Chapter

16 Russia and the revolutions, 1900–24

SUMMARY OF EVENTS

In the early years of the twentieth century, Russia was in a troubled state. Nicholas II, who was Tsar (emperor) from 1894 until 1917, insisted on ruling as an autocrat (someone who rules a country as he sees fit, without being responsible to a parliament), but had failed to deal adequately with the country's many problems. Unrest and criticism of the government reached a climax in 1905 with the Russian defeats in the war against Japan (1904–5); there was a general strike and an attempted revolution, which forced Nicholas to make concessions (the October Manifesto). These included the granting of *an elected parliament* (the *Duma*). When it became clear that the *Duma* was ineffective, unrest increased and culminated, after disastrous Russian defeats in the First World War, in two revolutions, both in 1917.

- The first revolution (February/March) overthrew the Tsar and set up a moderate *provisional government*. When this coped no better than the Tsar, it was itself overthrown by a second uprising:
- *the Bolshevik revolution* (October/November).

The new Bolshevik government was shaky at first, and its opponents (known as the Whites) tried to destroy it, causing a bitter civil war (1918–20). Thanks to the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, the Bolsheviks (Reds) won the civil war, and, now calling themselves communists, were able to consolidate their power. Lenin began the task of leading Russia to recovery, but he died prematurely in January 1924.

16.1 AFTER 1905: WERE THE REVOLUTIONS OF 1917 INEVITABLE?

(a) Nicholas II tries to stabilize his regime

Nicholas survived the 1905 revolution because:

- his opponents were not united;
- there was no central leadership (the whole thing having flared up spontaneously);
- most of the army remained loyal;
- he had been willing to compromise at the critical moment by issuing the October Manifesto, promising concessions. These included allowing an elected parliament (Duma); granting basic civil liberties to the population – freedom of conscience, of speech, of assembly and of association; universal suffrage in elections for the Duma; no law could begin to operate without the approval of the Duma.

The Manifesto appeared to grant many of the demands of the moderate liberal reformers, so that tsarism now had a breathing space in which Nicholas had an excellent opportunity to make a constitutional monarchy work, and to throw himself on the side of the moderate reformers. However, there were other demands not addressed in the Manifesto, for example:

- improvements in industrial working conditions and pay;
- cancellation of redemption payments – these were annual payments to the government by peasants in return for their freedom and some land, following the abolition of serfdom in 1861: although peasants had received their legal freedom, these compulsory payments had reduced over half the rural population to dire poverty;
- an amnesty for political prisoners.

Unfortunately Nicholas seems to have had very little intention of keeping to the spirit of the October Manifesto, having agreed to it only because he had no choice.

1 *The First Duma (1906)* was not democratically elected, for although all classes were allowed to vote, the system was rigged so that landowners and the middle classes would be in the majority. Even so, it put forward far-reaching demands such as confiscation of large estates; a genuinely democratic electoral system, and the right of the *Duma* to approve the Tsar's ministers; the right to strike and the abolition of the death penalty. This was far too drastic for Nicholas, who had the *Duma* dispersed by troops after only ten weeks. He was apparently heard to remark that if things continued to go on like this, 'we should find ourselves close to being a democratic republic. That would be senseless and criminal.'
2 *The Second Duma (1907)* suffered the same fate, after which Nicholas changed the voting system, depriving peasants and urban workers of the vote.
3 *The Third Duma (1907–12) and the Fourth Duma (1912–17)* were much more conservative and therefore lasted longer. Though on occasion they criticized the government, they had no power, because the Tsar controlled the ministers and the secret police.

Some foreign observers were surprised at the ease with which Nicholas ignored his promises and was able to dismiss the first two *Dumas* without provoking another general strike. The fact was that the revolutionary impetus had subsided for the time being, and many leaders were either in prison or in exile.

This, together with the improvement in the economy beginning after 1906, has given rise to some controversy about whether or not the 1917 revolutions were inevitable. The traditional liberal view was that although the regime had obvious weaknesses, there were signs that shortly before the First World War broke out, living standards were improving, and that given time, the chances of revolution would have diminished. The strengths were beginning to outweigh the weaknesses, and so the monarchy would probably have survived if Russia had kept out of the war. The Soviet view was that, given the Tsar's deliberate flouting of his 1905 promises, there was bound to be a revolution sooner or later. The situation was deteriorating again *before* Russia's involvement in the First World War; therefore the inevitable completion of the 'unfinished' revolution of 1905–6 could not be long delayed.

(b) Strengths of the regime

1 The government seemed to recover remarkably quickly, with most of its powers intact. Peter Stolypin, prime minister from 1906 to 1911, introduced strict repressive

measures, with some 4000 people being executed over the next three years. But he also brought in some reforms *and made determined efforts to win over the peasants*, believing that, given 20 years of peace, there would be no question of revolution. Redemption payments were abolished and peasants were encouraged to buy their own land; about 2 million had done so by 1916 and another 3.5 million had emigrated to Siberia where they had their own farms. As a result, there emerged a class of comfortably-off peasants (*kulaks*) on whom the government could rely for support against revolution, or so Stolypin hoped.

2 As more factories came under the control of inspectors, there were *signs of improving working conditions*; as industrial profits increased, the first signs of a more prosperous workforce could be detected. In 1912 a workers' sickness and accident insurance scheme was introduced.

3 In 1908 a programme was announced to bring about *universal education within ten years*; by 1914 an extra 50 000 primary schools had been opened.

4 At the same time *the revolutionary parties seemed to have lost heart*; they were short of money, torn by disagreements, and their leaders were still in exile.

(c) Weaknesses of the regime

1 Failure of the land reforms

By 1911 it was becoming clear that Stolypin's land reforms would not have the desired effect, partly because the peasant population was growing too rapidly (at the rate of 1.5 million a year) for his schemes to cope with, and because farming methods were too inefficient to support the growing population adequately. The assassination of Stolypin in 1911 removed one of the few really able tsarist ministers and perhaps the only man who could have saved the monarchy.

2 Industrial unrest

There was a wave of industrial strikes set off by the shooting of 270 striking gold miners in the Lena goldfields in Siberia (April 1912). In all there were over 2000 separate strikes in that year, 2400 in 1913, and over 4000 in the first seven months of 1914, *before* war broke out. Whatever improvements had taken place, they were obviously not enough to remove all the pre-1905 grievances.

3 Government repression

There was little relaxation of the government's repressive policy, as the secret police rooted out revolutionaries among university students and lecturers and deported masses of Jews, thereby ensuring that both groups were firmly anti-tsarist. The situation was particularly dangerous because the government had made the mistake of alienating three of the most important sections in society – peasants, industrial workers and the intelligentsia (educated classes).

4 Revival of the revolutionary parties

As 1912 progressed, the fortunes of the various revolutionary parties, especially *the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks*, revived. Both groups had developed from an earlier movement, the Social Democrat Labour Party, which was Marxist in outlook. Karl Marx (1818–83) was a German Jew whose political ideas were set out in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) and *Das Kapital* (*Capital*) (1867). He believed that economic factors were the real cause of historical change, and that workers (proletariat) were everywhere exploited by capitalists (middle-class bourgeoisie); this means that when a society became fully industrialized, the workers would inevitably rise up against their exploiters and take

control themselves, running the country in their own interests. Marx called this 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'. When this point was reached there would be no further need for the 'state', which would consequently 'wither away'.

