



Bolsheviks guarding the Smolny Institute in Petrograd, their military headquarters in the November Revolution of 1917.

Lenin slipped back into Petrograd. He now had over 20,000 armed men to command. The government couldn't even rely on its own troops in the capital (remember Soviet Order No. 1?). The Bolshevik Revolution began on 6 November. Under Trotsky's leadership, bands of Red Guards took over key points in the city – the telephone exchange, the arsenal, government buildings. There was hardly any resistance. By the evening of the next day the Red Guards controlled the city. Within a week, Bolsheviks had seized power in Moscow and other major

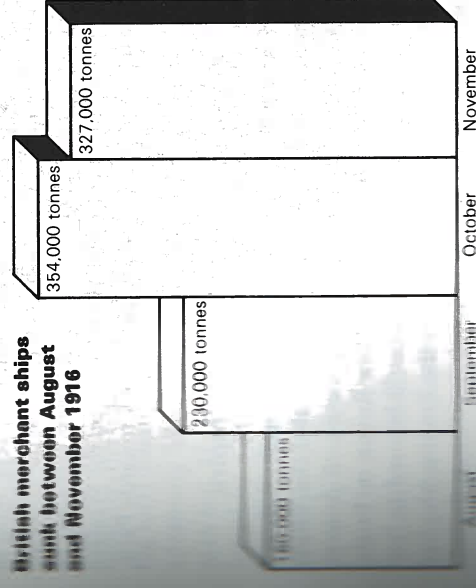
centres, and so had control of most of European Russia.

Straightaway Lenin announced two decrees. The decree on land gave the land to the peasants: they would divide it up among themselves. Although the decree gave the peasants the right to do what they were doing already, it brought Lenin the support of many people in the countryside. The decree on peace declared that the war would be ended at once. To the amazement and anger of her allies Russia was abandoning the Eastern Front.

The USA Enters the War

In March 1917 no-one could have foreseen the outcome of the bread riots in Petrograd – that within eight months Russia would have a communist government which would take Russia out of the war and take the pressure off Germany's Eastern Front. Perhaps if it could have been foreseen, the German admirals and soldiers who persuaded their government in March 1917 to unleash unrestricted submarine warfare on the high seas would not have had their way. Their argument was simple. Britain and France could not be beaten into submission by the German artillery and infantry on the Western Front: but it was just possible that they could be starved into defeat.

For a time, in the winter of 1916, the war's most important new naval weapon, the submarine, had looked as if it might turn the war in Germany's favour. British merchant ships were being sunk at an alarming rate:



In November there was a time when London had only two days' supply of wheat left.

From the British government under Lloyd George would take steps to counteract the U-boat menace: merchant ships would be organised into convoys protected by the Royal Navy; British shipbuilding would be speeded up, and farmers would be encouraged to plant more wheat. But, in the meantime, Britain survived only because of a steady flow of shipping from outside the UK – from the Dominions and, above all,

from the USA. Woodrow Wilson, the President of this great neutral power, favoured Britain but was reluctant to enter the war unless the action of the USA could lead to an early compromise peace – which was unthinkable to Britain and France.

Long before, in May 1915, a German submarine had sunk the British liner *Lusitania*: 128 American civilians (and 1,073 other passengers and crew) had gone down with her. Few people knew that the *Lusitania* was also carrying arms to Britain. That sinking had provoked outrage but not war. Since then, however, the Germans had sunk a number of American ships – and every attack brought Woodrow Wilson closer to military action against Germany.

Now, in 1917, the German High Command could hardly doubt that if they set out to destroy all American shipping making its way to Britain, they would drive the USA into war. But to desperate men who believed that the war could not be won on land, it seemed a risk just worth taking. In the early months of unrestricted submarine warfare enough American ships might be sunk to destroy the British war effort.

The USA declared war on Germany on 6 April 1917. She had no army worth speaking of, but a quick glance at Chapter 1 will tell you what Germany had taken on – the world's greatest industrial power, with a population fast approaching one hundred millions. In 1917, while she trained her recruits, America was only a distant threat to Germany. By 1918, when the Eastern Front had collapsed and it was obvious that the war would be decided in the west, America was ready to feed her fresh young men into the line of battle.

More than any other event, the entry of the USA into the Great European War appeared to turn it into a world war: indeed, we often refer to it as the 'First World War'. In fact, what happened was not that the fighting spread further afield, but that Americans crossed the Atlantic to help settle Europe's problems for her. The soldiers would come first, and later their President would follow. The Americans were coming fit, confident and, of course, with the very best intentions.

Fourteen Points for a Just Peace

Woodrow Wilson's declaration of war would