

tain high society, the hive of the civil service, and the city of the Tsar's court. From Petrograd the Tsar ruled Russia through an unholy combination of church, bureaucracy and brute force. His power to rule was unlimited, and he shared it with no group or class of the Russian people; although since 1906 he had had to accept the existence of a Duma, a sort of parliament with no real law-making powers. The Duma's chief importance was as a training-ground for politicians who sought liberal reforms in the way Russia was governed. They wanted a genuine parliament, a cabinet and ministers able to take their own decisions, and the modernisation of the country's educational and economic systems.

Before the war it had been easy for the Tsar to ignore the opinions of liberals. But, as the military failures became evident, there were widespread demands for a more democratic and efficient system of government to cope with the problems made more acute by the war. By the end of 1916 the Duma had ceased to be a mere 'talking-shop' and liberal politicians openly criticised the Tsar and Tsarina. In March 1917 (according to the Russian calendar—see Chapter 1, page 1), serious disorders began in Petrograd. The managers of the gigantic Putilov steel works in the south of the city locked out 20,000 workers after pay talks between them broke down. This put 20,000 tough, angry steelmen out on the streets with nothing to do and in a mood for trouble. Workers in nearby factories quickly came out on strike in sympathy until some 90,000 were out on the streets.

The next day, 8 March, bakeries in some parts of Petrograd ran out of bread. Bread rationing had already been introduced, bringing discontent and long queues with it. Now the queues of hungry shoppers began smashing up the empty bakeries. By the weekend, 250,000 workers were out on strike, surging around the streets in giant demonstrations. Although police managed to disperse one crowd by firing on it, Cossacks in another part of the city refused to attack a procession of strikers when ordered to do so. The President of the Duma, Michael Rodzianko, sent off an urgent telegram to the Tsar:

"The situation is serious. The capital is in a state of anarchy. The government is paralysed; the transport system is broken down; the food and fuel supplies are completely disorganised. Discontent is general and on

the increase. There is wild shooting on the streets; troops are firing at each other. It is urgent that someone enjoying the confidence of the country be entrusted with the formation of a new government."

Rodzianko believed that such a government would come from the Duma. But the Tsar behaved—as he often did—as if he lived on a different planet from his people; he ordered the Duma to stop meeting. Early next morning, however, on Monday 12 March, soldiers in Petrograd joined the workers' protests. They were sick of a war in which the army had suffered enormous casualties; they were also hungry. Riots were turning into revolution.

For the first time in its short history the Duma had a real political choice to make. It could either take the leadership of the revolution or be swept away by it. Twelve of its members disobeyed the Tsar and formed a Provisional government which demanded that Nicholas should abdicate. Nicholas, still in army headquarters at Mogilev, 500 kilometres from Petrograd, at last decided to return to take control of the situation. However, the leading generals of the army informed him that he no longer had their support. Nicholas had no real alternative but to abdicate. On 16 March he gave up his throne and power. There was suddenly a great political hole in Russia.

### Between Revolutions

There appeared to be no shortage of answers to the question of who would fill the hole. The Provisional government planned to rule the country until the people elected a Constituent Assembly which would work out a new system of government. But there were rivals to its claims to power. In Petrograd a Council of Workers, Peasants and Soldiers (the Petrograd Soviet) was determined to share power with the Provisional government. The Soviet was dominated by Marxists, mostly trade unionists from the *Menshevik* groups who believed that the workers should band together to defend their rights but that they were not yet powerful enough as a class to run the state. At this time the Soviet included only a few of the *Bolsheviks*—revolutionary communists whose leader, Lenin, believed in overthrowing the liberals at once and setting up a new government which would rule in the name of the working class.

The Soviet declared in Order No. 1 that soldiers

in the Russian army should not take their orders from officers but from committees elected by each regiment. The government's control of the army was thus weakened. But beyond that the parties in the Soviet didn't know how far to go. Although popular opinion was in favour of an end to the war, the government planned to continue the fighting on the Eastern Front; and the Soviet accepted that Russia must be defended from German aggression. Neither the government nor the Soviet had a clear idea of what to do about the peasants' demands for land.

The Bolsheviks' leader, Lenin, had been in exile in Switzerland, planning a revolution on paper. When the real revolution broke out he made a deal with the Germans who allowed him to pass through their land from Switzerland in a sealed train, not inspected by police or customs officers who would otherwise have arrested him as a citizen of an enemy country. Lenin, the hard, professional revolutionary, was now appalled by the unwillingness of the Soviet to declare open war on the Provisional government. Most Russian Marxists were still saying that their revolution, when the working class would seize complete control, could come only after a long period of capitalist development. Lenin couldn't wait that long. His arrival at the Finland Station in Petrograd in April 1917 was one of the decisive moments in the history of the twentieth century. He broached aside the committee that had turned up to welcome him and the next day, 17 April, made it clear what he intended the Bolsheviks to do. In a speech to a meeting of Bolshevik leaders he outlined a set of new policies for them to follow—the 'April Theses'. There must be an immediate end to the war, he said. Bolshevik agitators must go to the trenches and persuade soldiers to desert. There must be no cooperation with the Provisional Government: the workers must have all power. Industry must be put under the workers' control. Land must be nationalised, along with all banks. And a new Communist International must be set up to spread revolution outside Russia.

The April Theses alarmed other Bolshevik leaders. What thought that Lenin was being hopelessly unrealistic and that they could achieve more by working with the Provisional Government. Lenin replied to a famous slogan that 'Peace, Bread and Land' was what the peasants, workers and soldiers wanted and that the Provisional Government could not or would not meet those wants. If the Bolsheviks

told the people that they could give them what they wanted, then the people would support the Bolsheviks in elections to the Soviets. After that, Lenin said in another famous slogan, the Bolsheviks should demand 'All Power to the Soviets!' and confront the Provisional Government from their new position of strength.

Events ran out of Lenin's control. In June the Russian army launched a major offensive against their enemies. Within days it was halted and turned into a miserable retreat. In mid-July, mutinous soldiers and sailors joined hungry workers in demonstrations in Petrograd. Their slogan was 'All Power to the Soviets!'—Lenin's new battle-cry: but they were shouting it before the Bolsheviks were strong enough to do battle with the Provisional Government. On 16 and 17 June government troops restored some kind of order to the streets at the cost of 400 deaths. The government and the majority of the Soviet seized the chance to label the Bolsheviks as traitors. Many were arrested, and Lenin escaped only by putting on a wig and slipping out of Russia to Finland.

### Lenin's Revolution

Conditions in Russia grew worse. Neither the government nor the Soviet could control inflation. The government failed to announce schemes for the transfer of lands to the peasants, and by harvest time many peasants were seizing landlords' fields and crops for themselves. The government sent troops to stop them while, in contrast, Lenin deliberately supported the peasants. As the war went on, the Bolsheviks spread their propaganda view that the struggle against Germany and Austria benefited only the ruling class in Russia. Peasant soldiers were already deserting from the army in their thousands.

General Kornilov, the new army Commander, decided to put a stop to all this revolutionary nonsense and march to Petrograd. He intended to replace the Provisional government by a military one which would act firmly against the Soviet, and especially against the Bolsheviks. The government, however, had no desire to be kicked out: it turned for help to bands of Bolsheviks in the large factories (the Red Guards), and distributed weapons among them. Kornilov was defeated. Shortly afterwards, in the elections to the Soviet, the newly popular Bolsheviks won control. Leon Trotsky, Lenin's right-hand man, was already chairman of the Soviet.