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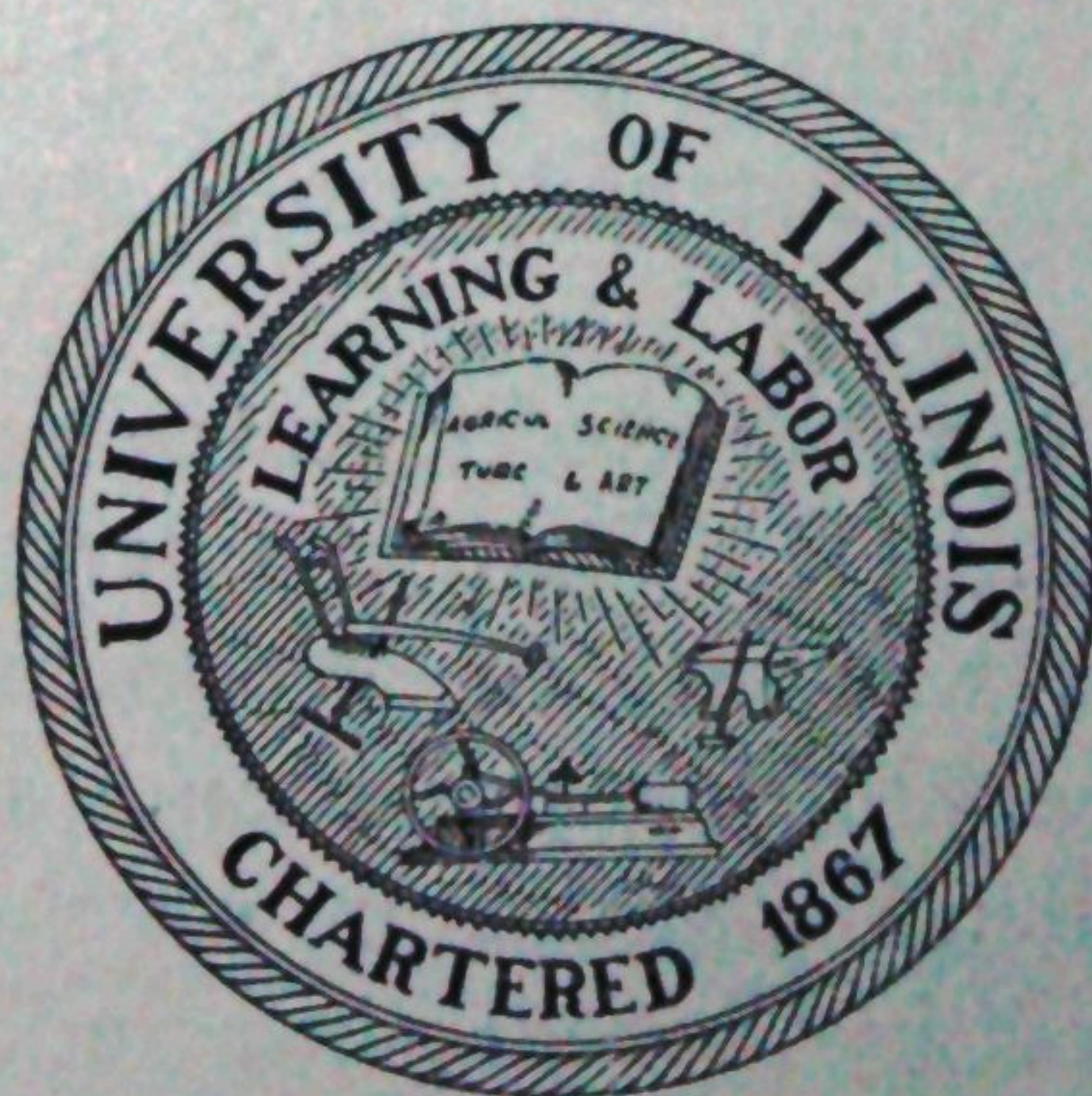
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## The Conflict of Parties in the Russian Revolution

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## THE CONFLICT OF PARTIES IN THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

The feelings of a person who from far away is watching the development of the Russian drama and who tries to keep his friendliness for its people undisturbed by partisan sympathies are likely to have but little constancy. The incidents are manifold and shifting. The information concerning them is incomplete and under the control of an interested censorship both at the transmitting and the receiving ends. The accounts by participants and witnesses are no more trustworthy on one side than on the other. There has been much scandalous lying against the Bolsheviki and no little misrepresentation in their favor. Perhaps some of it has been deliberate and malicious; for the most part it arises from misunderstanding and from those blind enthusiasms and antagonisms which such a struggle inevitably begets. But the distraction of people in this country who try to understand can be no greater than that of the Russians who are one day driven into the arms of the monarchists by the brutalities of the Bolsheviki and on the day following recoil toward the Bolsheviki from the atrocities of the monarchists. The present sketch makes no pretense of superhuman detachment, but in the survey of principles and actions here attempted, the aim has been to deal fairly with both parties to the controversy, to tell the truth as far as it can be construed from the published documents available to the writer.

