the provisional government, could be in turn overthrown by the proletariat, supported by the poorest peasants. Local power would be held by workers, soldiers, and peasants through the soviets, but under Bolshevik Party guidance. The soviets would provide the basis on which a new state could be constructed through the "dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry." It sounded so simple.

Aided by the provisional government's division and growing unpopularity, Bolshevik support grew among the factory committees, Red Guards (newly created factory workers' militias), sailors at the naval base of Kronstadt, and soldiers within the Petrograd garrison. The failure of the existing provisional government to provide either peace or land undermined its support among peasants. It was powerless to resolve industrial disputes or to put an end to land seizures. In the meantime, Menshevik leaders warned that continued Bolshevik radicalism might push conservatives toward launching a coup d'état.

### *The July Days*

Although neither troop morale nor the military situation boded well, in mid-June Kerensky announced a Russian offensive in Galicia. This was to reassure conservatives and moderates that military discipline had been restored, and to convince the Allies that Russia remained committed to winning the war.

On July 3, 1917, the Bolsheviks rose in insurrection. They had been encouraged by their increasing popularity among workers, the ongoing agrarian revolution, and widespread dissatisfaction with the war. Nearly 100,000 soldiers who feared being sent to the front joined the chaotic uprising. However, sensing defeat, the Bolshevik Central Committee tried to call off the insurrection the next day. Most troops remained loyal to the provisional government, and the insurrection failed.

These "July Days" hardened political lines in Russia. The provisional government ordered the arrest of Bolshevik leaders, and troops closed down party headquarters and the offices of the Bolshevik Party's newspaper, *Pravda* (Truth). Kerensky became prime minister of the second coalition government, depending even more on support from the liberal Kadets. Lenin fled to Finland.

The provisional government now believed that the Bolsheviks were finished. Kerensky tried to portray Lenin as a German agent, noting that the Bolsheviks in exile had received some German money. Kerensky's government disarmed army regiments it considered disloyal, reinstated the death penalty for military disobedience, and staged a state funeral, replete with national and religious symbolism, in honor of soldiers killed at the front.

But the repressive measures undertaken against the Bolsheviks were relatively ineffective because of the disorganization of the judicial apparatus, the rapid turnover of government officials, and the support the Bolsheviks enjoyed in the working-class districts of Petrograd. Many Bolshevik leaders escaped arrest and others were soon released from jail. The repressive measures further discredited the provisional government, which seemed to be using the July Days as an excuse to undertake a counter-revolution.

Doubting the revolutionary potential of the soviets, many of whose members and leaders remained Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries, the Bolsheviks turned to the factory committees to consolidate their support. Bolshevik newspapers and brochures in factories denounced the provisional government and accused moderate socialists of counter-revolution.

### *The Kornilov Affair*

Disillusioned by Kerensky's indecision, frustrated by the ineffectiveness of the repression against the Bolsheviks, and frightened by peasant land seizures, Russian conservatives, including some military officers and Kadets, began to think in terms of a coup d'état.

General Lavr Kornilov (1870–1918), newly appointed commander in chief of the army and a tough Cossack, seemed the obvious candidate to overthrow the provisional government. Prelates of the Orthodox Church sent him icons in the hope that the military could restore religious principles to Russia. In early August 1917, a "Conference of Public Figures," including influential leaders drawn from industry, commerce, banking, and the military, pledged Kornilov their support.

Kerensky organized a Moscow State Conference, which he hoped would mobilize support for his second coalition government. Most of the delegates (some of whom were leaders of trade unions, as well as bankers, representatives from the state dumas, military leaders, and professional people) now believed only a military dictatorship could save Russia from the soviets and from having to pull out of the war. German troops had captured Riga, a major Baltic seaport, posing a direct threat to Petrograd.

Kerensky wanted Kornilov to form a military government that could restore order, but he believed that the general would remain loyal to him and to the idea of establishing a democratic republic. Kornilov probably wanted to seize power and impose a right-wing military regime. A confusing exchange led each leader to misconstrue what the other meant. Kerensky demanded Kornilov's resignation as commander in chief and, when the latter refused, called on the army to remain loyal to the provisional government. On August 27, Kornilov issued an ultimatum to the provisional government declaring that "the heavy sense of the inevitable ruin of the country commands me in this ominous moment to call upon all Russian people to come to the aid of the dying motherland."

Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, and Socialist Revolutionaries formed a committee against counter-revolution. Workers reinforced security around their factories. Bolsheviks were among those receiving arms at the arsenals in anticipation of a stand against a military coup. But no coup d'état took place, and probably nothing specific had actually been planned. However, by raising the specter of counter-revolution, the Kornilov Affair aided the Bolsheviks, who portrayed themselves as the only possible saviors of the Revolution.

## THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION

The provisional government seemed both incapable of solving the worsening economic crisis and unwilling to take Russia out of the war. The workers of Petrograd were organized and armed, their demands increasing. Only the Bolsheviks promised in their program to turn over to the soviets some degree of political power. The radicalized All-Russian Executive Committee of the Soviets now approved the Bolshevik demand that a "democratic" republic be declared by a government "of representatives of the revolutionary proletariat and peasantry" from which Kadets, moderate constitutional democrats, would be excluded.

### *The Bolsheviks Seize Power*

After returning to Petrograd in disguise, on October 10 Lenin convinced the Bolshevik Central Committee that a second insurrection could succeed. Kerensky believed a Bolshevik insurrection imminent, but he vastly underestimated the party's influence with the Petrograd workers, the soviets,

and some army units. Bolshevik propaganda hammered away at the theme that their party was untainted by support for the provisional government. Even if a majority of soldiers or of the population of Petrograd or of Russia did not necessarily favor the Bolsheviks, Lenin's assessment that they would not oppose their seizure of power proved correct.

Late on October 24, 1917, Kerensky shut down Bolshevik newspapers and sent troops to hold the bridges over the Neva River. About 12,000 Red Guards launched the insurrection, supported by factory committees in Petrograd's industrial districts. Leon Trotsky (Lev Davidovich Bronstein, 1879–1940) coordinated the uprising. Trotsky, the revolutionary son of a wealthy Jewish farmer, had borrowed his alias from one of his prison guards. Bolsheviks repelled an attack by army cadets loyal to the provisional government, the only serious fighting of the October Revolution. The regiments upon which Kerensky had counted remained in their barracks, their neutrality striking a blow for the insurrection.

The provisional government collapsed. Kerensky left Petrograd the same day in a car borrowed from the U.S. embassy, hoping in vain to rally military support at the front. That night, the battleship *Aurora*, under the control of revolutionaries, lobbed a couple of shells toward the Winter Palace, where the last ministers of the provisional government were holding out. The provisional government surrendered after eight months of existence. The Bolsheviks held power in Petrograd.

The October Revolution had occurred as if in slow motion. There were fewer people killed than in the February Revolution or even the July Days.

The Bolsheviks seize the Winter Palace, October 1917.





Life went on in many districts of the city as if nothing unusual was occurring. Restaurants, casinos, theaters, and the ballet remained open, although banks closed and streetcars were hard to find. Shares on the stock market, which had risen in anticipation of a military coup d'état during the Kornilov crisis, declined. John Reed, an American sympathetic to the Bolshevik takeover, recalled that in Petrograd's fancy quarters "the ladies of the minor bureaucratic set took tea with each other in the afternoon, [each] carrying her little gold or silver or jeweled sugar-box, and half a loaf of bread in her muff, and wishing that the tsar were back, or that the Germans would come, or anything that would solve the servant problem . . . the daughter of a friend of mine came home one afternoon in hysterics because the woman streetcar conductor had called her 'Comrade.'"

