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**TITLE:** Politics and Society in Petrograd,  
1917-1920: The Bolsheviks, the  
Lower Classes, and Soviet Power,  
Petrograd, February 1917-July 1918

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### **NCSEER NOTE**

This report is based mainly on the first of a projected 2-volume study of politics and society in Petrograd from February 1917 to the end of the Russian civil war in 1920. The study is still underway and the author is in Moscow to research the KGB and Presidential Archives as access is beginning. The Report consists of (a) a description of the purpose and conditions of the work, including aspects of the August 1991 coup as witnessed in Leningrad by the author; (b) a brief description of the first volume, a summary of which is in the ANNEX following page 11; and (c) a section on historic parallels of that earlier period with the present, pages 6-11.

The paper has been considerably shortened by Council staff, mainly to eliminate descriptions of archives researched and other work done. The original is available from the Council on request.

## Executive Summary

During the contract period, I worked on the concluding part of a multi-volume history of the Bolshevik/Communist party in Petrograd, and revolutionary politics and society in the former Russian capital, between the fall of the old Tsarist regime in February 1917 and the end of the Russian civil war in 1920. The first two volumes of this study, covering the period from the February through the October 1917 Revolutions, were published in the United States some time ago and, more recently, in Russia. The concluding part of my study, focused on the first three years of Bolshevik rule in Petrograd, aims to evaluate the impact of the civil war crisis on the people of Petrograd, on revolutionary aims and ideals, and on the early development of the ultra-authoritarian Soviet political system. The study, taken as a whole, has intrinsic contemporary interest in that the 1917-1920 period witnessed the first comprehensive attempt by Russia to transform itself from a dictatorship into a Western-style democracy, just as it is seeking to do today.

Soon after I arrived in Moscow in June 1991 to begin what I thought would be the final stages of research on this project, I found that unprecedented opportunities for access to archives on my topic were rapidly emerging. Moreover, the failed August 1991 coup further improved these opportunities. As a result, I spent nearly 8 months in Russia studying extraordinarily illuminating sources in both government and party archives--many of which had not previously been accessible even to Soviet historians. These sources included a wide variety of top-secret protocols, directives, letters, memoranda, and other kinds of original records touching on virtually all facets of my subject.

Although I was unable to work in either the KGB or Presidential Archives (these repositories of the party's most politically sensitive secrets are only now opening up), it is difficult to exaggerate the value of the archival material I was able to collect. The new sources have enabled me to reconstruct events and to clarify significant, previously obscure political and social phenomena, as well as the dynamics of change, with a degree

of depth and specificity impossible earlier. If pressed to sum up what I have learned, it would be that the earliest stage in the development of Soviet authoritarianism was infinitely more fluid and complex than traditional interpretations, based largely on Leninist theory and on incomplete knowledge of elite politics, have led us to believe.

Indeed, there is so much new and important information that I have decided to divide the concluding part of my study into two separate volumes. The first volume, which is partially drafted, covers the period between October 1917 and August 1918. At the start of this period, despite the Bolsheviks' independent seizure of power, there was still a reasonable possibility that the goal of establishing a multi-party democratic socialist Soviet government shared by a broad spectrum of Left Socialist groups, including a majority of Bolshevik leaders around the country, might yet be realized. By August 1918, this alternative had long since vanished and some of the key characteristics of Soviet-style communism first appeared.

Central themes examined in this volume include the struggle of Bolshevik moderates to create a multi-party democratic socialist government and to recognize the supreme authority of the Constituent Assembly; the dynamics and lasting structural legacy of the bitter intra-party battle over the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk; and the short and long term impact on the party of the life and death struggle for survival during the first ten months of Soviet rule. Up to now, we could study only the edges of these issues.

Other fateful questions for the future of the Soviet system that I focus upon are the early competition for political supremacy at the national level between the multi-party Central Executive Committee (a forerunner of the present Supreme Soviet), and the exclusively Bolshevik government, the Council of People's Commissars, headed by Lenin; the disintegration of centralized political authority throughout the former Tsarist empire exemplified in Petrograd by the creation of the autonomous "Northern Commune" (as well as the earliest stage in "recentralization" of political authority and in communist state building); and the evolving roles of such ad hoc, ultimately ultra-powerful organs of state security as the Military Revolutionary Committee and the Cheka (the first precursors of the GPU and the KGB).

Finally, I examine such fundamental, ultimately decisive cultural, economic, and social issues as the evolution of working class culture; the political economic, social, and

demographic impact of dire food and fuel shortages, skyrocketing unemployment, chaotic demobilization and evacuation policies, and sharpening class and civil conflict (often the result of Bolshevik policies specifically aimed at intensifying social divisions). The book ends with a detailed reconstruction and analysis of the "Red Terror" and the crisis of Soviet power in Petrograd in the late spring and summer of 1918 (arguably, the gravest threat faced by the Bolsheviks in Petrograd during the entire civil war period).

Key characteristics of Soviet-style communism emerge clearly from reconstruction of the events covered in this volume. They include a deeply felt siege mentality and the encouragement of violence in dealing with real and invented class enemies; strict curbs on or outright prohibition of competing parties and popular movements; discouragement of meaningful dissent even within the party; the bureaucratization of party organizations, soviets, factory committees, and other mass organizations; the absolute supremacy of party over soviet organs; and strict subordination of lower to higher party and soviet organs. At the point at which this volume ends, some of these characteristics were well advanced. Others were just beginning to take shape. Perhaps none was then irreversible. However, between the fall of 1918 and the end of 1920, as the civil war crisis in Petrograd progressed, all became enduring features of everyday life. The dynamics of this process will be the primary focus of the second volume.

Experiencing Russia's present democratic revolution at first hand during an extended period has itself been immensely worthwhile in terms of relating Russia's tragic history to her present predicament. This was especially true during the August coup, when I roamed the streets of the city that was the focus of my historical research, trying as best I could to follow and gain insight into the behavior of the broadest possible range of "Leningraders." Two impressions from those days remain sharply etched in my mind. One is the enormous collective power of the hundreds of thousands of citizens from all walks of life who, when Russia's democratic future appeared at immediate risk, packed the Winter Palace Square to protest "fascism" and seemed fully prepared to risk their lives to defend the reformist city government. The other was the complete failure of efforts by the "putchisti" to bloc the flow of information from abroad and around the country, making clear the vast significance of new communication technologies for Russia's political future.

Both the 1917 revolutions and the revolution triggered by Gorbachev in 1985 were deeply rooted in the political, social, economic and cultural realities of Russia's past. In both cases, initial hopes of limiting and controlling change were frustrated. In 1917, as today, the breakdown of political authority at the center resulted in the upsurge of regionalism: the "Northern Commune's" insistence on controlling its own destiny is analogous to contemporary Petersburg's demand for status as a "Free Economic Zone." With Gorbachev as with Kerensky, realization of democratic goals was frustrated by a widely shared political culture in which appreciation of democratic values and responsibilities was largely absent. Moreover, early broad popular support for both Kerensky and Gorbachev was rapidly eroded by popular frustration over growing shortages of food and other necessities and, more generally, by deepening chaos in all aspects of Russian life.

Perhaps the biggest difference between the situations is that by 1917 Tsarist officials were bankrupt and powerless, while today, the Congress of People's Deputies and Supreme Soviet elected under the Communist regime, as well as holdover officials throughout Russia, still constitute a significant political force and an impediment to radical change.

At the end of 1991, after Gorbachev's fall and the demise of the Soviet Union, it was widely expected that Boris Yeltsin would have an easier time of it. However, the fundamental barriers that had thwarted Gorbachev's attempted democratization, many of which had earlier plagued Kerensky, were still firmly in place. Will the difficulty of present-day efforts to create a democratic system end as they did in 1917-1920, that is, in the imposition of a new authoritarianism dedicated to the building of some kind of utopian state? It seems to me that there are at least a few hopeful signs that this will not occur. Despite the ostensible attractions of the ultra-nationalist "red-brown movement," it has thus far failed to attract a mass following. Most important, the results of the April 1993 national referendum, in which the continuation of democratic reform received strong endorsement, suggest that despite the horror of daily life, forced to make a choice between a partial return to the old order and persevering along the painful, uncertain road to the new, millions of Russians support moving ahead.