From this survey a number of features emerge to serve as clues to the progress of events. (1) From the very beginning of the revolution all the real power was with the Workmen's and Soldiers' Councils and not with the ever-shifting provisional administrations. (2) The Workmen's and Soldiers' councils, in which originally the moderate socialists predominated, by degrees came under the complete control of the Bolsheviki. (3) The *coup d'état* which was effected through the dissolution by the Bolsheviki of the Constituent Assembly was only the inevitable step in the fulfilment of the revolution. (4) The Bolsheviki arrived at their power by unscrupulously resorting to every demagogic art and maintained themselves by every device known to arbitrary despotism, but made use of their power in a sincere attempt to carry out their promises, to give the people peace and bread, and to reconstruct society with a view to rendering justice to the exploited classes. (5) Many liberal and democratic elements continued to wage a struggle against the Bolsheviki but weakened their influence with the Russian people by making common cause with monarchist factions and calling in the military assistance of the Allies. (6) The developments



in the rival governments, where the power invariably passed from the hands of liberals to reactionaries and terminated in a military dictatorship, have served to reconcile Russians to the evils of Bolshevism and created a disposition on the part of former enemies to cooperate with the Bolshevik leaders. (7) The Bolsheviks, on their side, have been growing more conciliatory in their methods and have been more and more making those concessions to the views and prejudices of other parties which suggest a hope of arriving at a workable settlement. (8) Whether owing to the program of the Bolsheviks or to the other difficulties with which the country has had to contend, the economic condition of Russia is precarious and may result in the early downfall of the ruling party.

Three political parties have been prominent in the history of the revolution. The Constitutional Democrats (Cadets), who continue to be so called though they have changed their official title to the Party of Popular Freedom, represent the views of the liberal professional and mercantile classes and believe in a representative, parliamentary form of government such as exists in the United States or England. More important are the two great Socialist parties, Socialist Revolutionaries and Social Democrats. The primary distinction between them is that the former views the problems of social reconstruction from the standpoint of the peasant's interests, the latter from that of the workingman's. But the cleavage within these parties is of greater significance than the difference between the parties as a whole. They are both split up into moderate and radical factions, each having a tendency to coalesce with the corresponding group in the other party. The moderate and radical wings of the Socialist Revolutionaries are designated as Right and Left respectively. In the Social Democratic party the moderates are known as the Mensheviks and the extremists as Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks became closely allied with the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, while their most determined opposition came from the Right Socialist Revolutionaries. The official name by which the Bolsheviks now prefer to call themselves is the Communists; it describes their ideal of government. At present the name of the Bolsheviks is closely linked in people's minds with the Soviets. The connection between them, however, is not a necessary one. The word *Soviet* means *a council* and was a title adopted by the organizations of workmen and soldiers formed at the beginning of the revolution without any reference to party distinctions. The Mensheviks at first formed a vastly preponderating majority in the Soviets, but as the Bolsheviks identified themselves more particularly with the interests of the workingmen and made



themselves spokesmen of a demand that all governmental power be transferred to the Soviets, their influence became dominant in those bodies and they became the agents for carrying the idea into practise.