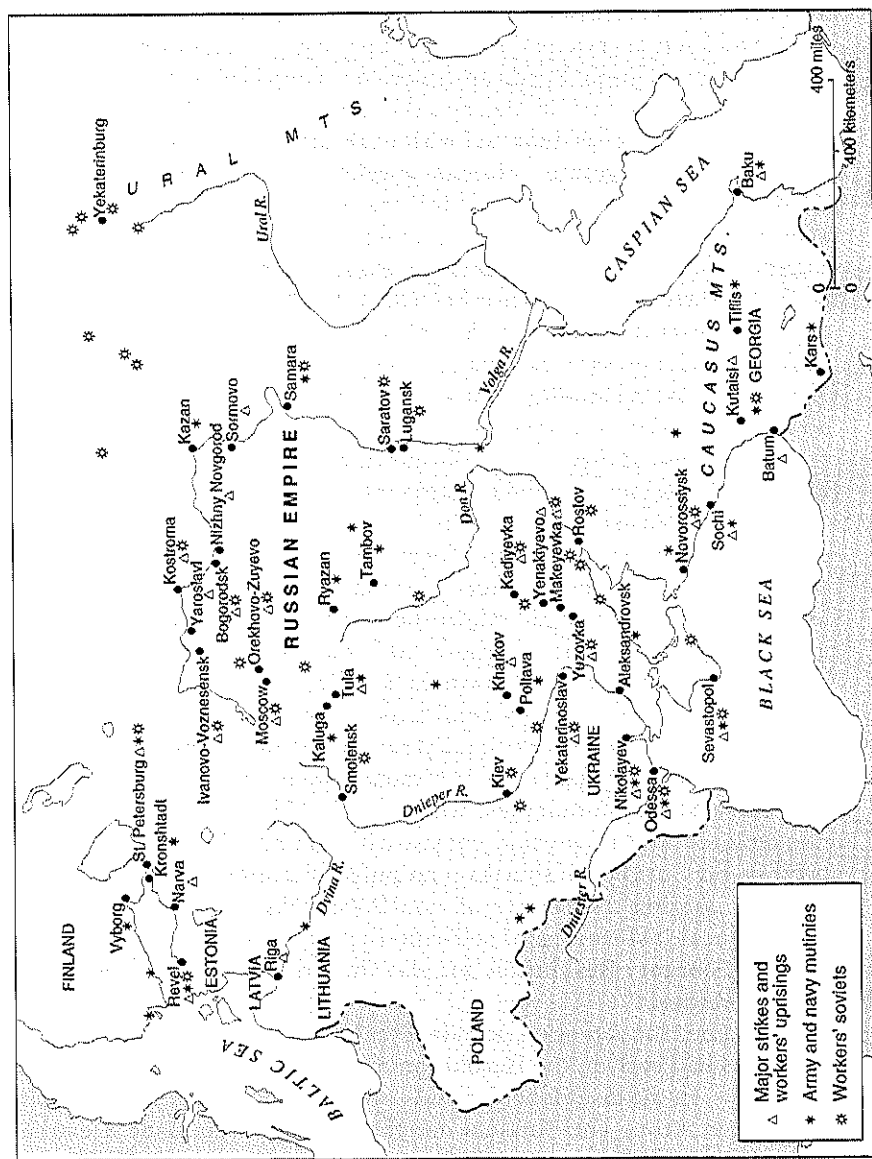
Most Mensheviks and many Socialist Revolutionaries walked out of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets to protest the Bolshevik insurrection. On October 26, the remaining members approved the Bolshevik proposal that "all local authority be transferred to the soviets." The Central Committee of the Congress of Soviets, all Bolshevik except for some leftist Socialist Revolutionaries, now ran the government.

In Moscow, Russia's second city, the insurrection began after the first reports from Petrograd arrived. There, too, the Bolsheviks found support in workers' neighborhoods. After a week of fighting, the forces of the provisional government surrendered. In the vast reaches of the former Russian Empire, a "revolution by telegraph" took place. Commissars representing the Bolsheviks went into the provinces (see Map 23.1). In industrial regions, where the Bolsheviks already dominated some soviets, it was easy enough to establish a military revolutionary committee to assume local power. In the countryside, the Bolsheviks cultivated support among the poorest peasants. Socialist Revolutionaries, with considerable influence among peasants, believed that they could coexist with the new Bolshevik-dominated government. But the Bolsheviks manipulated ethnic, social, and political tensions, purging the soviets of non-Bolsheviks and pushing aside not only the local institutions of self-rule that had spontaneously sprung up after the February Revolution but also their nominal allies, the Socialist Revolutionaries.

In Ukraine, the situation remained calm at least partially because the Bolsheviks had early in the Revolution made an agreement with Ukrainian nationalists. In the distant borderlands where ethnic Russians were a minority, however, strong anti-Russian national feeling often made it extremely difficult for the Bolsheviks to take control.

The Bolsheviks were a small minority in Russia at the time of the October Revolution. "We shall not enter into the kingdom of socialism in white gloves on a polished floor," Trotsky had warned shortly before the October Revolution. The revolutionary government, under Lenin's leadership, seized banks, closed down newspapers, and banned the liberal Constitutional Democratic Party. In December, a new centralized police authority, the

MAP 23.1 THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION Sites of strikes, uprisings, and army and navy mutinies during the Russian Revolution, as well as the cities in which soviets were established by the revolutionaries.



Cheka, began to arrest those who disagreed with the Bolsheviks. It rapidly proliferated into a large organization with virtually unlimited power. Arbitrary arrests led the eminent writer Maxim Gorky to ask, "Does not Lenin's government, as did the Romanov government, seize and drag off to prison all those who think differently?"