One of the Social Democrat leaders was *Vladimir Lenin*, who helped to edit the revolutionary newspaper *Iskra* (The Spark). It was over an election to the editorial board of *Iskra* in 1903 that the party had split into Lenin's supporters, *the Bolsheviks* (the Russian word for 'majority'), and the rest, *the Mensheviks* (minority).

- *Lenin and the Bolsheviks* wanted a small, disciplined party of professional revolutionaries who would work full-time to bring about revolution; because the industrial workers were in a minority, Lenin believed they must work with the peasants as well, and get them involved in revolutionary activity.
- *The Mensheviks*, on the other hand, were happy to have party membership open to anybody who cared to join; they believed that a revolution could not take place in Russia until the country was fully industrialized and industrial workers were in a big majority over peasants; they had very little faith in co-operation from peasants, who were actually one of the most conservative groups in society. The Mensheviks were the strict Marxists, believing in a proletarian revolution, whereas Lenin was the one moving away from Marxism. In 1912 appeared the new Bolshevik newspaper *Pravda* (Truth), which was extremely important for publicizing Bolshevik ideas and giving political direction to the already developing strike wave.
- *The Social Revolutionaries* were another revolutionary party; they were not Marxists – they did not approve of increasing industrialization and did not think in terms of a proletarian revolution. After the overthrow of the tsarist regime, they wanted a mainly agrarian society based on peasant communities operating collectively.

5 The royal family discredited

The royal family was discredited by a number of scandals. It was widely suspected that Nicholas himself was a party to the murder of Stolypin, who was shot by a member of the secret police in the Tsar's presence during a gala performance at the Kiev opera. Nothing was ever proved, but Nicholas and his right-wing supporters were probably not sorry to see the back of Stolypin, who was becoming too liberal for their comfort.

More serious was the royal family's association with Rasputin, a self-professed 'holy man', who made himself indispensable to the Empress Alexandra by his ability to help the ailing heir to the throne, Alexei. This unfortunate child had inherited haemophilia from his mother's family, and Rasputin was able, on occasion, apparently through hypnosis and prayer, to stop the bleeding when Alexei suffered a haemorrhage. Eventually Rasputin became a real power behind the throne, but attracted public criticism by his drunkenness and his numerous affairs with court ladies. Alexandra preferred to ignore the scandals and the *Duma*'s request that Rasputin be sent away from the court (1912).

(d) The verdict?

The weight of evidence seems to suggest therefore that events were moving towards some sort of upheaval before the First World War broke out. There was a general strike organized by the Bolsheviks in St Petersburg (the capital) in July 1914 with street demonstrations, shootings and barricades. The strike ended on 15 July, a few days before the war began; the government still controlled the army and the police at this point and might well have been able to hold on to power, but writers such as George Kennan and Leopold

Haimson believed that the tsarist regime would have collapsed sooner or later even without the First World War to finish it off. More recently, Sheila Fitzpatrick takes a similar view: 'The regime was so vulnerable to any kind of jolt or setback that it is hard to imagine that it could have survived long, even without the war.'

On the other hand, some recent historians are more cautious. Christopher Read thinks the overthrow of the monarchy was by no means inevitable, and that the situation in the years immediately before 1914 could have continued indefinitely, provided there was no war. Robert Service agrees: he argues that although Russia was in a condition of 'general brittleness', although it was a 'vulnerable plant, it was not doomed to suffer the root-and-branch revolution of 1917. What made that kind of revolution possible was the protracted, exhausting conflict of the First World War.' Soviet historians of course continued to argue to the end that revolution was historically inevitable: in their view, the 'revolutionary upsurge' was reaching a climax in 1914, and the outbreak of war actually delayed the revolution.

(e) War failures made revolution certain

Historians agree that Russian failures in the war made revolution certain, causing troops and police to mutiny, so that there was nobody left to defend the autocracy. The war revealed the incompetent and corrupt organization and the shortage of equipment. Poor transport organization and distribution meant that arms and ammunition were slow to reach the front; although there was plenty of food in the country, it did not get to the big cities in sufficient quantities, because most of the trains were being monopolized by the military. Bread was scarce and very expensive.

Norman Stone has shown that the Russian army acquitted itself reasonably well, and Brusilov's 1916 offensive was an impressive success (see Section 2.3(c)). However, Nicholas made the fatal mistake of appointing himself supreme commander (August 1915); his tactical blunders threw away all the advantages won by Brusilov's offensive, and drew on himself the blame for later defeats, and for the high death rate.

By January 1917, most groups in society were disillusioned with the incompetent way the Tsar was running the war. The aristocracy, the *Duma*, many industrialists and the army were beginning to turn against Nicholas, feeling that it would be better to sacrifice him to avoid a much worse revolution that might sweep away the whole social structure. General Krimov told a secret meeting of *Duma* members at the end of 1916: 'We would welcome the news of a *coup d'état*. A revolution is imminent and we at the front feel it to be so. If you decide on such an extreme step, we will support you. Clearly there is no other way.'

16.2 THE TWO REVOLUTIONS: FEBRUARY/MARCH AND OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 1917

The revolutions are still known in Russia as the February and October Revolutions. This is because the Russians were still using the old Julian calendar, which was 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar used by the rest of Europe. Russia adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1918. The events which the Russians know as the February Revolution began on 23 February 1917 (Julian), which was 8 March outside Russia. When the Bolsheviks took power on 25 October (Julian), it was 7 November elsewhere. In this section, the Julian calendar is used for internal events in Russia, and the Gregorian calendar for international events such as the First World War, until 1 February 1918.

(a) The February Revolution

The first revolution began on 23 February when bread riots broke out in Petrograd (St Petersburg). The rioters were quickly joined by thousands of strikers from a nearby armaments factory. The Tsar sent orders for the troops to use force to end the demonstrations, and 40 people were killed. Soon, however, some of the troops began to refuse to fire at the unarmed crowds and the whole Petrograd garrison mutinied. Mobs seized public buildings, released prisoners from jails and took over police stations and arsenals. The *Duma* advised Nicholas to set up a constitutional monarchy, but he refused and sent more troops to Petrograd to try to restore order. This convinced the *Duma* and the generals that Nicholas, who was on his way back to Petrograd, would have to go. Some of his senior generals told Nicholas that the only way to save the monarchy was for him to renounce the throne. On 2 March, in the imperial train standing in a siding near Pskov, the Tsar abdicated in favour of his brother, the Grand Duke Michael. Unfortunately nobody had made sure that Michael would accept the throne, so when he refused, the Russian monarchy came to an end.

Was it a revolution from above or below, organized or spontaneous? This has been the subject of some controversy among historians. George Katkov thought that the conspiracy among the elite was the decisive factor – nobles, *Duma* members and generals forced Nicholas to abdicate in order to prevent a real mass revolution developing. W. H. Chamberlin, writing in 1935, came to the opposite conclusion: 'it was one of the most leaderless, spontaneous, anonymous revolutions of all time'. The revolution from below by the masses was decisive, because it threw the elite into a panic; without the crowds on the streets, there would have been no need for the elite to act. None of the traditional liberal historians thought the revolutionary parties had played a significant role in organizing the events.

Soviet historians agreed with Chamberlin that it was a revolution from below, but they did not accept that it was spontaneous. On the contrary, they made out a strong case that the Bolsheviks had played a vital role in organizing strikes and demonstrations. Many recent Western historians have supported the theory of a mass uprising organized from below, but not necessarily one organized by the Bolsheviks. There were many activists among the workers who were not affiliated to any political group. Historians such as Christopher Read, Diane Koenker and Steve Smith have all shown that workers were motivated by economic considerations rather than politics. They wanted better conditions, higher wages and control over their own lives; in the words of Steve Smith, 'it was an outburst of desperation to secure the basic material needs and a decent standard of living'.