### *The Provisional Government*

The weakness of the Provisional Government and the strength of the Soviets are complementary elements in the first six months of the revolution. When the abdication of the Czar was announced, the members of the Fourth Duma at once chose a ministry on the basis of the party alignment in that body. With equal promptness the workmen in Petrograd organized their Councils and elected their deputies to watch lest their revolution sustain a mischief at the hands of the Provisional Government. The reason for the mistrust was the unrepresentative character of the body which had chosen the ministers. The members of the Fourth Duma had been elected by a narrowly restricted class suffrage. The largest representation in it was enjoyed by the Octobrists and Centrists. "Both these parties," according to the statement of a conservative Russian, "had in their time been invented to create the semblance of a governmental majority in the Duma, and had no sort of roots in the land. The best evidence of this is that after the Revolution they did absolutely nothing to testify to their existence."<sup>1</sup> Next in size was the delegation of the Constitutional Democrats, while the various socialist parties formed a small minority. The first cabinet contained seven Constitutional Democrats, three Octobrists, and only one socialist. If the chief desire of the Russian people at this time had been an efficient prosecution of the war against Germany, doubtless the new ministry would have served well. Its members had given ample proof of their devoted patriotism, and they had sincerely at heart the greatness and prosperity of the Russian people. But among the people themselves a new impulse was stirring. Worn out by their unimaginable losses and privations, their economic life utterly demoralized, their military situation precarious, they had no immediate desire but for peace, and the Soviets made themselves the mouthpiece of their longing. While the Government was pledging itself to the war aims of the Allies, the Soviet was issuing an appeal not only to the Allies, but to the neutral countries as well, and even to the workmen of the enemy, for peace on the basis of no annexations, no indemnities, and the self-determination of peoples. The ministers were making sincere efforts to induce the Allies to restate their war aims in accord with these principles but were having no success. The people

1. A. Bublikov: *The Russian Revolution*, New York, 1918. p. 31. (In Russian.)



remembered that Guchkov, the Minister of War, had once been a minister of the Czar's, and that Milyukov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, had at an unhappy moment risen in the Duma and announced that if a revolution were necessary for victory, he would prefer no victory at all. Under these circumstances it is not strange that the relations between the Government and the Soviet began in suspicion and jealousy.

For several months the Soviets merely sat behind the scenes and pulled the strings. They drew up the terms on which they would tolerate the authority of the existing government. They presented their demands through a "committee of contact" and practically dictated policies. The Workmen's and Soldiers' Council drew up the famous order abolishing the death penalty in the army and destroying military discipline, and the order was duly authorized by the ministry. When Guchkov, who was probably the strongest personality in the cabinet, but utterly without popular backing, made an effort to restore the old discipline, the Soviets drove him from his office. Milyukov dared to defy the peace program of the Soviets and to reaffirm his imperialist ideals, but his party, the Constitutional Democrats, bowed before the storm of opposition and he also was compelled to resign. There was scarcely a demand made by the workmen which the cabinet of Prince Lvov was able to resist. A determined purpose existed nowhere but in the Soviets. "The workmen in the factories," says Emile Vandervelde, the Belgian socialist who at this time was on a political mission in Russia, "were at that moment (May, 1917) the masters of Russia. . . . The Soviet which represented them as well as the soldiers constituted the only political power capable of making itself felt in the country, for they alone had power at their disposal. They had their militia; they were closely associated with the soldiers; and especially they had cohesion and capacity of coordination. There were neither police nor armed guards of any kind to oppose their will."<sup>2</sup>

This use of power without responsibility could not continue indefinitely. But though the Soviets agreed to let their leaders enter a coalition government, the antagonism between the two forces continued. The growing radicalism of the ministry failed to keep pace with the spread of the Bolshevik gospel. As economic and military demoralization grew more serious, the demands of the people became more exorbitant and more insistent. The Government knew not how to make head against the pressure of the current and so was hurtled along its fatal course to the inevitable catastrophe. Despairing talk was its substi-

2. "Three Aspects of the Russian Revolution," London, 1917, p. 42.



tute for action. After the disaster following the July 18-August 1 offensive, representatives of all organized groups gathered in a great congress at Moscow where everybody made speeches emphasizing the perilous situation of the country. Bitter truths were bravely uttered. Again the voice of Guchkov was raised to declare that the chief trouble with the Government was that it had no power. "The revolutionary democracy which was created first in Petrograd and then throughout the country is at present the actual master of the situation."<sup>3</sup> Every minister arose in turn to make a pathetic exposure of the affairs of his department. Several weeks later, General Kornilov, in announcing his revolt, gave as his justification the incompetence, weakness, and indecision of the government and its yielding to the pressure of "the Bolshevik majority in the Soviets."<sup>4</sup>

The mysterious circumstances connected with the uprising of Kornilov, the suspicion, not up to the present time cleared away, that Kerensky, the one popular man among the ministers, had somehow or other compromised with the military party, did more than any preceding event to undermine the Government. Failures in administration might have been tided over, but against loss of faith the leaders had no remedy. The Bolsheviks were quick to seize their opening and to stigmatize the Minister President as "counter-revolutionary." They were generally believed. From this time forth their star was in the ascendant and the progress of the revolution has to be followed with the clue which they provide.

