

THE TRUE STORY OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION AND THE
BUILDING OF SOCIALISM

How the Soviets were Formed

Vitaly STARTSEV

Under the General Editorship of Academician Isaac MINTS

Co-author Alexander PROSKURIN

“If the creative enthusiasm of the revolutionary classes had not given rise to the Soviets, the proletarian revolution in Russia would have been a hopeless cause, for the proletariat could certainly not retain power with the old state apparatus, and it is impossible to create a new apparatus immediately.”

Vladimir LENIN



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Translated from the Russian by Gulhammid SOBRATEE
Translation edited by Selena KOTLOBAI

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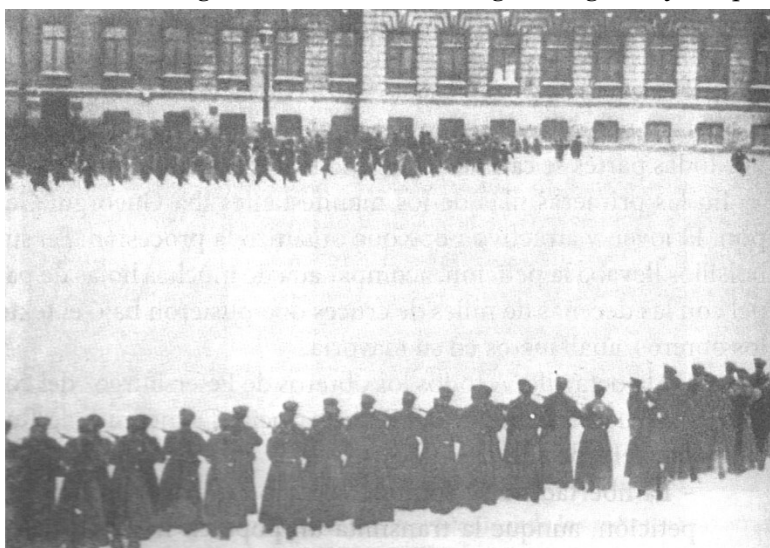
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BORN OF THE REVOLUTIONARY ENTHUSIASM OF THE MASSES

Throughout the night before Sunday, January 9, 1905, the windows in the working-class districts of St. Petersburg were lighted. The workers in the capital of the Russian Empire were preparing for a solemn march to the Winter Palace, the residence of the Russian autocrat, Nikolai II, in order to present him with a petition about the people's grievances.

The petition read in part:

"Your Majesty, we have come to you in search of truth and protection. We have been reduced to poverty; we are oppressed, burdened by work beyond our strength. Outrages are committed against us; we are not recognised as human beings; we are treated like slaves who must bear their sad fate without complaining. And we have borne it, but we are being pushed deeper and deeper into the web of poverty, rightlessness and ignorance. We are being strangled by despot-



Taking advantage of the religious inclinations and monarchical sentiments of the backward strata of the proletariat, the priest Georgy Gapon managed to persuade workers to sign a petition and take it to the tsar.

ism and tyranny, and we are suffocating. We cannot bear this any longer. Your Majesty. This is the limit to our patience. For us that dreadful moment has come when death is better than continuation of unbearable torment.”

It was a document full of contradictions. Though pervaded by a naive belief in the monarch as a “father figure”, the petition contained quite concrete proposals; convocation of a Constituent Assembly on the basis of universal, secret voting; establishment of an eight-hour working day and equal rights for all sections of society, guarantees of democratic liberties – inviolability of the person and of the home, freedom of speech, of the press and of assembly, the right to form unions and to strike; amnesty for political prisoners; and cessation of the war.¹

... Long before daybreak the streets of the capital were crowded with working people. Never in its 200-year history had St. Petersburg seen such a large demonstration. Dressed in their Sunday best, more than 140,000 workers with their wives and children, after attending church service, were moving towards the city centre to Palace Square. They were carrying large icons in bright metal frames, portraits of the tsar and the tsarina, and church banners bearing the grave face of Christ. The singing of the anthem “God Save the Tsar” resounded far and wide.

Georgy Gapon was in the forefront of the demonstration. This handsome young priest was the organiser of the march. In his pockets were the petition and thick bundles of sheets of paper covered with tens of thousands of crosses representing the signatures of workers who could not write their names.

An excerpt from a leaflet, “To All St. Petersburg Workers”, issued on January 8, 1905, by the St. Petersburg Committee of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party.

“You cannot buy freedom for such a low price as a petition, though presented by a priest on behalf of the workers. Freedom is bought with blood; freedom is won

¹ The Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905.

by means of arms, in fierce battles...

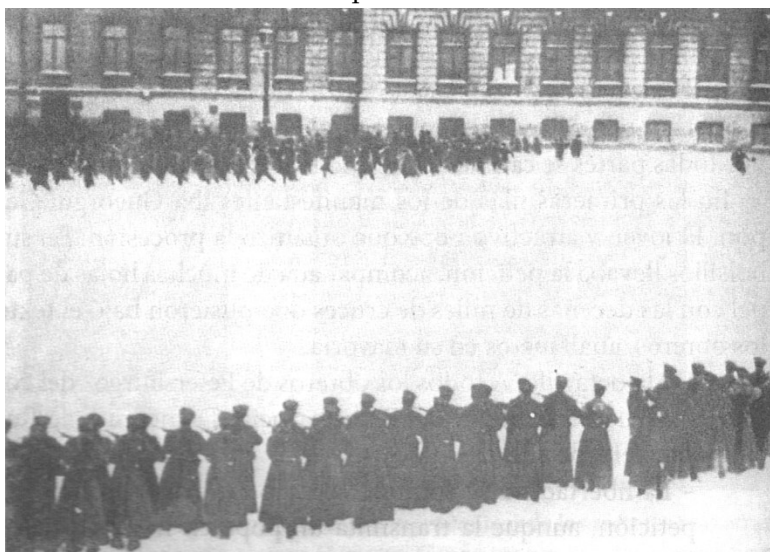
“Emancipation of the workers can only be achieved by the workers themselves – neither priests nor tsars will bring you freedom. You will see on Sunday in front of the Winter Palace (if you are allowed there at all) that there is nothing to be expected from the tsar...”

Nikolai II was not in the Winter Palace on January 9. He was at his country residence in Tsarskoye Selo and had no intention of leaving for the capital. He had asked his uncle, Grand Duke Vladimir, to deal with the demonstration “in a proper manner”. “The best way to treat a rebellion is to hang a hundred rebels,” his uncle had said.

The special staff formed by the Grand Duke put troops and the police on full alert. The metropolitan garrison was reinforced by more troops and artillery blocking all roads by which the workers could march to the Winter Palace. Everything was now ready for “treating a rebellion”.

Maxim Gorky (1868-1936), the great Soviet Russian writer, wrote:

”When the crowd poured from the street onto the



The shooting down of workers on the approaches to the Winter Palace on January 9, 1905. This day has gone down in Russian history as Bloody Sunday.

embankment a long, crooked line of soldiers barred its way to the bridge, but the people were not daunted by this thin grey barrier. There was nothing menacing in the figures of the soldiers that were distinctly drawn against the light blue background of the broad river. They were skipping to warm their frozen feet, flapping their arms, and pushing each other about. On the other side of the river the people saw a large, gloomy house. That was where 'He', the tsar, the master of this house, lived....

"Suddenly a dry, uneven rattle broke out, and it seemed as though the crowd had been lashed by scores of invisible whips. For a moment all voices seemed to have been frozen, but the mass of people continued slowly to push forward.

" 'Blank shot,' said somebody in a colourless voice, whether enquiring or stating a fact was not clear.

"But here and there groans were heard, and several bodies lay at the feet of the people in the crowd. A woman, wailing loudly and holding her hand to her breast, rapidly stepped out of the crowd towards the bayonets which were thrust out to meet her. Several people hurried after her, and then some more, sweeping round her and running ahead of her.

"Again came the rattle of rifle fire, louder, but more ragged than before.... People fell to the ground in twos and threes; some sank to the ground clutching their abdomens, others hastened away limping, still others crawled across the snow, and everywhere bright scarlet patches appeared on the snow, spreading, giving off vapour, and attracting everybody's eyes...

"Groups of people, bending low, ran forward to pick up the killed and wounded. The wounded too were shouting and shaking their fists. The faces of all had suddenly changed, and there was a glint of something akin to madness in their eyes. There were no signs of panic, of that state of universal horror which suddenly overcomes people, sweeps bodies into a heap like dry leaves and blindly drags and drives everybody in an unknown direction in a wild whirlwind of desire to

hide. But there was every sign of horror, horror that burned like the touch of frozen iron; it froze the heart, held the body as in a vice, and compelled one to stare with wide-open eyes at the blood that was spreading over the snow, at the blood-stained faces, hands and clothing, and at the corpses which were lying so calmly amidst the pandemonium of the living. There was every sign of burning indignation, of mournful, impotent rage, of much perplexity; there were numerous strangely motionless eyes, brows drawn in an angry frown, tightly clenched fists, convulsive gestures, and anger expressed in strong language. But it seemed as though it was cold, soul-crushing bewilderment that filled people's breasts most. Only a few short moments before they had marched along, clearly seeing their object before them; before their eyes had hovered that majestic, legendary image which they had admired, had loved, and which had sustained their hearts with great hope. Two volleys, blood, corpses, groans and – they all found themselves standing before a grey vacuum, impotent, and with hearts torn to shreds...

“Somebody, walking in front, but inseparably from the crowd, was saying:

“ ‘Today we took a pledge sealed with our blood – henceforth we must be citizens.’ ”

“Another voice interrupted him and said nervously with a sob:

“ ‘Yes – our fathers have shown us what they really are!’ ”

“And somebody else said threateningly:

“ ‘We shall never forget this day!’ ”

“They walked quickly, in a close-packed crowd, many talking at once, and their voices merged chaotically with the dark, angry murmur. Now and again somebody raised his voice to a shout, drowning all the other voices.

“ ‘Christ, how many were killed today!’ ”

“ ‘And what for?’ ”

“ ‘No! We can never forget this day!’ ”

January 9, which came to be known as Bloody Sunday,

marked the beginning of the Russian Revolution of 1905-1907 – the first people’s revolution in the epoch of imperialism. In the flames of that revolution the Soviets of Workers’ Deputies were born, which, with the triumph of the Great October Socialist Revolution in 1917, became the organs of proletarian government forming the political foundation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

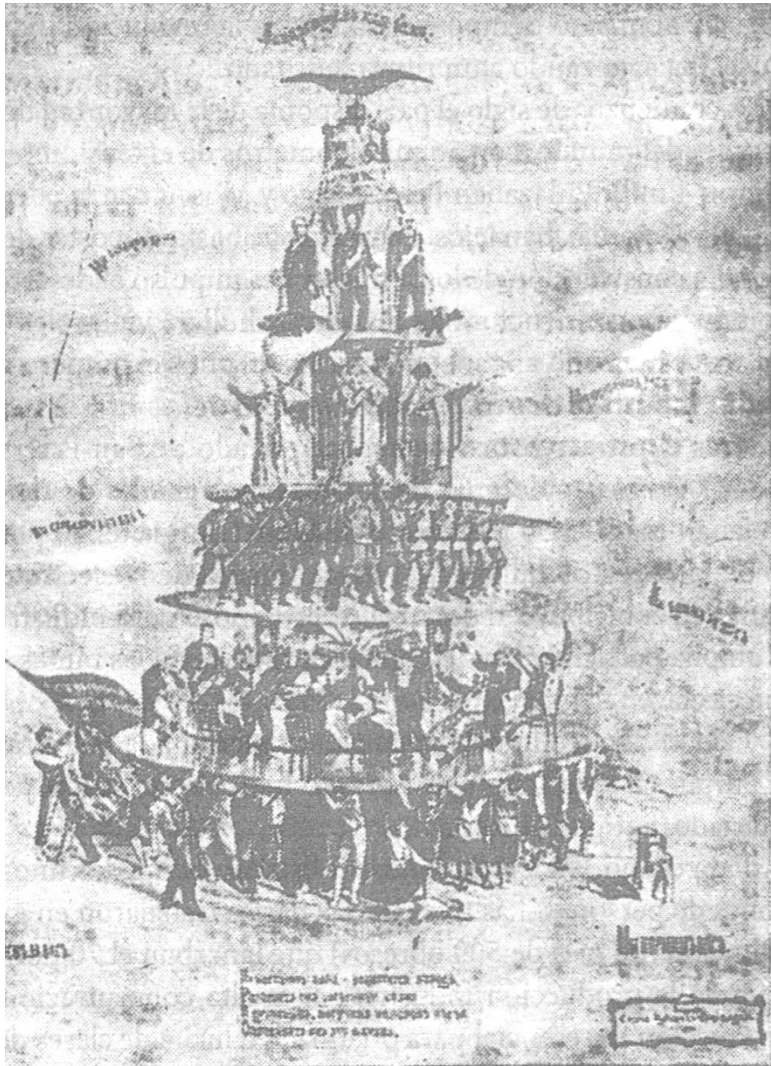
Karl Marx called revolutions the locomotives of history. By vigorous exertion the locomotive of revolution sharply accelerates the speed of the train of history, which usually moves smoothly on its rails. The Russian Revolution of 1905-1907, too, was such a locomotive. This was history’s first revolution in which the proletariat was the predominant force. By its selfless struggle for the interests of all working men and women, the proletariat proved that it was the only consistent revolutionary class capable of heading the revolution in the epoch of imperialism.

Any social revolution is the logical result of the operation of objective laws governing the development of society. No one has ever succeeded in accomplishing a revolution of his own will or in exporting a revolution to another country. The first Russian revolution was no exception. It had deep socio-economic causes. Russia had been moving towards the events of 1905-1907 slowly but surely, not for one or two years but for decades. This process was inevitable. And if the shooting of January 9 was the last step on that road, the autocracy had made its first step 44 years before Bloody Sunday.

“The Lower Orders Won’t, the Upper Classes Can’t”

On February 19, 1861, the Russian autocrat Alexander II signed a Manifesto on the Abolition of Serfdom. He could not have acted otherwise even if he had wanted to.

In the mid-19th century, when bourgeois revolutions freed the majority of European nations from the chains of feudalism, Russia continued to live in medieval conditions. Serfdom (the right, sanctioned by law and protected by the state, of the landed nobility to use peasants and their labour as they thought fit) was the foundation on which the despotic Russian autocracy rested.



A 1901 cartoon which reflects the social structure of the Russian society of those days. It shows the workers and peasants shouldering the burden of all the upper classes — the bourgeoisie, the army, the clergy, the government and monarch. The caption was prophetic: it said a time would come when the indignant people would cast off this enormous burden.

However, the yoke of serfdom could not prevent the growth of capitalist relations. The old subsistence economy was disappearing into the past never to return. Thousands of serfs ran away from their owners and became free workers. Out of semi-handicraft workshops grew large manufacturing factories. There came into being machine production. The new enterprises were in acute need of an extensive domestic market for the sale of their products and of a constant flow of wage labour. Neither could be provided by the autocratic-feudal state. A conflict was brewing between the nascent productive forces and the reactionary social system.

The foundation of serfdom cracked in due time. The ignominious defeat of tsarism in the Crimean War (1854-1856) was a major factor leading to a profound political crisis. Discontent spread among all sections of society. There emerged a revolutionary situation in Russia: the ruling circles were no longer able to retain their dominance in an unmodified form, while the landlord-oppressed people were fighting for land and freedom with increasing determination.

The pressure from below was strong enough to make the autocracy feel frightened and retreat, but too weak to break up the organisation of the dominating class, that had taken shape over the centuries. The reform of 1861 somewhat blunted the edge of class contradictions by initiating bourgeois transformations.

The abolition of serfdom staved off the social revolution but brought about an industrial revolution. Russia began to advance at an unprecedented pace.

By the beginning of the 20th century the country already had the world's largest railway network with 56,000 km of railway tracks (compared to 4,000 km in 1861). Railways linked St. Petersburg and Moscow with the Volga region and the Ukraine, and stretched far to the east approaching the Pacific coast. Railway construction encouraged the development of transport machine-building and of the coal and oil industries, and created a vast market for the iron-and-steel industry. The number of industrial plants rose within 25 years from 2,500 to 6,000.

After the establishment of the first commercial bank in St. Petersburg in 1864, there emerged dozens of others which by the end of the century controlled over 50 per cent of the iron-and-steel industry, 60 per cent of the coal and 80 per cent of the electro-technical industries. Russia's rapid industrial growth attracted large-scale foreign capital investments in the key branches of the economy.

With the development of capitalism there appeared in the social arena a bourgeoisie which was quickly gaining economic power, and its antipode – the proletariat.

Towards 1905 industry was employing about three million people, three-quarters of whom worked at large plants (over 500 workers), which accounted for more than 70 per cent of the country's total industrial output. Such a high degree of concentration of production was largely responsible for the organisation of the class struggle of the Russian proletariat.

Despite its impressive economic achievements, Russia continued to lag far behind the leading capitalist powers. In per capita production of major industrial items it compared with backward Spain and Austria-Hungary. The main obstacle to Russia's development consisted in survivals of feudalism which abounded in the countryside.

The reform of 1861 gave the peasants freedom but not the land they had wanted for so long. It turned out that emancipation from personal bondage deprived them of their means of subsistence. While abolishing serfdom the autocracy preserved most of the land, and the best, for the landlords. To buy the remaining part of the land the peasants had to pay prices far exceeding its value. To provide for themselves and their families they had to lease land from the landlords, cultivate it with their own implements and give their former masters more than half of the harvest.