(b) The provisional government

Most people expected the autocracy of the tsarist system to be replaced by a democratic republic with an elected parliament. The *Duma*, struggling to take control, set up a mainly liberal *provisional government* with Prince George Lvov as prime minister. In July he was replaced by Alexander Kerensky, a moderate socialist. But the new government was just as perplexed by the enormous problems facing it as the Tsar had been. On the night of 25 October a second revolution took place, which overthrew the provisional government and brought the Bolsheviks to power.

(c) Why did the provisional government fall from power so soon?

1 It took the unpopular decision to continue the war, but *the June offensive, Kerensky's idea, was another disastrous failure*. It caused the collapse of army morale and discipline, and sent hundreds of thousands of deserting troops streaming home.

2 *The government had to share power with the Petrograd soviet*, an elected committee of soldiers' and workers' representatives, which tried to govern the city. It had been elected at the end of February, before the Tsar's abdication. Other soviets appeared in Moscow and all the provincial cities. When the Petrograd soviet ordered all soldiers to obey only the soviet, it meant that in the last resort, the provisional government could not rely on the support of the army.

3 *The government lost support because it delayed elections*, which it had promised, for a Constituent Assembly (parliament), arguing that these were not possible in the middle of a war when several million troops were away fighting. *Another promise not kept was for land reform* – the redistribution of land from large estates among peasants. Tired of waiting, some peasants started to seize land from landlords. The Bolsheviks were able to use peasant discontent to win support.

4 Meanwhile, thanks to a new political amnesty, *Lenin was able to return from exile in Switzerland* (April). The Germans allowed him to travel through to Petrograd in a special 'sealed' train, in the hope that he would cause further chaos in Russia. After a rapturous welcome, he urged (in his *April Theses*) that the Bolsheviks should cease to support the provisional government, that all power should be taken by the soviets, and that Russia should withdraw from the war.

5 *There was increasing economic chaos*, with inflation, rising bread prices, lagging wages and shortages of raw materials and fuel. Industry was severely handicapped by a shortage of investment. In the midst of all this, Lenin and the Bolsheviks put forward what seemed to be a realistic and attractive policy: a separate peace with Germany to get Russia out of the war, all land to be given to the peasants, workers' control in the factories and more food at cheaper prices.

6 *The government lost popularity because of the 'July Days'*. On 3 July there was a huge demonstration of workers, soldiers and sailors, who marched on the Tauride Palace where both the provisional government and the Petrograd soviet were meeting. They demanded that the soviet should take power, but the members refused to take the responsibility. The government brought loyal troops from the front to restore order and accused the Bolsheviks of trying to launch an uprising; it was reported, falsely, that Lenin was a German spy. At this, the popularity of the Bolsheviks declined rapidly; Lenin fled to Finland and other leaders were arrested. But about 400 people had been killed during the violence, and Prince Lvov, who was deeply shocked by the July Days, resigned. He was replaced by Alexander Kerensky. It is still not absolutely clear who was responsible for the events of the July Days. American historian Richard Pipes is convinced that Lenin planned the whole affair from the beginning; Robert Service, on the other hand, argues that Lenin was improvising, 'testing the waters' to discover how determined the provisional government was. The demonstration was probably spontaneous in origin, and Lenin soon decided that it was too early to launch a full-scale uprising.

7 *The Kornilov affair embarrassed the government* and increased the popularity of the Bolsheviks. General Kornilov, the army commander-in-chief, viewed the Bolsheviks as traitors; he decided it was time to move against the soviet, and he brought troops towards Petrograd (August). However, many of his soldiers mutinied and Kerensky ordered Kornilov's arrest. Army discipline seemed on the verge of collapse; public opinion swung against the war and in favour of the Bolsheviks, who were still the only party to talk openly about making a separate peace. By October they had won a majority over the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries (SRs) in both the Petrograd and Moscow soviets, though they were in a minority in the country as a whole. Leon Trotsky (who had just become a Bolshevik in July) was elected Chairman of the Petrograd soviet.

8 In mid-October, *urged on by Lenin, the Petrograd soviet took the crucial decision to attempt to seize power*. He was strongly supported by Joseph Stalin and Yakov Sverdlov, who had assumed the leadership while Lenin was absent in Finland. But it was Leon Trotsky who made most of the plans, which went off without a hitch. During the night of 25–26 October, Bolshevik Red Guards and troops loyal to the Petrograd Soviet took over important buildings, including telegraph offices and the railway station, and surrounded the Winter Palace. Later the provisional government ministers were arrested, except Kerensky, who managed to escape. It was almost a bloodless coup, enabling Lenin to announce that the provisional government had been overthrown.

The Bolsheviks knew exactly what they were aiming for, and were well disciplined and organized, whereas the other revolutionary groups were in disarray. The Mensheviks, for example, thought that the next revolution should not take place until the industrial workers were in a majority in the country. Lenin and Trotsky believed that both revolutions could be combined into one, and so, after years of disagreement, they were able to work well together. However, the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries still believed that this revolution should have been delayed until the industrial workers were more numerous. They walked out of the Second Congress of Soviets, leaving Lenin and the Bolsheviks to set up a new Soviet government with himself in charge. It was to be called the Council of People's Commissars, or Sovnarkom for short.

(d) Coup or mass insurrection?

The official Soviet interpretation of these events was that the Bolshevik takeover was the result of a mass movement: workers, peasants and most of the soldiers and sailors were attracted by the revolutionary politics of the Bolsheviks, which included peace, land for the peasants, worker control, government by the soviets and self-determination for the different nationalities in the Russian Empire. Lenin was a charismatic leader who inspired his party and the people. Soviet historians have pointed out that in only 16 out of 97 major centres did the Bolsheviks have to use force in order to assert their authority. It was important for the Bolsheviks, or Communists, as they became known later, to emphasize the popular nature of the revolution because that gave the regime its legitimacy.

The traditional liberal interpretation put forward by Western historians rejected the Soviet view. They refused to accept that there was any significant popular support for the Bolsheviks, who were simply a minority group of professional revolutionaries who used the chaos in Russia to take power for themselves. They were successful because they were well organized and ruthless. According to Adam Ulam, 'the Bolsheviks did not seize power in this year of revolutions. They picked it up. ... Any group of determined men could have done what the Bolsheviks did in Petrograd in October 1917: seize the few key points of the city and proclaim themselves the government.' Richard Pipes is the most recent historian to re-state the traditional interpretation. In his view, the October revolution was due almost entirely to Lenin's overwhelming desire for power.

The libertarian interpretation takes a completely different line. Libertarians believe that the October revolution was the result of a popular uprising, which had very little to do with the Bolsheviks. The masses were not responding to Bolshevik pressure, but to their own aspirations and desires; they had no need of the Bolsheviks to tell them what they wanted. Alexander Berkman claimed that 'the shop and factory committees were the pioneers in labour control of industry, with the prospect of themselves, in the near future, managing the industries'. For the libertarians the tragedy was that the Bolsheviks

hijacked the popular revolution: they pretended that their aims were the same as those of the masses, but in reality they had no intention of allowing factory committees any power, and they did not believe in genuine democracy and freedom. Just as the masses were about to take power for themselves, it was wrenched from their hands by the Bolsheviks.