### *The Bolsheviks*

It is clear that in the summer of 1917 the workmen's Soviets were the real power in Russia, and that in these Soviets the Bolsheviks had by September or October become completely the masters. They had gained this mastery by virtue of their implacable adherence to a single-minded policy, and their readiness to employ any measures that would help them to attain their end. A French military observer who looked upon their propaganda with great horror, was forced to admit that they alone among the Russian parties seemed to have a program which, abominable though it was, had the advantage of being definite and precise. It seemed to him as if every man of energy and daring in the large cities was an unqualified supporter of Bolshevism.<sup>5</sup> Whatever the causes of indignation against them, no one who has been on the

3. A. J. Sack. "The Birth of the Russian Democracy," New York, 1918, p. 460.

4. *Ibid*, p. 476.

5. René Herval: "Huit Mois de Révolution Russe." Paris, 1918, p. 110.



scene is disposed to deny the courage, the enterprise, and the enthusiasm of the Bolsheviki—qualities which go far to account for their success.

The great event which the Bolsheviki wished to bring about was the seizure of the wealth of the world by the workers, to be used for the benefit of the workers. This they looked upon as an international movement, a movement which could not be carried out successfully unless the workers of the whole world participated in it. Russia, for them, merely happened to be the country which formed the nucleus and provided the base of operations. To the charge of treason they were supremely indifferent, for patriotism and loyalty were not theoretically in their catalogue of virtues. But their program, while it doubtless looked to large constructive designs in the distance, was for the time being purely negative. It had immediately in view only the grasping of power, the overthrow of the existing government and of every institution surviving from the old regime. The entire political and social structure of Russia had to be swept away in order to prepare the ground for the building of their own dream. When it is merely destruction that is to be accomplished, the most violent means are the best, and when there is nothing to be saved, there is no incentive to precaution. The Bolsheviki conducted their campaign with the shrewdness of practical politicians and the moral irresponsibility of Supermen. Every symptom of popular distress they transmuted into a devastating fire. The people wanted peace, and they were told to wipe out their armies, for if men would not fight, there could be no war. To the cries for bread the Bolsheviki said, "There is plenty of land; seize it, cultivate it, and enjoy the food you produce. And if you want clothing, there are the factories, and your hands are accustomed to work. Nothing else is necessary." They gave advice that was palatable, and they promised whatever any considerable body of people desired. The convocation of a Constituent Assembly was something that all Russia was eagerly looking forward to: the Bolsheviki were shrill in their outcries against Kerensky's delay in calling such an assembly and proclaimed their own solemn pledge to bring it about. If they could accomplish their object by parliamentary methods, they were content to make use of them; if not, they were equally ready to have recourse to mass violence. In all their outgivings at this time, nothing is clear or consistent except the determination to gain power at whatever cost.

Their principles and tactics appear incarnate in their great leader Nicholas Lenine, whose real name is Vladimir Oulianov. Lenine is an intense fanatic for whom all objects are valued in relation to the one idea of constructing a society on a communal basis. When warned that



his ideas threatened ruin to the revolution in Russia, his reply was, "So be it! But we shall kindle a world revolution! We shall pass on the standard to other lands and other peoples!" He accepts the disgraceful peace of Brest-Litovsk, "a brigand peace" he calls it, and is ready to accede to even more humiliating conditions for the sake of a little breathing-space in which to conduct his experiment. As for the temporary mutilation, what are five or ten years in the life of a country like Russia? Unlike other Utopians, Lenine does not base his hopes on faith in human nature. His incisive logical faculty penetrates into realities and his estimate of men is pretty low. He finds himself surrounded by characters of all degrees of disrepute, his ideas travestied in the minds of the unintelligent multitude. For every genuine Bolshevik, he admits, there are sixty fools and thirty-nine rascals, but he is too impatient to wait for the moral growth of men to bring about the changes he desires. He has confidence in his power to convert them into useful tools and perhaps hasten their moral education. To a man who dared so boldly manipulate the explosive forces latent in one hundred and fifty millions of untutored and uncontrolled human beings, the game with the mechanical German bureaucrats must have seemed very trifling. In the pursuit of his aim Lenine would not have balked at more serious violations of the conventional code of honor than was involved in accepting German money or German assistance of any sort. This utter and cynical unscrupulousness as to means characterized every step of his propaganda before he came into power, and it has marked his policy after he gained power when his task became one of getting unruly forces under control. Lenine is not to be classed with the democratic leaders who were prominent at the beginning of the revolution. Gaining ascendancy by the methods of the destructive demagogue, he ripened quickly into the role best suited to his talents and after a short interval emerged before the world the self-confessed dictator.