But no matter how widespread the remnants of serfdom were, they did not determine the development of the countryside where the process of class differentiation was accelerating. There appeared in the countryside a new and far more sinister figure than the landlord, namely, the *kulak*, who was from the well-to-do strata of the peasantry.

The kulaks were popularly called “blood-suckers” because of their ruthless exploitation of their fellow villagers and their unquenchable thirst for profit. By 1905 the kulaks had taken over three-quarters of all peasant holdings and more than half of the draught animals.

Towards the beginning of the 20th century the impoverishment of the rural inhabitants became a national calamity. With the low productivity of agriculture at the time, four-fifths of the peasant families (10.1 million out of 12.3 million) were unable to earn a subsistence wage. The grim condition of the peasantry was even further aggravated by a major crop failure in 1901. The famine that hit 147 *uezds*¹ with a total population of 27.6 million drove thousands of people to the towns, where they swelled the ranks of the already large army of unemployed.

Lenin (1870-1924), founder of the Communist Party and the Soviet state, wrote of the peasants’ plight:

”The peasant was reduced to beggary. He lived together with his cattle, was clothed in rags, and fared on weeds; he fled from his allotment, if he had anywhere to go, and even *paid* to be relieved of it, if he could induce anyone to take over a plot of land, the payments



This is what most villages in tsarist Russia looked like in the early 20th century.

¹ *Uezd* — an administrative-territorial unit in Russia forming part of a *guberniya*. In 1923-1929 the *uezds* and *guberniyas* were reorganised into districts and regions respectively.

on which exceeded the income it yielded. The peasants were in a state of chronic starvation, and they died by the tens of thousands from famine and epidemics in bad harvest years, which recurred with increasing frequency.”¹

The conditions of the Russian proletariat were as deplorable as those of the peasantry. During the worldwide industrial crisis of 1900-1903 the country closed down more than 3,000 enterprises. More than half a million workers lost their jobs. Those who managed to stay on worked 13 to 14 hours a day, although a law of 1897 limited the working day to 11.5 hours. A complicated system of fines took away up to 40 per cent of the wages of a worker, who hardly earned enough to buy food for himself and his family. The least protest against the existing order was ruthlessly suppressed.

A circular issued by the Minister of Internal Affairs, Ivan Goremykin, read as follows:

“Ban all meetings of workers without exception, find the instigators of these meetings and arrest them if they were persuading the workers to strike.”

While trade unions and the strike movement had been existing in the West for decades, in Russia strikes were considered a grave crime. And one could be sentenced to hard labour for attempting to organise a trade union.

The Russian proletariat suffered both from the development of capitalism and from its inadequate development. The capitalists were ruthless in exploiting the workers, for they had at their disposal an enormous reserve army of labour. Behind the gates of factories and plants stood a long line of poor peasants willing to work for any wage.

The sharp social contradictions that rended Russian society were intensified by national contradictions.

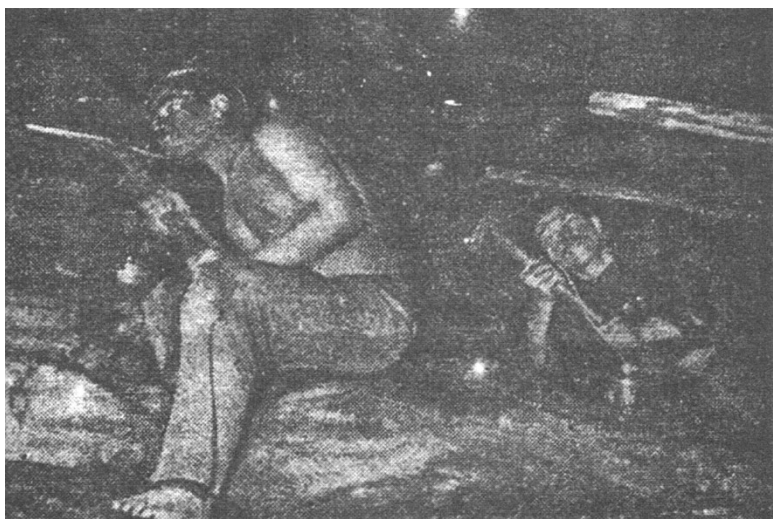
According to the census of 1897, the country was inhabited by 146 different nations and national and ethnic groups. The autocracy regarded its multinational empire as a single and indivisible entity, and to maintain its unity

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 4, p. 422.

it resorted to, among other methods, Russification of the outlying regions and the suppression of any manifestation of national individuality. Acting by the principle of “divide and rule”, tsarism established a system of oppression and enslavement of the non-Russian nationalities, set them against one another, and sowed distrust and enmity between them; it encouraged and often provoked clashes between the nationalities, pogroms and slaughter. Most of the non-Russian nationalities were not allowed to publish books and newspapers in their native languages or to teach in these languages in the few schools they had.

The millions of exploited workers and half-starved peasants, and all the oppressed nationalities were ruled by a small landed gentry headed by the autocratic monarch.

The political system of Russia was probably the most reactionary one in Europe. Russia was the only capitalist country with no parliament and no legal political parties. The autocracy retained all the attributes of feudal absolutism both in fact and in juridical terms. The Russian autocrat wielded unlimited legislative and executive power. Affairs of state were administered by the all-powerful court clique. The army, the police and the political police were the main support of the throne. The church dinned into the



The early 1900s. Coal cutters in the Donets coalfields.

minds of millions of people the idea of the divine origin of the tsar's power. At all ceremonies and festivals "God Save the Tsar" had to be sung.

The autocracy had to be overthrown if Russia were to develop further. At the turn of the century a revolutionary wave arose that threatened to topple the throne.

At the head of the revolutionary movement stood the proletariat – the most united and best organised social force. It was the proletariat, before all the other classes, that created its own vanguard – the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP), which later became the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Having united in its ranks workers of the different nationalities of the country, it set about energetically preparing for an all-Russia uprising against the existing system.

The Party was headed by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. With his joining the working-class movement, revolutionary Marxism acquired a brilliant theoretician and the Party – the most gifted organiser and leader history has ever seen. Under Lenin's guidance the first Programme of the RSDLP was worked out, and it was adopted by the Second Congress of the Party in 1903. Pointing out that the ultimate goal of the working class was to accomplish a socialist revolution, set up a dictatorship of the proletariat and build a socialist society, the Programme put forward as top-priority tasks the struggle to overthrow the autocracy, the founding of a democratic republic, confiscation of landed estates, and the establishment of full equality of all nations and nationalities inhabiting the country with recognition of their right to self-determination.

In 1901 disturbances broke out in higher educational establishments in which the workers took an active part. This was the first time that the student and the working-class movements, formerly separate, came together. The following year saw even more massive demonstrations against tsarism and more persistent strikes. Now a strike that began in one plant was often supported by the workers of neighbouring plants. A strike which affected the whole city of Rostov lasted more than three weeks.

The bulk of the working masses began clearly to realize

that they were being oppressed not only by the capitalists and landlords and their stewards, but by the whole system of government. That is why instead of vague and purely local demands characteristic of the 1890s they began to advance proletarian demands: establishment of an eight-hour working day, political liberties, and state insurance. The slogan “Down with the autocracy!” was increasingly heard at their rallies.

The year 1903 saw the first general strike in the history of the Russian working-class movement which affected the whole of the south of the country. More than 300,000 workers were involved – this time Russia had outstripped Britain, France, Germany and Italy in the number of strikers.

There was unrest in the countryside, too. Not content with passive resistance (refusal to pay taxes, evasion of various duties), the peasants went over to active struggle. They used the lands of the landlords without permission, ransacked their estates and felled trees in their forests. In the 1900-1904 period there were 670 instances of peasant unrest in 42 out of the 55 guberniyas of European Russia. But on the whole the movement was still a spontaneous one. The peasants regarded the landlord and his land monopoly as the chief evil. Their belief in the tsar as the “father” was still strong.

In countering the revolutionary movement the autocracy resorted to all possible means, but mostly to repression – arrest, imprisonment, exile. Many working-class centres were under police surveillance. In areas of peasant disturbances the unruly were flogged and put in convict labour gangs.

The great Russian writer Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) wrote:

“One-third of Russia is under close guard, i.e. they are considered outlaws. The army of policemen – in uniform and in plain clothes – is steadily increasing. Jails and places of exile and penal servitude are crowded, in addition to the hundreds of thousands of common criminals, with political prisoners, among whom workers are now ranked too. Censorship has

reached the point of imposing absurd bans, such as it never imposed even in the worst days of the 1840s. Religious persecution has never been so frequent and cruel as it is today, and it is becoming more and more cruel and frequent. Everywhere in the cities and industrial centres troops are concentrated and ordered to charge at the people with live cartridges. In many places there has already been fratricidal bloodshed, and new and fiercer clashes are being prepared and will inevitably take place everywhere."

But the more repressive the military-police dictatorship, the less effective its policy of the "knout" proved to be. Like a drowning man clutching at a straw, the authorities seized the idea of the Chief of the Moscow Secret Police Department, Sergei Zubatov, who proposed setting up workers' organisations everywhere for discussing the drafts of various reform bills under police control. Participation in such organisations, according to this master of surveillance, should divert the workers from revolutionary struggle. The tactics, which came to be called "police socialism", had no great success since Zubatov did not inspire the workers with confidence.

At this point the priest Georgy Gapon stepped in and tried to put some life into Zubatov's dying organisations. Skilfully exploiting the religious beliefs and patriarchal-monarchical sentiments of the backward sections of the proletariat, Gapon, an eloquent orator and demagogue, managed to attract to his meetings quite a few workers, including those in such major industrial centres as Moscow and St. Petersburg. Hardly anyone knew then that Gapon had been associated with the Secret Police Department since he was a student at the seminary, and that he was receiving for his reports a big monthly pay. Gapon's organisations collapsed immediately after Bloody Sunday and the "working men's priest" himself did not survive long after that: he tried to hide, but, exposed as a provocateur, he was caught and hanged by his former colleagues in March 1906.

The government pinned great hopes on the foreign policy factor. The Minister of Internal Affairs, Vyacheslav

Pleve, tried to make War Minister Alexei Kuropatkin understand that “to hold back the revolution we need a small victorious war”. There was an old rival against whom a war could be waged. Ever since the late 19th century imperialist Japan had been the main competitor foiling the tsarist plans of foreign economic expansion in the Far East. No one doubted that the war would be “small” and “victorious”. It proved to be neither.

On the night of January 25, 1904, without declaring war Japan attacked a Russian squadron lying in the roads at the naval base of Port Arthur. From the first days of hostilities it became clear that Russia was unprepared for war. Japan had superior forces on both land and sea. The bureaucratic machine of the Russian War Department failed to keep up with developments in the theatre of war.

The Far Eastern venture of the autocracy was extremely unpopular with the people. The Russian troops wondered why they should fight on land thousands of miles away from home. A number of grave defeats quickly sobered the liberal opposition intoxicated with chauvinism. Port Arthur, the autocracy’s main base in Manchuria, fell after a 157-day siege.

Lenin wrote:

“The fall of Port Arthur is a great historic outcome of tsarism’s crimes, which began to reveal themselves at the outset of the war, and which will now reveal themselves more and more extensively and unrestrainedly.... It was the Russian autocracy and not the Russian people that started this colonial war, which has turned into a war between the old and the new bourgeois worlds. It is the autocratic regime and not the Russian people that has suffered ignoble defeat. The Russian people has gained from the defeat of the autocracy. The capitulation of Port Arthur is the prologue to the capitulation of tsarism.”¹

It was evident that the state apparatus was extremely unstable: in 1900-1904 sixteen ministers were replaced in six of the most important ministries (the Ministries of In-

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 8, pp. 51, 53.

ternal and Foreign Affairs, of Finance, of War, the Merchant Marine and Education). The liberal opposition gradually became more active, and its left wing was already boldly speaking about the need to introduce a constitutional monarchy. The country's financial crisis became further aggravated. All this testified to a crisis at the "top".

The war brought new sufferings to the working people. Prices soared and unemployment increased. The growing burden of war expenditure was shifted on to the shoulders of working people by means of indirect taxes. The real wages of the workers dropped by 25 per cent, while the bourgeoisie was making fabulous profits. Hundreds of thousands of families lost their breadwinners in the war.

A great wave of strikes surged in 1904. In many cities huge rallies were held under the slogan "Down with the war!" In Moscow, St. Petersburg and Kharkov the workers downed tools. In December a general strike took place in Baku, where the government had to make concessions: for the first time in the history of the working-class movement in the Russian Empire a collective agreement was concluded, a nine-hour working day established and wages raised by 20 per cent.

The patience of the working people was finally exhausted by tsarism's military defeat in the Far East. Contrary to the hopes of the autocracy of using the war against an external enemy as a means of averting domestic social unrest, the Russo-Japanese War further aggravated the general political crisis and brought a final clash nearer. As Internal Affairs Minister Pyotr Svyatopolk-Mirsky put it, Russia had been turned into a barrel of gunpowder and brought to a volcanic state.

However, a revolutionary situation cannot by itself become a revolution. Even in a period of crisis, Lenin said, no government will "fall" if it is not "toppled over".¹ In other words, when the objective conditions for a revolution are ripe, of decisive importance is the subjective factor – the degree of political consciousness and organisation of the masses. In 1905 there appeared in Russia a social force

¹ See V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, p. 214.

able and willing to “topple over” the autocracy; it was the working class headed by the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party.

The spark that set off the revolution in Russia was an ordinary industrial dispute involving the dismissal of several workers at the huge Putilov Works in St. Petersburg. In retaliation 13,000 of the plant’s workers stopped the machines on January 3. Within several days the strike had spread throughout the city; towards the evening of January 7 over 130,000 people were taking part in it. It was in that situation that Georgy Gapon put forward his plan of presenting the tsar with a “workers’ petition” outlining their requests. The demonstration was scheduled for Sunday, January 9...

Echo of the Sunday Salvoes

...The dead lay in the streets of the tsarist capital, and it seemed that law and order would be preserved for many years to come. In fact it was not fear and submissiveness, but fear and anger that gripped the working masses after the foul shooting. The salvoes that thundered in St. Petersburg echoed throughout the Russian Empire.

A chronicle of major events:

January 10. St. Petersburg. Barricades are being put up. In different parts of the city armed clashes are taking place between workers and government troops.

Moscow. A general strike has begun. The Moscow garrison has been put on the alert.

January 11. Vilno. Skirmishes between workers and the police, in which more than 30 are killed and wounded. Gomel. Craftsmen, shop assistants, bank employees, and servants go on strike. Yekaterinoslav. Workers at printing shops and employees of the major enterprises have stopped work.

January 12. Riga. Soldiers fire on a political demonstration. About 80 people are killed.

January 18. Tiflis. A strike has just started, opening up a vast area of political actions by the workers in Transcaucasia.

The January strikes of 1905, the result of an outburst of nationwide indignation, paralysed the country. The number of strikers (444,000) was ten times greater than the average annual figure in the preceding decade. During the first three months of 1905, 810,000 people went on strike – more than in all the leading capitalist countries over the fifteen years from 1894 to 1908. The world had never before seen a strike movement on such a scale.

The extensive working-class movement forced the tsarist government to take urgent retaliatory measures. As early as January 11 it instituted the post of Governor-General of St. Petersburg with emergency powers. General Dmitry Trepov, an arch-reactionary, was appointed to the post. He was one of those tsarist administrators who considered force to be the only effective means of pacification. The portfolio of Minister of Internal Affairs was given to another advocate of drastic measures, Alexander Bulygin. There were mass arrests and house searches everywhere. A number of higher educational establishments and progressive press organs were closed down.

As before, the tsarist authorities resorted to its favourite method of suppressing the people – the kindling of national feud. Bourgeois nationalists in Baku provoked an Azerbaijani-Armenian clash in which scores of people were killed. Attempts were made in Lithuania and Byelorussia to set workers of different nationalities against one another. With the obvious connivance of the police members of the Black Hundreds¹ raided Jewish neighbourhoods in the Ukraine.

The revolution that had got under way in Russia posed the urgent task of uniting the working class and strength-

¹ The Black Hundreds were armed gangs of declassed elements formed to combat the revolutionary movement.

ening its Party. The Bolsheviks¹ undertook the initiative of calling a new congress so as to overcome discord within the Party and work out common political tactics. The Third Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party opened on April 12 in London (the Mensheviks refused to attend it). Among the items on its agenda were the staging of an armed uprising, the setting up of a provisional revolutionary government, and the attitude towards the peasant movement.

The spring and summer of 1905 were marked by a fresh upsurge of mass actions by workers and peasants.

A Bolshevik May Day leaflet of that year read in part:

“Comrades! We in Russia are now on the eve of great events. We have entered into the last desperate battle with the autocratic tsarist government; we must bring this battle to a victorious end.”

May Day was celebrated throughout the country. Rallies and demonstrations were held in 200 towns. Two hundred and twenty thousand people went on strike. The peasant movement was gaining momentum, sweeping European Russia, the Ukraine and the Baltic area. In January-February the authorities registered 126 instances of peasant unrest, in March-April – 247, and in May-June – 791.

News from the Far East kindled revolutionary fervour. The February defeat at Mukden, where the Russian army lost some 90,000 men, was followed by a major catastrophe: on May 14-15 the Japanese Navy wiped out a Russian squadron in the Strait of Tsushima.

