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The government which Lenin and the Bolsheviks set up after the revolution of November 1917 was called 'Sovnarkom', short for Council of People's Commissars. During the next few weeks, Soviets all over Russia joined in the revolution and took control of most towns and cities. By the end of 1917 nearly all Russia was in Soviet hands.

This did not mean, however, that the Bolsheviks controlled Russia. Far from it: only fourteen of the twenty-five members of Sovnarkom were Bolsheviks; not all Soviets were run by Bolsheviks; and in the countryside most peasants supported the Socialist Revolutionary Party. Even more awkward from the Bolshevik point of view, the long-awaited elections for a Constituent Assembly (arranged by the Provisional Government earlier in the year - see page 32) gave a large majority to the Socialist Revolutionaries.

Lenin had no intention of sharing power with others in an elected parliament. When the Constituent Assembly met for the first time in January 1918, armed Bolsheviks closed it down - for good. In Lenin's view, his first tasks were to establish the authority of Sovnarkom and to crush any other parties or organisations that either demanded a share in government or threatened to undermine the Bolshevik Party.

Sovnarkom had already put an end to the private ownership of land (see page 34). It had gone on to issue a decree on work, establishing an eight-hour day and a forty-eight hour week; a decree on unemployment insurance, outlining plans for workers' insurance against injury, illness and unemployment; a decree on workers' control, putting all factories under the control of elected committees of workers; and a decree on banking, putting all banks in Russia under state control. Now Sovnarkom issued more decrees which pointed the way to the kind of Russia that Lenin intended to create. All titles and ranks were abolished: from now on, people were to call each other 'Comrade' or 'Citizen'. Women were declared to be the social equals of men. The Orthodox Church, which had already been stripped of its lands, was to stop teaching religion.

Some of this was merely tinkering with the old Russia. The new Russia could not be built until the

Bolsheviks had swept away the enemies within, who were already recruiting armies for the struggle. Even more urgent was the problem of the German armies still on Russian soil. For any Russian government that continued the war would risk losing whatever support it had among the people. The Provisional Government had made that mistake and Lenin was determined not to repeat it.

### The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk

Late in 1917, Trotsky, now Commissar for Foreign Affairs, led a team of negotiators to the headquarters of the German army in the Polish town of Brest-Litovsk. The German demands were so savage that Trotsky returned and advised Lenin to carry on with the war. But the Bolshevik leader was convinced that the future of Bolshevik Russia depended more than anything else on peace. He said to Trotsky:

"You yourself say that our trenches are deserted . . . At the moment there is nothing more important in the world than our revolution; the revolution has to be safeguarded no matter what the price."

In February 1918 the German armies rolled forward again: the Russians were unable to stop them. On 3 March the Russian negotiators were back in Brest-Litovsk to sign a peace treaty whose terms were even more humiliating than the Germans' original demands. Russia had to give up all her western territories - Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Ukraine and Georgia. As these were the richest areas of the country, Russia lost 62 million people - 26 per cent of the entire population - along with 27 per cent of her farm land, 26 per cent of the railway system and 74 per cent of her iron ore and coal. Russia also had to pay an indemnity of 300 million gold roubles to Germany.

### Reds and Whites: the Russian Civil War

No sooner had the Russian people shaken off the horrors of the Great War than they were plunged into the most vicious of civil wars. The new government

was attacked from all sides by the 'Whites', the enemies of the Bolsheviks, who included supporters of the former Tsar, landowners and Tsarist generals, as well as groups such as the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks with whom the Bolsheviks refused to share power. In the Ukraine, nationalists formed their own army and government to resist the Bolsheviks as well as the Germans who occupied their land. In the north, the Socialist Revolutionaries set up a government in Archangel, and troops led by General Mannerheim cleared the Bolsheviks out of Finland; while by the end of 1918 much of Siberia was controlled by a former Tsarist admiral, Kolchak, and his forces.

Sovnarkom was merely one government among many by the middle of 1918. Even the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk seemed to have backfired on Lenin. It had brought off the Germans but it had also aroused the wrath of Russia's wartime allies. They feared that the Germans would now be able to transfer their eastern armies to the Western Front. So, hoping to bring down Lenin and to establish a new, friendly government which would start fighting the Germans again, the British, French, Americans and Japanese sent troops to Russia to help the White armies fight the Bolsheviks.