### *The Bolsheviks in Power*

In the light of a clear understanding of the spirit of the parties which opposed each other, the events of the Russian Revolution appear altogether intelligible; they even assume a kind of logical necessity. The Bolsheviks had made a test of force as early as July, 1917, but had found that they were not yet strong enough. In a few months, however, they gained in strength and confidence. The following figures for the voting in Moscow in June and September testify to the change that was taking place. The Socialist Revolutionaries fell from 374,885 in June to



54,374 in September, the Mensheviks fell from 76,407 to 15,887, while the Bolsheviks increased from 75,409 to 198,320. The vote of the Constitutional Democrats remained about the same: 108,781 in June and 101,106 in September.<sup>6</sup> In the weeks following the September elections, the Bolsheviks directed their efforts toward bringing about the exclusion of the Cadets, representing the middle classes, from a share in the government. Failing in that, they began preparations for overthrowing the government by force. The revolt broke out in Petrograd on October 25-November 7 and in Moscow on the next day, and meeting with almost no military resistance, it succeeded easily in both places. While there were many protests from democratic bodies, including a strike by the organized teachers, the only party to make serious trouble at first were the Anarchist-Syndicalists, who were disappointed that the Bolsheviks did not act rapidly or drastically enough. Against them measures of repression were promptly taken.

But most people did not find the new rule hesitating or gentle. The first measures of the Bolsheviks were the distribution of the land and the beginning of negotiations for peace. They remembered, too, their promise to convoke the Constituent Assembly and arranged for its election. The election, though conducted under their own auspices and, as is alleged, not with the strictest regard for a square deal to their opponents, was not altogether satisfactory to the Bolsheviks. They obtained only 154 seats out of a total of 495 while the Socialist Revolutionaries had 260. The weakness of the Cadet representation, 14 members in all, is possibly accounted for by the terrorizing of voters in the cities. The opposition came from the rural districts into which Bolshevik influence had not penetrated. The Bolsheviks tried to construct a lame pretext for questioning the validity of the elections, and at once launched a campaign against the Constituent Assembly, claiming that the Soviets were the only bodies truly representing the Russian people. It became evident to clear-sighted Russians that the Assembly was doomed to failure, that if it ever did meet, its existence would depend on subservience to the Soviets as entirely as did the provisional governments of Lvov and Kerensky. On January 5-18, 1918, the Assembly met. A radical group under the leadership of Maria Spiridonova broke away from the Socialist Revolutionaries and aligned itself with the Bolsheviks, but the moderate majority still retained control and elected Victor Chernov presiding officer. The Bolsheviks thereupon withdrew and on the following day sent a squad of armed sailors from the Baltic fleet to disperse the Assembly.

6. René Herval, *op. cit.*, p. 108.



For five months following the dissolution, the defeated elements continued to hope in the justice of their cause. Allegiance to the idea of the Constituent Assembly was the passion inspiring the liberal opposition, as it was also the subterfuge of the monarchist reactionaries. Peaceful demonstrations in behalf of it were put down by the same bloody weapons as in the days of Czar Nicholas. The Second All-Russian Peasants' Congress, meeting in Petrograd in December, 1917, had, in spite of bullying, declared itself by a vote of 359 to 314 in support of the Constituent Assembly. The Bolsheviki in reply dispersed and outlawed the refractory majority and then declared that the Congress of Peasants was ready to support the Soviets. The Third All-Russian Peasants' Congress, which met on January 10, 1918, had similar sympathies and was similarly treated. Discontent continued to express itself, but the Bolsheviki simply rode rough-shod over every party and group that stood in their way. They dissolved meetings of hostile political parties and persecuted leaders of opposing factions. They exercised a severe censorship over the press. They refused to recognize local governments chosen in September, 1917, on the basis of universal suffrage. They even did violence to the sacred institution of the Soviets and dispersed such bodies when the majority happened to be adverse to them. They are also charged with a multitude of atrocities, but in this perhaps they suffer an injustice. It should be remembered that a very dark picture can be drawn of lawlessness in Russia under the provisional government. Doubtless license and criminality continued also under Bolshevik rule. There is no evidence, however, that this had the encouragement or sanction of the authorities. On the contrary, there is an impression of growing orderliness and discipline under the high-handed Bolshevik administration.