The fiasco of the Far Eastern venture could not but af-

¹ Bolsheviks – Russian Communists, consistent Marxist Leninists, members of the RSDLP. The name “Bolsheviks” was coined at the Second Party Congress (1903) when in elections to the central Party bodies Lenin and his supporters won a majority (*bolshinstvo* in Russian). Their opponents, who adhered to an opportunist petty-bourgeois trend in Russian Social Democracy, were in a minority (*meshinstvo* in Russian) and came to be called “Mensheviks”.

fect the morale of the Russian troops – the main support of the tsarist throne. And here, too, the government had little cause for complacency. In the first half of 1905 thirty-four large-scale acts of rebellion took place in the army and the navy. The biggest one was the June rebellion on the Black Sea Fleet's best-equipped warship – the armoured cruiser *Knyaz Potemkin-Tavrichesky*, which flew a red flag for eleven days. Although the rebellion was put down, it was a slap in the face that the autocracy could not forget for a long time. The name of the armoured cruiser was crossed out from the list of the Navy's warships: The *Potemkin* was renamed *Panteleimon*.

The tsarist government obviously lacked the necessary will and energy to put things in order. It backed down once again. On August 6 Nikolai II signed a manifesto on the setting up of a consultative body – the Duma. The right to elect the members of the Duma was limited. Young people under 25, women and servicemen could not vote, and the property qualification was strict. Out of the 143 million inhabitants of the Russian Empire, only four million had the suffrage. In fact the workers had no need to boycott this mockery of elections.



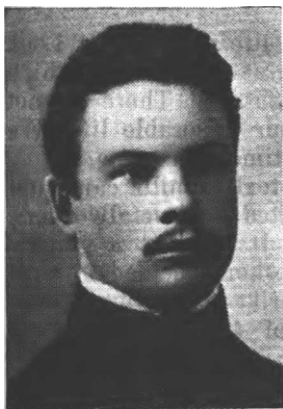
Members of the Revolutionary Committee of the battleship "Potemkin".

Seventy-Two Days of Struggle in Ivanovo-Voznesensk

The wave of strikes of May 1905 spread to new industrial areas and cities. Only recently Ivanovo-Voznesensk was an out-of-the-way little town where pigs and chickens roamed about on dirt roads. It became a major industrial centre with 70,000 workers in the wake of the industrial boom. It was a typical product of capitalist urbanisation: there were handsome mansions, expensive shops and asphalted roads in the rich suburbs and squalid slums in the working-class districts. The weavers were among the most oppressed contingents of the Russian proletariat. In no other industrial branch was children's and women's labour so widely exploited as in the textile industry. And nowhere else in the country did the working day last 16-17 hours.

A revolutionary storm broke out in the spring of 1905. On May 9 Bolshevik representatives of the workers of Ivanovo-Voznesensk held a clandestine conference in a forest outside the town and decided to start a general strike. The conference drafted 26 basic demands which were to be put to the employers and adopted an appeal entitled "To All Working Men and Women of Ivanovo-Voznesensk".

Part of it read: "We cannot bear this life any longer. Look at the way we live, look at the state to which our masters have brought us! There is not a glimmer of hope in our miserable life. We have had enough! The time has come..."



Mikhail Frunze, a Bolshevik and professional revolutionary, one of the leaders of the general political strike in Ivanovo-Voznesensk.

On May 12 the workers of textile mills came out on strike. They were supported by metalworkers, railwaymen and craftsmen. It became a general strike. At a town rally the workers decided to elect a special body to direct the strike – a Soviet (Council) of Deputies consisting of 151 of their most able and trusted comrades.

On May 15 the deputies met at their first organisational session, which elected Avenir Nozdrin, an engraver, Chairman of the Soviet's Presidium; his assistant and secretary were also elected. An organ of government by workers, Russia's first Town Soviet of Workers' Deputies, began its work.

In the course of the strike the structure of the Soviet was improved. Strike, food and finance commissions were set up, and after the shooting of workers on June 3, a commission was formed to look into the circumstances of the incident.

In defiance of the governor's orders, the Soviet set up a Workers' Militia to maintain revolutionary order and coordinated its work with the Voluntary People's Militia formed earlier under the Town Party Organisation. The Workers' Militia helped protect strike leaders and those attending the general meetings of strikers and sessions held by the RSDLP group and the Soviet, and prevented strike-breakers from entering enterprises.

Much attention was paid to propaganda work among the strikers. A propaganda group regularly informed the workers about developments connected with the strike and about major events, explained to them the decisions adopted by the Bolshevik organisation and by the Soviet, and issued special bulletins and leaflets.

Nikolai Zhidelev (1880-1950), a member of the Ivanovo-Voznesensk Soviet, recalled:

"From the first days of its existence the Soviet was a powerful force with which the town as well as the provincial authorities had to and did reckon. The Soviet told the governor and the factory owners that it would guarantee peace in the town provided troops and the police did not interfere with the strike."

From its first days the Soviet operated as a body of

revolutionary government. At its second sitting it passed a decision on closing the town's liquor shops and on prohibiting gambling; later, it made merchants give the strikers foodstuffs on credit and forbade factory owners from evicting them from factory living quarters. The Town Duma, finding itself ignored, discontinued its sessions.

The Soviet set up a cooperative for providing the strikers with foodstuffs, and had some partial success in forcing the factory owners to pay the workers their wages during the strike. The Finance Commission did much to replenish the strike fund. Deputies were empowered to collect money for the benefit of the strikers; they contacted many Russian cities which responded by sending money.

After the initial shock, the tsarist authorities resorted to their usual weapon – repression. On the night of June 2 the governor summoned three battalions of soldiers and two Cossack¹ squadrons and ordered them to arrest Soviet activists and break up the workers' rally on the bank of the river Talka.

Russkiye vedomosti (Russian Gazette) reported:

“The Cossacks... went into action with whips, without any warning, evidently guided by the tactics of a swift charge. The strikers were dispersed and a small group of them were arrested and sent to police torture chambers. In panic many headed for the forest, and a roundup got under way. At the same time something horrible was taking place: human beings were being hunted down. Defenceless people who were finding their way from the place of the rally to the railway embankment were shot one by one by the Cossacks, as if they were partridges...”

But acts of repression failed to intimidate and break the will of the strikers. And the prestige of the Soviet of

¹ Cossacks — members of a favoured military caste in Russia in the 18th to the beginning of the 20th century, the mainstay of the autocracy. Tsarism exploited the political backwardness of the mass of the Cossacks and dispatched Cossack troops to crush national liberation and revolutionary movements.

Workers' Deputies rose still higher when at its demand the governor had to release the arrested strike leaders and deputies, rescind his order to ban strikers' meetings on the Talka, and withdraw troops from the town.

It was not only among the strikers that the Ivanovo-Voznesensk Soviet enjoyed great popularity. Peasant envoys came to the Soviet to complain about the oppression of landlords, to seek material aid, and to ask that speakers be sent to the villages, etc.

...The last session of the Soviet took place on July 19. The workers had been under great strain, and since their demands for higher wages and better social and living conditions were partially satisfied, the Soviet decided to end the strike. On July 23 the workers returned to their factories in an organised manner.

The strike of the textile workers of Ivanovo-Voznesensk lasted 72 days. As may be recalled, for 72 days the Paris Communards fought behind barricades. These two events are equal in significance in the history of the international working-class movement. The Paris Commune provided an example of the first working-class government – the successor to bourgeois parliamentarism and bourgeois democracy. The Ivanovo-Voznesensk Soviet of Workers' Deputies showed that it was possible to set up a different state form of proletarian dictatorship.



A meeting of Ivanovo-Voznesensk workers on the banks of the Talka.

Comrades! Hasten to Elect Your Deputies!

In the summer of 1905 throughout Russia landed estates were afire, machines came to a standstill, and factories and plants became deserted. In the cities guns fired and workers were shot; in the countryside rebellious peasants were whipped. The military authorities demanded more Cossack units to put down mutinies.

Having failed to defeat the external enemy, the tsarist government was now in a great hurry to make peace with them so as to hurl all its forces at its domestic enemy. On receiving news of the signing on August 23 of the Treaty of Portsmouth with Japan,¹ Nikolai II gave a grand reception at his country residence at Peterhof. The Minister of the Royal Court, Vladimir Frederix, did his best: the whole of Peterhof glittered with multicoloured illumination. The same day War Minister Alexander Rediger received an order to have troops transported from the Far East to the central provinces. The trains with Cossack divisions were still moving along the Trans-Siberian railway when events occurred which historians would later describe as the "paralysis of the tsarist government".

A strike of Moscow railwaymen began in early October. Within a few days it spread to the whole of Russia, involving 1.5 million industrial workers and 200,000 civil servants and employees of commercial enterprises, and urban transport workers.

The tsarist government reacted in the usual way. The Governor-General of St. Petersburg, Dmitry Trepov, gave this order: "Don't use blank cartridges and don't spare cartridges".

But the punitive measures failed to produce the desired results. The authorities proved incapable of even restoring railway communication between St. Petersburg and Peterhof, and the tsar was isolated in his country resi-

¹ The Treaty of Portsmouth concluded the Russo-Japanese War. Under the treaty Russia recognised Korea as a sphere of influence of Japan and ceded to it South Sakhalin and the rights to the Liaotung Peninsula.

dence. The tsar's yacht *Shtandart* was under steam in the Gulf of Finland; the autocrat of Russia was ready to flee the country at any moment.

In conditions of the nationwide political strike and an impending armed uprising, the revolutionary people felt that they needed to set up organs of power which they could trust completely, which expressed their vital interests, and which could serve as commanding centres of an all-out war of the workers and peasants against the autocracy. Such an organ was the St. Petersburg Soviet of Workers' Deputies, formed on October 13 of representatives of the striking factories and plants in the capital.

An appeal of the St. Petersburg Soviet to the workers said in part:

"Yet another effort, and the chains of age-old slavery will fall from the people. But to make this effort the working class must close ranks and come out as a single organised force. We must not let the strikes now flare up, now go out in individual factories and plants. That is why we have resolved to establish united guidance of the movement by setting up a general workers' committee... This committee, by coordinating our movement, will make it organised, united and strong. It will represent the St. Petersburg workers, voice their needs before the rest of society. It will determine what we have to do during the strike and when to end it. Organise yourselves, comrades! Hasten to elect your deputies..."

The creation of the Soviet was a new experience for the Russian Social Democrats. They were not unanimous on the question of what form the Soviet should take and what tasks it should accomplish. All parties in the revolutionary camp were striving to overthrow the monarchy and establish a republic. But while all of them attached major importance to the question of power (the central problem of any revolution), there was little agreement as to how that question should be resolved. The Mensheviks, for example, believed that after the victory of the revolution power should be taken over by the bourgeoisie, and that the Soviet of Workers' Deputies could only be a body for guiding

the strike struggle of the proletariat or a huge trade union comprising representatives of workers of all trades. "Ultra-revolutionary" Mensheviks regarded the Soviet as a local self-government body of the type that existed in the days of the town dumas.

Nor was there complete agreement among the Bolsheviks. At first they took a cautious attitude towards the St. Petersburg Soviet, regarding it as a non-Party organisation most of whose leaders were Mensheviks. Some members of the metropolitan committee of Bolsheviks wanted the Soviet to adopt the programme of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. Otherwise, in their opinion, all Party members would have to withdraw from the Soviet.

Lenin alone was able to make a correct evaluation of the Soviets of Workers' Deputies and of their role in the unfolding of revolutionary events. In Stockholm, where he stopped for a few days on his way back to Russia from exile abroad, he wrote a letter which he entitled "Our Tasks and the Soviet of Workers' Deputies" to the legal Bolshevik newspaper *Novaya zhizn* (New Life). With exceptional modesty, voicing the reservation that he spoke "as an onlooker", who had not yet seen the Soviet of Workers' Deputies, he spoke out against opposing the Soviet to the Party: "The decision must certainly be: *both* the Soviet of Workers' Deputies *and* the Party."¹

The leader of Russian Social Democracy considered the Soviet to be the prototype of a provisional revolutionary government in which all revolutionary parties should cooperate in the struggle against a common enemy – the tsarist autocracy.

Despite the predominance of Mensheviks in the St. Petersburg Soviet, developments in the country and the growing influence of the Bolsheviks among the city's workers were steadily pushing the Soviet "to the left", turning it from the general strike guiding centre into an organ of proletarian power.

Already at its second session on October 14, the Soviet passed a resolution on getting enterprises which had not

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, p. 19.

yet joined the strike to do so; on October 18 it demanded that the government declare an amnesty for political prisoners; then it passed decisions on the abolition of censorship for newspapers, and on deferment of payment of rent and for goods bought on credit since the strikers had been deprived of their wages; and it helped to introduce, without permission from the authorities, an eight-hour working day and promote freedom of the press and of assembly.

The determined actions of the "second government" in St. Petersburg compelled Nikolai II to make concessions, and on October 17 he signed a manifesto which formally proclaimed democratic rights and freedoms, vested the newly set-up State Duma with legislative powers, and extended the right to vote in elections to this Duma to more people. This was the first concession that the revolutionary forces exacted from the autocracy.

In those autumn days of 1905 the Soviet of Workers' Deputies in St. Petersburg proved to be a major political force and emerged as an organ of the new revolutionary power. It called a general political strike, effective from midday on November 2, of all the city's workers in solidarity with the sailors of the Kronstadt naval fort who had joined the revolutionary proletariat. On November 3 nearly 140,000 St. Petersburg workers were on strike. Detachments of armed workers' militia were formed everywhere. Resolutions adopted at rallies emphasised that the workers were joining the strike in response to the call of their Soviet.

The government had to give in and declared that the Kronstadt sailors would be committed for trial at an ordinary court and not be court-martialed. Once its immediate aim was attained, the Soviet of Workers' Deputies declared that the general strike was over.

The Soviet was also able to have death sentences passed on railwaymen of the Kushka station repealed. During a general strike by postal and telegraph workers the Prime Minister, Sergei Vitte, had to ask the Soviet for help in dispatching government telegrams. The publisher of the newspaper *Novoye vremya* (New Time), Alexei Suvorin, known for his reactionary views, wrote on November

24 that the tsarist government, though vested with all powers, lacked influence while the second government (the St. Petersburg Soviet), which had no formal rights, enjoyed great prestige.

In those days the St. Petersburg Soviet, the country's biggest, could become an all-Russia centre of struggle against tsarism, an organ of revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry, the need for which the Bolsheviks had spoken about at the very beginning of the revolution. Many Soviets which appeared in other cities regarded the St. Petersburg Soviet as the future government of the country. The Rostov, Voronezh and other Soviets passed decisions declaring that they were willing to abide by the resolutions of the St. Petersburg Soviet, and that they were waiting for its call for nationwide action.

Also linked with the St. Petersburg Soviet were peasant organisations in various provinces which regarded it as a central organ of government, as well as national organisations. For instance, the All-Russia Delegate Congress of Postal and Telegraph Workers adopted a resolution on November 22 on joining the St. Petersburg Soviet. The Railwaymen's Union sent its representatives to the Soviet. Contact was also maintained with the All-Russia Peasant Union.

All this showed that it was possible to turn the St. Petersburg Soviet, whose staff had grown as peasants' and soldiers' representatives came to take part in its work, into a provisional revolutionary government. But it did not become such a body largely because the Menshevik leaders did not wish to transform the Soviet into a directing body for an armed uprising and an organ of all-Russia revolutionary government.

The tsarist government saw clearly enough the tremendous influence of the Soviet. Six weeks after the publication of the Manifesto of October 17, it inflicted a trial blow at the revolution. On November 26 the Chairman of the Soviet, Georgy Khrustalev-Nosar, was arrested. Then followed edicts empowering the local authorities to take whatever measures they considered necessary, without

prior government approval, to suppress the strikes of railwaymen and of employees at post and telegraph offices, and to prosecute strikers. The newspapers were full of reports about the tsar's appeal to pogromists to help the government "establish law and order". But the Soviet went on fighting: on December 2, St. Petersburg newspapers printed the Soviet's financial manifesto calling on the population to stop paying taxes, to withdraw their deposits from savings banks, to demand their wages in gold, and to prevent payment of state debts with tsarist government bonds. In retaliation the authorities, for the first time after the proclamation of "freedom of the press", closed down the newspapers that had printed the Soviet's manifesto. On the evening of December 3 the majority of the members of the Soviet and its Executive Committee were arrested. The remaining deputies met in an attempt to organise elections of new deputies. The last issue of the newspaper *Izvestia* came out on December 14. But the work of the Soviet could not be resumed till February 1917.

The situation had undergone a change. The St. Petersburg workers who had been heading the all-Russia struggle of the proletariat since the first days of the revolution were becoming exhausted. The November lockouts and incessant repressions further drained their strength. Besides, in St. Petersburg, where the central government apparatus and the tsar's court, the Guards and the Cossack units were located, the proletariat was confronted with a well-organised and formidable enemy.

Moscow took over the initiative for a decisive offensive against tsarism.

At the Barricades of Moscow

Some historical events which took place within a few days are far more important than those which dragged on for months and even years. Among the former are the climaxes of revolutions when the courage and determination of oppressed classes manifested themselves to the full. The culmination of the first revolution in Russia was the Moscow Armed Uprising of December 1905.

Towards November the situation in Moscow was aggravated to the extreme. The government's repressions increasingly infuriated the Moscow proletariat. On November 22 a City Soviet of Workers' Deputies was formed and it elected its Executive Committee comprising representatives of political parties. Here the Bolsheviks enjoyed greater influence and prestige among the workers than in St. Petersburg – a circumstance of decisive importance for the entire activity of the Moscow Soviet.

On December 2 a rebellion broke out in the Rostov Regiment. On the following day the Moscow Soviet of Soldiers' Deputies was formed. At their first and only session the deputies unanimously declared that they sympathised with the revolutionary movement, might join the people's uprising, and at any rate would not shoot at their own brothers. The situation was highly favourable for an uprising, but the Soviet failed to assess it correctly. Instead, it waited for a signal for nationwide action from St. Petersburg. The rebellion of the Rostov Regiment was left without support and was suppressed.