## POLITICS AND SOCIETY IN PETROGRAD<sup>1</sup>, 1917-1920:

### The Bolsheviks, the Lower Classes, and Soviet Power, Petrograd, February 1917-July 1918

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#### I. Purpose of Project

The purpose of my project is to complete research and writing of the concluding part of a multi-volume history of the Bolshevik or Communist party in Petrograd, and revolutionary politics and society in the former Russian capital, between the fall of the old Tsarist regime in February 1917 and the end of the Russian civil war in 1920. The first two volumes of this study were published in English sometime ago. (One of these volumes was translated into Russian and produced in a mass circulation edition in Moscow in 1989. A Russian edition of the other volume was published in Moscow in September, 1992.) These first two volumes covered the period from the February 1917 Revolution through the October 1917 Revolution that brought the Bolsheviks to power. A major aim of the concluding part of my study, focused on the first three years of Bolshevik rule in Petrograd, is to evaluate the impact of the civil war crisis on the people of Petrograd, on revolutionary aims and ideals, and on the earliest development of the ultra-authoritarian Soviet political system.

The study, taken as a whole, has intrinsic contemporary interest in that the 1917-1920 period witnessed the first comprehensive attempt by Russia to transform its political system from a dictatorship into a Western-style democracy; parallels between difficulties encountered then and the situation prevailing in the Russian federation today are many and striking.

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<sup>1</sup>Petrograd was renamed Leningrad in 1924, after Lenin's death; it reverted to its pre-1914 name of St. Petersburg in 1991

## **2. Work Completed During Contract Period**

I had already spent many years scouring Western archives and libraries, as well as libraries in Russia for data pertaining to my study. Therefore, I envisioned doing no more than two to three months of supplementary research in Moscow and Leningrad. At the beginning of June 1991, when I began supplementary research in Moscow, it immediately became clear that my modest expectations regarding archival access were out of date. With relatively little difficulty, I was given permission to use valuable, previously classified files in the Central State Archive of the October Revolution (although, it quickly became clear that some key documents known to be in this archive were still "secret"). What is more, utilizing contacts developed over many years, within several weeks I was granted access to files in the previously sacred Central [Communist] Party Archive. While these developments significantly increased my opportunity to deepen my research in ways that I would not have dreamed possible months earlier, in the Central Party Archive even more than in the State archive, it was apparent that some files of great potential value for my research were still being held back. I was also aware that beginning in the Stalinist era additional important materials had been transferred to the so-called KGB archives or to the "Presidential Archive" in the Kremlin, either because they were used in this or that political trial or because for one reason or another, they were considered to be specially sensitive. Essentially these same conditions pertained in Leningrad archives when I began to work there at the beginning of August, 1991.

With respect to those archives in Moscow and Petersburg to which I already had access, the abortive August 1991 coup turned out to have immense significance for the success of my research. At the time the coup began, I was working very profitably in the Leningrad party archive. However, the opportunity to witness an attempted coup in practice was too much to resist. For the better part of three days and nights I roamed the streets of the city trying as best I could to follow and gain insight into the behavior of the broadest possible range of "Leningraders" (many of whom, to my initial shock, seemed less concerned with the success or failure of the coup then underway than with the difficulties of shopping and other ever harsher realities of daily life). I took part in rallies and marches organized to demonstrate support for Yeltsin and ended each evening at the barricades built

around the headquarters of the Leningrad Soviet (i.e., the city government) on St. Isaacs Square, mingling in the crowds waiting nervously for tanks which mercifully remained on the outskirts of the city for the duration of the crisis.

Though the coup collapsed quickly, its initial effect on my work was catastrophic. Within a few days after its disintegration, triumphant civil authorities seized and sealed all property of the Communist Party, including the party archive in which I was working. Again, however, long-standing contacts proved invaluable. After two weeks, and months before the party archive officially reopened, I was quietly permitted to resume work there. And from then on, in the State and Party Archives both in Leningrad and later in Moscow, I was given materials denied me before the coup. To my knowledge there was no change in directives affecting archival access at this time. The pace with which archives were formally declassified was still agonizingly slow (no doubt partly because of staffing shortages). Rather, for the time being, it was as if at least some archival administrators now recognized that attempts to restrict access to materials under their supervision no longer had much point and, indeed, that they might be better off vis-a-vis new authorities if they appeared "progressive." Then, too, it became clear to me that with the onset of "glasnost" at least some archivists had become increasingly uncomfortable with their roles as "policemen." Having found a sense of liberation in the post-coup atmosphere, they no longer felt bound by old restrictions, now seemingly completely outdated. My impression was that this was especially true of lower level archival staff. In any event, I extended my stay in Leningrad for several extra weeks to take advantage of my good fortune.

I returned to what was now the "former" Soviet Union for further research at the beginning of June 1992. At that time the archive administration was in greater disarray than ever. Particularly in Moscow, it now appeared that commercial considerations would place new impediments in the way of access to archives (suddenly, it seemed everybody was out for a quick buck). Files that had previously been available became inaccessible because they were being filmed by the Hoover Institution or another foreign agency, or rights to them were being negotiated, etc. One reflection of this new and ominous concern of the archival administration with maximizing financial returns on historical archives was that in some repositories file guides (opisi) abruptly "disappeared" from open shelves, thereby

significantly complicating the task of identifying and ordering materials. Also photocopying became easier but at wildly high prices.

Fortunately, such problems did not significantly hinder my work. However, the work of others was inevitably impeded; this was especially true of foreign scholars in the beginning stages of research and doctoral students from abroad, often Americans, with limited funds. With regard to my own situation at the time of my departure from Moscow in August 1992, while still unsuccessful in gaining access to the KGB and Presidential archives, I was satisfied that in those archives accessible to me, I had collected all of the material of critical importance for the successful completion of my project that had been declassified or that was otherwise available up to that time. It began to seem logical to divide the work into two parts, which I now envision as two separate volumes.

### **3. Current Status of Project**

The first volume, approximately half of which is embodied in rewritten chapters, covers the period between October 1917 and August 1918.<sup>2</sup> Among the topics focused upon in this volume are such central, previously little-studied aspects of Bolshevik party history as the struggle of Bolshevik moderates to create a multi-party democratic socialist government and to recognize the authority of the Constituent Assembly (this effort was much more broadly based and lasted much longer than previously assumed); the dynamics and structural legacy of the bitter intra-party battle over the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk; and the impact of the beginning of the Bolshevik's life and death struggle for survival in the Russian the civil war.

I also examine such fateful systemic problems as the competition between the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Sovnarkom for governmental supremacy at the national level; the disintegration of centralized political authority throughout the former Tsarist empire in the aftermath of the October revolution exemplified in the creation in Petrograd of the autonomous "Northern Commune" (as well as the earliest stage in the "recentralization" of political authority and Communist state building); the first critical steps in the definition of the relationship between party and soviets; and the evolving roles of such

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<sup>2</sup>See ANNEX following page 11.

ad hoc, ultimately ultra-powerful organs of state security as the Military Revolutionary Committee and the Cheka (the earliest forerunners of the GPU and the KGB).