In May and June of 1918 the political unrest culminated in the sharp clash of civil war, disrupting the Russian state into the fragments which now remain and creating the situation which is still confusing the rest of the world. In April, 1918, there were said to be 132,000 workmen in Petrograd. About 100,000 of these, it is asserted, formed an organization, held a congress, and issued "instructions" to the workmen of Russia in which the government was arraigned and its resignation demanded.<sup>7</sup> A special delegation was sent to Moscow and brought about similar action by the workmen there in May. At the same time the eighth Congress of Right Socialist Revolutionaries was meeting in Moscow and adopting resolutions in favor of foreign intervention. A fraction of this party along with some other democratic groups,

7. V. I. Lebedev, in *Narodnaya Gazeta*, (New York), December 12, 1918.



among whom the Cadets were most prominent, formed the Union for the Regeneration of Russia and entered into official relations with the Allies. They were joined by conservative and reactionary bodies which had independently been preparing to fight the Bolsheviki. They established their first capital in Cossack territory at Samara. Though their government was called All-Russian and was professedly based on the elections to the Constituent Assembly, the Bolsheviki and their partners were outlawed as the Party of National Treason. A body of Czechoslovaks in the Ural region became the nucleus of their National Army, and negotiations were begun for the landing of Allied troops at Archangel and Vladivostok. Civil war was on.

Association with notorious monarchists and the calling in of foreign assistance turned out to be serious tactical errors. It gave the Bolsheviki a chance to play not only on the favorite watchwords of the revolution, but on the hitherto despised sentiment of patriotism as well. Their hands were immensely strengthened and they felt justified in increasing the pressure against their opponents by way of reprisal. Pointing out that many of the Right Social Revolutionaries and Mensheviki were working with the Czechoslovaks and Allies against the revolution, they voted to exclude those parties from membership in the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets.

Subsequent events tended to vindicate the position of the Bolsheviki. They proved that the democratic elements in the newly organized governments were not strong enough to sustain their part and sooner or later fell victims to the ambitious scheming of a military clique. In the western and southwestern provinces dominated by the Germans, it was to be expected that the reactionary elements should control. But what was to be thought of the proceedings of the Government of the North at Archangel where the venerable socialist, Nicholas Tchaikovsky, had been established as president? An influential group was formed in favor of a dictatorship, Tchaikovsky was arrested by a Colonel Chaplin and put into prison. The refusal of our ambassador, David Francis, to countenance the act compelled the restoration of the president, but he was restored with only the shadow of power. The other members of his government were replaced with "safe" officials, and some of his followers, completely disheartened, left the country. In the Far East the spectacle offered by the personal ambitions of men like General Horvath and General Semenov was not edifying.

There still remained the "All-Russian" government at Omsk, which for many months was administered by a directorate chosen from among the members of a Constituent Assembly. To this government the



friends of Russian freedom attached their hope, but in the early days of November came the disillusioning shock. A party of officers arrested Avksentsev and the other socialist directors, accused them of Bolshevik leanings and treason, and without even giving them a hearing, deported them swiftly toward Japan. Admiral Kolchak was proclaimed dictator. The stroke was neat and complete. At first Kolchak mumbled something about giving the people an opportunity to choose their form of government and to elect a new Constituent Assembly, but actually he went about restoring the golden days of Czaristic rule. Popular assemblies were suppressed, political discussions forbidden, and the sale of vodka reestablished. The record of atrocities committed by him in the name of order has not been widely advertised, but an American correspondent tells of 1200 Bolsheviks dragged in a train backward and forward from station to station till most of them perished of cold and hunger while the living lay in torment beside the bodies of their dead companions. Admiral Kolchak's idea of governing Russia is revealed by some of his remarks to this correspondent. "In a deep sense," he said, "Russia was democratic under the Czars. . . . Russian people understand nothing about socialism—whether that of the Bolsheviks or any other sort."<sup>8</sup>

The Bolsheviks point to these events as demonstrating the force of their claims that they alone are both willing and able to create an order which shall assure social and economic justice to all. True, their methods are dictatorial and undemocratic. The dilemma is a dictatorship of the Bolsheviks in the interest of the masses or a dictatorship of Admiral Kolchak in the interest of the old bureaucracy. Whether fairly or not, this is the form in which the alternative presents itself to the Russian people. The revolution stands to them for certain definite gains which they are loth to relinquish. There is doubtless also the feeling that it will be easier to correct the excesses of Bolshevik rule than to wrest concessions from restored privilege. And so they cling to the evils which they have rather than fly to others that they know too well.