The majority of Moscow workers wanted immediate action. "Why delay? It's time to act", they said at the Soviet. It became clear that to wait for a directive from the capital and keep the masses from taking action could mean destroying the very idea of an armed uprising against tsarism. The mood of the working class was conveyed to the leaders of the Soviet. On December 6 a plenum of the Soviet unanimously adopted a resolution on calling a general strike which was to start at midday the following day.

Exactly at the appointed hour nearly 600 Moscow enterprises simultaneously stopped work. The strike involved 150,000 workers. Traffic on all railways, except the Nikolaevskaya¹ came to a halt. Voluntary people's militia began to disarm the police.

From the first day of the strike nearly all government functions were taken over by the Moscow Soviet of Workers' Deputies. Four-fifths of the city's population were un-

¹ The Nikolaevskaya (now the Oktyabrskaya) railway linked Moscow with St. Petersburg.

der its control. And the power of the Soviet did not manifest itself merely in issuing proclamations and manifestos; the Soviet had both effective power and authority.

The strike call met with a prompt response. At a few small factories, where the followers of Gapon were strong, work was stopped by the workers of big plants nearby. The Soviet's resolutions were carried out unquestioningly. Its armed volunteers were used exclusively against the police and troops.

The Soviet's Executive Committee permitted some stores to remain open and closed others, it banned the sale of spirits, exempted workers from payment of rent during the strike, organised the guarding of factories and plants against thugs and thieves, and forbade the baking of all except black bread.

Barricades were put up in all parts of the city and around the city centre controlled by Governor-General Fyodor Dubasov. Traffic came to a standstill throughout Moscow.

M. Gaston Leroux, a correspondent of *Le Matin*, wrote:

"In Moscow... barricades appeared within several minutes: two telegraph poles, three street lamps, four sledges, a ladder, and six boards were put together, with wires all around – and a barricade was built. The military units were never sure that having taken one barricade they would not find behind it ten others which they would not be able to take".

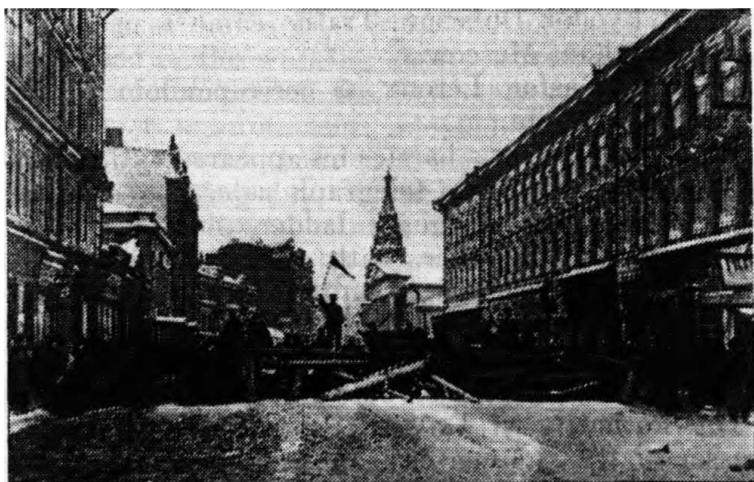
The authority of Dubasov – the energetic suppresser of the summer peasant actions in Southern Russia, where he for the first time ordered the use of artillery fire against the rebellious villages, thereby winning the post of Moscow's Governor-General – extended only to the city centre, where he remained with troops loyal to him. Dubasov had to lock up a large section of the Moscow garrison in the barracks, having taken away the soldiers' rifles and cartridges. The newly appointed Governor-General implored the high command to send him "an infantry brigade at least for a short lime". But an uprising was being expected at any minute in St. Petersburg too, and Dubasov received

this reply: "We have no troops to spare."

Not only the Moscow workers, but also shopkeepers, craftsmen and office workers accepted the rule of the Soviet willingly and in a disciplined manner. The big bourgeoisie lay low in their mansions, awaiting better times, but offered no resistance. In a word, the only real force countering the Soviet was Dubasov and his soldiers, Cossacks and policemen. And on the outcome of the struggle depended the fate of the revolution in Moscow.

For the first two days, on December 7 and 8, the strike went peacefully. The first to attack were the tsarist troops. On December 9 they opened artillery fire at the Fidler School where an all-Moscow conference of the armed volunteer forces was under way. Many volunteers were killed or wounded, more than a hundred were arrested. For the proletariat the firing of the guns was a signal to action.

The barricades were a real boundary separating revolutionary power from tsarist power. But the aim of the uprising was not to safeguard the revolutionary forces from the remnants of tsarism in Moscow, but to smash the latter. To this end it was necessary to mount an offensive and not be on the defensive. But the workers, taking cover behind the barricades, more often than not waited for the



The streets and squares of Moscow were crisscrossed with barricades.

enemy's attack instead of using them as strong points for launching offensive actions.

The initiative slipped into the hands of the enemy. Dubasov at once resorted to the method he had so successfully used in the Ukraine: he set the artillery into action. The militiamen's rifles and pistols were powerless against the artillery. The various districts of the city were isolated, and the Executive Committee of the Moscow Soviet was cut off from them. Guidance of the uprising was virtually taken over by the district Soviets; the uprising split up into separate seats of resistance.

On December 15 the Semyonovsky Guards Regiment arrived in Moscow from St. Petersburg, followed a little later by the Ladozhsky Regiment. The alignment of forces changed sharply. The uprising began to be ruthlessly put down. The Commander of the Semyonovsky Guards, Colonel Min, gave this order: "Make no arrests and act ruthlessly."

Presnya offered a more prolonged resistance than did the other districts. Here the workers showed the highest degree of fortitude and organisation in the struggle. Life in the district was wholly supervised by a Soviet of Workers' Deputies which acted as a revolutionary government.



The Semyonovsky Regiment sent to suppress the uprising in Moscow.

Among other things, it nationalised the pharmacies and organised a weapon repair shop. A Military Revolutionary Tribunal operated under the Soviet. Its armed volunteers fighting on the barricades of Presnya were well armed and well organised. The punitive forces had to battle their way through, demolishing and burning down everything that stood in their way. On December 16, when the preponderance of government forces became overwhelming, the Executive Committee of the Moscow Soviet decided to stop the uprising and the strike, and to retreat in an organised manner in order to preserve the cadres.

From the organisational and technical point of view the Moscow uprising was ill prepared. Towards early December the city had only 2,000 armed and about 4,000 unarmed volunteers. The lack of arms proved disastrous. But Marx and Engels noted in their day that in a revolution there are moments when surrender of positions without a struggle is more demoralising than defeat in battle. The Moscow workers felt they had to resist the onslaught of the tsarist authorities by staging an uprising. Courage and determination had to compensate for the unfavourable situation and for the lack of military-technical training.

An excerpt from the last order issued by the Presnya headquarters of armed volunteer forces:

“We started it. We shall now end it... Blood, violence and death will be at our heels. But this is nothing. The future is with the working class. Generation after generation in all countries will learn how to be firm and unyielding from the experience of Presnya.”

Not Talking Shops, but “Working” Bodies

Lenin said:

“No party invented the Soviets... no party could have invented them. They were brought to life by the 1905 revolution.”¹

Following Ivanovo-Voznesensk, St. Petersburg and Moscow, Soviets appeared in Saratov and Smolensk, Novo-

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 26, p. 490.

rossiisk and Perm, Krasnoyarsk and Samara, Odessa and Irkutsk, and in a number of other industrial centres. By the end of 1905 there were Soviets in 55 cities and towns. Having emerged as strike committees, the Soviets became organs of general revolutionary struggle against the government, and then headquarters of uprisings, and embryos of revolutionary power.

From the very outset the Soviets represented bodies of the working people. Many documents adopted by the Soviets in 1905 contain the demand that deputies should be elected exclusively by workers. Voting was direct and equal, and in some cases by secret ballot.

An excerpt from the Charter of the Tver Soviet reads:

“The deputy shall report to his electorate on his activity and the activity of the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies... If he fails to justify the confidence of his constituents, they shall bring this to the attention of the Assembly of Deputies; the latter is obliged to hold new elections.”

The Soviets were the first representative bodies after the Paris Commune to have firm links with the bodies of working people who had created them. Thus the deputies were bearers of the Soviet’s decisions among the masses as well as direct organisers of the fulfilment of the workers’ mandates. The practice of fulfilling electors’ mandates which was first introduced in 1905 is still observed today by the Soviets of People’s Deputies in the USSR.

As the revolution gained momentum there emerged the first Soviets of Peasants’ Deputies in the Tver Guberniya, near Rostov and Novorossiisk, in the Urals, in Transcaucasia and the Baltic area. In the Tver Guberniya, for example, the Peasants’ Soviets set up their own armed volunteer forces and their own court, and dealt with many economic problems. Not infrequently the Soviets of Peasants’ Deputies had representatives in the Soviets of Workers’ Deputies in industrial centres.

In Krasnoyarsk there was a Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies; in Chita, Irkutsk, Vladivostok and Sevastopol – Soviets of Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Deputies. There

was a growing tendency towards turning the Soviets into organs of revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, towards their unification into Soviets of all working people in the country.

Acting as bodies which united the masses on a broad democratic basis, the Soviets had from the outset rallied working people of all nationalities. For example, the Charter of the Kostroma Soviet emphasised that "all workers without distinction as to sex, age, religion and nationality have the right to vote in elections to the Soviet of Workers' Deputies". The Soviets were built up by Russian workers together with workers of various nationalities inhabiting the Russian Empire.

Lenin said:

"The Soviets will be able to develop properly, to display their potentialities and capabilities to the full only by taking over *full* state power; for otherwise they have *nothing to do*, otherwise they are either simply embryos (and to remain an embryo too long is fatal), or playthings."¹

Of course far from all strike committees elected by bodies of workers later became Soviets. These committees became Soviets provided, with broad support from below, they proved capable of compelling the exploiters to reckon with the will of the working people, and of implementing their economic and political decisions.

One of the most authoritative and influential Soviets in the provinces, the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies of Krasnoyarsk, independently collected taxes from the population in order to maintain its armed volunteer forces and made it an obligation of employers to pay the volunteers their full wages although they took time off for patrol duty. Military units were obliged to provide patrols as required by the Soviet; officers were absolutely forbidden to address soldiers impolitely and to have servants at the expense of the state. In its resolution of December 19, 1905, the Krasnoyarsk Soviet declared that it had undertaken to protect the town and combat robbery.

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 26, p. 104.

In many cases the Soviets dissolved existing bodies of local self-administration and acted as full-fledged organs of the new state power. As Lenin said, “for a time several cities in Russia became something in the nature of small local ‘republics’.”¹ In Chita, for instance, for nearly two months power was in the hands of the Soviet of Soldiers’ and Cossacks’ Deputies, which had established full control over the town’s institutions and enterprises. The “Republic of Novorossiisk” proclaimed by the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies existed for two weeks. Only the decisions of the Soviet were in force on its territory; the Soviet introduced new taxes in favour of the striking workers, set up its own court and workers’ militia, and organised the publication of a proletarian newspaper.

By abolishing the police, the political police and the tsar’s court of law, the Soviets eliminated some of the main institutions of the exploitative state, which performed the function of suppressing the working masses. In Moscow, Novorossiisk, Yekaterinodar, Taganrog and other cities the Soviets set up peoples’ revolutionary courts and arrested and disarmed policemen.

The Soviets, which emerged as bodies of the revolutionary movement, represented a decisive break not only with the traditional bourgeois conception of the functions of state authority, but also with those forms of bodies of state authority through which the capitalists and landlords wielded power. The deputies took decisions on questions of revolutionary struggle on behalf of the workers and dealt with a wide range of problems pertaining to their work and everyday life. Then they organised the implementation of these decisions at work collectives and checked on the way they were being carried out. Under such a system the activity of the deputy ceased to be a profession, a means of earning a livelihood.

However, it was difficult for a deputy employed at a factory to perform so many duties. Already in 1905 the practice of Soviet power provided examples showing how this vital problem could be resolved: in conformity with the

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 23, p. 248.

Rules of the Soviets in Baku, Kostroma, Odessa and other towns, all of the more important issues were discussed collectively at the general meetings of deputies convened two to four times a month. In intervals between meetings the work of Soviets was carried on by deputies elected to their Executive Committees, which ensured the implementation of the Soviets' resolutions and reported to plenary meetings on the work done.

There was another form of organisation which ensured the continuity of activity of the Soviets – their committees and subcommittees (for dealing with financial matters, for combating unemployment and collection of funds, for providing fuel and foodstuffs to the population, and editing and auditing committees). The Krasnoyarsk Soviet, for example, had three committees – for observation of the movement of troop trains, for dealing with matters relating to the internal order at industrial plants, and for conducting relations with elected deputies.

Thus, as early as 1905 the Soviets meant a break with bourgeois parliamentarism which was based on the separation of legislative power from executive power and was designed to ensure the dominance of the exploiting minority over the working majority.

Lenin said:

“The way out of parliamentarism is not, of course, the abolition of representative institutions and the elective principle, but the conversion of the representative institutions from talking shops into ‘working’ bodies.”¹

Together with the Soviets there came into being during the first Russian revolution trade unions, which took an active part in the fight against tsarism and capitalism. It is quite natural that these two organisations of the masses should operate not in isolation but in close interaction with each other. The common tasks of the proletariat formed the basis for interaction of the Soviets with other organisations of the working people in revolutionary struggle.

It was the Soviets of Moscow, Kiev, Rostov-on-Don and

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, p. 428.

other cities that initiated the formation of trade unions and other public organisations. For instance, at its very first session on November 30, 1905, the Samara Soviet of Workers' Deputies adopted a decision which said that the Soviet's tasks were to coordinate the activity of the trade unions, set up unions where they did not exist and to give them active support everywhere. The Yekaterinoslav Soviet of Workers' Deputies, recognising the need for workers to be united in trade unions, worked out and approved model trade union rules which were assumed as a basis by the unions of printing workers, railwaymen, bakers, metal workers and tailors, formed in the city.

In their turn the trade unions submitted questions for consideration to the general meetings of the Soviets and their executive bodies, participated in the formulation of decisions and organised their implementation.

An important feature of the Soviets which determined their entire development was that they were guided by the revolutionary Party of the working class. In this matter the following Leninist principle was operative from the outset – the Party guides the Soviets through the Communists elected to them. This principle was endorsed by the Fourth Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in April 1906.

Thus, the Soviets of 1905 provided a practical solution to the problem of finding a form of government to replace the machinery of the autocratic police state. The activity of the Soviets also showed that they could become bodies of state power not only in the period of the bourgeois democratic revolution, but after the triumph of the socialist revolution as well.

Of course the Soviets which came out victorious in October 1917 had far outstripped their predecessors which functioned in the period of the first Russian revolution. But the democratic traditions whose foundations were laid by the workers, peasants and soldiers, who fought against the autocracy in 1905-1907, were not only preserved by Soviet power, but were turned into the basic principle of organisation of the world's first worker-peasant state.

THE SOVIETS AND THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT: POWER WITHOUT A GOVERNMENT AND A GOVERN- MENT WITHOUT POWER

The first day of 1917 in Russia was a Sunday. It marked the 127th week of the First World War, which Lenin called "a war of robbers for booty".

For millions of Russian soldiers it was one more day of being face to face with death. The bloody battles in the autumn of 1916 and the government's failure to solve the problem of materiel and supplies for the army led to a sharp growth of anti-war sentiments among the soldiers. In the outgoing year there were more than 1.5 million deserters. The army had not merely ceased to be a reliable support for the Romanov dynasty of tsars; it had become a threat to its existence.

The war undermined the already weak economy of the country. Among the belligerents Russia suffered the greatest economic losses. Industrial plants came to a standstill for lack of fuel and raw materials. The railways failed to cope with the increased volume of freight. Agriculture fell into decay; the crop area diminished; unploughed fields were overgrown with weeds. The government decided to requisition grain. Newspaper headlines read: "Petrograd is without Bread", "Speculation with Flour", "Fuel Crisis", "Impoverishment of the Countryside", "Fight the Profiteers".

In poverty-stricken villages peasant families dragged out a half-starved existence. In the towns the wives and children of workers queued up outside food shops night after night in the hope of buying a loaf of bread.

The growing paralysis of the national economy and the military defeats finally caused the governmental machinery to break down. Tsarism tried in vain to save the situation and stop the relentless course of events. The government now made conciliatory gestures to the liberal bourgeoisie, now dissolved the congresses of its urban organisations and *Zemstvos*,¹ now supported military-industrial

¹ *Zemstvo* —a rural elective body of self administration

committees, now put them under police surveillance, now clamoured for war till the victorious end, now probed into the possibility of a separatist peace with Germany.

The confusion and instability within the ruling camp found reflection in yet another reshuffle of ministers. Court favourites were hastily named to ministerial posts and just as hastily dismissed. Twenty-five ministers were replaced during the war' years.

The government crisis manifested itself at all levels: top executive bodies failed to take well-considered political decisions in good time while those at lower levels could not ensure their prompt fulfilment. The state machinery was being further crippled by corruption and parochialism, by bureaucracy and incompetence.

The Victorious Storming of Tsarism

The national crisis in Russia was coming to a head. From the beginning of January workers of several enterprises in Petrograd went on strike, and every week there were bigger strikes involving tens of thousands of men. Political rallies and anti-war demonstrations were held spontaneously. The workers' struggle was guided by the Bolsheviks and a small group of Left Socialist Revolutionaries¹ and Mensheviks.