Revisionist interpretations have concentrated on what was happening among ordinary people; their conclusions were wide-ranging. However, they all agree that there was great political awareness among ordinary people, many of whom were involved in trade unions and the soviets. In some places they seem to have been influenced by the Bolsheviks; in Kronstadt, the island naval base off Petrograd, the Bolsheviks were the largest group in the local soviet. In June 1917 it was their influence which caused the Kronstadt soviet to pass a resolution condemning 'this pernicious war' and the Kerensky offensive.

The revisionist interpretations are the ones most widely accepted nowadays, although Richard Pipes continues to cling to the traditional views. More evidence has become available since the end of communist rule in the USSR, when millions of files were thrown open in the previously closed archives. There seems no doubt that by October 1917 the masses were broadly in favour of a government by the soviets, of which there were some 900 by that time, throughout Russia. Christopher Read believes that 'the revolution was constantly driven forward by the often spontaneous impulse given to it from the grass roots'. Robert Service (in *Lenin: A Biography*) stresses the role of Lenin; he thinks there can be no doubt that Lenin wanted power and used the potentially revolutionary situation brilliantly. 'His every pronouncement was directed towards encouraging the "masses" to exercise initiative. His wish was for the Bolsheviks to appear as a party that would facilitate the making of Revolution by and for the people.' So in fact the Bolsheviks did have popular backing, even though it was fairly passive, for their October *coup*, because the popular movement thought it was going to get government by the soviets.

Although the circumstances were right and there was hardly any resistance to the Bolsheviks, it still needed that small group of people with the nerve and the resolve to use the situation. This was the contribution that Lenin and Trotsky made – they judged to perfection the point of maximum unpopularity of the provisional government, and then they actually 'made' the revolution happen. It would not have been possible without the masses – it was the popular movement which determined that there would be so little resistance, but equally, it would not have been possible without Lenin and Trotsky.

(e) Lenin and the Bolsheviks consolidate their control

The Bolsheviks were in control in Petrograd as a result of their coup, but in some places the takeover was not so smooth. Fighting lasted a week in Moscow before the soviet won control, and it was the end of November before other cities were brought to heel. Country areas were more difficult to deal with, and at first the peasants were only lukewarm towards the new government. They preferred the Social Revolutionaries, who also promised them land and who saw the peasants as the backbone of the nation, whereas the Bolsheviks seemed to favour industrial workers. Very few people expected the Bolshevik government to last long because of the complexity of the problems facing it. As soon as the other political groups recovered from the shock of the Bolshevik coup, there was bound to be some determined opposition. At the same time they had somehow to extricate Russia from the war and then set about repairing the shattered economy, while at the same time keeping their promises about land and food for the peasants and workers.

16.3 HOW SUCCESSFULLY DID LENIN AND THE BOLSHEVIKS DEAL WITH THEIR PROBLEMS (1917–24)?

(a) Lack of majority support

The Bolsheviks had nothing like majority support in the country as a whole. One problem therefore was how to keep themselves in power and yet allow free elections. One of Lenin's first decrees nationalized all land, including former crown estates and land belonging to the church, without compensation, so that it could be redistributed among the peasants and, so he hoped, win their support. The decree on workers' control gave industrial workers authority over their managers and was intended to reduce unrest and strikes in factories. Another decree limited the working day in factories to eight hours. Other decrees included granting self-determination to every national group, nationalizing banks, large factories and mines, and cancelling all debts incurred by the tsarist government and the Provisional government. One major concession that Lenin and Trotsky were prepared to make was to allow some Left Social Revolutionaries to act as junior partners in the government, because they had far more support than the Bolsheviks in rural areas. At the same time they took steps to deal with any opposition. The government claimed the right to close down hostile newspapers and journals, and set up a new security police force. This had the mind-blowing name – the Extraordinary Commission for Combating Sabotage and Counter-Revolution, usually known as the Cheka. Its leader was Felix Dzierzynski.

Lenin knew that he would have to allow elections, since he had criticized Kerensky so bitterly for postponing them; but he sensed that a Bolshevik majority in the Constituent Assembly was highly unlikely. Kerensky had arranged elections for mid-November, and they went ahead as planned. Lenin's worst fears were realized: the Bolsheviks won 175 seats out of about 700, but the Social Revolutionaries (SRs) won 370; the Mensheviks won only 15, Left Social Revolutionaries 40, various nationality groups 80 and Kadets (Constitutional Democrats who wanted genuine democracy) 17.

Under a genuine democratic system, the SRs, who had an overall majority, would have formed a government under their leader, Viktor Chernov. However, Lenin was determined that the Bolsheviks were going to stay in power; there was no way in which he was going to hand it over to the SRs, or even share it, after the Bolsheviks had done all the hard work of getting rid of the Provisional Government. After some anti-Bolshevik speeches at the first meeting of the Constituent Assembly (January 1918), it was dispersed by Bolshevik Red Guards and not allowed to meet again. Lenin's justification for this undemocratic action was that it was really the highest form of democracy: since the Bolsheviks knew what the workers wanted, they had no need of an elected parliament to tell them. The Assembly must take second place to the Congress of Soviets and Sovnarkom (the Council of People's Commissars); this was a sort of cabinet which had Lenin as its chairman. Armed force had triumphed for the time being, but opposition was to lead to civil war later in the year.

(b) The war with Germany

The next pressing problem was how to withdraw from the war. An armistice between Russia and the Central Powers had been agreed in December 1917, but long negotiations followed during which Trotsky tried, without success, to persuade the Germans to moderate their demands. *The Treaty of Brest–Litovsk (March 1918)* was cruel: Russia lost Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the Ukraine, Georgia and Finland; this included a third of Russia's farming land, a third of her population, two-thirds of her coalmines and

Map 16.1 **Russian losses by the Treaty of Brest–Litovsk**

half her heavy industry (Map 16.1). This was a high price to pay, and all the other parties condemned it; the Left Socialist Revolutionaries walked out of Sovnarkom. However, Lenin insisted that it was worth it, pointing out that Russia needed to sacrifice space in order to gain time to recover. He probably expected Russia to get the land back anyway when, as he hoped, the revolution spread to Germany and other countries.

(c) The drift towards violence

Almost immediately after the October revolution, the Bolsheviks began to resort to coercion in order to get things done and to stay in power. This raises the question, much debated by historians, of *whether Lenin had violent intentions from the beginning, or whether he was pushed into these policies against his will by the difficult circumstances.*

Soviet and Marxist historians played down the violence and claimed that the Bolsheviks had no choice, given the uncompromising attitude of their enemies. After the signing of the Treaty of Brest–Litovsk, the SRs left Petrograd and moved eastwards to Samara on the

Volga. They set up an alternative government which launched a campaign of assassination and terror, before the civil war started. According to Christopher Hill,

> there was no wholesale suppression of the opposition press during the six months immediately after the Bolshevik revolution, and no violence against political opponents, because there was no need for it. The death sentence was even abolished at the end of October, though Lenin thought this very unrealistic.