Finally, in this volume I study such fundamental, ultimately decisive cultural, economic, and social issues as the evolution of working class political culture; the political, economic, social and demographic impact of dire food and fuel shortages, skyrocketing unemployment, chaotic demobilization and evacuation policies, and sharpening class and civil conflict (often the result of Bolshevik policies specifically aimed at intensifying tensions). This volume ends with a detailed reconstruction and analysis of the crisis of Soviet power in Petrograd in the late spring and summer of 1918 (in my view the gravest threat faced by the Bolsheviks in Petrograd during the entire civil war period). This crisis culminated in an armed uprising on behalf of reconvening the Constituent Assembly triggered jointly by workers in one of Petrograd's largest factories, the Obukhov plant, and by mutinying sailors from a formidable mine-laying flotilla based nearby; a one-day general political strike organized by the Extraordinary Assembly; the Left SR's assassination of Count Mirbach (the German Ambassador to Russia), and the Left SR's ill-prepared, easily suppressed uprising; all followed by the "official" proclamation and implementation of the "Red terror."

At the start of the period covered in this volume, despite the Bolsheviks' independent seizure of power, there was still a possibility that the goal of establishing a multi-party democratic socialist Soviet government shared by a broad spectrum of Left Socialist groups, including a majority of Bolshevik leaders around the country, might yet be realized. By August 1918, this alternative had collapsed and some of the key characteristics of Soviet-style communism first appeared.

These characteristics emerge clearly from my reconstruction of the events covered in this volume. They included a deeply felt siege mentality and the encouragement of violence in dealing with real and invented class enemies; strict curbs on or outright prohibition of competing parties and popular movements; discouragement of meaningful dissent even within the party; the bureaucratization of party organizations, soviets, factory committees, and other mass organizations; the absolute political supremacy of party over soviet organs; and strict subordination of lower to higher party and soviet organs. In August 1918, at the point at which this volume will end, some of these characteristics were well advanced. Others were

just beginning to take shape. Perhaps none was as yet irreversible. However between the fall of 1918 and the end of 1920, as the civil war crisis in Petrograd progressed, all became enduring features of everyday life. The dynamics of this process will be the primary focus of the second volume.

#### **4. Historical Parallels**

Among historians, the drawing of parallels between developments during the 1917-1920 period and the momentous events that have taken place in Russia since 1985 have been commonplace. While such intellectual exercises can and have been overdone, this penchant is understandable. As noted earlier, the 1917-1920 period witnessed the first attempt by Russia to transform itself from an autocracy into a Western-style democracy.

Both the 1917 revolutions and the revolution triggered by Gorbachev in 1985 were deeply rooted in the realities of Russia's past--in late imperial Russia's political, social, and economic inequities and contradictions, in the first case, and in the inability of Brezhnev's bureaucratic and corrupt "administrative-command" system to halt the Soviet Union's economic decline, in the second case. In both cases, initial hopes of limiting and controlling change were frustrated. Thus in the wake of the February Revolution the liberal Provisional Government sought to postpone fundamental economic and social reform until the war was over and a "properly" elected Constituent Assembly could be convened and could go about the business of creating a new democratic Russia in peaceful conditions. Moreover, until the fall of 1917, the moderate socialists who initially controlled the popularly elected councils or soviets representing workers, peasants, and soldiers that were spawned by the revolution gave at least grudging support to this policy. However, the educated middle class civic society necessary to stop the radical revolutionary storm unleashed by the disintegration of the old order was still quite weak by Western standards. Despite the support of the moderate socialists, the Provisional Government was unable to suppress the demands of long pent-up social and political forces "from below" for immediate radical change, especially once Lenin came on the scene.

Similarly, beginning in 1985 the Soviet government under Gorbachev sought to contain change within narrow bounds. Thus it strived to accelerate economic productivity

through such measures as the curbing of alcohol abuse, intensified labor discipline and, a bit later, the reorganization of factory management. In 1987, only after it became apparent that such relatively modest steps were having little impact, did Gorbachev adopt the more far reaching policies of "glasnost," "perestroika," and democratization. Reformed soviets, capped by a national Congress of People's Deputies and a smaller permanent working legislature (the Supreme Soviet), were now given authoritative independent roles in government. Electoral procedures were liberalized and the Bolsheviks' most popular slogan in 1917, "All Power to the Soviets!", was hastily resurrected and given new life.

Significant, albeit largely unsuccessful attempts were also made to encourage democratization and "socialist pluralism" within the Communist party. However while a multiplicity of political groups flourished on the sidelines, the Soviet Union remained a one-party state and the Communist party officially retained its leading policy defining role.

Meanwhile the policy of glasnost, the primary purposes of which included exposing abuses of power and discrediting Stalinist authoritarianism once and for all, was gradually undermining the entire Soviet one-party political system. As one observer put it, "Once opened, the Pandora's box of post 1917 history released an angry swarm of ghosts and revelations so damning and so hopelessly intertwined with the tribulations of the present that they helped carry off not only the garrulous Mr. Gorbachev but even a seemingly unassailable system that had been in power for nearly 75 years." By the end of 1990 and the first half of 1991, in significant ways the situation confronting Gorbachev was akin to that faced by Kerensky during the summer of 1917. Realization of traditional democratic goals was frustrated by a widely shared political culture in which appreciation of democratic values and responsibilities was largely absent. With Gorbachev as with Kerensky, early broad popular support was quickly eroded by popular frustration over growing shortages of food and other necessities of life and, more generally, by deepening chaos in all aspects of Russian life. As in the case of the Tsarist empire, the collapse of traditional centralized authority under Gorbachev led inexorably to the breakup of the entire Soviet state.

In the newly established "Russian Federation" Gorbachev was forced to compete for authority with a popularly elected President and long time rival, Boris Yeltsin. Attacked by the left for the slow pace of political and economic reform, and by the center and right for

presiding over the demise of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of law and order, Gorbachev, like Kerensky before him, eventually moved rightward. Ironically both men were gravely compromised by short-lived tragicomic rightist coups, Kerensky by the so-called "Kornilov affair" at the end of August 1917, and Gorbachev by the August 1991 putsch. Significantly, both Kornilov and Yanayev were appointed by Kerensky and Gorbachev, respectively, not long before their attacks. Both conspiracies were badly planned and served only to temporarily unite democratic forces. (In both cases, key rebels spent the most critical hours of their adventure drinking!)

The parallels do not end here. Neither Kerensky nor Gorbachev learned from their experiences (and, in any event, perhaps it was too late for that). At the end of August 1917, Kerensky resisted immediate fundamental change as fiercely as ever, just as Gorbachev returned from his Crimean ordeal still oriented toward reform of the Communist party and the realization of a more humane form of socialism. However admirable their motives, both men were hopelessly out of touch with popular sentiment. Within months both were swept from the political scene--Kerensky, by the Bolsheviks in the name of democratic socialism in October 1917, and Gorbachev at the end of 1991 by the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the name of national self-determination, Western-style political democracy, and a full-blown free market economy.

It was widely expected that Gorbachev's successor in what was left of Russia, Boris Yeltsin, would have an easier time of it. Historians should have known better. Revolutions, especially democratic revolutions, are never easy! The fundamental impediments that had thwarted Gorbachev's attempted democratization, many of which had earlier plagued Kerensky, were still firmly in place to haunt Yeltsin. These included lack of familiarity with Western-style democracy and free enterprise, and, at a popular level, traditional reliance on a strong centralized patrimonial state. As in the case of Kerensky, the efforts of both Gorbachev and Yeltsin to construct a new democratic political system has been undermined most of all by dire economic problems (although the causes of these problems differ).

Perhaps the biggest difference between the two cases is that by 1917 Tsarist officials, unlike conservative former Communist officials today, were completely bankrupt and powerless. Thus when conservative members of the Imperial Duma tried to meet and to exert

institutional political influence after the February revolution the only thing they accomplished was to trigger a public scandal while today, the Congress of People's Deputies and Supreme Soviet elected under the Communist regime, as well as holdover officials throughout Russia, still constitute a significant political force and impediment to radical change.