An excerpt from a letter by Sergei Tverskoy, Governor of Saratov read:

"...What is happening? It is as if eleven years have not passed since 1905. The same personages, the same words, on the one hand, and the same paralysis of government, on the other. In the provinces gentry-class Zemstvo councillors have plunged into politics once again. And once again we hear resounding resolutions

which existed in Russia from 1864 to 1918.

¹ Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs) – members of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, a left-wing bourgeois-democratic party which existed in Russia from 1901 to 1923. They expressed the interests of the petty bourgeoisie. In December 1917 the left wing of the party formed an independent party – the Left Socialist Revolutionary Party.

about the hateful government and so on. Well, what next? Next the peasant will be speaking out or, rather, will be doing things. This is depressing.”

Frightened by the revolutionary outburst, the leaders of the bourgeois opposition still hoped to come to terms with Nikolai II. On February 10, Chairman of the State Duma Mikhail Rodzyanko, in his last report to the tsar, again urged him to agree to the formation of a government from members of the bourgeois factions in the Duma. This time, too, he received a negative answer.

In the middle of February general strikes took place at the Putilovsky and Izhorsky plants in Petrograd. In an attempt to suppress the workers actions the management of the Putilovsky plant declared a mass lockout, having dismissed 30,000 employees on February 22. The following day, February 23 (March 8, new style), in response to a call by the Bolsheviks 100,000 workers went into the streets to mark International Women's Day. The demonstrators carried placards denouncing war and calling for the overthrow of the autocracy. The first barricades appeared. The police proved unable to cope with the situation.

On February 24 the strikes spread to the entire city. Interior Minister Alexander Protopopov called out military Guards units to maintain law and order in the capital. But fearing that a massacre might produce an unfavourable impression on Russia's allies, the authorities hesitated to give the order to open fire. The workers got round military posts and gathered on Nevsky Prospekt in the city centre, where they held meetings.

On February 25 representatives of revolutionary parties got together to discuss once again the vital question of electing a Soviet of Workers' Deputies. By that time the workers of some Petrograd plants had begun to show initiative and elect deputies to the Soviet. But first the main task – that of carrying through the struggle with the tsarist government – had to be accomplished. It is for this reason that the Bolsheviks had called on the workers to demonstrate.

On the evening of February 25 the commander of the Petrograd military district, General Khabalov, received an

order from Nikolai II (who was at General Headquarters in Mogilev) demanding an immediate end to all disturbances in the capital. On the night of the 26th the authorities arrested five members of the Petrograd Bolshevik Committee and about a hundred people belonging to revolutionary parties. The next morning the troops were given live cartridges and in the day time they went into action. For three hours they fired on the demonstrators, after which they managed to clear Nevsky Prospekt and the city centre. However, the order to shoot at the people caused great resentment in the capital's garrison. In a number of units the soldiers agreed among themselves to stop shooting and not to carry out orders of their officers.

Early on the morning of February 27 soldiers of the reserve battalion of the Volynsky Guards Regiment killed a company commander and started an uprising. They were joined by neighbouring troop units. Soon the whole of Liteiny Prospekt and the adjoining streets were thronged with troops. A vast area became affected when the rebellious soldiers joined the workers. Having overcome the post of the Moscow Guards Regiment, the huge crowd went on to stir to action the soldiers of the Moscow and Grenadier Regiments and the workers of the Petrogradskaya Storona



Petrograd in the days of the February Revolution of 1917.

(Petrograd district). At the call of the Bolshevik Mikhail Kalinin, who was later to become Chairman of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet,¹ the demonstrators seized the Kresty prison in the capital and freed the political prisoners held there.

Towards two o'clock in the afternoon the enormous crowd reached the Taurida Palace, which housed the State Duma. There things were in a state of confusion. In the morning the tsar had ordered the adjournment of the State Duma's session until April. Members of the Duma, being loyal to the monarchy, obeyed the decree and stopped the official session, but they met "privately" in the next hall. There was disagreement among them; some proposed submitting to the order of the tsarist government, while others said that a military dictator must be urgently found. It was while this debate was going on that armed soldiers and workers, having overcome the guards of the Duma, broke into the Taurida Palace and filled its halls and corridors. "Left-wing" intellectuals who considered themselves close to the revolutionary parties rushed to the palace. A rather mixed public had gathered. The Mensheviks – those double-faced politicians – without wasting time went to the room of the Finance Committee of the State Duma and after a short conference announced the creation of a "Provisional Executive Committee of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies". There were only three Bolsheviks on the Committee. Most of the active members of the Bolshevik Party (they numbered about 2,000 at the time) were then in the streets, participating in the actions of the revolutionary masses. It was they who were leading the soldiers and workers in the storming of police stations and in the seizure of public and state buildings.

The Provisional Executive Committee of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies set the norm of representation in elections to the Soviet: one deputy per thousand workers and one per company of soldiers. As a result the Taurida Palace

¹ Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet – a permanently operating body of the USSR Supreme Soviet elected by the two equal Chambers.

became the place of assembly of the first deputies of the Soviet; the organisational promptness of the Mensheviks was rewarded. They themselves were among the founders of the Soviet and its Executive Committee. As a matter of fact, the Mensheviks had stolen the slogan of the Soviets from the masses in order to forestall the Bolsheviks and keep the revolution within a bourgeois-democratic framework.

On learning that the Provisional Executive Committee of the Soviet had been set up, the members of the State Duma established their own organisational centre – the Provisional Committee of the State Duma; but they were not in a hurry to take over state power and awaited further developments. At that point the members of the Duma had not yet given up hope of doing a deal with the tsar. Mikhail Rodzyanko telegraphed Nikolai II twice, imploring him to form a government from among members of the Duma. Instead the tsar dispatched the punitive detachment of General Ivanov to Petrograd on the evening of February 27, and on the night of the 28th he left for his residence in Tsarskoye Selo.

Meanwhile the deputies of the Petrograd Soviet met at their first session at the Taurida Palace.

Here is an excerpt from an appeal of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' Deputies to the population of the city, issued on February 28, 1917:

“...The struggle is still continuing; it must be carried through. The old government must be finally overthrown to make way for a people's government. Herein lies the salvation of Russia.

“To bring the struggle to a successful end in the interests of democracy the people must set up a governmental organisation of their own.

“Yesterday, on February 27, in the capital a Soviet of Workers' Deputies was formed from elected representatives of factories and plants, insurgent military units, and also democratic and socialist parties and groups.

“The Soviet of Workers' Deputies which is holding its session in the State Duma sets itself the principal

task of organising the people's forces to fight for the final consolidation of political freedom and people's rule in Russia."

Dual Power

Thus, the very first day of the February uprising bore out Lenin's prediction that Soviets could emerge and play a decisive role only at the time of an armed struggle for power. His second forecast also came true, namely, that at the time of transition to a socialist revolution the country's government must be built along the lines of the Paris Commune of 1871 or of the Russian Soviets of 1905.

From its very first moves the Petrograd Soviet showed itself to be an organ of revolutionary government. But its Menshevik leadership was in no hurry to proclaim the Soviet a provisional revolutionary government or to set about forming one. The conception of the Mensheviks was quite simple; in the event that the autocracy was overthrown state power must pass directly into the hands of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie would then form a provisional government which would convene a Constituent Assembly. To the working class the Mensheviks assigned the role of a loyal ally of the bourgeoisie, the role of its main strike force in the streets and at the barricades – wherever sacrifices were needed, but not in the halls of the organ of state administration.

Nikolai Sukhanov (1882-1940), a Menshevik who participated in the February Revolution, wrote:

"The government that would succeed tsarism must not be any other than a bourgeois government. It is necessary to steer our course towards this decision. Otherwise the revolution will fail and perish."

The Bolsheviks headed by Lenin proposed setting up without delay a provisional revolutionary government without the participation of the bourgeoisie, having formed for this purpose a governmental bloc of revolutionary parties. They strongly objected to the transfer of power to a bourgeois government in the event of the overthrow of the autocracy. In the opinion of the Bolsheviks, the bourgeois-

democratic stage of the revolution could not be considered completed until after the formation of a provisional revolutionary government.

The Bolsheviks raised this question at the session of the Executive Committee of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies, but the majority of its members were against the immediate formation of a provisional revolutionary government. The Executive Committee made no objection even when the Provisional Committee of the State Duma, being convinced of the complete and inevitable victory of the Petrograd uprising and of the total collapse of the tsarist government, announced its decision to appoint a new government. The Duma's Committee set up a military and a food commission, and appointed commissars to ministries and departments. And the Soviet's Executive Committee began to cooperate with the Duma's Committee, thereby encouraging its activity in forming the country's government.

What is surprising is that the Soviet itself had no intention of renouncing its powers, and, notwithstanding its tactics of compromise proved to be an organ of genuine revolutionary power. It set up its own food and military commissions, sent its representatives to the districts to set



Soldiers of the First Army Corps (Western Front) welcoming the February Revolution.

up district branches of the Soviet, established assembly points for armed workers and revolutionary soldiers, and decreed the organisation of a workers' militia.

Thus, from the very first hours following the victory of the February Revolution a system of dual power took shape: in the capital there ruled simultaneously the bourgeois Provisional Committee of the State Duma and the revolutionary Executive Committee of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. What is more, in spite of the revolutionary mood of the masses the Executive Committee carried on secret talks with the Provisional Committee, to which it delegated two of its members – the Menshevik Nikolai Chkheidze and the Socialist Revolutionary Alexander Kerensky. Chkheidze was also elected Chairman of the Soviet, and Kerensky one of his assistants. So the conciliatory policy of the Soviet was approved at the highest level. A short while later the Soviet merged its military and food commissions with those of the State Duma, thereby enhancing the positions of the Duma's Committee.

On February 28 and March 1, 1917, the Provisional Committee of the State Duma discussed the question of forming a new government. By that time the tsarist ministers and many high-ranking officials and generals had been arrested; the railway stations and government and public buildings were occupied by revolutionary guards and armed workers under the command of the Petrograd Soviet. The whole of the 300,000-strong garrison of the Russian capital went over to the side of the revolution. But the situation was uncertain in many ways: the punitive forces of General Ivanov were approaching Petrograd.

On the night of March 1 a meeting took place between delegations of the State Duma's Provisional Committee and the Soviet's Executive Committee, at which the Soviet's delegation agreed that the new government would be formed by the State Duma's Provisional Committee from representatives of bourgeois parties exclusively. But the Soviet's deputies had not given their Socialist Revolutionary and Menshevik leaders the powers to conclude such an agreement. The Executive Committee delegation not merely renounced participation in the official government,

but promised to support it provided it included in its programme declaration the proclamation of a general political amnesty, the introduction of democratic liberties, the abolition of the old police and a promise to convene a Constituent Assembly.

In those February days the soldiers often acted on their own without orders from their officers who were hiding in private flats. The Executive Committee of the State Duma tried to get them to obey their former commanders, and so the question of control over the armed forces became extremely acute. To secure this control, on March 2 the Soviet issued Order No. 1 in relation to troops of the capital's garrison. Arms were handed over to Soldiers' Committees; military units could act only on orders of the Soviet. The soldiers rejoiced over Order No. 1, which dealt a crushing blow to the old military discipline and to the traditional dictatorial power of the officer in the Russian army; it abolished saluting and standing at attention when seeing an officer, addressing soldiers by the humiliating "thon", and the titles of officers. Order No. 1 at once gave the Soviet full control over the Petrograd garrison, thereby depriving the emerging bourgeois Provisional Government of the possibility to use troops for counterrevolutionary purposes. On the morning of March 2 it became known that General Ivanov's soldiers had gone over to the side of revolution and his punitive expedition had ended in fiasco; this meant that the Petrograd Soviet now held absolute power in the capital. It no longer had any armed enemies and could take all state power into its own hands.

But the Menshevik leaders of the Executive Committee thought they would gain more by shirking responsibility for the state of affairs in the country and leaving the matter of forming an official organ of government to the bourgeoisie. On the evening of March 2 a general meeting of the Petrograd Soviet endorsed the transfer of power to the Provisional Government. An absurd decision, it would seem, and yet logical. For among the thousand deputies of the Soviet who voted for the decision, the majority were representatives of industrial enterprises and military units who did not belong to any party, and former peasants who

little understood the almost barely perceptible differences between political parties. Both the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries called themselves "socialists" and their ultra-revolutionary talk could mislead even more experienced men. Still placing their full confidence in the Menshevik leaders, the deputies rejected the Bolshevik proposals that support be withdrawn for the Provisional Government and a Revolutionary Government be formed immediately.

What is more, the general meeting of the Soviet welcomed the entry into the Provisional Government of the Socialist Revolutionary Alexander Kerensky, who, despite the Executive Committee's decision on non-participation of its members in the newly formed government, made a demagogic appeal for support directly to the deputies, saying he had accepted the post of Minister of Justice so that the arrested members of the tsarist government should not escape just retribution at the people's hands. By an overwhelming majority of votes the meeting of the Petrograd Soviet adopted a resolution supporting the Provisional Government as long as it carried out the tasks set. Additional demands were made on the Provisional Government: to confirm that all reforms would be introduced without delay; not to withdraw the revolutionary troops from Petrograd; to proclaim the granting to all nationalities inhabiting Russia the right to national and cultural self-determination.

On March 3, a joint sitting of the delegations of the Executive Committee, the State Duma's Provisional Committee and the Provisional Government agreed on the text of a government declaration including the additional demands put forward by the general meeting of the Soviet. This agreement signified the final collapse of the autocratic monarchy in Russia. The leaders of the bourgeois opposition had never cherished such far-reaching goals; it was the revolutionary people who had propelled them towards the final break.

Only recently, on February 26-March 1, the tsar refused to make the small concessions which Rodzyanko implored him to make. It was not until late on the evening of

March 1 in Pskov, where the Northern Front Headquarters was located, that Nikolai II, seeing that resistance to the new system was no longer feasible, agreed to form a government with the participation of the bourgeois parties. But his decision to do so came too late and even Rodzyanko himself rejected it. The tsar was asked to abdicate.

To Pskov came representatives of the State Duma's Provisional Committee – Alexander Guchkov and Vasily Shulgin. Nikolai II told them that he was abdicating not only for himself but also for his son, in favour of his brother Mikhail. The tsar signed the abdication manifesto. Juridically the monarchy still existed, but at that moment not a single monarchist would dare to come out openly in its support. That is why the majority of the members of the State Duma's Provisional Committee and of the Provisional Government, fearing a fresh outburst of popular indignation, advised Grand Duke Mikhail to renounce the throne, which he did.

Now the Provisional Government, left without a single soldier at its disposal, stood face to face with the Petrograd Soviet, which held the reins of real power in the capital although it had declared its support for the government.

Alexander Guchkov (1862-1930), War Minister of the Provisional Government, wrote:

“The Provisional Government does not possess any real power, and its instructions are carried out to the extent permitted by the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, which holds the key elements of real power, such as troops, the railways, and the post and telegraph offices. It can be frankly said that the Provisional Government exists only as it is allowed to do so by the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.”

No Support for the Provisional Government!

On March 1 a Soviet of Workers' Deputies was formed in Moscow and from its first session proved itself to be an organ of government. It ordered the resumption of the work of the water-supply services, freight transport, the cooperatives and the railways, and the republication of

newspapers. It also adopted a decision to organise district Soviets. On March 2 a general meeting of the Moscow Soviet decreed the arrest of all the members of the old government. On the following day an organisational committee of the Soviet of Soldiers' Deputies was formed in Moscow, and the first task it set itself was to carry out Order No. 1 of the Petrograd Soviet.

In early March Soviets of Workers' Deputies, and also joint Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies appeared in Ivanovo-Voznesensk, Kineshma, Nizhni Novgorod, Omsk, Revel, Arkhangelsk, and then in hundreds of provincial and industrial centres, in district towns and workers' settlements. Within only a week the scale on which Soviets were formed exceeded many times that of the period of the first Russian revolution. A specific feature of the political situation was that the Soviets were established and existed along with the coalition committees of public organisations, commissars of the Provisional Government, the old town dumas and zemstvos. From the outset they all showed themselves to be true organs of revolutionary local government; they organised a workers' and people's militia, saw to the observance of revolutionary order, established control over local garrisons, and appointed commanders of local military units. Thus in the provinces too there appeared dual power: bourgeois-democratic bodies of local government and the Soviet system.

Of course the local Soviets too were initially dominated by the petty-bourgeois parties of Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, for whom the stand taken by the central Soviet in Petrograd was a model to be copied. On the main issue of the revolution – that of power – all of the country's Soviets assumed a common position in March 1917: conditional support for the Provisional Government combined with control over it.

But in practice this control was not so strict. For example, as early as March 2 the Petrograd Soviet decreed the setting up of a "watchdog committee" to oversee the activity of the Provisional Government, but its Executive Committee was in no hurry to enforce the decree. It was only after a number of clashes with the government over

matters pertaining to the organisation of a military parade on March 2, over Order No. 1, over the future of the tsar's family that the Executive Committee at last carried into effect the decision of the Soviet's general meeting. But it did not do so as the rank-and-file deputies wished. It set up not a "watchdog committee", but a "contact commission" in which delegations of the Provisional Government's Executive Committee were to inform one another about proposed measures pertaining to home policy. With such an almost friendly approach the contact commission was quickly transformed from a body of revolutionary-democratic control over the bourgeois Provisional Government into a body reconciling the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries with members of the bourgeois parties.

As to the Bolsheviks, in the second half of March they abandoned the slogan of forming a Provisional Revolutionary Government and took the position that Soviets were to be the future organs of government. The March 22 resolution of the Bureau of the Central Committee of the RSDLP(B),¹ prepared for the all-Russia Conference of Party Workers, said that the Soviets were the "embryos of revolutionary government ready at a future stage of development of the revolution to exercise to the full the power of the proletariat in alliance with revolutionary democrats so as to fulfil the demands of the insurgent people". However, it was not until early April that the Bolsheviks were able successfully to complete the reshaping of their tactics and advance a slogan that accorded with the requirements of the moment – "All Power to the Soviets!"