It may be seen now how the civil war has strengthened the grip of the Bolsheviks, in the first place by providing them with a *bona fide* excuse for making their government purely partisan, and in the second place by discrediting the opposition which allowed the rival governments to drift into the power of the feared reactionaries. Deprived of their leaders, who were either driven into the recesses of their own vast country or scattered over the face of the globe, the people who had

8. Herman Bernstein, in New York *Herald*, Jan. 27, 1919.



stood out in protest were compelled to make the best of their situation. To what extent the Bolsheviks have captured the confidence of the population it is impossible to judge at our distance from the scene, but it can scarcely be questioned that a considerable number of those who had been standing aloof, and some prominent persons among them, have by degrees been reentering the life of the nation. The Socialist Revolutionaries have formally abandoned their struggle against the Bolsheviks, giving as their reasons the defeat of Germany and the fact that "the intervention in Russia by the victorious powers is assuming more and more the character of assistance given by the bourgeoisie."

The spirit of the government has not been uncompromising. The party has abated the rigor of its principles for the sake of immediate results. Overtures have been made to leaders of other socialist groups with a view to bringing about a *modus vivendi*, and these have met with some response. In spite of the accusation of opportunism by the more fanatical, concessions have even been made to the prejudices of the bourgeois class. One American correspondent, recently returned from Russia, had his revolutionary sensibilities outraged by what seemed to him a restoration of a middle-class ideal of order and seemliness in the outward aspect of Russian life. Whether these manifestations are to be interpreted as symptoms of weakening or of increasing confidence depends altogether on the sympathies of the interpreter.

What can be asserted with some assurance is that the Governments of the Allied countries are undergoing a change in their attitude toward the Bolsheviks. Not that they are a whit more inclined than ever to endorse their principles. But they have officially admitted that the policy of military intervention was mischievous. They perceive that the Bolshevik authority is for the time the only authority that counts in Russia, and they are resigning themselves to the necessity of negotiating with it. On their part the Bolsheviks are manifesting the same spirit of compromise as in their domestic policy. Far from shunning contact with the "capitalist" and "imperialist" rulers whom for two years it has been their chief pastime to denounce, they have declared their readiness to refrain from official propaganda, to pay all their foreign debts, and to enter into economic relations with the Allies. The repugnance to the meeting at Prince's Island proposed by the Peace Conference has been shown primarily by the Kolchak government and by those exiled representatives of Russia whose credentials are the most questionable.



In an address to the workingmen last April, Lenine declared, "We have won by methods of suppression. We will be able to win also by methods of management." The Bolsheviki were faced with a task of gigantic proportions. They had to devise and set in motion a new and elaborate machinery for controlling the political, economic, and social relations of a vast population. More adverse conditions for the work could hardly have been imagined. Their richest farming and industrial provinces torn away, the economic foundations of their life disrupted, hemmed in and isolated from the rest of the world, without access to the sea and to the materials necessary for a revival of normal activity, fighting domestic and foreign foes within and without, dealing with an untutored population that had grown accustomed to looking upon its demands as the law of the land, having no leaders experienced in affairs of state or in the management of great business undertakings, the immediate and ignominious failure of the Bolsheviki would have been no occasion for surprise. For more than a year it has freely been predicted as imminent in a week or a day. Perhaps the doom is not far off, but meanwhile it is of interest to observe the efforts of the government to solve its important economic problems.

The first great task which confronted the Soviet was the settlement of the land question. Practically all parties in Russia agreed that the land ought to be distributed among the peasants, but the method and principles of distribution involved many nice and complicated problems requiring time and study for their satisfactory solution. Prince Lvov's government had appointed Land Committees to exercise control in the transition, to prevent lawless appropriation, and to settle disputes between peasants until such time as the Constituent Assembly should meet to make definite enactments. But the peasants were impatient and feared that the property, which they had already come to regard as theirs, would be seriously damaged and despoiled. Upon these fears the Bolsheviki played in order to undermine the supports of Kerensky's government. Their first act after seizing power was to issue a decree abolishing the right of private property in land without compensation to the owners.