The members of the provisional government who had been arrested were almost all released after promising 'not to take up arms against the people any more'. Lenin himself remarked in November 1917: 'We do not use the sort of terror as was used by the French revolutionaries who guillotined unarmed people, and I hope we shall not have to use it.' However, *circumstances became increasingly difficult.*

- *By January 1918 there were severe food shortages in Petrograd and Moscow* and some other cities. Lenin was convinced that the better-off peasants (*kulaks*) were hoarding huge quantities of grain in protest against the low payments that they were receiving. They hoped to force the government to increase their payments. There is plenty of evidence that this was indeed the case. Lenin's new secret police, the Cheka, were given the job of dealing with grain hoarders and speculators. 'There will be no famine in Russia', Lenin said in April 1918, 'if stocks are controlled and any breach of the rules is followed by the harshest punishment – the arrest and shooting of takers of bribes and swindlers.'
- After the signing of the humiliating Treaty of Brest–Litovsk (March 1918), *the loss of Ukraine, a vitally important source of wheat, made the food situation worse.*
- *The left-wing Social Revolutionaries did their best to wreck the treaty, and began a campaign of terror.* They assassinated the German ambassador and a leading Bolshevik member of the Petrograd soviet, and there was some evidence that they were attempting either to seize power for themselves or to spark off a popular uprising to force the Bolsheviks to change their policies.
- On 30 August 1918, the head of the Petrograd Cheka was assassinated, and later the same day a woman shot Lenin twice with a revolver at point-blank range. He was wounded in the neck and one of his lungs, but seemed to make a quick recovery.

All these events can be taken as evidence that it was the desperate situation, rather than any inherent ideological motive, which drove Lenin and the Bolsheviks into retaliating with violence.

The problem was that however well-intentioned the Bolsheviks were, *Lenin's reasoning was fatally flawed in two vital respects.*

1 Karl Marx had predicted that the collapse of capitalism would take place in two stages: first, the middle-class bourgeois capitalists would overthrow the autocratic monarchy and set up systems of parliamentary democracy. Secondly, when industrialization was complete, the industrial workers (proletariat), who were now in a majority, would overthrow the bourgeois capitalists and set up a classless society – the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. The first stage had taken place with the February revolution. The Mensheviks believed that the second stage could not occur until Russia was fully industrialized and the proletariat was in a majority. However, Lenin insisted that in Russia's case, the two revolutions – bourgeois and proletarian – could be successfully telescoped together; this was why he had launched the October coup – the opportunity was too good to be missed! This had given rise to the situation in which the Bolsheviks were in power before their most reliable supporters – the

industrial workers – had become a large enough class to sustain them. This left the Bolsheviks as a minority government, uncomfortably dependent on the largest, but most self-interested class in Russian society – the peasants.

2 Lenin expected that a successful revolution in Russia would occur as part of a European or even a worldwide socialist revolution. He was convinced that revolutions would quickly follow in central and western Europe, so that the new Soviet government would be supported by sympathetic neighbouring governments. None of this had happened, so Russia was left isolated, facing a capitalist Europe which was deeply suspicious of the new regime.

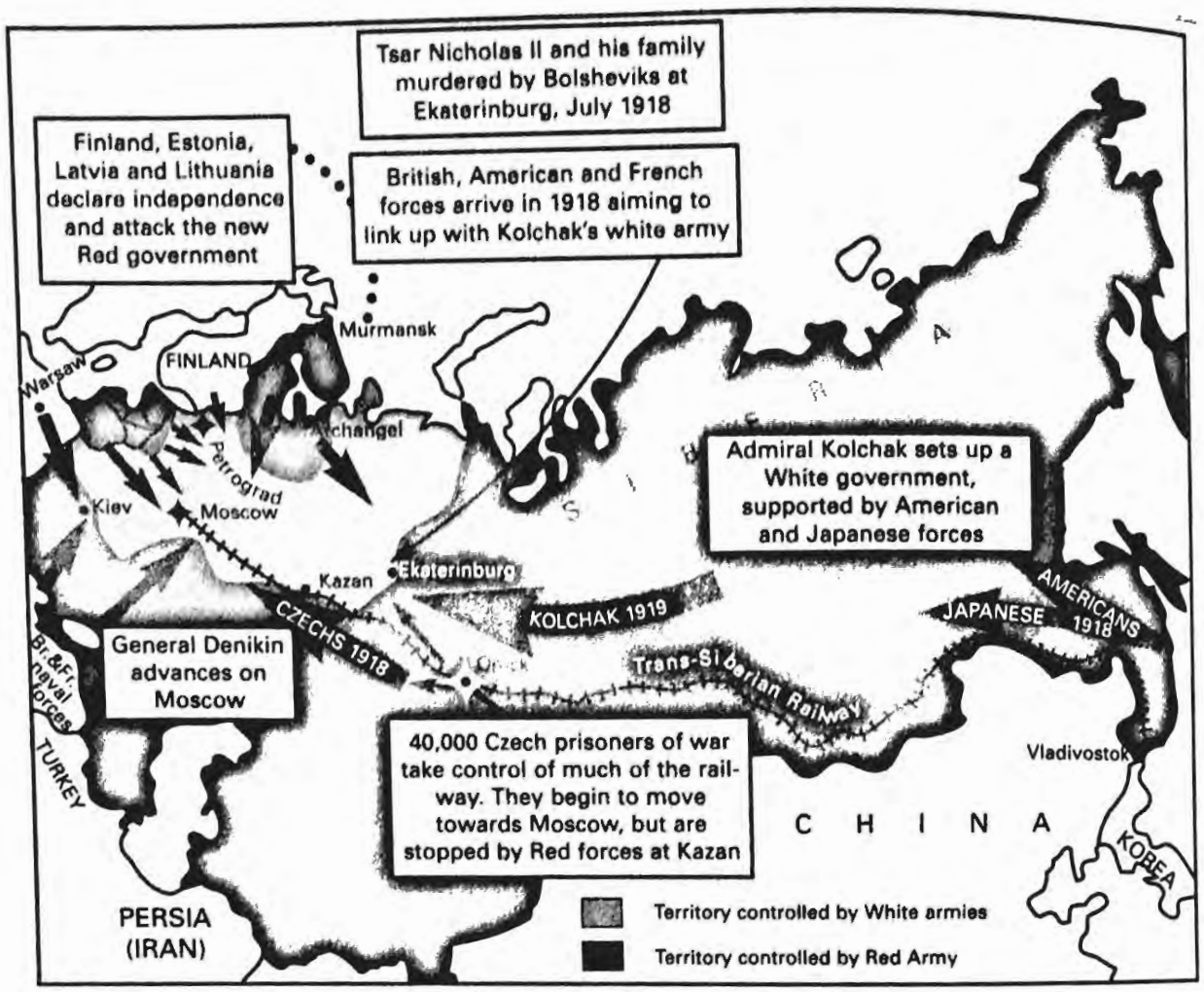
Both internally and externally, therefore, the regime was under pressure from the forces of counter-revolution. Law and order seemed to be breaking down and local soviets simply ignored the government's decrees. If the Bolsheviks intended to stay in power and rebuild the country, regrettably they would more than likely have to resort to violence to achieve anything significant.

Traditional liberal historians reject this interpretation; they believe that Lenin and Trotsky, though perhaps not all the Bolshevik leaders, were committed to the use of violence and terror from the beginning. Richard Pipes claims that Lenin regarded terror as an absolutely vital element of revolutionary government and was prepared to use it as a preventive measure, even when no active opposition to his rule existed. Why else did he set up the *Cheka* early in December 1917, at a time when there was no threat of opposition and no foreign intervention? He points out that in a 1908 essay on the failure of the French revolutionaries, Lenin had written that the main weakness of the proletariat was 'excessive generosity – it should have exterminated its enemies instead of trying to exert moral influence over them'. When the death penalty was abolished, Lenin was highly indignant, retorting: 'This is nonsense, how can you make a revolution without executions?'