The story of the fighting in the Civil War can be quickly told. The White armies were never a united force. They fought separate campaigns against a Red Army, created and commanded by Trotsky, which had the great strategic advantage of controlling the heartland of western Russia. The allied armies of intervention, made up of the odds and ends left over from the Western Front, fell into disorder when mutinies broke out among the French forces in Odessa, and were withdrawn early in 1919. The war lasted nearly two years. Both sides committed terrible atrocities, on each other and on the suffering people.

The Bolsheviks were prepared to use any means to survive and win the Civil War. One of those means was a new security police force which had been established in December 1917, the 'All-Russian Commission against Counter-Revolution, Sabotage and Speculation', known and feared by its short name - the Cheka. Led by Felix Dzerzhinsky, the Cheka organised a 'Red Terror' during the summer of 1918. Cheka units in the countryside hanged, beat, shot and tortured anyone who helped the Whites or fought for them. They spied on the Red Army and drove its soldiers into battle with

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machine-guns trained on their backs. Probably 50,000 people, Reds as well as Whites, died at the hands of the Cheka.

### War Communism

The Bolshevik government was equally harsh in its direction of the Russian economy. Sovnarkom took strict measures to organise industry and agriculture in the areas under its control. Its aims were to keep the Red Army supplied with food and with weapons, and to introduce a system of communism - the equal sharing of wealth. Under this 'War Communism' of 1918-21, Sovnarkom banned private trade, took (not bought) surplus food produced by the peasants to feed the hungry towns and the Red Army, and nationalised all factories and workshops which employed more than ten workers. The Supreme Council of National Economy (VSNKH) took over the management of industry, the Commissariat of Transportation managed the flow of goods and foodstuffs on the railways and waterways, while the Food Commissariat (Narkomprod) organised the rationing of food in the towns.

War Communism kept the Red Army going but it had grim, sometimes appalling, effects on the people in the towns. The Russian newspaper *Pravda* summed up the situation in an article on 26 February 1920:

"The workers of the towns and of some of the villages choke in the throes of hunger. The railroads barely crawl. The houses are crumbling. The towns are full of refuse. Epidemics spread and death strikes to the right and to the left."

The figures below will show you how near the Russian economy was to complete collapse in 1921.

Pig-iron production was only 2.4 per cent of the 1913 figure.

Iron ore production was only 1.7 per cent of the 1913 figure.

Coal production was only 27 per cent of the 1913 figure.

The harvest of food crops was 40 per cent below pre-war levels.

For every 100 horses in 1916, there were now only 75.

For every 100 cattle in 1916, there were now only 79.

For every 100 pigs in 1916, there were now only 72.

For every 100 sheep and goats in 1916, there were now only 55.

Then, in March 1921, the sailors in the port of Kronstadt, near Petrograd, rebelled against the government. The sailors demanded free elections for new soviets, freedom of speech, freedom of association and the right for peasants to farm their land freely. Trotsky, still *Commissar for War*, sent loyal Red Army troops against the sailors and after a battle that raged for ten days in blinding snowstorms, the mutineers were defeated and their leaders were shot.

### The New Economic Policy

The Kronstadt mutiny had failed; but it was, in Lenin's words, "the flash which lit up reality better than anything else". Lenin could see that government controls must be relaxed, and War Communism brought to an end. So in March 1921 the New Economic Policy (NEP) was launched. Private trade was permitted once again, peasants were allowed to sell their surplus produce, and many small factories returned to private ownership.

If we measure the effects of the NEP on agriculture by looking at how much more food was produced, then the following statistics show definite improvements:

	1922	1925
Grain harvest (million tonnes)	50.3	72.5
Horses (million head)	21.7	27.1
Cattle (million head)	45.8	62.1
Pigs (million head)	12.0	21.8

However, these figures don't tell the full story of what was happening to the Russian peasants. For a start, NEP came too late to affect the sowing of crops in 1921, and a dry summer ruined what was already a disastrous harvest. The result was a massive famine. Over five million peasants died of starvation. According to Pravda, more than 27 million people were living at below subsistence level. Cannibalism became common in the worst affected areas.

Even after the famine of 1921-22, NEP did not solve the problem of food shortages in the towns - and that was its primary aim. Although there was an increase in the amount of grain produced, the amount of grain sold by the peasants remained low - about 20 per cent of the total output. One very obvious reason for this was that as the peasants produced more, they also ate more - a very natural thing to do. They were using the NEP to fill their own bellies.