Lenin said:

"Not a parliamentary republic – to return to a parliamentary republic from the Soviets of Workers' Deputies would be a retrograde step – but a republic of Soviets of Workers', Agricultural Labourers' and Peasants' Deputies throughout the country, from top to bottom.

"The masses must be made to see that the Soviets of Workers' Deputies are the *only possible* form of revo-

¹ RSDLP(B)-Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks).

lutionary government, and that therefore our task is, as long as *this* government yields to the influence of the bourgeoisie, to present a patient, systematic, and persistent *explanation* of the errors of their tactics.”¹

Although Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries continued to hold leading positions in the majority of Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies and also in the Soviets of Peasants’ Deputies formed separately by Socialist Revolutionaries, to strengthen their influence on the masses they had to conduct measures which objectively promoted the consolidation of the system of Soviets throughout the country. One such measure was, for example, the convening of an All-Russia Conference of Soviets which took place in Petrograd from March 29 to April 3. It was attended by delegates from eighty Soviets who heard reports on the attitude in the localities towards the Provisional Government, the war, the mobilisation of revolutionary forces, the struggle against counterrevolution, preparations for elections to the Constituent Assembly and the organisational unification of the Soviets.

As regards the last-mentioned question it was decided to start preparations for an All-Russia Congress of Soviets; the task was assigned to the Petrograd Soviet, recognised so far as the highest body among the Soviets. On the major issues pertaining to the revolution the majority of delegates supported the conciliatory policy of the Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks who were on the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet. The conference’s resolution on the Provisional Government stated that on the whole the government was fulfilling the obligations it had undertaken and that, consequently, the conditional support for it must be continued. While calling on revolutionary democrats to unite around the Soviets, the conference at the same time demanded that revolutionary democrats should gradually secure political control over the Provisional Government in order “to spur it to vigorous struggle against the forces of counterrevolution, to take resolute steps towards complete democratisation of the en-

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 23.

tire life of Russia and to prepare for a general peace without annexations or indemnities on the basis of the self-determination of nations.”

Lenin considered this stand harmful since it meant spreading among the masses the illusion that the government of capitalists and landlords could accomplish all this without changing its class essence.

Lenin wrote:

“A gigantic petty-bourgeois wave has swept over everything and overwhelmed the class-conscious proletariat, not only by force of numbers but also ideologically; that is, it has infected and imbued very wide circles of workers with the petty-bourgeois political outlook.”¹

It was not only a section of the proletariat that was infected with this petty-bourgeois wave, but some Bolsheviks as well. For instance, the leader of the Bolshevik faction at the conference, Lev Kamenev, believing that at the bourgeois-democratic stage of the revolution it was not necessary to work for the removal of the bourgeois government from power, declared that the Bolsheviks were entirely satisfied with the resolution proposed by the presidium of the conference, and withdrew the draft submitted earlier by the Bureau of the Central Committee of the RSDLP(B). On his advice the Bolshevik faction voted for the resolution of the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries, to the great satisfaction of the latter.

On April 4, in Petrograd, Lenin twice read his paper entitled “The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution” – at a Bolshevik meeting and at the All-Russia Conference of Soviets. The paper, published in *Pravda* on April 7 under the title “April Theses”, outlined a plan of struggle for the development of the bourgeois-democratic revolution into a socialist one. It expressed the Party’s attitude regarding the war and the Provisional Government, formulated a programme for the economic transformation of Russia, and raised a number of organisational questions pertaining to the Party. Lenin called on the Bolsheviks to

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 62.

explain to the masses the true nature of the bourgeois Provisional Government and to adopt the slogan "No support for the Provisional Government!", and showed the need to transfer all power to the Soviets. The "April Theses" caused a storm among the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries, who had hoped to persuade the Bolsheviks to accept their policy of compromise. In the numerous polemical articles which appeared after the publication of the "April Theses" they admitted that they considered the Soviet to be "temporary structures", the scaffolding, which would make it easier to build the edifice of bourgeois-democratic statehood. What to them was the primary defect of the Soviets was to the Bolsheviks their greatest merit; in the Soviets there were representatives of the working people only and none of the exploiter classes – the bourgeoisie, the clergy, the landlords. Nor were there any well-to-do intellectuals among the deputies. Only those members of the bourgeois intelligentsia who had dedicated themselves to the revolutionary cause had received Deputy's credentials among the delegates from Party committees, trade unions, cooperatives, and so on.

Having found what in their opinion was a "serious defect" of the Soviets, the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries asserted that government bodies elected on the basis of universal suffrage would express the people's will more fully than did the Soviets. To this the Bolsheviks replied that the working masses made up nine-tenths of the country's population, and that for this very reason the Soviets must be the prototype of the new state, that they must therefore take over all state power. Lenin took an active part in this polemic. In his articles and numerous speeches made before Party activists, workers and soldiers, he explained the plan of struggle outlined in his "April Theses" for the socialist revolution, for the transition of the revolution to its second stage when power should be handed over to the working class and the poorer sections of the peasantry. Because of the specific nature of the political situation – the existence of dual power – the struggle for the fulfilment of this demand should be a peaceful one.



Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870-1924), founder of the Bolshevik Party and the Soviet state.

On the one hand, the fact that effective power was in the hands of the Soviets and not of the bourgeois Provisional Government would enable the Soviets to remove it peacefully from office by taking a firm decision. On the other hand, the struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeois Provisional Government could not be started so long as the majority of the people supported the policy of the Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionary leaders of the Soviets. These leaders, not wishing to take all power into their own hands, declared that it was necessary to back the Provisional Government. The latter would have gladly resorted to the use of armed force against the people, but since it had no armed forces the mass of the armed workers and soldiers did not regard it as a threat or enemy.

On this question Lenin said: "Should the Provisional Government be overthrown immediately?

"My answer is: (1) it should be overthrown, for it is an oligarchic, bourgeois, and not a people's government, and *is unable* to provide peace, bread, or full freedom; (2) it cannot be overthrown just now, for it is being kept in power by a direct and indirect, a formal and actual *agreement* with the Soviets of Workers' Deputies, and primarily with the chief Soviet, the Petrograd Soviet; (3) generally, it cannot be 'overthrown' in the ordinary way, for it rests on the '*support*' given to the bourgeoisie by the *second* government – the Soviet of Workers' Deputies, and that government is the only possible revolutionary government, which directly expresses the mind and will of the majority of the workers and peasants. Humanity has not yet evolved and we do not as yet know a type of government superior to and better than the Soviets of Workers', Agricultural Labourers', Peasants', and Soldiers' Deputies.

"To become a power the class-conscious workers must win the majority to their side. *As long as* no violence is used against the people there is no other road to power."¹

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 40.

The First Steps Towards a Proletarian Dictatorship

One of the priority tasks of the working-class movement after the victory of the February Revolution was to establish an eight-hour working day. But during discussions with the Provisional Committee of the State Duma of the question of organising a Provisional Government, the leaders of the Petrograd Soviet failed to include in the draft agreement a clause on the establishment of an eight-hour working day. It is quite natural that the Provisional Government would omit this point in its declaration on its membership and tasks.

In a number of localities the Soviets were firm in their demand for an eight-hour working day. For instance, the Yekaterinburg Soviet, at its first session on March 23, demanded that employers introduce an eight-hour working day starting April 1, and the latter agreed.

To direct the economic struggle of the proletariat special commissions were set up under the Soviets or their Executive Committees in March 1917: under the Petrograd and Moscow Soviets – labour departments, under the Voronezh Soviet – a commission for the accounting of workers' earnings, under the Tula Soviet – a labour commission, and so on. What was important, of course, was not the names of these commissions, but the fact that they were able to resolve, and often with great efficiency, vital issues concerning the workers; and they would often do so for all the factories and plants in the given city, thereby proving themselves to be the city's organ of government. The Irkutsk Soviet, for example, extended its resolution of April 8, 1917, on the raising of workers' wages by 50 per cent to all enterprises within the city's limits. The Ivanovo-Voznesensk and Kronstadt Soviets did the same. The principle of equal pay for equal work applied to all workers irrespective of nationality.

Sometimes the Soviets had to resort to repressive measures against individual capitalists in order to get positive and quick results. For example, the Executive Committee of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies at the mine of the Yekaterininskoye Mining Society (the Lugansk dis-

trict of the Donets Basin) dismissed the mine's manager from his post because he refused to raise the miners' wages by 30 per cent.

The Soviets of major industrial centres often set up under their Executive Committees provincial departments which helped regional or district Soviets. On their part, the Soviets of small towns not strong or experienced enough to counter local capital appealed for help to higher Soviets. Thus a unified system of Soviets was taking shape throughout the country.

With the direct support of the Soviets the trade union factory committees quickly became influential bodies capable of controlling and when necessary rectifying the actions of employers. Capitalists who were used to doing whatever they thought fit at their enterprises now had to accept the factory committees' intervention in matters relating to the hiring and dismissal of workers. Among other things, the factory committees compelled employers to take on former strikers who had been discharged or who had served prison sentences. Such decisions were passed by the factory committees of the Perovo Workshops in Moscow Region, the Putilovsky Plant in Petrograd and the Shoduar Works in Yekaterinoslav. While supporting those who had been persecuted for taking part in the working-class movement the factory committees drove out of the enterprises, and sometimes arrested, foremen, engineers, managers and directors who had been supporters of the old regime or were cruel to workers. A purge of the management of factories and plants was taking place throughout the country.

Although the Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionary majority in the Soviets had set up food commissions under the Executive Committees, in effect they left the matter of food supply in the hands of the bourgeoisie. But pressure from the masses upset the plans of the conciliationists, and many Soviets, despite the position taken by their leaders, assumed the responsibility of distributing foodstuffs. They took stock of foodstuffs and requisitioned them, introduced a food rationing system, established fixed prices, and organised bread supply for the workers.

After the victory of the February Revolution workers' militia and workers' public order squads appeared in the country's industrial centres. Both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat were fully aware of how they would be affected by the question of who would undertake the organisation of a permanent militia, who would be its members and under whose command it would be. Right till the July events the bourgeoisie failed in its attempts to restore the police as an organisation of armed men opposed to, and separated from, the people. The Bolsheviks fought for the organisation of a proletarian militia subordinated to the Soviets. Wherever possible armed detachments of workers became executive bodies of the Soviets: they searched the warehouses of capitalists who hid away goods, artificially creating economic and food problems, arrested profiteers, saw to the fair distribution of provisions, etc.

The post-February Soviets represented a clash of two conceptions: that held by the Mensheviks who believed that Russia was not ripe for socialism, that the bourgeoisie should be the leader of the revolution and that the Soviets should not become government bodies and remove the bourgeoisie from power; and that held by the Bolsheviks who maintained that transition to a socialist revolution was imperative and that this transition would be inconceivable without turning the Soviets into organs of state power to replace the bourgeois administrative apparatus.

The two conceptions came into conflict at every step, in resolving every issue, whether it concerned the establishment of a shorter working day, the raising of wages or the averting of a nationwide famine. The very struggle for peace, bread, land and freedom brought it home to the masses that the Soviets, on becoming organs of government, would succeed in resolving these problems in favour of the working people. Their own experience had convinced them of the futility of a policy of conciliation with the bourgeoisie.

The April Crisis

The first crisis of the dual power system broke out in April. The cause was the so-called conflict over the objectives of the war. From mid-March the Petrograd Soviet took a stand of "revolutionary defensism": while calling on all the belligerent nations to conclude a democratic peace, it told the army to hold out at the front and prevent the enemy from breaking through. And it said that the nature of the war had changed after February, that it had turned from a war of conquest into a defensive, just war. The fallacy of this assertion was obvious. Since the imperialist bourgeoisie was still in power, as far as Russia was concerned the war was still an imperialist war of conquest.

Under the pressure of the Soviet the Provisional Government published an appeal to the people on the allegedly defensive aims of the war, while at the same time sending a note to its allies.

The Provisional Government's note, dated April 18, 1917, read in part:

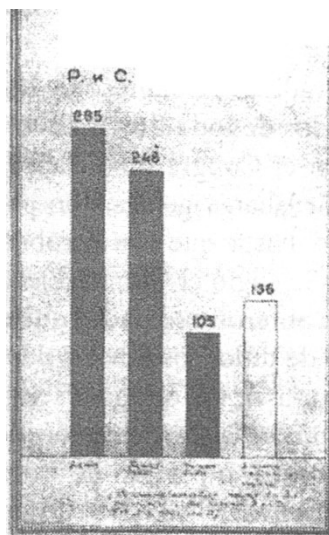
"Imbued with a new spirit of emancipated democracy, the statements of the Provisional Government do not give anyone the slightest reason to think that the revolution that has been accomplished has led to a weakening of Russia's role in the common struggle of the Allies. On the contrary, the nationwide striving to bring the world war to a decisive victory has only been intensified owing to a general awareness of the responsibility of one and all."

On learning about this note on the morning of April 20, the soldiers of the Petrograd garrison, without calls from the Soviet or any political party (including that of the Bolsheviks), spontaneously staged an armed demonstration of protest against the policy of the Provisional Government and its Minister of Foreign Affairs, Pavel Milyukov. This demonstration, in which tens of thousands of armed soldiers participated, caused a sharp aggravation of relations between the government and the Petrograd Soviet. The Bolsheviks sought to take advantage of the crisis to remove the bourgeoisie from power altogether. At their call work-

ers' demonstrations were held the same day under the slogan "All power to the Soviets!" This time too the Menshevik- and Socialist Revolutionary-dominated Executive Committee dodged the responsibility of taking over power and tried to calm the soldiers with promises; it issued an order prohibiting fresh actions by the soldiers without the Soviet's approval.

On April 21 the crisis became even more acute. With the knowledge of War Minister Alexander Guchkov, the commander of the Petrograd military district. General Lavr Kornilov, ordered cadets, cavalry and artillery to assemble on Palace Square for a possible military confrontation with the Soviet. But the troops did not obey their commander, and the Executive Committee issued an order whereby the garrison's units were to carry out only resolutions endorsed by the Military Headquarters of the Soviet. The Soviet demonstrated anew that it retained control over the garrison and thus over the country's armed forces as a whole. Yet once again the leaders of the Petrograd Soviet failed to use the opportunity to seize power. Instead, it did everything to support the compromised bourgeois government. At the proposal of the conciliationists the majority of the Soviet's deputies voted for considering the incident "closed".

Diagram showing the composition of delegates to the First All-Russia Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies: 285 Socialist Revolutionaries, 248 Mensheviks, 105 Bolsheviks, and 136 representatives of other parties and groups.



For their part the Bolsheviks organised fresh workers' demonstrations under the slogan "All power to the Soviets;," and said that this slogan should be practically implemented. But the mass of the petty bourgeoisie still believed in their leaders.

The members of the Provisional Government – we must give them their due – understood quite well the nuances of the situation. They realised that an open dictatorship of the bourgeoisie would be impossible at that moment, and that putting forward a frankly imperialist policy would inevitably lead to a new crisis fatal to themselves. It was then that they decided to persuade the leaders of the Soviet's Executive Committee to join their government – not a new stratagem, but an effective one. On April 26 the Minister-Chairman, Prince Georgy Lvov, sent an official letter to the Executive Committee inviting it to participate in the formation of a new government.

After some hesitation and in spite of protests by the Bolsheviks, the leaders of the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries accepted the invitation. On May 5, 1917, a coalition Provisional Government came into being.

From then on the prestige of the Menshevik-Socialist



Conference hall of the delegates to the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets.

Revolutionary leadership of the Soviets began to fall. With each passing day the masses became more and more convinced that the government was not on their side. At the same time, the slogan "All power to the Soviets!" was gaining in popularity. In a number of provincial Soviets and in some district Soviets of Petrograd and Moscow the Bolsheviks achieved numerical superiority already in May.

There Is Such a Party!

The First All-Russia Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies opened on June 2 in Petrograd. In the organisational respect it was of immense importance: the congress worked out forms of the Soviet system which were to exist for nearly twenty years with only minor changes, until the adoption of the 1936 Constitution of the USSR. And it elected a Central Executive Committee of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, which acted as the supreme body of all the country's Soviets in intervals between congresses. But in political matters the majority of delegates followed the conciliationists. The congress endorsed the entry of the Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries and a small number of "People's Socialists" into the Provisional Government, approved the Russian army's offensive at the front and also the economic and national policy of the Petrograd Soviet and the Provisional Government, opposed the transfer of all state power to the Soviets and favoured preservation of the principle of coalition with the bourgeois parties. Defending the Provisional Government, Socialist Minister Irakly Tsereteli asserted that there was not a political party in Russia that would be prepared to take power into its own hands.

"There is!" exclaimed Lenin.

Lenin elaborated:

"They map out a programme to us for a bourgeois parliamentary republic, the sort of programme that has existed all over Western Europe; they map out a programme to us for reforms which are now recognised by all bourgeois governments, including our own, and yet they talk to us about revolutionary democracy. Whom

are they talking to? To the Soviets. But I ask you, is there a country in Europe, a bourgeois, democratic, republican country, where anything like these Soviets exists? You have to admit there isn't.... The Soviets are an institution which does not exist in any ordinary bourgeois-parliamentary state and cannot exist side by side with a bourgeois government. They are the new, more democratic type of state which we in our Party resolutions call a peasant-proletarian democratic republic, with power belonging solely to the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies."¹

The June political crisis revealed serious differences in political sentiments between the more active section of the Petrograd workers and soldiers on the one hand, and the Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionary majority at the First All-Russia Congress of Soviets, on the other. The Bolshevik Party had called for a peaceful demonstration to be held on Saturday, June 10, in support of the call transferring power to the Soviets. The leadership of the congress regarded this as a challenge and banned the demonstration. The Party had great difficulty in restraining the masses from spontaneous action. Though they condemned the undemocratic behaviour of the congress's leadership, the Bolsheviks did not defy the ban because such a demonstration conducted under the slogan "All power to the Soviets!" would be against the desire of the Soviets concerned.