(d) The 'Red Terror'

Whatever the intentions of the Bolsheviks, there is no doubt that violence and terror became widespread. The Red Army was used to enforce the procurement of grain from peasants who were thought to have surpluses. During 1918 the *Cheka* suppressed 245 peasant uprisings and 99 in the first seven months of 1919. Official *Cheka* figures show that during the course of these operations over 3000 peasants were killed and 6300 executed; in 1919 there were over 3000 more executions, but the actual death toll was probably much higher. Social Revolutionaries and other political opponents were rounded up and shot. One of the most disturbing features of this 'Red Terror' was that many of those arrested and executed were not guilty of any particular offence, but were accused of being 'bourgeois'; this was a term of abuse, applied to landowners, priests, businessmen, employers, army officers and professional people. They were all labelled 'enemies of the people' as part of the government's campaign of class war.

One of the worst incidents of the terror was the murder of the ex-Tsar Nicholas and his family. In the summer of 1918 they were being kept under guard in a house in Ekaterinburg in the Ural Mountains. By that time the civil war was in full swing; the Bolsheviks were afraid that White forces, which were advancing towards Ekaterinburg, might rescue the royal family, who would then become a focus for all the anti-Bolshevik forces. Lenin himself gave the order for them to be killed, and in July 1918 the entire family, together with members of their household, were shot by members of the local *Cheka*. Their graves were only discovered after the collapse of the Soviet Empire. In 1992 some of the bones were subjected to DNA analysis, which proved that they were indeed the remains of the Romanovs.



Map 16.2 **Civil war and interventions in Russia, 1918–22**

(e) Civil war

By April 1918, armed opposition to the Bolsheviks was breaking out in many areas (see Map 16.2), leading to civil war. The opposition (known as the Whites) was a mixed bag, consisting of Social Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, ex-tsarist officers and any other groups which did not like what they had seen of the Bolsheviks. There was great discontent in the countryside, where peasants hated the food-procurement policies of the government; even the soldiers and workers, who had supported the Bolsheviks in 1917, resented the high-handed way in which the Bolsheviks treated the soviets (elected councils) all over Russia. One of the Bolshevik slogans had been 'ALL POWER TO THE SOVIETS'. Naturally, people had expected that every town would have its own soviet, which would run the town's affairs and local industry. Instead, officials (known as commissars) appointed by the government arrived, supported by Red Guards; they threw Social Revolutionary and Menshevik members out of the soviets, leaving Bolshevik members in control. It soon turned into dictatorship from the centre instead of local control. The slogan of the government's opponents became 'LONG LIVE THE SOVIETS AND DOWN WITH THE COMMISSARS'. Their general aim was not to restore the Tsar, but simply to set up a democratic government on Western lines.

In Siberia, Admiral Kolchak, former Black Sea Fleet commander, set up a White government; General Denikin was in the Caucasus with a large White army. Most bizarre of all, the Czechoslovak Legion of about 40 000 men had seized long stretches of the Trans-Siberian Railway in the region of Omsk. These troops were originally prisoners

taken by the Russians from the Austro-Hungarian army, who had then changed sides after the March revolution and fought for the Kerensky government against the Germans. After Brest-Litovsk the Bolsheviks gave them permission to leave Russia via the Trans-Siberian Railway to Vladivostok, but then decided to disarm them in case they co-operated with the Allies, who were already showing interest in the destruction of the new Bolshevik government. The Czechs resisted with great spirit and their control of the railway was a serious embarrassment to the government.

The situation was complicated by the fact that Russia's allies in the First World War intervened to help the Whites. They claimed that they wanted a government which would continue the war against Germany. When their intervention continued even after the defeat of Germany, it became clear that their aim was to destroy the Bolshevik government, which was now advocating world revolution. The USA, Japan, France and Britain sent troops, who landed at Murmansk, Archangel and Vladivostok. The situation seemed grim for the Bolsheviks when, early in 1919, Kolchak (whom the Allies intended to place at the head of the next government) advanced towards Moscow, the new capital. However, Trotsky, now Commissar for War, had done a magnificent job creating the well-disciplined Red Army, based on conscription and including thousands of experienced officers from the old tsarist armies. Kolchak was forced back and later captured and executed by the Reds. The Czech Legion was defeated, and Denikin, advancing from the south to within 250 miles of Moscow, was forced to retreat; he later escaped with British help.

By the end of 1919 it was clear that the Bolsheviks (now calling themselves communists) would survive. As the White armies began to suffer defeats, the interventionist states lost interest and withdrew their troops. In 1920 there was an invasion of Ukraine by Polish and French troops, which forced the Russians to hand over part of Ukraine and White Russia (the Treaty of Riga, 1921). From the communist point of view, however, the important thing was that they had won the civil war. Lenin was able to present it as a great victory, and it did much to restore the government's prestige after the humiliation of Brest–Litovsk. *There were a number of reasons for the communist victory.*

1 *The Whites were not centrally organized.* Kolchak and Denikin failed to link up, and the nearer they drew to Moscow, the more they strained their lines of communication. They lost the support of many peasants both by their brutal behaviour, and because peasants feared that a White victory would mean the loss of their newly acquired land.
2 *The Red Armies had more troops.* After the introduction of conscription, they had almost 3 million men in arms, outnumbering the Whites by about ten to one. They controlled most of the modern industry and so were better supplied with armaments, and had the inspired leadership of Trotsky.
3 Lenin took decisive measures, known as *war communism*, to control the economic resources of the state. All factories of any size were nationalized, all private trade banned, and food and grain were seized from peasants to feed town workers and troops. This was successful at first since it enabled the government to survive the civil war, but it had disastrous results later.
4 Lenin was able to present the Bolsheviks *as a nationalist government fighting against foreigners*; and even though war communism was unpopular with the peasants, the Whites became even more unpopular because of their foreign connections.

(f) Effects of the civil war

The war was a terrible tragedy for the Russian people – *there was an enormous cost in human lives and suffering.* Taking into account those killed in the Red Terror, in the military

action, and in the White anti-Jewish pogroms; those who died from starvation and those who perished from dysentery and in the typhus and typhoid epidemics, the total number of deaths was at least 8 million – more than four times the number of Russian deaths in the First World War (1.7 million). The economy was in ruins and the rouble was worth only one per cent of its value in October 1917.

At the end of the war *important changes had taken place in the communist regime.* Economically it became more centralized, as state control was extended over all areas of the economy. Politically, the regime became militarized and even brutalized. *The question that has occupied historians is whether it was the crisis of the civil war which forced these changes on the government, or whether they would have taken place anyway because of the nature of communism.* Was this the inevitable drive towards socialism?

Robert C. Tucker argues that the civil war *was* responsible for the political developments. He believes that it brutalized the Party and gave its members a siege mentality which they found it difficult to break away from. It made centralization, strict discipline and mobilization of the population in order to achieve the regime's targets an integral part of the system. Tucker also points out that already, at the height of the civil war, there were signs of Lenin's more 'liberal' thinking, which he was able to put into practice during the period of the New Economic Policy (NEP). For example, in May 1919 Lenin wrote a pamphlet in which he explained that the main obstacle to the achievement of socialism in Russia was the culture of backwardness left over from centuries of tsarist rule. According to Lenin, the best way to change this was not by forcible means, but by education, which unfortunately would take a long time.