War, civil war, and now starvation. Just four victims among the millions, during the famine of 1921.

Chairman of each of the Soviets of remote villages in the back of beyond.

The Party could say that it operated a Soviet democracy; people stood for election; people turned out to vote. It was just that the result of any election was bound to be a Communist victory. Real power lay in the hands of the Party officials - the 'apparatchiks'.

The man who hired and fired those officials, who could promote a man's career in the Party 'organs' or ruin him, was the real ruler of the new Russia.

Lenin established a dictatorship which he and the Communist Party claimed to exercise on behalf of the Russian workers and peasants, but in doing so he established a system which could be corrupted into a dictatorship of one man.

Lenin died in January 1924, Petrograd was renamed Leningrad in his honour, and his mortal remains were embalmed and placed in a mausoleum in Red Square, Moscow - where they have remained on public display ever since.

### The Search for Security

The new Europe of the early 1920s was an explosive mixture of dissatisfied, angry and anxious states. In the three years after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, violent disturbances continued to shake Central and Eastern Europe. A chain of new states, from Finland in the north to Yugoslavia in the south, had been created to satisfy nationalists' demands for the right to govern themselves – yet there were still well over 20 million people living as minorities in states ruled by other nationalities. Out of Czechoslovakia's total population of some 14 millions, well over 4 million were Germans, Poles, Hungarians and Ruthenes. Among 12 million 'Yugoslavs' were nearly 2 million Germans, Romanians, Albanians and Hungarians. As a direct result of the peace settlement Romania had taken over more than a million and a half Hungarians.

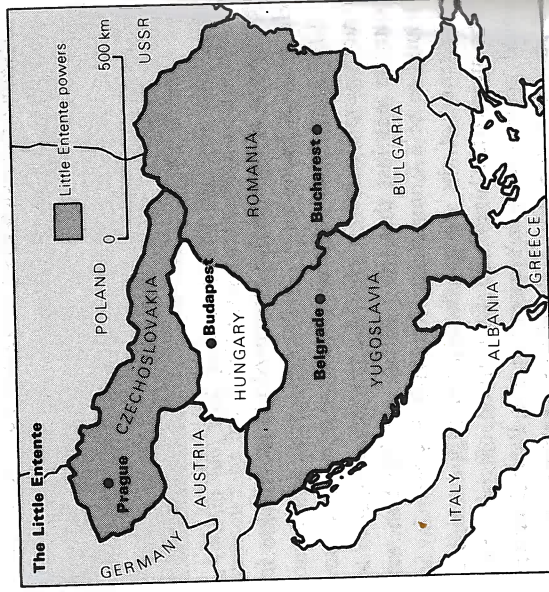
It was obvious that neither Germany nor Russia would be prepared to let things stand as they were. Both powers had lost lands which had been extremely valuable to the economies of their pre-war empires. For example, Russian oil fields had been given to Romania, and German coalmines in the east now belonged to the Poles. No European statesman could fail to see that one day Germany and Russia would try to re-draw the lines on the map which had taken land, people and power from them. To a casual observer, the Europe of, say, 1923 would have looked a much more dangerous place to live in than the Europe of June 1914. But the continent did not explode into war in the twenties – mainly because neither Germany nor Russia was strong enough to use force to alter the map. Instead those years were a period in which European countries tried to make themselves more secure by seeking alliances to protect themselves against likely enemies.

It was inevitable that the majority nationalities dominated the new states of Central and Eastern Europe: the Czechs in Czechoslovakia, the Serbs in Yugoslavia, the Poles in Poland. In some places minorities were treated fairly, as equal citizens: in others they got a raw deal. In good times – when most workers in the towns and cities had jobs, and when peasant farmers received a decent price for their surplus produce – minority peoples shared in the general well-being. When times became hard, as they did at

the end of the twenties, it would be a different story – of job discrimination in the interests of majorities; of new grievances on both sides to sharpen old dislikes.