In elections for the Constituent Assembly, the Bolsheviks were supported only by the left wing of the Socialist Revolutionaries. The Bolsheviks won just 29 percent of the vote, compared with 58 percent for the Socialist Revolutionaries. When the elected deputies arrived early in January 1918, the Bolsheviks forced the assembly to adjourn the next day. It never met again. Red Guards fired on protesters.

That month, Lenin proclaimed the "Declaration of the Rights of the Toiling and Exploited People," which stated that the goal of the revolutionary government was "the socialist organization of society and the victory of socialism in all countries." The third All-Russian Congress of Soviets established the Russian Socialist Soviet Republic, a federation of "soviet republics." But, as in the Russian Empire, Russia's interests, even under Bolshevik communism, remained paramount.

### *The Peace of Brest-Litovsk*

After the Bolsheviks took power, Trotsky, now "People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs," offered Germany an armistice, signed early in December 1917. However, Trotsky broke off negotiations for a permanent peace agreement because of draconian German demands. In mid-February, German troops captured Kiev and much of Ukraine and Crimea, as well as some of the Caucasus region. On March 3, 1918, the Bolshevik government signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany, giving up one-fourth of the area of what had been imperial European Russia, containing some of its most fertile land and most of its iron and steel production. The Bolsheviks also agreed to German occupation of Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia and agreed to pull Russian troops out of Ukraine and Finland. Angered by the treaty and demanding rapid attention to the agrarian question, the leftist Socialist Revolutionaries ended their cooperation with the Bolsheviks. The Germans then occupied all of Finland and Ukraine, setting up puppet regimes in both states.

## CIVIL WAR

The Russian Civil War began in 1918 when Kornilov and other generals raised armies to fight the Bolsheviks (see Map 23.2). The anti-Bolshevik forces became known as the "Whites" because they shared a common hatred of the Bolsheviks, the "Reds." The White armies held Central Asia and Siberia, territory east of Moscow, and the Caucasus Mountains. A

legion of 50,000 Czechoslovak troops, which had surrendered earlier in the war, operated as an anti-Bolshevik force along an extensive stretch of territory into Siberia, holding the crucial trans-Siberian railway. The White army played upon anti-Semitism by denouncing Trotsky and other Bolshevik leaders because they were Jews. A wave of pogroms spread through Ukraine and parts of Russia. More than 2 million people fled abroad to escape the Russian Revolution and the ensuing Civil War.

MAP 23.2 THE RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR Boundaries of areas controlled by the Whites and the Reds during the Russian Civil War, including advances by the White and foreign armies.



Ukraine passed back and forth between Bolshevik and nationalist control in bloody fighting, falling again briefly into the hands of the Germans. A huge peasant army led by the anarchist Nestor Makhno (1889–1934) allied with the Bolsheviks and controlled parts of Ukraine after the Germans had fallen back. In Siberia, General Alexander Kolchak (1874–1920), backed by Britain and France, established a dictatorship that claimed to be the new government of Russia.

In February 1918, the Soviet government proclaimed the nationalization of all land. Food shortages and famine spread that summer. The Bolsheviks reacted to the crisis by implementing “War Communism.” The state appropriated heavy industries and gradually put an end to private trade. The Bolsheviks forcibly requisitioned food and raw materials, turning poor peasants against more prosperous ones, known as “kulaks.” Peasants from whom grain was being taken sometimes reacted with shock—after all, before the October Revolution the Bolsheviks had loudly proclaimed their support for immediate land reform. Now soldiers were confiscating their grain. Many peasants resisted. War Communism may have saved the Revolution, but it took a terrible toll, leading to a dramatic decline in industrial production.

Bolshevik guards moved Nicholas II and his family to Ekaterinburg, a town in the Ural Mountains, as rumors spread that the Czech legion or monarchist generals were planning to rescue them. On July 17, 1918, they

Lenin addressing the troops leaving for the front during the Civil War, 1920. Trotsky is in uniform standing to the right of the podium, and was later removed from this famous photo on Stalin's order after he was purged.



were brutally executed on the orders of the local soviet, an act evidently approved by Bolshevik leaders.