Seeing that the masses obviously resented the ban on the demonstration, the presidium of the congress went back on its decision and announced that a demonstration would be held on June 18 for laying wreaths on the graves of the victims of the February Revolution. The demonstration was attended by 50,000 workers and soldiers of the capital. A government crisis seemed imminent when on the morning of June 19 it became known that the Russian army had assumed the offensive on orders from War Minister Alexander Kerensky, who had replaced Guchkov. Now it was the right-wing forces, bourgeois organisations and parties, and a section of the Mensheviks and Socialist

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, pp. 17 18. 20.

Revolutionaries, who organised “patriotic” demonstrations on June 19-21 in support of the offensive, thus again aggravating the situation in Petrograd.

The Bolsheviks did their utmost to prevent a massacre of the people. They saw that the counterrevolutionary semi-military and militarised organisations were trying to provoke the masses into coming out in the streets.



The June demonstration of 1917 in the Field of Mars in Petrograd.

THE CONGRESS OF SOVIETS DECREES...

On the morning of July 3, 1917, the barracks of the First Machine-Gun Regiment were buzzing like a disturbed beehive. A meeting had been going on for hours on end. The soldiers were demanding an immediate armed onslaught on the Provisional Government. For two weeks following the June 18 demonstration they had been seething with discontent. They felt that they had been cheated as in April when they demanded peace and got Milyukov's note instead; they had again denounced the war, but the Provisional Government started offensive actions at the front. The soldiers were furious.

It also became known that the day before the Cadet¹ Ministers had left the Provisional Government. Their manoeuvre was simple: to bring about a government crisis so as to intimidate the conciliatory parties and concentrate full power in the hands of bourgeois-landlord counterrevolution.

The Bolshevik Party maintained that an offensive against the government was premature, that the conditions for this were not ripe. In the majority of towns and provinces in Russia the broad masses had not yet emerged from the spell of the pseudo-revolutionary phrases of the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries, and they would not have supported revolutionary action in the capital. Frontline units and garrisons in the rear, having lost confidence in the Provisional Government, still looked to their committees for leadership, and these committees were controlled by the conciliationists.

But nevertheless, the masses became so indignant that they thronged the streets despite the Bolsheviks' warnings. So on the evening of July 3 the Bolshevik leaders of Petrograd decided to join the movement that had started and called on workers and soldiers to stage a peaceful and organised demonstration.

On July 4 hundreds of thousands of demonstrators

¹ Cadets – members of the Constitutional Democratic Party, a party of the liberal monarchist bourgeoisie in Russia.

moved slowly towards the Taurida Palace. Their slogan was "All power to the Soviets!"

Meanwhile the government was on the alert. District headquarters had called out military units and Cossack regiments still loyal to the Provisional Government, which filled Palace Square. These counterrevolutionaries met the demonstrators with machine guns. It was impossible to join battle in such conditions: the alignment of forces was not in favour of the revolution.

An excerpt from an order issued by War and Navy Minister Alexander Kerensky read:

"I hereby order the armed gangs of soldiers immediately to leave the streets of Petrograd. Bring in mounted and unmounted patrols. If the units make fresh attempts to come out, disarm them; their machine guns must be taken away and sent to the front at once. Convey to the Chief Military Prosecutor my instruction to immediately start investigating the events of July 3 and bring the culprits to trial."

After the breakup of the demonstration of July 4 a campaign of terror was launched against the Bolsheviks. The counterrevolutionaries hastened to consolidate their success. On the night of July 4 cadets raided the office of the Bolshevik newspaper *Pravda* and wrecked everything there. On the next day the units of the Petrograd garrison which had taken part in the July demonstration were disbanded. Government troops seized the mansion housing the Petrograd Committee of the RSDLP(B). On July 7 the government promulgated a decree on the arrest and trial of Lenin and other Bolsheviks.

Thus, in those July days the Petrograd Soviet began to lose control over the troops and turn into a powerless appendage of the Provisional Government. Dual power ceased to exist.

Under these circumstances the Sixth Congress of the RSDLP(B) temporarily withdrew the slogan "All power to the Soviets!" This did not mean, however, that the Bolsheviks had abandoned the Soviets as organs of the future proletarian government.

On July 8 the Central Executive Committee declared

the Provisional Government of Kerensky, who had replaced Prince Lvov as Prime Minister, a "government for the salvation of the revolution" and vested it with full powers. Kerensky lost no time in getting repressive legislation passed and restoring the death penalty at the front as of July 12.

The Foiling of the General's Conspiracy

There is a curious photograph dating from that period. It shows, amidst a dense crowd of well-dressed men and women, a group of officers carrying a smiling general on their shoulders. Around him were excited faces and bouquets of flowers. At Moscow's Alexandrovsky railway station on August 13 the bourgeoisie was giving an enthusiastic welcome to their idol – General Lavr Kornilov, whom it regarded as the best candidate for the role of suppressor of the revolution.

One of the main provisions of the programme of the would-be military dictator was the breaking up of the Petrograd Soviet and all other Soviets in the country, and the disbandment of the Central Executive Committee. He appointed General Alexander Krymov commander of a special strike army which was to occupy the capital because General Krymov "would hang each and every member of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies without a moment's hesitation".

Together Kerensky and Kornilov prepared for a counterrevolutionary revolt. They only disagreed over the methods of crushing the revolution, and were rivals for the role of military dictator. Kerensky was apprehensive of the general's precipitate, incautious actions which could hamper his own preferred tactics of gradual strangulation of the revolution. Kornilov was getting impatient with the Prime Minister's manoeuvring, but counted on his help.

Taking advantage of a situation in which reaction and terror reigned at the front, Kornilov turned General Headquarters into a centre for preparing a counterrevolutionary revolt. The conspirators needed to form a strike force from picked units and ensure at least the neutrality of the ma-

jority of the troops. Contingents of men to be used for suppressing the revolution were formed of volunteers, Cossacks and the "wild" Caucasian division. Kornilov wanted a state of emergency declared in the capital and all military and civilian authority placed in his hands.

At the last moment Kerensky, who recoiled at the prospect of Kornilov's personal dictatorship, dissociated himself from the latter. But more than anything else he feared a fresh outburst of popular indignation. Having been given emergency powers from the Provisional Government, he removed his rival from the post of Supreme Commander-in-Chief. But the Kerensky government could do nothing more than making threatening demarches. The Cadet Ministers immediately handed in their resignations, hoping to play the part of intermediary between the two opposing sides. Kornilov now had nothing to lose, and on the evening of August 26 he ordered his troops to move on Petrograd. The bourgeoisie's hostility towards the government forced Kerensky to appeal for support to the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies and to the Executive Committee of the All-Russia Soviet of Peasants' Deputies. At that crucial moment the Soviets, having united all revolutionary-democratic forces, became the organisational centre in the struggle against Kornilov and his followers.

Coming under the pressure of the revolutionary masses who strongly resented the general's venture, the Central Executive Committee set up a Committee for the People's Struggle Against Counterrevolution. In those days such committees appeared in many provincial towns, industrial centres and even under district Soviets in the cities. All revolutionary-democratic parties, including the party of the Bolsheviks, were represented in them.

An excerpt from the Central Committee of RSDLP(B) read:

"Kornilov's triumph would mean an end of freedom, the loss of land, victory and absolute power of the landlord over the peasant, of the capitalist over the worker, of the general over the soldier."

The Bolsheviks took a most direct and active part in the suppression of the Kornilov revolt. It was in the days of struggle against the rebellious general that the Bolshevik Party again won considerable prestige.

The Bolsheviks raised in the Committee for the People's Struggle Against Counterrevolution the question of arming the workers, for after the July events the Red Guards and the workers' militia, having been subjected to repression, were in a semi-legal status. The Committee had to agree to this move and gave instructions for 8,000 rifles to be distributed among the workers.

At the call of the Bolsheviks railwaymen disassembled the rails, or blocked the tracks with empty cars and drove away the engines. General Krymov's troops could advance only with great difficulty, and on August 29-30 they were finally stopped; meanwhile Bolshevik agitators appeared in the Cossack regiments. Under the Bolsheviks' influence Kornilov's troops began to go over to the side of the revolution. Within less than a week the revolt was suppressed without the use of armed force.

Being at the head of the nationwide struggle against the Cadet-Kornilov counterrevolution, the Soviets became organs of power replacing local government bodies. But this did not mean a restoration of dual power. On the contrary, the Soviets were striving to create a unified government. The struggle against the Kornilov counterrevolution had demonstrated the formidable power of the Soviets.

The struggle against the Kornilov forces presented another opportunity for the peaceful transfer of power to the Soviets, but this time, too, their petty-bourgeois leaders rejected the Bolshevik proposal to take over power and instead returned to the policy of conciliation with the bourgeoisie.

The Course Towards an Armed Uprising

...Autumn came. Six months had passed since the triumph of the February Revolution. Yet the conditions of the people steadily worsened. There was increasing economic dislocation. Industrial production was declining – in 1917

gross industrial output fell by more than one-third. Nearly 800 enterprises closed down. In the autumn of 1917 the buying power of the ruble was one-tenth of what it was in 1913. The country was flooded with cheap paper money. The bills in new denominations issued by the government were contemptuously called “kerenki” among the people who thought they had better be used for papering walls. Transport was in ruins. And there was an acute shortage of food.

Towards autumn Russia was faced with revolutionary crisis. The strike movement reached its highest peak since February. In late September 100,000 workers went on strike in the Urals; in October 300,000 textile workers in the Ivanovo- Kineshma area, and printing and tannery workers in Moscow, oil workers in Baku and miners in the Donets Basin downed tools. The peasant movement against landlords developed into an all-out mass struggle, a real uprising. The Bolsheviks were backed by the majority of soldiers at the major fronts, those closest to the central part of the country – the Northern and Western Fronts; they had the full support of the sailors of the Baltic Fleet.

In these conditions the Soviets entered a new stage in their activity.

On August 31, for the first time since the emergence of the Soviets, the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries were in a minority in the voting on the key issue of power. On the night of August 31 a plenary session of the Petrograd Soviet, by a majority of 279 votes against 115, with 50 abstentions, adopted a resolution drafted by the Bolsheviks which condemned the policy of forming coalitions, called for the transfer of all power to the Soviets and mapped out a programme of revolutionary transformations for the country. This was a turning point in the history of the capital's Soviet.

On September 1 Lenin wrote an article “On Compromises”. Analysing the new political situation, he showed the possibility of reaching a compromise with the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries who headed the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets. According to Lenin,

the Bolsheviks would support a government formed by the Central Executive Committee without the bourgeoisie and on the basis of the Soviets and accountable to the Soviets. This government must ensure the transfer of power to local Soviets. Without demanding that they be included in the government and without calling for the immediate establishment of a proletarian dictatorship, the Bolsheviks retained the right of agitation in the struggle to implement their programme. This was the last chance, as it became clear later, for a peaceful transfer of power to the Soviets. But instead of reaching a compromise with the Bolsheviks the Mensheviks preferred to strike new deals with the bourgeoisie against the revolution.

The fate of the Petrograd Soviet was finally decided on September 9. Its Menshevik-Socialist Revolutionary Presidium staked everything by calling for a vote of confidence in its leadership. Out of the thousand delegates who had gathered in the assembly hall of the Smolny Institute, 519 voted for the Bolsheviks. On the same day the Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionary Presidium of the Moscow Soviet handed in its resignation.

The newspaper *Rabochy put* (Workers' Path) wrote:

"The proletariat and garrisons of the two capitals, of the two largest industrial centres gave clear evidence of the collapse of the policy of conciliation, of the defeat of the tactics of the former ruling parties of the Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks. The vote of the Petrograd and Moscow Soviets is one of the serious developments marking a new wave of the revolution."

A process of Bolshevisation of the Soviets began. On September 7 the Kazan Soviet of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies adopted the Bolshevik resolution on the transfer of power. After heated debate the Kiev Soviet passed the same decision. After a month of struggle the Bolsheviks secured firm positions in the Kharkov Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies as well. Almost everywhere the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries put up a fight to retain their positions, and yet in September and October more than 250 Soviets in Russia came out in support of the Bolsheviks. In October the peasants' Sovi-

ets, too, began to vote for the Bolshevik slogan. Thus, on October 14 the Executive Committee of the Pskov Guberniya Soviet of Peasants' Deputies sent the Executive Committee of the All-Russia Soviet of Peasants' Deputies a telegram expressing support for the Bolshevik resolution on the transfer of power. Similar messages came from the congresses of Soviets of Peasants' Deputies of the Kazan and Kherson Guberniyas.

The Bolshevik-led Soviets began to exercise power with firm determination. The Moscow Soviet resolved to intervene in the workers' economic struggle in order to force the capitalists to meet the strikers' demands. The Revel Soviet stopped the evacuation of factories and plants in spite of the Provisional Government's decision. In Starobelsk (Kharkov Guberniya) the Soviet ordered the arrest of members of bourgeois organs and requisitioned public buildings for holding workers' meetings. The Kovrov Soviet of Workers' Deputies confiscated flour from a flour mill and handed it over to the food board.

Nor did the Soviets hesitate to intervene in capitalism's most sacred sphere – its banking system. Thus, the Soviet of the Voronezh Guberniya established control over the activity of the local branch of the Voronezh bank. The Executive Committee of the Orekhovo-Zuevo Soviet posted armed guard at the bank and prohibited the withdrawal of more than a thousand rubles by individual depositors.

The Soviets were acting as a government while the bourgeois organs of power were preserved. But this was not a return to dual power. In that period the two systems went together. In the autumn of 1917 the Soviets were performing several administrative functions in firm and open defiance of the bourgeoisie.

The *Moskovskiy vedomosti* (The Moscow Gazette) wrote:

“Any impartial observer of current events can see that the Bolsheviks have virtually triumphed all along the line.”

The changed membership and policy of the majority of the country's Soviets and their conversion into militant organisations of the masses created the objective prerequi-

sites for the restoration by the Party of the slogan "All power to the Soviets!" This slogan was now equivalent to a call for an armed uprising.

Preparations for an uprising could not be put off much longer, for the bourgeoisie might undertake actions threatening the revolution. The crucial moment was approaching. An uprising was the immediate practical task on the agenda.

A Storm Ahead

On September 25 the Central Executive Committee of Soviets, complying with the demand of the majority of Soviets, set October 20 (later postponed to October 25) as opening day of the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets. Many deputies of the Petrograd Soviet hoped that the Second Congress would take power into its hands. But this approach was fraught with danger: the Provisional Government might prevent the congress from taking place, thereby threatening the success of the uprising.

With Lenin's return to Petrograd from Finland, where he had gone into hiding after the Provisional Government's July order for his arrest, the session of the Central Committee of the RSDLP(B) on October 10, 1917, passed the final decision: the armed uprising must without fail precede the congress. However, this decision did not require that the election campaign be suspended.

Congresses of Soviets (at provincial and regional levels) were held in October throughout the country. Delegates from the Congress of Soviets of the Donets Basin and the Krivoi Rog Region met in Kharkov, representatives of the working people of Eastern Siberia – in Irkutsk, and those of the Congress of Soviets of the Northern Region – in Petrograd. Almost all the congresses indicated the readiness of the masses to oppose the Provisional Government.

In their pre-congress election campaign the Bolsheviks put forward a concrete programme of revolutionary transformations solving the questions of peace and land, and leading to the establishment of a Soviet government. The local Soviets were the principal political organisations on

which the Bolsheviks relied in preparing for the armed uprising. Their structure greatly facilitated the preparations. For example, in the capital the local links in the Soviet system were the district Soviets. By October 1, 1917, eleven out of the city's seventeen district Soviets supported the Bolsheviks' positions. Some of them had retained the emergency bodies formed during the struggle against the Kornilov counterrevolutionaries. Others formed such bodies anew. District Commandant's Headquarters of the Red Guards were also set up under some Soviets.

In early October the military situation became aggravated in Petrograd. Having captured the Moonsund Archipelago, the Kaiser's troops penetrated the farther approaches to the city. The Provisional Government decided to take advantage of the situation by demanding the withdrawal of most of the units of the Petrograd garrison from



Members of the Bureau of the Military Organisation of the RSDLP(B) Central Committee took an active part in forming the Petrograd Military Revolutionary Committee – the headquarters of the armed uprising (Petrograd, 1917).

the city and their dispatch to frontline positions. But the soldiers' committee of the Petrograd Soviet came out against this. At a session of the Executive Committee on October 9 the Bolshevik members of the soldiers' committee proposed the setting up of a revolutionary headquarters for the defence of Petrograd against both the internal and external enemy. Two days later such a headquarters came into being; it was called the Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC). Through this body the Bolshevik Party, using the entire authority of the Petrograd Soviet, supervised preparations for the uprising.

From October 21 the Military Revolutionary Committee began to appoint its own commissars to military units of the Petrograd garrison so as to prevent the government



The storming of the Winter Palace – the last bastion of the bourgeois Provisional Government.

from attempting to use them for suppressing the uprising. The holding of "Petrograd Soviet Day" on October 22 was a major event in the capital's tense political life in those days. The best Bolshevik speakers addressed dozens of meetings in the largest public halls of the city. To the assembled workers, soldiers and sailors they put this question squarely: Would they go into battle against the Provisional Government at the call of the Soviet and the Bolshevik Party? The answers were unanimous: Yes!