Will the difficulty of present-day efforts to create a democratic system end up as they did in 1917-1920, that is in the imposition of a new authoritarianism dedicated to the building of some kind of new utopian state? In slightly varying forms this question, more frequently than any other, was posed to me during the research trips to Russia described above--especially if my interlocutor connected my name with my writings. I must confess there were many moments, especially during the summer of 1992, when it seemed to me that the reform movement could not possibly survive unless it was slowed or suspended (continued "shock therapy" seemed intolerable). My feelings of hopelessness were fed by my knowledge of Russia's tortured past, as well as by innumerable conversations with Russians in all walks of life, albeit all them either in Moscow or St. Petersburg. Intellectuals, professionals, housewives, students, taxi drivers, young and the old (it didn't seem to matter), appeared ever more demoralized and desperate for personal security at any cost. The exception were growing numbers of young entrepreneurs and former party apparatchiks--whom everyone else despised and took for granted were part of the ostentatious and corrupt "mafia."

Two revealing events interrupted this generally gloomy picture for me and give me pause in thinking about Russia's future, even when prospects for continued peaceful reform have seemed at their worst. The first of these events was the Presidential campaign won by Yeltsin in June 1991. The energy and idealism demonstrated by Yeltsin's faithful as I observed them at first hand in this first free "national" election in Russia since the elections to the Constituent Assembly in mid-November 1917 were an enduring inspiration.

The second such singularly illuminating event was the failed putsch of August 1991. To be sure, as already noted, the putsch failed in part because of bad planning; the conspirators were, it quickly became apparent, an incredibly mediocre lot. However, that was not the main thing. Despite the seeming indifference of many citizens at the height of the crisis, what has remained most vivid in my mind is the fierce determination with which hundreds of thousands of people, whether building barricades around the Leningrad Soviet or

rallying on the Winter Palace Square, were ready to fight in defense of their newly won freedoms, notwithstanding their frustration with the still largely negative results of systemic reform. Also, still clearly etched in my mind is the significance for Russia's political future of new communication technologies. Efforts by the "putschisti" to bloc the flow of information from abroad and around the country by imposing strict controls over television, radio, and the press were completely unsuccessful. The impossibility of reestablishing a closed society became immediately apparent; it seemed that almost everybody who cared had access to CNN, the BBC, telephones, Xerox and fax machines, and even electronic mail.

The triumph over the "putschisti," constantly reenforced by endless television replays of the most memorable images of the crisis, stimulated a wave of national pride, skyrocketing support for Yeltsin, and even a measure of euphoria about the future. "We finally showed the whole world we can do something right," was a common refrain. However, as the harsh reality of the approaching winter set in, and for unexplained reasons Yeltsin failed to capitalize on his new won popularity, this momentary upbeat mood quickly dissipated. By the time I suspended my research and left Russia in October 1991, it had disappeared altogether.

When I returned to Russia during the summer of 1992, the economic situation of most people I spoke with, as well as the prevailing popular mood generally, was bleaker than ever. Thanks in part to the effects of the bitter conflict over political power between reformers led by Yeltsin, on the hand, and the "old guard" in the Congress of People's Deputies and the Supreme Soviet, on the other, the Russian state had resumed its slide into what many viewed as utter chaos and anarchy.

Ostensibly, the future of democracy in Russia was again very much in doubt. Still, the two events just touched on, the Presidential elections of June 1991 and the failed putsch the following August, engender hope that Russia's trials might yet be resolved by the establishment of a democratic system rather than the imposition of a new dictatorship. The results of the April 1993 national referendum in which the continuation of democratic reform received surprisingly strong endorsement is yet another, more recent sign pointing in the same direction. As at the time of the August putsch, despite the continuing horror of everyday life, forced to make a choice between a partial return to the old order and

persevering along the painful, uncertain road toward the new, millions of voters supported continuing to move forward.

A freely elected constituent assembly (or constitutional conference whose work would be subject to ratification by another national referendum) now appears to be the next logical step in the establishment and legitimation of a permanent democratic political system in Russia (just as it was in 1917/1918). Peaceful settlement of differences over Russia's new state structure as embodied in a new constitution between Yeltsin, the Congress of People's Deputies, competing political parties, and increasingly assertive economic and regional interests will not be easy. How it will all end is impossible to predict--the stakes involved are obviously enormous. However the domestic environment in which this second national Constituent Assembly takes place, despite its extreme complexity, will surely be more propitious than it was in January 1918. Then the Taurida Palace in which the Constituent Assembly met was controlled by troops fanatically loyal to the existing Soviet dictatorship. They dispersed the Assembly as soon as it became clear that it would not recognize the supreme authority of Soviet power. Hopefully, today's changed circumstances preclude repetition of this tragic outcome.

**The Bolsheviks, the Lower Classes, and Soviet Power:****Petrograd, February 1917-July 1918.**

In the late spring of 1917, the Bolshevik party in Petrograd first began to acquire the broad popular support which in October of that year enabled it to take power and to form the first Russian Soviet government. Yet barely 6 months later, this popular support had badly eroded. The dynamic between the Bolsheviks, the lower classes,<sup>1</sup> and Soviet power in Petrograd had undergone drastic change. As the Bolsheviks struggled to adapt to these circumstances and to retain power in the face of ever deepening economic and social crises, some of the key characteristics of the ultra-authoritarian Communist system which was to endure for the better part of a century first emerged. In my paper I would like to focus attention, however briefly, on a few of what seem to me to have been the defining stages in this fateful transformation.

**February to August, 1917**

The first of these stages can be said to have begun with Lenin's call for an immediate socialist revolution and transfer of all governmental power to the Soviets upon his return to Petrograd from Switzerland in April 1917.<sup>2</sup> Lenin's return coincided with the last sessions of a gathering of more than 100 Bolshevik leaders from all over Russia (the numerical and qualitative equivalent of a national party congress), that convened in Petrograd to prepare for the First All-Russian Conference of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' deputies.<sup>3</sup> Prior to Lenin's appearance, under the strong influence of party moderates led by Lev Kamenev, the Bolshevik gathering had adopted

a resolution of qualified support for the Provisional Government that was very close to the Menshevik-SR position. In fact the Bolsheviks subsequently supported the majority resolution on the government adopted by the Conference of Soviets itself.<sup>4</sup> The Bolshevik gathering had also adopted a "defensist" position on the war effort. Equally telling, it had agreed to begin discussions on unification with the Mensheviks aimed at the reestablishment of a united Russian social democratic party.

To be sure, Lenin himself soon retreated from the goal of an immediate socialist revolution. Moreover throughout 1917 an attraction for political collaboration with other Left socialist groups remained far stronger among Bolsheviks at the national and local levels than has commonly been assumed. Nonetheless, Lenin's intervention resulted in the almost immediate scuttling of unification talks and, following the April national party conference, in establishing the Bolsheviks' commitment to immediate peace, radical economic and social reform, and "peoples power" exercised throughout a countrywide network of democratically elected, multi-party worker, soldier and peasant soviets.

Lenin's pre-1917 conception of a small, highly centralized professional party was abandoned. Organizational structures were decentralized and democratized and the party admitted thousands of fresh recruits from Petrograd factories and military units. So it was that after the formation of the first liberal-moderate socialist cabinet in May, the Bolsheviks were perfectly positioned to respond to and draw strength from popular frustration with the results of the February revolution, and with the conservative foreign and domestic policies of the Provisional Government. It was precisely now that the Bolsheviks armed with a political program that corresponded to the most deeply felt

aspirations of workers, soldiers, and peasants, began to develop strong structural links with major Petrograd factories and military units, and to gain strong influence in such mass labor organizations as trade unions and factory shop committees, as well as in such embryonic institutions of popular self-government as district Soviets.