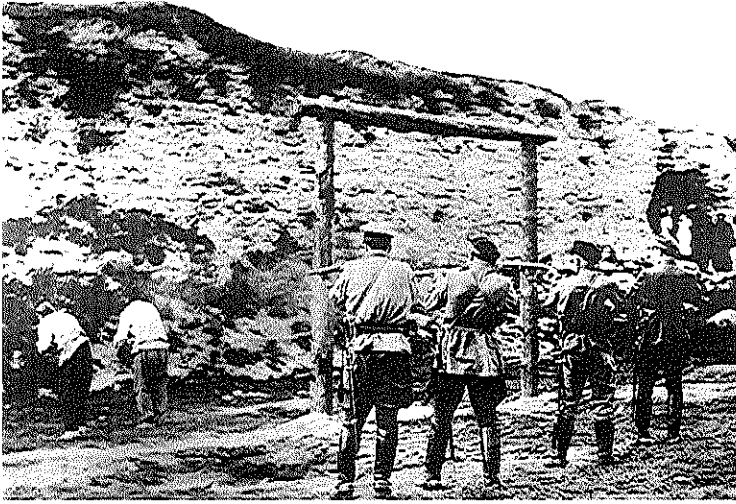
The Allies, particularly Britain, provided supplies to the White armies. In August, British, American, and Canadian soldiers landed in the northern port of Murmansk, claiming that such measures were necessary to prevent Russia's northern ports from falling to the Germans. Allied suspicion of the new Bolshevik government strengthened their decision to intervene. British troops attacked Soviet forces, and American troops landed at the icy northern port of Archangel. Japanese troops moved into Siberia, where the Bolsheviks had little effective control, remaining there until 1922.

Allied intervention helped rally popular opinion against the Whites, whose wanton brutality, including routine rape and murder (some victims were forced to kneel and kiss portraits of the tsar before being killed), exceeded that of the Bolsheviks. Whites filled three freight cars with bodies of Red Guards, sending them along to the Bolsheviks, who were starving, with the wagons labeled "fresh meat, destination Petrograd." However, the Whites had no monopoly on savagery, as in some places Red forces massacred peasants and Cossacks. In Finland, after a bitter civil war between local Reds and Whites, the "White Terror" took 80,000 victims among those who had supported the Revolution. Moreover, the Russian nationalist calls of White leaders for an "indivisible" Russia alienated other national groups, aiding the Bolsheviks, who falsely promised to respect the rights of non-Russian nationalities.

Following attempts on the lives of several Bolshevik leaders, including Lenin, the "Red Terror" began in September 1918. Government decrees gave the Cheka almost unlimited authority and set up forced labor camps to incarcerate those considered enemies. While many victims were indeed working for the overthrow of the regime, many others were simply Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries, or others who held political beliefs that displeased the Bolsheviks.

Fighting the Whites required the mobilization of 5 million men. The Red Army defeated the largest White army in Ukraine during the summer of 1919 and turned back a final march on Moscow in October. General Alexander Kolchak's White army held out until late that year. The Civil War continued in 1920, and in the Pacific region fighting lasted into 1922.

In 1920, Józef Pilsudski, commander of the Polish army, sought to take advantage of apparent Soviet weakness in the wake of the Civil War by creating a federation of independent states, including Lithuania, Ukraine, and Belarus, under Polish leadership. Having defeated the White armies, Lenin planned a Soviet attack on Poland. But the Polish army invaded Ukraine, until the Red Army repelled the attack and pushed Polish forces back into Poland. However, Polish peasants and workers refused to join the Red Army. Pilsudski's forces surrounded the Soviet army on the edge of Warsaw in August 1920—the "miracle of the Vistula" River. This put an end to the possibility of the Soviet army pushing toward Berlin and linking up with a revo-



The White army executes suspected Bolsheviks during the Civil War.