Its operation was what might have been foreseen. The enforcement of the loose provisions was in the hands of small local groups which proceeded to divide up according to their own notions of equity and right. It resulted in a free-for-all scramble. The man who had two carts carried off more movables than his neighbor who had only one. The farmer best provided with seed planted the greatest acreage. It is



alleged that the distributing committees were not above taking advantage of their opportunities, and that the person who benefited least by the change was the very one in whose favor the revolution had been proclaimed. It does not need a very credulous mind to believe the many stories of pillage and destruction which the temporary dissolution of authority made all too possible.

The more detailed Land Decree which they issued in September, 1918, seems to recognize the defects of the former decree and to look forward to the correction of its errors.<sup>9</sup> In theory the land is now completely socialized. It is the property of the state, which is loaned to individual tillers to be cultivated for the public benefit. In fact, however, most holdings are in the hands of peasants who think the land has been given to them as a free gift in perpetuity. The Decree admits that the socialization of the land has not been fully accomplished and outlines an elaborate set of instructions which is to govern its gradual distribution. "The apportionment of land on the production and consumption basis among the agricultural population is to be carried on gradually in various agricultural sections, according to regulations stated herein." Meanwhile "the relations of agriculturalists will be regulated by the land departments of the Soviets in accordance with a special instruction."

Evidently the task before the government is to wean the tiller of the soil from his personal attachment to it, to develop in him an attitude toward it like that of the workman for his craft and its machinery, and it is proposed to do this by encouraging the peasant in every way to organize in groups for cultivating on a large scale. The land departments are entrusted with the duty of developing collective homesteads in agriculture (in preference to individual homesteads) as the most profitable system of saving labor and material, with a view to passing on to socialism. In arranging the order in which land is to be apportioned, it is provided that preference be given to laboring agricultural associations over individual homesteads, and again, in offering specific aid for the general tilling of the soil, in the form of machinery, seeds, education, preference is given to communistic and cooperative homesteads.

The Russian peasant has during the last fifteen years been learning rapidly the lessons of cooperation.<sup>10</sup> He has an enormous network of organizations of producers and of consumers, supported by credit asso-

9. The text of this decree is printed in *The Nation*, Jan. 25, 1919 (International Relations Section).

10. See the interesting booklet by J. W. Bubnoff: "The Cooperative Movement in Russia", Manchester, 1917.



ciations, with the People's Bank of Moscow serving as the financial heart. These have been a beneficent force in the life of the Russian agriculturalist. They continued to expand during the war and they are the one feature of Russian economic life with which the Bolsheviks have not tampered. The difficulties placed in the way of private ownership have already resulted in a great access of power to these cooperatives, and the prestige which they have earned may prove helpful to the Bolsheviks in their endeavor to impose communism on the Russian peasant. It will also be open to the government to effect its aims by coercion through its monopoly of the grain trade and the trade in agricultural implements.

News that reaches us of economic conditions in Russia is not calculated to create confidence in the ability of the Soviets to set the country upon a prosperous course. In the factories the lowering of the output has been enormous and continuous. It is stated officially that only three percent of employees in the West Moscow textile region are at work. In a certain district of Soviet Russia only forty sugarfactories remain where there were once 232. The five hundred and thirteen industrial and commercial undertakings which have been nationalized up to the beginning of 1919 have yielded losses to the state and have adversely influenced the returns from privately owned enterprises. Owing to the breakdown of transportation there are wide differences in the prices of commodities at various points and the influence of the government has not availed to bring about uniformity. "At a time when the best quality flour was selling in Petrograd at 700 rubles a pud, it could be bought at Tver for 63 rubles." The supply of food is scant, and in its distribution the "bourgeois" are made to suffer in order that they may be forced to enter the ranks of the proletarians. The condition of the national finances may be inferred by economists from the statement that 30,000,000,000 rubles in credit notes have been issued since January 1, 1918. If these facts are typical, they constitute the severest possible arraignment of Bolshevik rule, and the Russian people must be reaching the limit of their endurance. It is true that the leaders can plead in excuse that they are the victims of foreign enemies, especially of the bourgeois class, who are bent upon throttling their popular experiment by military as well as by economic coercion, but excuses will not long be accepted as a substitute for results. Unless there is some truth in the assertions on the other side, that in the last few months a decided improvement has been in evidence, it is difficult to see how the present government can survive.