In Petrograd the initial results of Bolshevik organizational efforts at the grass roots level, and of the magnetic attraction of the party's radical political program among the city's lower classes, was demonstrated with particular force on June 18 (during the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets). On that day the Bolsheviks successfully transformed a mass march intended as an expression of solidarity with the policies of the moderate socialist national Soviet leadership into a powerful show of support for an end to coalition with the liberals, immediate peace, and Soviet power. However, two weeks later, on July 3-5, the strategic risk in tying the party's policies too closely to the most militant elements of the lower classes was amply demonstrated; at that time the leadership of the Bolshevik Military Organization and individual members of the Petersburg Committee, responsive to strong pressure from garrison soldiers threatened with immediate transfer to the front, helped organize and spread the July uprising against the expressed wishes of the party Central Committee.<sup>5</sup>

On the eve of the July uprising, the continuing predilection of a majority of the Bolshevik Central Committee for collaboration with other Left Socialist groups was reflected in the Central Committee's decision to try to unite all "internationalist" social democratic organizations at a national party congress, then scheduled to convene on July 20.<sup>6</sup> Following the collapse of the July uprising, after the moderate socialist Soviet

leadership gave the Provisional Government a virtual blank check to suppress the Bolsheviks, a Central Committee conference rejected Lenin's demand that the party's emphasis on the Soviets as future government organs be abandoned and that it reorient its thinking to the eventual seizure of power independently of the Soviets. The results of this conference suggest that the impulse of many of Lenin's colleagues to unite all Left forces in defense of the revolution, and of the Soviets as their political embodiment, was, if anything, reinforced by the July experience.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, this impulse responded to the mood of the Petrograd lower classes, as eloquently reflected in a resolution supported by all Left Socialist groups and passed by the Narva District Soviet at this time:

In view of the extreme internal and external dangers threatening our country, we believe that disorganization in the ranks of the revolutionary democracy...is intolerable and harmful. Furthermore, we believe that all political groupings and multifarious shades of opinion came from "above." The majority of those "below" don't understand, don't know, indeed can't even comprehend..all of their disputes. We appeal...to all those who are participating in the common revolutionary struggle and who value our newly won freedom...to respond to our call. We recommend that they rally around the Soviet of Workers' and Soldier's Deputies as the highest organ of democracy. We propose that those above find a common language so that united we can struggle against the enemies of the revolution.<sup>8</sup>

#### August to October 1917

To many Left political leaders (Bolsheviks, Menshevik-Internationalists, and Left SR's alike), the swift and bloodless defeat of General Lavr Kornilov's attempted rightist putsch at the end of August was further testimony to the enormous potential power of all socialist groups working together. As nearly as I have been able to tell, among Petrograd workers, soldiers, and Baltic fleet sailors who expressed themselves politically in any way, the demand for establishment of a homogeneous socialist government now

became close to universal. It is of course true that at the Democratic State Conference in mid-September this greatly strengthened demand for radical transformation of the government was insufficient to overcome the resistance to a break with the bourgeoisie on the part of relatively conservative delegates from the provinces, predominantly from non-soviet "democratic" institutions.<sup>9</sup> However, for practical purposes this setback simply refocused attention on a nationwide assembly of Soviet representatives as the arbiter of national politics. No sooner did the Democratic State Conference close, than the Bolsheviks, Left SR's, and Menshevik-Internationalists set their sights on the formation of a homogeneous socialist coalition government at an early national Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, initially scheduled to convene on October 20 and subsequently postponed until the 25th. Moreover, in the weeks immediately following it appeared so certain that a majority of deputies to this Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies would overwhelmingly support formation of an exclusively socialist coalition government, and popular opposition to usurpation of the Congress's prerogatives in the prevailing circumstances was so great, that a majority of the Bolshevik leadership in Petrograd turned a deaf ear to Lenin's frenetic demands, first made from a hideout in Finland at the beginning of the Democratic State Conference, that the party take upon itself immediate organization of an uprising against the Provisional Government "without losing an instant."<sup>10</sup>

It is a little known fact that soon after the decision to convene the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets on October 20, the Bolshevik Central Committee resolved to hold an emergency national party congress beginning on October 17.<sup>11</sup> On the

preliminary agenda of this congress were (1) discussion of the party's [theoretical] program and (2) organizational questions. However in view of Lenin's categorical insistence on the immediate seizure of power, there can be little doubt that the central topic of discussion would have been the issue of Lenin's strategy versus that of linking transfer of power to the Soviets with the imminent national congress of soviets.

Moreover, in view of the relative caution of party leaders nationally, as well as political realities in Petrograd (most importantly, the resistance of the Petrograd lower classes to the usurpation of the prerogatives of the Soviet congress), there is equally good reason to assume that a majority of delegates to a party congress at this juncture would have rejected Lenin's call to immediate battle. However, under circumstances that have never been explained (or to my knowledge even seriously investigated), the party congress scheduled for October 17 was aborted. Instead on October 10, with only 12 of the Central Committee's 23 members, including Lenin, present, the committee adopted a resolution making organization of an armed uprising "the order of the day."

Even so, the threat of resistance to immediate revolutionary action among the Petrograd lower classes and the risks of acting unilaterally seemed so great (as indeed they were), that during the run-up to the opening of the Congress of Soviets the Bolshevik leadership of the newly formed Military Revolutionary Committee limited itself to preparatory measures consistent with linking Kerensky's overthrow to the decision of the Congress. A direct military attack against the Provisional Government did not begin until the pre-dawn hours of October 25. By that time, at the grass roots level, a weak preemptive strike by Kerensky, as well as the imminent opening of the

Congress, made it possible to present this assault as a defensive measure on the Soviet's behalf. And even so, Lenin's sudden emergence from hiding was required to trigger it, again, as in April, Lenin's last minute intervention appears to have been decisive.<sup>12</sup>

#### November 1917 to January 1918

It is difficult to exaggerate the historical impact of the so-called "October Armed Uprising." Before it began, formation of a homogeneous socialist government at the Congress, including representatives of most if not all Soviet fractions, appeared all but certain.<sup>13</sup> By providing the Mensheviks and SR's with justification for withdrawing from the Congress, and by impelling the Left SR's to temporarily abstain from participation in a Soviet government, the "uprising" paved the way for formation of an exclusively Bolshevik government headed by Lenin (which, one strongly suspects, was what Lenin had in mind from the beginning). However it by no means put an end to efforts by a significant number of top Bolshevik leaders (not just the Kamenev wing of the party), the Left SR's, and the Menshevik-Internationalists to form a broadly-based homogeneous socialist coalition government. Between October 29 and November 5, these efforts were focused on negotiations over reconstruction of the government sponsored by the All-Russian Executive Committee of the All-Russian Union of Railway Workers (Vikzhel).<sup>14</sup> Vikzhel's aim was to superintend the formation of a government embracing all Soviet parties, from the Popular Socialists on the Right to the Bolsheviks on the extreme Left. On October 29, a meeting of the Bolshevik Central Committee from which Lenin and Trotsky were absent endorsed the party's participation in the Vikzhel talks.<sup>15</sup> Later the same day, the Central Executive Committee of the All-Russian Soviet of Workers' and

Soldiers' Deputies, chaired by Kamenev and controlled by the Bolsheviks, did the same.<sup>16</sup> Further, during the initial phase of these talks, which began the night of October 29, Bolshevik representatives led by Kamenev and Georgi Sokolnikov accepted Vikzhel's formula for formation of a new government insisting only that it pursue the reform program adopted by the Second Congress and that it be responsible to the Soviets. But already Bolshevik curbs on the opposition press had begun; Petrograd, not to speak of Moscow, was in a state of civil war; and erroneous estimates of popular animosity toward the behavior of the Bolsheviks on the part of the Mensheviks and SR's hardened the resistance of the latter to any compromise with Bolshevism. Two days later, after the staying power of the Bolsheviks was demonstrated by such developments as the suppression of the Cadet uprising, the defeat of Kerensky and Krasnov, and the triumph of forces loyal to the Soviet in Moscow, the position of the Bolsheviks' opponents in the Vikzhel negotiations softened. On November 1, when it seemed that Kamenev might agree to dropping Lenin and Trotsky from a new all-socialist cabinet and to making the government responsible to a more broadly based body than the Central Executive Committee, prospects for formation of a homogeneous socialist government including representatives of the entire spectrum of Soviet parties suddenly appeared bright.<sup>17</sup> However, this illusion was quickly shattered. For Lenin and Trotsky, intent on civil and class war rather than on compromise, and arguing with justification that Bolshevik supporters at the grass roots level would view any retreat from the Second Congress's reform program and from the principle of Soviet power as a betrayal of the revolution, had outmaneuvered Kamenev and his closest supporters in a Central Committee

showdown.