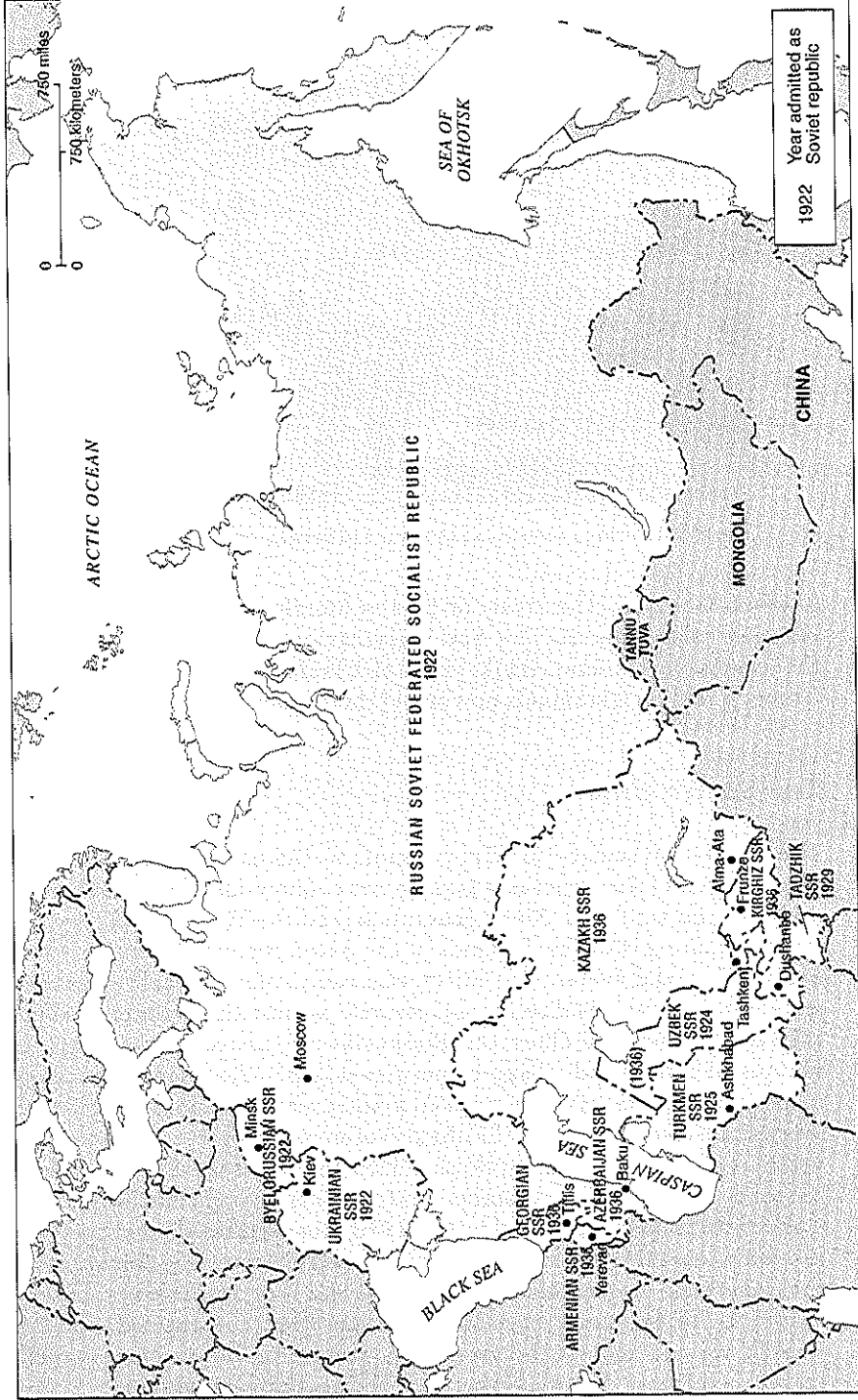
lution in Germany. The Treaty of Riga in March 1921 ended the hostilities between Poland and the new Soviet government, which had been largely at the expense of Ukraine. While much of Ukraine was left within the Soviet Union, 5 million Ukrainians now found themselves living in Poland.

## THE SOVIET UNION

The Revolution seemed to offer peasants in Russia hope. After destroying the authority of the imperial regime in the countryside, they then broke the power of the landlords. Many peasants feared the Whites, and they therefore went along with the demands of the Soviet regime, hoping that “peace and land” would follow. The Bolsheviks were able to install a centralized state authority to mobilize the countryside against the counter-revolution. Like the old imperial elites, the Bolsheviks mistrusted the peasants, their notions of family and village ownership of land, their sense of collective responsibility, and their eagerness to market what they produced. The Civil War established a precedent for the use of mass terror to enforce the party’s will in rural areas. Gradually, Bolshevik commissars reestablished Bolshevik authority over Ukraine and border lands such as Georgia and Turkistan.

A constitution promulgated in July 1918 promised freedom of speech and assembly, as well as the separation of church and state. The “dictatorship of the proletariat” became that of the Bolsheviks. Marxist theory promised the “withering of the state” once socialism had been constructed, and Lenin himself warned against the growing power of the bureaucracy, which he had helped create. But the Soviet state did anything but wither.

MAP 23.3 THE SOVIET REPUBLICS, 1922–1939 Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs) and their capitals in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.





The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was created in 1922. It included Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Transcaucasia (Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, which all became separate republics in 1936), to which Uzbek (Uzbekistan) was added in 1924, Turkmen (Turkistan) in 1925, Tadzhik in 1929, and Kazakh (Kazakhstan) and Kirghiz in 1936 (see Map 23.3).