Meanwhile, although complaints about the ill-treatment of minorities were often to be heard (especially from Germany, where a propaganda campaign was started against the treatment of brother Germans living in Poland), the new states survived and searched for friends who would guarantee their survival. In 1921 Poland formed a defensive alliance with France: a glance at the map of Europe on page 43 will tell you the enemy they would defend each other against. In 1922, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia came together in a 'Little Entente' to discourage Hungary from trying to take back the lands and peoples they had all seized from her at the end of the war. Two years later Czechoslovakia also formed an alliance with France. It looked as if a determined effort was being made by France in the West and four states in the East to make the new lines on the map permanent.

France wanted Britain to support the effort. But while Britain was willing to go to almost any lengths to defend her empire in Asia, she was not prepared to guarantee frontiers in 'faraway' Eastern Europe. Britain still thought of herself first as a great imperial, sea-going power: the idea that her future could be closely bound up with the goings on of Poles and Czechs came a very bad second.



Any disagreement between Britain and France was good news for Germany: it weakened the alliance against her in the West. Germany's aim in the mid-twenties was to separate France from her new friends in the East, the Poles and the countries of the Little Entente. That separation began with the Locarno Pact of 1925, which at first sight seemed to put an end to more than ten years of hostility in Europe, but which alarmed the leaders of the Eastern European states.

At the end of Chapter 11 (page 50) we noted that the agreements signed at Locarno included a promise by Germany, France and Belgium to respect the frontier between them which had been set down in the Treaty of Versailles. The results were that France at last began to feel safe from the awful possibility of a German attack; and Germany at last looked sufficiently respectable to be invited to join the League of Nations (an invitation she accepted in 1926). But you also saw on page 50 that the Locarno agreements did not curtail a German guarantee to respect the frontiers of Poland or Czechoslovakia. And now that France's frontier with Germany was guaranteed by the Locarno Pact, some French politicians began to think that France would be safer if she avoided alarming Germany by becoming too friendly with Poland and Czechoslovakia. In 1929 the French began to build massive fortifications – the Maginot Line – along their border with Germany, just in case the Germans didn't take the Locarno Pact as seriously as they had promised. And as they felt themselves more secure from attack, they attached less importance to their treaties with Poland and Czechoslovakia. The French were turning their backs, instead of their bayonets, to the East.

### Communist Russia and the Comintern

Far to the East lay the great new unknown factor in European politics – a Russia which had lost much of her territory but which now lay under communist rule. Perhaps only two things were certain about that country: its desperate need for breathing space in which to rebuild a shattered economy, and its leaders' fears of attacks from the West. The Western intervention in the Civil War of 1918–20 strengthened the communist belief that the state could not survive for long if the industrial countries of the West decided to pick up post-war quarrels and turn on Russia in an

attempt to destroy communism before it could seriously threaten their capitalist societies.

Following the example set by the Bolsheviks, communist parties quickly developed in several Western European countries – especially in Germany and Italy – and you will remember from Chapter 9 (page 39) that there were very real fears among the Allies of a wave of communist revolutions sweeping over Europe while the Big Three were still trying to agree on a peace settlement. Early in 1919 the Comintern (Communist International) was set up to oversee the actions of Marxist parties throughout the world. Socialist groups from most European countries joined the Comintern, calling themselves 'communist' parties, and committed to international revolution. After all, Marx had called for workers of all countries to unite and overthrow their masters. The Russian Soviet leaders may not have believed that international revolution would happen immediately, but they certainly hoped that the countries of the West would be weakened by strikes and disturbances in which the new communist parties would play a leading part.

The leadership of the Comintern was clearly in the hands of the Russians, who saw it as an instrument for weakening their European enemies. At the second congress of the Comintern, held in Moscow (the new capital of Russia) in 1920, a number of conditions were laid down for the parties who wished to join. Each party must be tightly disciplined and obey its leaders; all the parties must agree to the decisions of the Comintern; and every party was 'obliged to give unconditional support to any Soviet republic in its struggle against counter-revolutionary forces'. 'Soviet' here meant communist, and at that time the only communist republic in the world was Russia.

There was nothing very surprising about the Russians taking over the leadership of the international communist movement. But it meant that what the Comintern did in future would be decided by the policies and personalities of the Russian Communist Party. However, as early as 1921 communist rebellions had been defeated in Hungary and Germany and it was becoming clear that the non-revolutionary socialist parties (which were not members of the Comintern) had far more support than the communist parties among workers and peasants outside Russia. Despite the strenuous efforts of its Chairman, Grigori Zinoviev, the Comintern never stood any real chance of lighting the spark of revolution in Europe.