Other historians argue that the civil war was one of the influences which brutalized the communist regime, but that it was not the only one. Christopher Read makes the point that the Bolsheviks were products of the tsarist environment, which had itself been extremely authoritarian; tsarist governments had never hesitated to use extreme methods against their enemies. It was only a few years since Stolypin had executed around 4000 opponents. 'In the prevailing circumstances', argues Read, 'it is hard to see why opposition should be tolerated when the Russian tradition was to eradicate it as heresy.' Among the older generation of liberal historians, Adam Ulam argued that violence and terror were an integral part of communism, and claimed that Lenin actually welcomed the civil war because it gave him an excuse to use more violence.

There is the same debate about the economic features of war communism: were nationalization and state control of the economy central to communist aims and ideals, or were they forced on the government by the need to harness the economy to the war effort? Even Soviet historians differ in their interpretations of this. Some believe that the Party had a basic plan for nationalizing the major industries as soon as possible: hence the nationalization of banks, railways, shipping and hundreds of large factories by June 1918. Others believe that what Lenin really hoped for was a mixed economy in which some capitalist activity would be allowed. Alec Nove came to the very sensible conclusion that 'Lenin and his colleagues were playing it by ear. ... We must allow for the interaction of Bolshevik ideas with the desperate situation in which they found themselves.'

(g) Lenin and the economic problems

From early 1921 Lenin faced the formidable task of rebuilding an economy shattered by the First World War and then by civil war. War communism had been unpopular with the peasants, who, seeing no point in working hard to produce food which was taken away from them without compensation, simply produced enough for their own needs. This caused severe food shortages aggravated by droughts in 1920–1. In addition, industry was almost at a standstill. In March 1921 a serious naval mutiny occurred at Kronstadt, the

island naval base just off St Petersburg. This was suppressed only through prompt action by Trotsky, who sent troops across the ice on the frozen sea.

The mutiny seems to have convinced Lenin that a new approach was needed, to win back the faltering support of the peasants; this was vitally important since peasants formed a large majority of the population. He put into operation what became known as *the New Economic Policy (NEP).* Peasants were now allowed to keep surplus produce after payment of a tax representing a certain proportion of the surplus. This, plus the reintroduction of private trade, revived incentive, and food production increased. Small industries and trade in their products were also restored to private ownership, though heavy industry such as coal, iron and steel, together with power, transport and banking, remained under state control. Lenin also found that often the old managers had to be brought back, as well as such capitalist incentives as bonuses and piece-rates. Foreign investment was encouraged, to help develop and modernize Russian industry.

There is the usual debate among historians about Lenin's motives and intentions. Some Bolsheviks claimed that the Kronstadt mutiny and peasant unrest had no bearing on the decision to change to NEP; that in fact they had been on the point of introducing an earlier version of NEP when the outbreak of the civil war prevented them. To confuse matters further, some of the other communist leaders, especially Kamenev and Zinoviev, disapproved of NEP because they thought it encouraged the development of *kulaks* (wealthy peasants), who would turn out to be the enemies of communism. They saw it as a retreat from true socialism.

Did Lenin intend NEP as a temporary compromise – a return to a certain amount of private enterprise until recovery was assured; or did he see it as a return to something like the correct road to socialism, from which they had been diverted by the civil war? It is difficult to be certain one way or the other. What is clear is that Lenin defended NEP vigorously: he said they needed the experience of the capitalists to get the economy blooming again. In May 1921 he told the Party that NEP must be pursued 'seriously and for a long time – not less than a decade and probably more'. They had to take into account the fact that instead of introducing socialism in a country dominated by industrial workers – the true allies of the Bolsheviks – they were working in a backward, peasant-dominated society. Therefore NEP was not a retreat – it was an attempt to find an alternative road to socialism in less than ideal circumstances. It would require a long campaign of educating the peasants in the benefits of agrarian co-operatives so that force would not be necessary; this would lead to the triumph of socialism. Roy Medvedev, a dissident Soviet historian, was convinced that these were Lenin's genuine intentions, and that if he had lived another 20 years (to the same age as Stalin), the future of the USSR would have been very different.

NEP was moderately successful: the economy began to recover and production levels were improving; in most commodities they were not far off the 1913 levels. Given the territorial losses at the end of the First World War and the war with Poland, this was a considerable achievement. Great progress was made with the electrification of industry, one of Lenin's pet schemes. Towards the end of 1927, when NEP began to be abandoned, the ordinary Russian was probably better off than at any time since 1914. Industrial workers who had a job were being paid real wages and they had the benefits of NEP's new social legislation: an eight-hour working day, two weeks' holiday with pay, sick and unemployment pay and healthcare. The peasants were enjoying a higher standard of living than in 1913. The downside of NEP was that unemployment was higher than before, and there were still frequent food shortages.

(h) Political problems were solved decisively

Russia was now the world's first communist state, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR); power was held by the Communist Party, and no other parties were

allowed. *The main political problem now for Lenin was disagreement and criticism within the Communist Party.* In March 1921 Lenin banned 'factionalism' within the Party. This meant that discussion would be allowed, but once a decision had been taken, all sections of the Party had to stick to it. Anybody who persisted in holding a view different from the official party line would be expelled from the Party. During the rest of 1921 about one-third of the Party's members were 'purged' (expelled) with the help of the ruthless Cheka; many more resigned, mainly because they were against NEP. Lenin also rejected the claim of the trade unions that they should run industry. Trade unions had to do as the government told them, and their main function was to increase production.

The governing body in the Party was known as the 'Politburo'. During the civil war, when quick decisions were required, the Politburo got into the habit of acting as the government, and they continued to do so when the war was over. Control by Lenin and the Communist Party was now complete (for his successes in foreign affairs see Section 4.3(a) and (b)). However, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' was nowhere in evidence; nor was there any prospect of the state 'withering away'. Lenin defended this situation on the grounds that the working class were exhausted and weak; this meant that the most advanced workers and their leaders – the Communist Party – must rule the country for them.

In May 1922 Lenin suffered a stroke; after this he gradually grew weaker, and was forced to take less part in the work of government. He later suffered two more strokes, and died in January 1924 at the early age of 53. His work of completing the revolution by introducing a fully communist state was not finished, and the successful communist revolutions which Lenin had predicted in other countries had not taken place. This left the USSR isolated and facing an uncertain future. Although his health had been failing for some time, Lenin had made no clear plans about how the government was to be organized after his death, and this meant that a power struggle was inevitable.

16.4 LENIN – EVIL GENIUS?

(a) Lenin remains a controversial figure

After his death the Politburo decided that Lenin's body should be embalmed and put on display in a glass case in a special mausoleum, to be built in Red Square in Moscow. The Politburo members, especially Joseph Stalin, encouraged the Lenin cult for all they were worth, hoping to share in his popularity by presenting themselves as Lenin's heirs, who would continue his policies. No criticism of Lenin was allowed, and Petrograd was renamed Leningrad. He became revered almost as a saint, and people flocked to Red Square to view his remains as though they were religious relics.

Some historians admire him: A. J. P. Taylor claimed that 'Lenin did more than any other political figure to change the face of the twentieth-century world. The creation of Soviet Russia and its survival were due to him. He was a very great man and even, despite his faults, a very good man.' Some revisionist historians also took a sympathetic view. Moshe Lewin, writing in 1968, portrayed Lenin as having been forced unwillingly into policies of violence and terror, and in his last years, in the face of ill health and the evil ambitions of Stalin, struggling unsuccessfully to steer communism into a more peaceful and civilized phase.