### *Democratic Centralism*

For Lenin, "democratic centralism," which had referred to decisions taken by the Bolshevik Party, was also a goal in itself in the organization of the socialist state. In the summer of 1918, the Bolsheviks took the name of the Communist Party, a name Lenin had favored during the war as a way of more clearly differentiating the more radical Bolsheviks from the Mensheviks, their socialist rivals. Lenin's concept originally called for open and free discussion and debate on policy issues, but once party leaders made a decision all dissent had to end and all party members were to unite around the party line. Major decisions and discipline would thus come from the top. The structure suffocated the democratic apparatus on the local level, which henceforth received orders that flowed downward and outward from the central party apparatus in the name of the state.

The Communist government did not tolerate workers' self-management, a goal of many people who had helped overthrow the tsarist autocracy. A group called the Left Communists had opposed signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany, arguing that Russia should lead a revolutionary war against the capitalist powers. Furthermore, they denounced the growing centralization of power. In response, Lenin acidly denounced "Left Infantilism and the Petty Bourgeois Spirit" in the summer of 1918, referring to those who criticized the abandonment of the principles of workers' self-management. Now "workers' control" meant state control.

In June 1919, the Bolsheviks nationalized most of the large-scale industries. In early 1921, at the end of the Civil War, worker discontent erupted in strikes and demonstrations in some industrial centers. In March 1921, the Red Army crushed a revolt at the Kronstadt naval base, where sailors demanded freely elected soviets. Massive strikes rocked Petrograd after Bolshevik authorities rebuffed workers' demands for better working conditions and more control over their shops and factories. Party officials pushed the soviets out of the way as the state turned against the idea of workers' self-management. In 1922, someone asked Trotsky, "Do you remember the days when you promised us that the Bolsheviks would respect democratic liberties?" Trotsky replied, "Yes, that was in the old days." That same year, when protests occurred in one region against the confiscation of Orthodox Church treasures, Lenin himself suggested that demonstrators be shot: "The more [of them] we manage to shoot, the better. Right now we have to teach this public a lesson, so that for several decades they won't even dare to think of resisting."

Lenin and the other Bolshevik leaders debated how socialism could be implemented in a vast, poor country of many nationalities. The new Soviet government had to repair the massive disruption done to the economy by the Great War and subsequent Civil War. More than 7 million people died of starvation and sickness during a famine in 1921–1922. Moreover, the war against Poland and the loss of territory also accentuated the gravity of the economic situation. With the economy in near total collapse, Lenin recognized that communist ideology, which called for the abolition of private ownership, for the moment would have to be sacrificed. Market incentives would have to be tolerated, perhaps for some time.

Furthermore, War Communism had collapsed because of the resistance, active and passive, of peasants and workers. The cities and army had only been fed because the state had been able to requisition or commandeer supplies in the vast countryside. At a time of severe famine, the government needed to feed the population and build up a surplus of raw materials and food supplies. After the threat from the White armies had ended, peasants had violently resisted grain requisitioning. Against this background, in March 1921, Lenin announced a “New Economic Policy” (NEP). Although the state maintained its centralized control over the economy, the NEP permitted peasants to use the land as if it were their own and allowed trade of produce at market prices, although the state retained control of heavy industries. The goal was, above all, to encourage peasants to bring their crops to market. Lenin called this a temporary “retreat” on the road to socialism. Some merchants whose stores had been nationalized during the Civil War were now allowed to manage them again, and the government permitted small-scale, privately owned manufacturing. Lenin even invited foreign investment in mining and other development projects.

The NEP revived the economy. The amount of land under cultivation and industrial production gradually began to reach pre-war levels. In towns, small businesses run by “nepmen” prospered, and kulaks gained. But if the NEP brought economic concessions, there were virtually none in the political realm. The Bolsheviks further consolidated their hold over most government functions, claiming to be serving the interests of the working class by protecting them against the Western Allies. They declared all other political parties illegal, although Lenin claimed that this ban would be only a temporary measure, like the NEP itself. The Bolsheviks continued the campaign against Socialist Revolutionaries, as well as Mensheviks. In 1924, the state limited the entrepreneurship of “nepmen” and, three years later, of kulaks.

