

and especially over vital industries such as munitions, coal and railways. News from the fronts was officially censored. In Britain the Defence of the Realm Act (known unaffectionately as DORA) gave the government wide powers over the individual citizen, including not only the power to take over private land and property for military purposes, but also to control, and change, the hard-drinking habits of the people (the opening hours of pubs were severely restricted). The French government took similar powers into its own hands, directing the economic life of the country and closely regulating the behaviour of its citizens. The people of Britain and France, two liberal democracies, were getting their first real taste of 'state control'.

Changes in Attitudes

The longer the war went on the more it separated whole peoples from each other in hatred. Governments used propaganda to whip up people's cruder emotions and direct them not only against the vile, inhuman enemy but also against the 'shirkers' and 'conshies' (conscientious objectors) at home. Civilians were, by and large, the fiercest haters - it was their substitute for actually fighting. At the fronts the war sharpened men's wits, infested them with vermin and maimed them. It killed them every day and night, without warning; and in that awful uncertainty they lived as close as men could be to each other, as 'mates', and wondered why they were there at all. They knew whom they were fighting against, but whom and what were they fighting for? Some of them came to believe they were fighting not to defeat 'the enemy' but to ensure a better future for themselves and their children in a world without war.

By 1917 the bright and spirited patriotism of the

distant summer of 1914 had taken a bloody beating. The loss of millions of men had brought merely the prospect of further agony - repeat performances of failed offensives by unimaginative or incompetent generals. In the west, the British army was disillusioned. The French army fell apart under the strain. Some soldiers simply packed up and went home; others mutinied. The habit of obedience had been stretched beyond endurance; and traditions of respect for superiors, duty, loyalty, all lay in tatters. The army was pulled together by General Pétain: the ring-leaders of the mutinies were shot; the complaints of the rest of the troops were treated with some sympathy. The French army held its positions on the Western front but it was never the same again as a fighting force.

The German army was still held together by remarkably tight discipline, despite shortages of food and other supplies. But the Austrian army had not recovered from the shattering blow of losing over a third of its men as prisoners of the Russians in the summer of 1916. Many of the men had surrendered willingly for they were not German-speaking Austrians but Slavs from the subject peoples of the Austrian Empire. They hoped that the Empire would suffer a defeat which would bring freedom to its nationalities. Czech and Ruthene soldiers came to despise their incompetent Austrian commanders. Only those Austrian battalions and divisions stiffened with German troops could now be considered effective units. If Germany lost the war, there would be nothing left to hold the Austrians' army or empire together.

In the east the war was about to shatter the government of an empire even bigger than Austria's. We must now turn to look at how the war brought about the end of the rule of the Tsars in Russia and at the beginning of something quite new.

7 1917: Russia in War and Revolution

Russia in Crisis

By the winter of 1916 there was a serious military crisis in the Russian armies. From the beginning of the war there had been repeated complaints (most of them genuine, some of them invented by generals playing at politics) about shortages of ammunition and equipment for the soldiers at the front. By July 1915 about nine million men had been called into the Tsar's forces. It was not enough to stop a terrible series of defeats and retreats. Morale sank to rock bottom. Ill-trained, under-fed troops surrendered to the enemy in their thousands. Generals took revenge on their own men by cancelling leave, by floggings and by murder. For example,

'at Opatow [in Poland] in June 1915 a battalion, ordered to attack, fell into uncut wire and enemy machine-gun fire. The survivors fell into shell-holes and were bombarded by enemy artillery. A few white flags then appeared above the shell-holes; and Russian officers, in the rear, ordered Russian guns to fire on the troops, as well as the German ones.'

In the autumn of 1915 the Tsar had taken over as Commander-in-Chief of the Russian armies; and since then he had been in charge of the war effort from his headquarters at Mogilev, far to the south of Petrograd. His presence made not the slightest difference to the performance of the Russian army. In the military campaigns of 1916 more than two million Russian soldiers were killed or wounded, and a third of a million were taken prisoner. Furthermore, Nicholas's absence from Petrograd quickly led to a serious government crisis. His German-born wife, Tsarina Alexandra, had taken control of the imperial government and she, in turn, had been taken over by Gregory Rasputin, a drunken, lecherous 'holy man', who claimed that he had the power to cure the Tsarina's only son of haemophilia, an incurable disorder of the blood.

In Rasputin's heyday the imperial government had been turned into a farce. In under two years, twenty-two ministers were sacked and replaced by Rasputin's favourite - most of them incompetent old men. Eventually, in December 1916, Rasputin was murdered by a group of noblemen, but by then a great deal

of damage had been done. The Tsarina's foolish antics had brought accusations that the imperial government was, of all things, pro-German!

The crisis in government was accompanied by a growing economic crisis. By the start of 1917 prices were, on average, four times higher than they had been in August 1914. One of the main reasons for this rapid inflation was that the government had put heavy taxes on goods to pay for the war. In all the towns and cities food became scarce and more expensive; and there were now more mouths to feed since great numbers of peasants had left their villages to work in the munitions industries. In the countryside the poorer peasants demanded land, while the better-off ate or hoarded much of their surplus food rather than sell it to the towns for paper money which quickly lost its value.

The war-time economic crisis was the final disastrous peak in changes that had been eating away at traditional society for twenty years before 1914. There had been a massive migration from the countryside to the towns. Some peasants had uprooted themselves because a rising population left too little land to feed everyone in the villages of their district. Others had abandoned cottage industries, such as making rope and sacks or weaving cloth, which had been ruined by competition from town factories. Yet others had been attracted by the higher wages paid in the booming centres of industry. Whatever the cause, an urban working class (or, as Marxists called it, a 'proletariat') was growing steadily and irresistibly. The extra war-time demand for labour in arms factories and on the railways swelled the numbers while inflation and food shortages deepened the discontent. Nearly all of this new working class, by 1917 seething with discontent, was concentrated in the cities and towns of European Russia, west of the Urals, and especially in Moscow and Petrograd.

The March Revolution

Petrograd (whose pre-war name of 'St Petersburg' had been changed because it sounded German) was an extraordinary place. Its industrial areas were all that a revolutionary communist could hope for (fifty, disease-ridden, bulging at the seams with the families of poor workers. Yet the city was also the centre of Rus-