Moreover in the immediately succeeding days, after it became apparent that Kamenev and more moderately inclined party colleagues were continuing to work toward a compromise settlement of the government issue, Lenin successfully manipulated their resignations from the Central Committee and the government. Chairmanship of the All-Russian Executive Committee, which under Kamenev had strived mightily if unsuccessfully to curb abuses of power by the Sovnarkom, and to make the latter responsible to the former, was now shifted to the ever obedient Yakob Sverdlov.

At the beginning of December Bolshevik moderates, confident that they represented the views of a majority of the party nationally, made a heroic last stand. They managed to take temporary control of the Bureau of the Bolshevik Constituent Assembly fraction and, under their direction, the Bureau adopted an independent course clearly aimed at acknowledging the Constituent Assembly's supreme political authority. But led by Lenin, the Central Committee, still devoid of moderates, quickly quashed this intra-party insurgency. Once again, demands by the moderates for a party congress were ignored. Instead the top party leadership in Petrograd developed the strategy of subverting the Constituent Assembly as a tool of the counterrevolution and of forcing it to acknowledge the sovereignty of the soviets or face dissolution.

How do these events relate to the evolving relationship between the Bolsheviks, the lower classes, and Soviet power? An overwhelming body of contemporary sources indicate that most Petrograd workers, soldiers, and Baltic fleet sailors considered the overthrow of the Provisional Government, the major Second Congress decrees, and

especially the proclamation of Soviet power as their triumphs. At the start of the Vikzhel talks, as nearly as I have been able to tell, they genuinely hoped that other Left socialist groups, if not the entire revolutionary democracy, would join a Soviet government. When this did not occur, their attachment to the idea of Soviet power dictated their support for the existing "homogeneous" Bolshevik Soviet government.<sup>18</sup>

In Petrograd the issue was put squarely during elections for seats in the Constituent Assembly which took place on November 16-18--in effect a popular referendum on Bolshevik policies and Soviet power during the first weeks after October. All available data indicate that among the Petrograd lower classes, the election results constituted a solid victory for the Bolsheviks. Suffice it to note that they received 424,024 or 45% of the total vote, completely dominating working class districts of the capital and doing similarly well or better among soldiers of the Petrograd garrison (previously the preserve of the SR's).<sup>19</sup> Significantly, in the wake of the elections Vikzhel formally acknowledged the authority of the TsIK and turned its attention to asserting authority over the Commissariat for Transportation. A disappointed Novaia Zhizn correspondent was not far off the mark when, commenting on the results of elections to the Constituent Assembly in Petrograd, he wrote that "however we may feel about it, we cannot but admit one thing: even with respect to the Constituent Assembly, the workers of Petrograd recognize the Bolsheviks as their leaders and spokesmen for their class interests."<sup>20</sup> Lower class support for the Bolsheviks was reinforced by a number of events: the publication of Russia's secret treaties; the beginning of peace talks with the Germans; a continuing torrent of revolutionary decrees; and, indeed, even such

repressive measures as the dissolution of the Petrograd City Duma, the outlawing of the entire Kadet party, and the harassment and arrest of Provisional Government ministers still at liberty, members of the All-Russian Commission on Elections to the Constituent Assembly, and top Menshevik and SR leaders generally, however abhorrent these measures may have been to the socialist intelligentsia. Such events help explain why the Left SR's, the Petrograd Bolsheviks' lone successful competitors for mass support at this time, soon jettisoned their resistance to collaboration with the Bolsheviks in a Soviet government. They also help to explain the relative weakness of popular resistance to suppression of the Constituent Assembly at the beginning of January, 1918.

#### January - June 1918

It was not in fact until the first half of 1918 that several interrelated factors caused gradual but ultimately quite significant slippage in popular support for the Bolsheviks in Petrograd. Let me try to summarize the more important of these factors.

Foremost among them was surely the horrendous food supply shortage, which had contributed mightily to the downfall of both the Tsarist regime in February and the Provisional Government in October. Trying to avoid a similar fate, the Sovnarkom had first attempted to establish an exclusive state monopoly, fixed prices, and a strict accounting, distribution, and rationing system for grain, meat, milk, potatoes, sugar, and other essential foodstuffs. In mid-January 1918, the already alarming food supply situation suddenly became even worse; at that time Lenin demanded that workers take matters into their own hands and shoot speculators on the spot as a means of dealing with the deepening crisis.<sup>21</sup> The food supply situation improved slightly in February but

took another drastic nosedive in the early spring and summer of 1918, due to organizational chaos, a further deterioration in means of transport, continuing upheaval in the countryside, and the impact of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and the expanding civil war (which together cut off central Russia from most of the country's richest grain and coal producing regions).

A second major factor contributing to deterioration in the standing of the Bolsheviks among the Petrograd lower classes during the first half of 1918 was mass unemployment, partially caused and certainly greatly exacerbated by chaotic demobilization and evacuation policies. The industrial crisis in Petrograd that had begun before the October revolution, primarily due to shortages of fuel and raw materials, grew much worse at the beginning of 1918, after factories in war-related production were ordered to cease operations. A few statistics suggest the dimensions of the ensuing industrial crisis. By April 1918, the factory work force in Petrograd had declined to about 40% of its January 1917 level.<sup>22</sup> Between January 1 and the beginning of April 1918, approximately 134,000 workers or 46% of the city's industrial work force joined the ranks of the unemployed.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, by March an estimated 30,000 workers had been laid off in the "Red" Vyborg district alone.<sup>24</sup> Hardest hit by this economic and social disaster were workers in larger metalworking and chemical plants--the very plants that had been the main pillar of mass support for the Bolsheviks and Soviet power throughout 1917.

An ever-deepening cadre crisis within the Bolshevik party compounded the party's predicament. In October 1917 there had been roughly 50,000 Bolsheviks in Petrograd, a

high percentage of whom had been recruited in local factories and military units and who had played important roles in the "Bolshevization" of the lower classes between February and October. However, beginning immediately after the seizure of power massive numbers of these party members were gradually mobilized for full time soviet work or shipped out of Petrograd altogether, either to help consolidate Soviet rule elsewhere in the country, to serve with food procurement detachments, or to serve on one or another of the early civil war fronts. By June 1918 the number of Bolsheviks in Petrograd, including those in full time government work, had dropped to 13,472--this despite the continual enrollment of new members.<sup>25</sup> It has been persuasively argued that following the October revolution, most leading Petrograd Bolsheviks held the view that the party as an institution should not play any special role in government (thus, presumably, they were not especially troubled by the drop in membership).<sup>26</sup> Be that as it may, the main point is that most party organizations at the district and especially the factory level now atrophied--and what is most important, continual interaction between the Bolsheviks and the working classes, which had been a key to Bolshevik success in 1917, ceased. Only in mid-April, and even then very slowly, were attempts begun to reverse the subordination of party to soviet work, to reconnect linkages with the lower classes, and ultimately to define for the party a systematic controlling role in politics.