In the meantime, Joseph Stalin (1879–1953) emerged as an important figure in the Soviet hierarchy. Stalin—an alias taken from the Russian word for “steel”—was born Joseph (Soso) Dzhugashvili in Georgia, beyond the Caucasus Mountains in the southern reaches of the Russian Empire. His father was a tough cobbler who may have been killed in a tavern brawl, his mother

a religious woman who worked as hard as her husband drank. The young Stalin entered an Orthodox seminary in 1894 in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi. Stalin rebelled against the conservatism of the Orthodox Church. In the seminary, Stalin learned Russian, secretly read Marxist tracts, and joined a radical study circle, for which he was expelled. Arrested in 1902 and exiled to Siberia the next year, Stalin escaped and returned to Georgia. There he sided with the Bolsheviks against the Mensheviks (see Chapter 18). The Bolsheviks' hardened secrecy appealed to the young Georgian's acerbic personality. More arrests, jail terms, exile to Siberia, and escapes followed in rapid succession over the next seven years. In 1912, Vladimir Lenin appointed Stalin to the Bolshevik Central Committee, and, after yet another escape from prison, he became editor of *Pravda*.

At the time of the February Revolution, Stalin was a prisoner in Siberia, 600 miles from even the trans-Siberian railway. He managed to return to Petrograd and, after the October Revolution, helped Lenin draft the "Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia," which promised the peoples of the former Russian Empire self-determination. During the Civil War, he served on the military revolutionary council and quarreled with Trotsky over military strategy.

Trotsky had surprisingly little talent for the ruthless political infighting that was as natural to Stalin as breathing. An intense intellectual and powerful orator, Trotsky considered Stalin a "mediocrity." Stalin remained suspicious of "cosmopolitan"—often an anti-Semitic code word for Jewish—intellectuals such as Trotsky. Espousing "permanent revolution," Trotsky believed that socialism in the Soviet Union could only be victorious following world revolution and that the capitalist nations of the West were ripe to be overthrown by proletarian revolutions. The Communist International had been founded in 1919 to help organize and assist revolutionary Communist parties in other countries. Lenin had believed that workers would overthrow one Western state after another. But this had not happened. The German Revolution of 1919 and the revolutionary government of Béla Kun in Hungary had been crushed (see Chapter 24). The International also promised to help colonial people win independence from imperialist domination.

The problem of the status of the 180 nationalities in the Soviet Union became ever more pressing. Lenin's support for national self-determination had been principally intended to undermine the provisional government and win the support of non-Russian nationalities. Furthermore, concerned with the Soviet Union's image in the colonial world, he wanted to give the impression that the various peoples enjoyed a degree of sovereignty. He still believed that national differences posed a threat to the revolution and that they would become irrelevant in the communist state. Stalin, who served as commissar for nationalities (1917–1923), wanted the peoples of the old imperial state incorporated into the existing Russian state. During the Civil War, he had crushed what he called "the hydra of nationalism" in his native Georgia. Russian interests prevailed within the party, and thus within the government. The



Vladimir Lenin (*left*) with Joseph Stalin (*right*) in a photo doctored by Stalin, who was eager to exaggerate his close association with Lenin.

republics created within the Soviet Union in 1922 and thereafter enjoyed virtually no autonomy. The official line was that communism had brought stability by eliminating ethnic tensions and that nationalism would disappear in the new socialist world. If Soviet policies encouraged the survival of some local languages, one reason was to ensure that state bureaucratic directives could be read by Soviet citizens. The Constitution of 1924 would declare the states of the Soviet Union equal, but the reality was completely otherwise.

In May 1922, Lenin suffered a stroke. His illness set off a struggle of succession infused with personal as well as ideological rivalries. Stalin had demonstrated forceful independence while remaining loyal to the party, and a capacity for organization. The previous month, the Central Committee had named Stalin to the recently created post of general secretary, which allowed him to appoint allies to various important posts and to repress dissent within the party. Stalin kept Lenin isolated as much as possible from visitors. In December, a day after suffering a second stroke, Lenin dictated his doubts about Stalin: "Comrade Stalin, on becoming general secretary, concentrated boundless power in his hands, and I am not sure whether he will always know how to use this power with sufficient caution." Lenin also warned against the expansion of the bureaucracies of both the Communist Party and the state.

Lenin's death in January 1924 consolidated Stalin's position. He placed his own men on the Central Committee and made party appointments throughout the Soviet state. He took every occasion to leave the impression that Lenin had handpicked him to be the next Communist Party leader, later doctoring photos so that he appeared to have been constantly at Lenin's side. Under Stalin, the Soviet Union became even more of a totalitarian regime. The promised "dictatorship of the proletariat" became that of the Communist Party and that of Joseph Stalin.