To gain time to mobilise its forces, the Military Revolutionary Committee postponed giving the order for the offensive and conducted talks with the headquarters of the Petrograd military district on the status of the commissars it had appointed to the military units. Kerensky took this as a sign of weakness, and on the night of October 23 ordered the closure of two Bolshevik newspapers and the arrest of the members of the Military Revolutionary Committee.

This move produced a result contrary to what Kerensky had expected. As a matter of fact, the government speeded up its own downfall by taking the initiative in unleashing a civil war. From the morning of October 24 the Military Revolutionary Committee undertook retaliatory measures.

Rabochy put wrote:

"What do the workers, peasants and soldiers, and all the urban and village poor need? We need to put an end to the predatory war by proposing a democratic peace! We need to abolish landed estates and hand over all the land without compensation to the peasant committees! We need to eliminate famine and ruin, and establish workers' control over production and distribution! We need to give all the peoples of Russia the right freely to organise their life. But to accomplish all this it is necessary first of all to seize power from the Kornilovites¹ and hand it over to the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies. That is why our first demand is: All power to the Soviets!"

¹ Kornilovites – here members of the Provisional Government are meant.

By the evening of October 24 the Military Revolutionary Committee had already established its control over the bridges across the Neva and seized communications facilities and a number of railway stations. After Lenin came to the Smolny¹ late in the evening the Military Revolutionary Committee began to operate under his direct guidance. On the morning of October 25 Red Guard detachments, soldiers and sailors occupied the remaining railway stations, the State Bank, the Central Telephone Exchange and other strategic points. The Provisional Government was blockaded in its own residence – the Winter Palace.

Towards five o'clock in the evening, when dusk had covered the city, lines of Red Guards, sailors and soldiers closed in on the Winter Palace. To avoid bloodshed the Military Revolutionary Committee twice asked the Provisional Government to surrender. When no answer came the Military Revolutionary Committee gave the order to attack. At 9.40 p. m., simultaneously with a signal shot from the cruiser *Aurora* the storming of the Winter Palace began. The attackers burst into the palace.

Pyotr Malyantovich, Minister of Justice of the Provisional Government, recalled:

“There was a noise at the door. It flew open and, like a chip thrown in by a wave, a small man was propelled into our room by the crowd pressing behind him, which like water flowed into the room, filling every corner of it.

“The man, bespectacled and with long reddish-brown hair, wore a broad felt hat pushed back, his coat thrown open.

“He said, ‘You, all of you members of the Provisional Government, are under arrest. I am Antonov, representative of the Military Revolutionary Committee.’ “

¹ Smolny – building of the former Society for the Education of Young Ladies of Noble Birth. In 1917 it housed the Petrograd Soviet and the Military Revolutionary Committee. In the days of the October armed uprising it was the headquarters of the revolutionary forces.

That was how the last bourgeois government in Russia ceased to exist.

The Revolution Triumphed

In the afternoon of October 25, an emergency session of the Petrograd Soviet opened in the assembly hall of the Smolny. Lenin was the speaker. He spoke of a new stage in the history of Russia that had just begun. The Soviet Government would carry on its work without the participation of the propertied classes. A decree would be issued on the abolition of private ownership of land, and workers' complete control over production would be established. The old state apparatus would be replaced by Soviet organisations. Lenin said that the most important task was to conclude a peace treaty as soon as possible and stop the war on a fair democratic basis.

On the evening of the same day the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets opened at the Smolny. It was attended by delegates from 402 Soviets, most of whom (69.6 per cent) supported the slogan of the transfer of power to the Soviets.

From the first hours of the congress's proceedings the true face of every party was clearly revealed. The Bolsheviks came out as the only consistent revolutionary force expressing the vital interests of the masses. The Left Socialist Revolutionaries tried to reconcile the Bolsheviks with the Mensheviks and the Right Socialist Revolutionaries. But seeing that they were in a minority, the Mensheviks and Right Socialist Revolutionaries withdrew from the congress.

The delegates discussed the question of power late into the night. Anatoly Lunacharsky read out Lenin's appeal "To Workers, Soldiers and Peasants!". The Congress of Soviets, it said, in accordance with the will of the vast majority of the people and on the basis of the victorious uprising in Petrograd, had taken power into its own hands. The congress decreed that all local authority be transferred to the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies, which would ensure genuine revolutionary order.

Albert Rhys Williams, an American journalist, wrote:

“Pandemonium! Men weeping in one another’s arms. Couriers jumping up and racing away. Telegraph and telephone buzzing and humming. Autos starting off to the battle- front; aeroplanes speeding away across rivers and plains. Wireless flashing across the seas. All messengers of the great news!

“The will of the revolutionary masses has triumphed. The Soviets are the government.”¹

The question of peace was on the agenda. Lenin took the floor.

Here is an excerpt from his speech:

“The workers’ and peasants’ government, created by the Revolution of October 24-25 and basing itself on the Soviets of Workers’, Soldiers’ and Peasants’ Deputies, calls upon all the belligerent peoples and their governments to start immediate negotiations for a just, democratic peace.

“By a just or democratic peace, for which the overwhelming majority of the working class and other working people of all the belligerent countries, exhausted, tormented and racked by the war, are craving – a peace that has been most definitely and insistently demanded by the Russian workers and peasants ever since the overthrow of the tsarist monarchy – by such a peace the government means an immediate peace without annexations (i.e., without the seizure of foreign lands, without the forcible incorporation of foreign nations) and without indemnities.

“The Government of Russia proposes that this kind of peace be immediately concluded by all the belligerent nations...”²

The applause continued following the congress’s unanimous approval of the Decree on Peace as Lenin once again took the floor. He read out the Decree on Land, a

¹ Albert Rhys Williams, *Through the Russian Revolution*, New York, 1921, p. 104.

² V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 26, p. 249.

document for which more than one generation of Russian peasants had been waiting.

An excerpt from the Decree on Land read:

“(1) Landed proprietorship is abolished forthwith without any compensation.

(2) The landed estates, as also all crown, monastery, and church lands, with all their livestock, implements, buildings and everything pertaining thereto, shall be placed at the disposal of the volost land committees and the uyezd Soviets of Peasants’ Deputies...”¹

The peasants received 150 million *dessiatines*² of land free of charge. They were exempted from paying rent on land (700 million rubles in gold annually), and their debts on land were cancelled, which by that time had reached an enormous sum – 3,000 million rubles. All the cattle and implements of the landlords were also given to rural workers free of charge.

The peasant delegates went “wild with joy”, the American journalist John Reed was to write later. Reed, like Albert Rhys Williams, attended the congress.

The congress adopted a number of other decisions as well – on the abolition of the death sentence at the front which was restored after the July events, on the transfer of local authority to the Soviets, and on the release of members of land committees arrested by the Provisional Government.

The congress vested executive power in the government it formed – the Soviet of People’s Commissars, which had to report back to the All-Russia Congress on its activity. Thus congresses of Soviets became bodies of foremost importance in all state affairs, the government was accountable to them, and in intervals between congresses – to the Central Executive Committee.

The Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets endorsed the whole system of Soviets which took shape in the period

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 26, p. 258.

² *Dessiatine* – a Russian measure of area equal (o 1.09 hectares.

from February to October, and removed from office the commissars of the overthrown Provisional Government. Thus it abolished the former undemocratic structure of administration, under which centrally appointed commissars exercised control over local government.

On October 27 the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets came to a close, having proclaimed the victory of the armed uprising and the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat, and laid the foundation for converting the Soviets into a system of bodies of state authority.

The Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets represented mainly the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies and



Soldiers reading the Decree on Peace.

had few delegates from the Peasants' Soviets, which functioned in parallel. A Special Congress of Peasants' Soviets convened in mid-November, and later on the Second All-Russia Congress of Peasants' Deputies adopted a resolution calling for the unification of their Executive Committee with the All-Russia Central Executive Committee of Soviets. Their first joint session was held on November 15, 1917.

The Triumphal March of the Soviets Across Russia

The experience of past revolutions had shown that a successful uprising in the capital city would be short-lived or unstable unless it had the support of the whole nation. After the victory of the workers and soldiers in Petrograd the fate of the October Revolution was being decided in the various provinces of the country.

In a number of towns the counterrevolutionaries, seeing that nearly all forces were on the side of the armed people, surrendered without resistance. This was also the case with the majority of big industrial centres. In Ivanovo-Voznesensk, for example, the Soviet took over power simultaneously as the Petrograd Soviet did in the capital. On the following day Soviet power was proclaimed in Ufa, and on October 27 in Samara.

Power passed into the hands of the Soviets peacefully in the Far East – in Vladivostok and Khabarovsk. The counterrevolutionaries capitulated without a fight in the towns of Central Russia – Vladimir, Tver, Kostroma, Oryol, Yaroslavl; and also in the Urals and in Siberia – in Yekaterinburg, Perm, Krasnoyarsk, Omsk, and Novonikolaevsk.

The workers, peasants and soldiers were victorious without an armed struggle in some national regions – in Estonia and Byelorussia. They won a comparatively easy victory in some cities of Central Asia – Ashkhabad, Samarkand, and Fergana.

But wherever the counterrevolutionaries had the least chance of success they fought to the last man. Battles raged on for four days in the streets of Tashkent, capital of

Turkestan. More than 300 Red Guards were killed in nine days of battles in Irkutsk. The armed struggle in Moscow lasted for nearly a week.

In Moscow the counterrevolutionaries had considerable forces at their disposal – about, 20,000 well trained officers and cadets from military and ensigns' schools. The military district headquarters and the "Committee for Public Salvation" issued an ultimatum calling for the disbandment of Moscow's Military Revolutionary Committee. After the latter's rejection of the ultimatum, a state of emergency was declared in the city. The cadets managed to seize the Kremlin and occupy nearly the whole of the city centre. The Military Revolutionary Committee, being cut off from working-class districts, was on the verge of being exterminated.

The Bolsheviks urgently mobilised all the Red Guard forces and armed the Moscow workers. On November 1 the revolutionary troops mounted an offensive and dislodged the White Guards from nearly all their strong points. Towards the end of the day the cadets held only the Kremlin, the Alexandrovskoye Military School and the ensigns' school. On the following day the "Committee for Public Salvation" capitulated.

An excerpt from a Manifesto issued by Moscow's Military Revolutionary Committee read:

"After five days of fierce fighting the people's enemies, who wanted to crush the revolution by force of arms, have been wiped out. They have surrendered and have been disarmed. Victory was achieved at the cost of the blood of courageous soldiers and workers. Henceforth people's power is established in Moscow – the power of the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies."

The fight against counterrevolution assumed a large scale in the Orenburg Guberniya. The Chieftain of the Orenburg Cossacks, Alexander Dutov, arrested Samuil Tsvilling, the guberniya's commissar appointed by the Soviet Government and members of the Military Revolutionary Committee and the whole of the Bolshevik Committee. In his orders to the Cossack troops Dutov declared war on Soviet power.

In its offensive against Dutov the Soviet Government brought together detachments of sailors and Red Guards from Petrograd, Moscow and the Volga area. In the Urals the Bolsheviks announced a mobilisation of all Party members who could carry a gun.

There was a severe frost and the roads were blocked with snow when the Soviet detachments approached Orenburg. After stubborn fighting, in January 1918, the Dutov force was routed and its remnants fled.

Counterrevolutionary actions on the Don were even more widespread. The Chieftain of the Don Cossacks, Alexei Kaledin, refused to recognise the Soviet Government and began preparing for campaign on Moscow and Petrograd. Numerous counterrevolutionary forces rallied around him. Having captured Rostov, Taganrog and Azov, Kaledin started an offensive on the Donets Basin. Surviving counterrevolutionaries in the central parts of the country were ready to give their support to the Cossack Chieftain.

But there, too, the anti-Soviet forces proved incapable of stopping the onward march of the revolution.

Red Guard detachments and revolutionary military units came out against Kaledin. So did the miners of the Donets Basin and the workers of Taganrog and Rostov. They were supported by the Cossack poor and the working peasantry of the Don.

In many industrial centres of the Ukraine the Soviets took over power by peaceful means. This was the case in Lugansk, Kramatorsk, Makeyevka and Kherson. In December Soviet power was established in Kharkov. But in several areas Soviet power met with stiff resistance on the part of Ukrainian bourgeois nationalists who after the February Revolution had set up a Central Rada (Council). The Rada, having brought its forces to Kiev and occupied key points in the city, proclaimed its authority over the whole of the Ukraine and did not recognise the authority of the Soviet Government of Russia.

But the Ukrainian working people rose up against the Rada with weapons in hand. For many days battles raged in Kiev, where in January 1918 the workers staged an-

other uprising. They were supported by Soviet troops marching on Kiev. On January 26 Kiev was liberated. Soviet power was established in almost the whole of the Ukraine.

Lenin wrote:

“...Everywhere we achieved victory with extraordinary ease precisely because the fruit had ripened, because the masses had already gone through the experience of collaboration with the bourgeoisie. Our slogan ‘All Power to the Soviets’, which the masses had tested in practice by long historical experience, had become part of their flesh and blood.”¹

Soviet power marched in triumph from one end of the vast country to another. Within less than four months – before March 1918 – the Soviets became the sole legitimate system of government.

An excerpt from the Declaration of the Rights of the Toiling and Exploited People read:

“Russia is declared a Republic of Soviets of Workers’, Soldiers’ and Peasants’ Deputies. All power, both central and local, belongs to these Soviets.”

This declaration was inserted in full in the text of the first Soviet Constitution, adopted on July 10, 1918, by the Fifth All-Russia Congress of Soviets. The Constitution legislatively enshrined the system of Soviets.

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, p. 89.

“AN AUTHORITY OPEN TO ALL”

This definition of the Soviet Government was given by Lenin, founder of the Soviet state. According to him, the organs of proletarian dictatorship should really be open to all. However, in the first post-revolutionary years the Soviets were not and indeed could not be open to all, because representatives of the ousted exploiter classes, who had unleashed a civil war, were deprived of suffrage. It was not until after the construction of a socialist society in the USSR that it became possible to remould the Soviets from class organisations into organisations of all working people. The Constitution of 1936 introduced universal suffrage.

The democratic principles of the formation and activity of the Soviets were further developed when the Soviet state became a state of the whole people.

Article 2 of the 1977 Constitution of the USSR says:
“All power in the USSR belongs to the people.

“The people exercise state power through Soviets of People’s Deputies, which constitute the political foundation of the USSR.

“All other state bodies are under the control of, and accountable to, the Soviets of People’s Deputies.”

The Soviets of People’s Deputies today are a system of representative bodies built on uniform principles and designed to exercise unified state authority in the country. In conformity with the federal structure of the multinational Soviet state, this system includes the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, 15 Supreme Soviets of Union Republics and 20 Supreme Soviets of Autonomous Republics, as well as nearly 51,000 local Soviets.

In the present Soviet political system there is no opposition between local and higher bodies of authority. Every higher Soviet not only checks the correctness of the actions of a lower one, but guides it and in turn bears responsibility for its work. The combining of general centralised supervision with local self-government ensures organisation of the entire political, economic and cultural life on uniform principles and makes for harmony of local and national interests.

The country's highest body of authority is the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. It enacts laws, forms the government of the USSR, and endorses plans of economic, social and cultural development of the Soviet state. It also has an unrestricted right of control over any state body, up to and including the Council of Ministers of the USSR. In the Union and Autonomous Republics the highest bodies of authority are their own Supreme Soviets.

Local Soviets see to the observance of laws in the area under their jurisdiction, they dispose of the land, organise the work of educational establishments, ensure free medical service for the population and the timely granting of state pensions, maintenance of law and order, protection of public and personal property, and so on.

It is a traditional practice in Western countries to make a distinction between national administrative bodies (whose officials are appointed from above) and bodies of self-government which administer local affairs under the supervision of higher bodies. This has not been the practice in the USSR. In the Soviet state system there are neither governors nor prefects, and Soviet law does not recognise the concept of "administrative tutelage" over local self-government bodies. All local executive bodies are elected by the Soviets themselves and are fully accountable to them.

Unlike municipal councils in the West, the local authorities in the USSR have wide powers in the economic sphere as well. In particular, they exercise control over all local industrial enterprises. Besides, the Soviets can intervene in the activity of enterprises and organisations located in their areas but subordinate to All-Union and Republican ministries.

Recent years have seen a further extension of the powers of local Soviets in the economic sphere. For example, they now have the right to administer funds of enterprises, subordinated to All-Union and Republican authorities, for the purpose of housing and municipal construction, the building of roads, the provision of social, cultural and service facilities, the production of consumer goods, and so on.

To enhance the powers of local Soviets in the compre-

hensive development of areas under their jurisdiction, in March 1981 the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet and the USSR Council of Ministers adopted a special resolution "On Furthering the Role of the Soviets of People's Deputies in Economic Construction". Of immense importance is a clause in it providing for the transfer to the budgets of local Soviets of not only part of the profits of local industrial enterprises, as was the case before, but also of plants and factories subordinate to Republican and All-Union authorities.

The Soviet settles major issues regarding its activity at the general meetings of deputies. The country's Soviets have a total of 2,270,000 deputies representing all segments of society.

The activists of the Soviets of People's Deputies number over 30 million. In addition, there are another ten million or so people who participate in the work of people's control bodies (they are formed by the Soviets and have the right to check on the performance of the state apparatus, economic and other organisations).

In other words, through the Soviets approximately every fourth adult citizen of the USSR participates in some way in the administration of his country.