One of the earliest signs of the negative impact of mass hunger and unemployment on the energy of the Petrograd lower classes, and on their susceptibility to mobilization by the Bolsheviks, came during the second half of February after the breakdown of peace negotiations at Brest-Litovsk and the unexpected resumption of the

German offensive during the second half of February. To be sure, from the moment separate peace talks at Brest had begun, the Bolshevik Petersburg Committee, reflecting the mood of district-level activists, was a bastion of opposition to the "obscene" separate peace and of determination not to give in to German imperialism at whatever the cost. On February 20, when the new German offensive became a reality, delegates to the Bolshevik Petrograd Fourth City Conference, quickly agreed on the necessity of fighting the Germans and sharply condemned the Sovnarkom's policy of immediate capitulation.<sup>27</sup> The first test of the Petrograd Bolsheviks' ability to back up their militancy with action on the part of the broad mass of factory workers and soldiers came a few days later, when it suddenly appeared that the city of Petrograd might itself be in imminent danger of German occupation. At that point it immediately became clear that demoralization among garrison soldiers was as deep as that of troops at the front and, consequently, that there was not hope whatever of moving them into battle. For a variety of reasons, assessing worker responses to mobilization appeals is more complex. Based on the archival data I have been able to analyze to date, my general impression is that initially, efforts to recruit workers into the newly forming Red Army or, more often, into ad-hoc partisan detachments met with modest success. Still, Petersburg Committee member Fedor Dingelshedt may have had a point when he suggested that in any such assessments a distinction needed to be made between factory level party leaders and "worker activists" on the one hand, and the great mass of employed and unemployed workers, on the other. According to Dingelshedt, although activists were beginning to rethink their positions at the time the German advance was most threatening, most were

still sympathetic to the idea of revolutionary war and genuinely eager to combat the Germans. On the other hand, rank-and-file workers were reluctant to fight from the start.<sup>28</sup> Other contemporary observers see a more gradual shift in the mood of workers toward immediate surrender.<sup>29</sup> Be that as it may, by the second week in March even the most ardent Petrograd Left Communists were forced to concede that all vestiges of worker militancy had evaporated.<sup>30</sup>

A clearer and therefore more alarming reflection of erosion in popular support for the Bolsheviks at the grass roots level in March 1918 was reflected in the emergence and initial rapid growth of an organization called the "Extraordinary Assembly of Delegates from Petrograd Factories and Plants."<sup>31</sup> The Assembly of Delegates movement was initiated at the beginning of March by Menshevik, SR, and unaffiliated workers, many of them from factories in the heavily industrialized Nevskii district, in response to the worsening plight of workers. The movement was also stimulated by the widespread view that such existing institutions as soviets, trade unions, and factory committees were no longer working class institutions.<sup>32</sup> During the first month and a half of its existence (encompassing the first five of the Assembly's plenary meetings), representatives of a broad spectrum of Petrograd factories and plants, as well as of unemployed workers, participated in the Assembly of Delegates deliberations. Although some Mensheviks, SR's, and even an occasional Bolshevik were prominent in the movement, its leadership consistently strived to rise above parties so as to optimize the Assembly's chances for becoming an effective politically neutral advocate of working class concerns.

In the earliest stage of its existence, the Assembly of Delegates focused much of its attention on studying and formulating positions on the critical food supply problem, unemployment, and the evacuation; on ways of working through the existing system to affect change<sup>33</sup>; and on strengthening itself organizationally. Perhaps because it was a genuine labor movement and not overtly anti-Soviet, for some time neither the leadership of the "Petrograd Commune" nor the Petrograd party organization took a position on it. As a result, in addition to the occasional participation of Bolshevik delegates from a particular factory, the Bolshevik Committee in at least one district of Petrograd, the Vyborg district, actually circulated Assembly of Delegates recruitment material to its own factory collectives.<sup>34</sup>

By the middle of April, it had become clear to the Assembly of Delegates leadership that efforts to reform the existing system "from within" were not working; rather all of the problems which had spawned the Assembly were getting worse. Moreover, it appeared that the government was now prepared to go to whatever extremes were necessary, including sanctioning seemingly indiscriminate shooting of protesting workers, in order to suppress labor unrest. Within the Assembly of Delegates this led to a split between moderates and radicals and demands on the part of the latter, who were in the majority, for reconvoation of the Constituent Assembly. At the same time, somewhat contradictorily, due to such factors as growing worker intimidation, passivity, and dispiritedness, Assembly members generally began to lose confidence in their ability to mobilize workers and to survive an open clash with the government. This insecurity emerged with particular clarity in the course of preparations for an anti-

government demonstration on May Day; weeks of work on the demonstration were aborted at the 11th hour because of the unresponsiveness of labor (unknown to the Assembly of Delegates, Bolshevik efforts to organize May Day demonstrations were encountering similar difficulties).<sup>35</sup>

Meanwhile, Bolshevik authorities in Petrograd had become more and more alarmed about the increasing militancy within the Assembly of Delegates and, more generally, with Petrograd's deepening economic and social crisis (which was far more serious than the situation in Moscow at this time). Apart from a constant propaganda barrage against the Assembly of Delegates, it was precisely now that initial steps were taken to rejuvenate party organizations and to make them responsible for controlling such heretofore largely independent institutions of local government as district soviets. Moreover the idea of convening periodic, ostensibly nonparty district worker conferences, (which had originated with the Interdistrict Conference) was now embraced as a means of reestablishing linkages with the masses. Justifying endorsement of district workers' conferences at a gathering of skeptical district level party organizers on May 20, Zinoviev explicitly acknowledged the validity of the Assembly of Delegates' frequent charge that the soviets had become divorced from the broad mass of ordinary workers, referring at one point to district soviets as "Houses of Lords".<sup>36</sup>

As subsequently convened in May and early June 1918 in all parts of Petrograd, these district workers' conferences were dominated by a coalition of Bolsheviks and Left SR's. Bolshevik preponderance in district soviets that were responsible for overall organization of the conferences and in factory committees that implemented them in the

workplace guaranteed that.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, these conferences were sufficiently free and broad-ranging to reveal the deep antagonism toward Bolshevik policies on the central issues of the day and toward soviets as they were then operating in Petrograd.

The workers' conference in the First City District, held between May 25 and June 5, was typical.<sup>38</sup> The conference began with reports from factory delegates, many of whom utilized the opportunity to describe the impossibly difficult plight of workers crushed by dire food shortages, expanding unemployment, and chaotic evacuation policies, and to criticize district soviets for having become estranged, bloated bureaucracies.<sup>39</sup> Generally speaking, these district conferences may have served their purpose of establishing a new, manageable conduit to the lower classes (Zinoviev, for one, was quite pleased by their results). However, they obviously did nothing to ease dire food shortages or any other root causes of the growing popular despair. Consequently, it is not surprising that during the second half of May demands within the Assembly of Delegates that it take upon itself organization of a nationwide general strike to protest Bolshevik policies now became ever more insistent.

Towards the end of May, a riot broke out among more than 3000 women gathered to discuss the food supply situation in the Moscow district--a revealing indication of the prevailing mood. Around this time, worker assemblies at several of Petrograd's largest industrial plants, including the Putilov, Obukhov, Nobel, and Porokhovskii factories, adopted resolutions repudiating soviet power and calling for convocation of the Constituent Assembly. Moreover, workers at some of these as well as other factories now intensified efforts to circumvent government regulations and to take

solution of problems into their own hands. Thus, for example, workers at the Aleksandrovskii Locomotive shops and on the Nikolaevskii rail line threatened to go out on strike unless they were given immediate permission to procure food on their own.<sup>40</sup>

Probably the most serious trouble spot for harried Petrograd city officials at this time was the Nevskii district, where support for the Assembly of Delegates was strongest and where SR's still retained considerable influence. During the last week in May, political strikes were declared by workers at several factories in the district (albeit not the Obukhov plant). Concerned that isolated strikes would undermine possibilities for organizing a general strike, the Assembly of Delegates appealed to Nevskii district workers to return to work<sup>41</sup> and, partly as a result, the strike petered out.