These interpretations are at opposite poles from what some of his contemporaries thought, and also from the traditional liberal view which sees Lenin as a ruthless dictator who paved the way for the even more ruthless and brutal dictatorship of Stalin. Alexander

Potresov, a Menshevik who knew Lenin well, described him as an 'evil genius' who had a hypnotic effect on people that enabled him to dominate them. Richard Pipes can find scarcely a single good word to say about Lenin. He emphasizes Lenin's cruelty and his apparent lack of remorse at the great loss of life which he had caused. The success of the Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917 was nothing to do with social forces – it was simply because Lenin lusted after power.

Robert Service probably presents the most balanced view of Lenin. He concludes that Lenin was certainly ruthless, intolerant and repressive, and even seemed to enjoy unleashing terror. But although he sought power, and believed that dictatorship was desirable, power was not an end in itself. In spite of all his faults, he was a visionary: 'Lenin truly thought that a better world should and would be built, a world without repression and exploitation, a world without even a state. ... It was his judgement, woeful as it was, that the Dictatorship of the Proletariat would act as midwife to the birth of such a world.' He points out that with the introduction of NEP, the situation began to settle down. 'The Cheka's resources were limited and its repressive functions somewhat moderated. Religion was openly practised. Age-old peasant customs were left undisturbed. Whole sections of economic activity were released from state ownership.' Perhaps it was one of the great tragedies of the twentieth century that Lenin died prematurely before his vision could be realized. Nevertheless his achievements make him one of the great political figures of the last century. In the words of Robert Service: 'He led the October revolution, founded the USSR and laid down the rudiments of Marxist–Leninism. He helped to turn a world upside down.'

(b) Leninism and Stalinism

One of the most serious charges laid against Lenin by his critics is that he bears the responsibility for the even greater excesses and atrocities of the Stalin era. Was Stalinism merely a continuation of Leninism, or did Stalin betray Lenin's vision of a society free from injustice and exploitation? During the early years of the Cold War, Western historians held the 'straight line' theory – that Stalin simply continued Lenin's work. It was Lenin who destroyed the multi-party system when he suppressed the Constituent Assembly. He created the highly authoritarian structures of the Bolshevik Party, which became the structures of government, and which Stalin was able to make full use of in his collectivization policies and his purges (see Sections 17.2–3). It was Lenin who founded the *Cheka*, which became the dreaded KGB under Stalin, and it was Lenin who destroyed most of the powers of the trade unions.

Revisionist historians take a very different view. Moshe Lewin, Robert C. Tucker and Stephen F. Cohen argue that there was a fundamental discontinuity between Lenin and Stalin – things changed radically under Stalin. Stephen Cohen points out that Stalin's treatment of the peasants was quite different from Lenin's merely coercive policies: Stalin waged a virtual civil war against the peasantry, 'a holocaust by terror that victimized tens of millions of people for 25 years'. Lenin was against the cult of the individual leader, whereas Stalin began his own personality cult. Lenin wanted to keep the Party bureaucracy as small and manageable as possible, but Stalin enlarged it. Lenin encouraged discussion and got his way by persuading the Politburo; Stalin allowed no discussion or criticism and got his way by having opponents murdered. In fact, during the 'Great Terror' of 1935–9, Stalin actually destroyed Lenin's Communist Party. According to Robert Conquest, 'it was in cold blood, quite deliberately and unprovokedly, that Stalin started a new cycle of suffering'.

Robert Suny provides this clear summing up of Leninism and its relationship to Stalinism:

Devoted to Karl Marx's vision of socialism, in which the working class would control the machines, factories and other sorts of wealth production, the communists led by Lenin believed that the future social order would be based on the abolition of unearned social privilege, the end of racism and colonial oppression, the secularization of society, and the empowerment of working people. Yet within a generation Stalin and his closest comrades had created one of the most vicious and oppressive states in modern history.

FURTHER READING

Acton, E., *Rethinking the Russian Revolution* (Edward Arnold, 1990).
Berkman, A., *The Russian Tragedy* (Consortium Books, 1989 edition).
Brown, A., *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (Vintage, 2010).
D'Encausse, H. C., *Lenin* (Holmes & Meier, 2001).
Ferro, M., *Nicholas II: The Last of the Tsars* (Viking, 1991).
Figes, O., *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891–1924* (Penguin edition, 1998).
Fitzpatrick, S., *The Russian Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 3rd edition, 2008).
Hill, C., *Lenin and the Russian Revolution* (Penguin, 1971 edition).
Lewin, M., *The Making of the Soviet System* (New Press, 1994).
Lewin, M., *Lenin's Last Struggle* (Michigan University Press, 2005).
Lieven, D. C. B., *Nicholas II: Emperor of All the Russias* (John Murray, 1996).
Lincoln, W. B., *Red Victory: A History of the Russian Civil War, 1918–21* (Da Capo, 1999).
Lowe, N., *Mastering Twentieth Century Russian History* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).
Massie, R. K., *The Romanovs: The Final Chapter* (Random House, 1995).
McCauley, M., *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union* (Longman, 2nd edition, 2007).
Nove, A., *An Economic History of the USSR* (Penguin, 3rd edition, 1992).
Pipes, R., *The Russian Revolution, 1899–1919* (Harvill, 1993).
Pipes, R., *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime, 1919–1924* (Harvill, 1997 edition).
Radzinsky, E., *Rasputin* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2000).
Read, C., *From Tsar to Soviets: The Russian People and their Revolution,1917–21* (Oxford University Press, 1996).
Read, C., *Lenin: A Revolutionary Life* (Routledge, 2005).
Service, R., *The Russian Revolution 1900–1927* (Macmillan, 3rd edition, 1999).
Service, R. *Lenin: A Biography* (Macmillan, 2000).
Service, R., *Stalin: A Biography* (Macmillan, 2004).
Service, R., *Comrades: A World History of Communism* (Macmillan, 2007).
Service, R., *Trotsky: A Biography* (Macmillan, 2010).
Smith, S. A., *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories, 1917–1918* (Cambridge University Press, 1983).
Suny, R. G., *The Soviet Experiment* (Oxford University Press, 2nd edition, 2010).
Ulam, A. B., *Lenin and the Bolsheviks* (Fontana/Collins, 1965).
Volkogonov, D., *Lenin: Life and Legend* (Free Press, 1994).
Wood, A., *The Origins of the Russian Revolution, 1861–1917* (Routledge, 3rd edition, 2003).
Yakovlev, A., *A Century of Violence in Soviet Russia* (Yale University Press, 2002).

QUESTIONS

1 Explain why the tsarist regime was able to survive the 1905 revolution but was overthrown in February/March 1917.

2 How far would you agree that the February/March revolution which overthrew the Russian monarchy was a 'spontaneous uprising'?
3 'The Bolsheviks did not seize power, they picked it up; any group of determined men could have done what the Bolsheviks did in Petrograd in October 1917' (Adam Ulam). Explain to what extent you agree or disagree with this view.
4 How far was popular dissatisfaction with the Provisional Government responsible for its overthrow in October/November 1917?
5 How far did the Tsar Nicholas II fulfil the promises made in the 1905 October Manifesto by the outbreak of war in 1914)
6 How far was Russia a modernized industrial state by 1914?
7 How far would you agree that the impact of the First World War on Russia was the main reason for the downfall of Nicholas II in 1917?
8 How far would you agree that Lenin's leadership was the main reason for the success of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917?
9 In what ways, and with what success, did Lenin's policies attempt to solve the problems facing Russia at the beginning of 1918?
10 Assess the reasons why the Bolsheviks were victorious in the civil war by 1921.

 There is a document question about differing views of Lenin on the website.