Of course, no one was more concerned about the apparent deepening crisis of Soviet power in Petrograd than Zinoviev, chairman of the "Petrograd Commune." In mid-April he had dispatched a frantic appeal to the Sovnarkom and Central Committee in Moscow for an immediate dispensation of 100 million rubles to help cope with the effects of hunger and unemployment.<sup>42</sup> How the Sovnarkom responded to this appeal is unclear. However, it is perhaps not coincidental that at the very end of May, Bolshevik officials in Moscow ordered Zinoviev's immediate removal from Petrograd. It is probable that he was blamed for failing to deal more effectively with Petrograd's deepening crisis. In any case, after some of Zinoviev's closest comrades in Petrograd (Lashevitch, Stasova, and Ioffe) shot back a telegram unequivocally demanding his retention,<sup>43</sup> the order was rescinded.

## June and July 1918

The crisis in Petrograd that had begun in spring 1918 came to a climax during the second half of June and the beginning of July. During the second week in June Soviet authorities in Petrograd, under intense pressure from below, scheduled elections to that body to be held during a seven-day period ending on June 25.<sup>44</sup> Since less than half of the projected 700 plus deputies in the new Soviet were to be directly elected in factories, the Bolsheviks were assured of a majority even before the elections began. Thus they were taking no risk in announcing that they would yield power if they lost their majority in the Soviet.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, they were equally disingenuous in implying that retention of a Bolshevik majority would serve as a mandate for repression of such opposition movements as the Assembly of Delegates. Nonetheless failure of the party to make a strong showing among Soviet deputies elected directly in factories was quite realistically viewed by local Bolshevik leaders as a potentially disastrous blow. Consequently they hurriedly mounted an ambitious electoral campaign, attempting to regain a significant measure of the popular support they had clearly lost in the preceding weeks and months, when agitation and "party" work at the grass roots level had been limited.

At the height of this campaign (on June 20) the Bolsheviks' campaign director, V. Volodarskii, was assassinated by an SR terrorist. Using the assassination as a pretext, the Cheka immediately rounded up several Nevskii district SR activists, triggering a chain of interrelated events which I can only mention briefly. The arrest of local SR leaders was the last straw for workers at the long simmering Obukhov factory, the largest industrial plant in the Nevskii district. On the morning of July 22 they began to prepare

for an armed uprising; moreover, they were immediately joined by mutinying sailors from a sizable mine-laying flotilla docked along the nearby Neva quay. Apart from the sources of alienation from the Bolsheviks common to a significant portion of the Petrograd lower classes at this time, the sailors from the mine-laying flotilla were especially disturbed by the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which appeared to obligate the Soviet government to destroy the Baltic fleet, and by the arrest and summary execution of Vice Admiral A.M. Shchastny, for attempting to come to the fleet's rescue. Both the Obukhov workers and sailors from the mine-laying flotilla called for the immediate formation of a homogenous socialist Soviet government made up of all left parties, pending convocation of a Constituent Assembly. This rebellion was contained and suppressed through the quick action of Soviet authorities, strongly supported by loyalist sailors hastily rushed in from Petrograd.<sup>46</sup>

These events, coupled with other ominous signs of an approaching showdown with the Soviet government, finally spurred the Assembly of Delegates to action. On June 26, at what was destined to be its final plenary meeting, the Assembly finally resolved to schedule a one-day political strike for July 2--this despite continuing division of opinion regarding the responsiveness of workers to a strike call. The strike resolution, which passed by a near unanimous vote, concluded:

Continuing to remain silent is impossible.

The Assembly of Delegates, having discussed the question of the intolerable situation of the proletariat and of the entire country, has decided to call on Petrograd workers to participate in a one-day political protest strike under the slogans:

Down with capital punishment!

Down with shootings and civil war!

Long live the Constituent Assembly!  
Long live freedom of speech and of assembly!  
Long live freedom to strike!<sup>47</sup>

Meanwhile elections to the Petrograd Soviet had been completed. Elsewhere, I have tried to interpret the results.<sup>48</sup> Suffice it to note that even in direct elections at the work place, the Bolsheviks *appear* to have done reasonably well (electing 127 of 260 factory delegates). All this needs to be restudied with reference to recently declassified archives. However judging by election data published in the contemporary press, it seems that despite the enormous difficulties of everyday life, when forced to choose between the long term hopes embodied in Soviet power and a return to the Constituent Assembly (which the Bolsheviks tried to equate with an inevitable resurgence of the bourgeoisie), significant numbers of workers still opted for the former. As a contemporary commentator, no friend of the Bolsheviks, lamented in the July 2 Novaia Zhizn', "one cannot escape the fact that many workers still have not outgrown Bolshevik 'communism' and continue to consider Soviet power, for better or for worse, the representative of their interests. They associate it with their fate and the fate of the workers' movement."<sup>49</sup> At its first meeting on June 27, the newly elected Petrograd Soviet adopted a Bolshevik-sponsored resolution approving the dissolution of the Assembly of Delegates "as a counterrevolutionary organization." In the prevailing circumstances, the response to the Assembly's call for a strike on July 2 was negligible--after which the organization was effectively and permanently suppressed.

There is one last aspect of the spring and early summer crisis of 1918 that needs to be mentioned--namely the final, decisive rupture of the Bolshevik-Left SR alliance.

It seems to me that up to now the historical significance of this alliance and its break up has been vastly underestimated. In October 1917, collaboration between Bolsheviks and Left SR's in the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet was of crucial importance to the establishment of Soviet power. In mid-November, after the much-heralded merger of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies with the All-Russian Executive Committee of Peasant Deputies, the Left SR's resisted the temptation to reconstruct the Sovnarkom with a Left SR majority. This appears to have been less because of any reverence for the Bolsheviks than because of organizational weakness and what one leading Left SR, Vladimir Karelin, referred to at the Fourth Left-SR Congress in October 1918 as a deeply rooted "fear of power."<sup>50</sup> At any rate on December 9, 1917, six leading Left SR's accepted posts in the Sovnarkom, thus significantly enhancing the legitimacy of Soviet power among workers and especially peasants (with whom Bolshevik linkages were still disastrously weak). The alliance of Bolsheviks and Left SR's was especially important at the time of the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly. Moreover as partners in government the Left SR's could reasonably take pride in some important initiatives, particularly in the agrarian sector (despite considerable effort, they were less successful in achieving their goal of limiting political arrests and other Bolshevik abuses of power).<sup>51</sup>

Even after March, when the Left SR's withdrew from the Sovnarkom in opposition to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, Left SR's in Petrograd remained deeply involved in local government and administration. Moreover in the spring of 1918, when

lower class alienation widened under the impact of growing food shortages and skyrocketing unemployment, Left SR's defended the principle of Soviet power against proponents of reconvening the Constituent Assembly as fiercely as the Bolsheviks did.<sup>51</sup> So as not to further destabilize Soviet power in Petrograd, the Left SR's barely complained when the Bolsheviks manipulated electoral regulations to the new Petrograd Soviet to insure retention of a Bolshevik majority.<sup>52</sup>

By late June, however, Left SR tolerance of continued Bolshevik willingness to compromise with German imperialism irrespective of cost had reached the breaking point. National Left SR leaders were hopeful that a majority of delegates to the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets, which was due to open in Moscow on July 4, would share their views on the need to face up to the Germans. Nonetheless a majority of them now endorsed terrorism as a means of provoking the Germans to resume hostilities and of rousing the Bolsheviks and revolutionary Russian and European workers to battle if this turned out not to be the case. Such tactics were approved by the Left SR Central Committee on June 24,<sup>53</sup> and were strongly supported at the Third All-Russian Left SR Congress at the end of the month.<sup>54</sup>

The worst fears of the Left SR's were realized during the opening sessions of the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets after which, on July 6, the German Ambassador, Count Mirbach, was killed. However the result of this sensational act, for which the Left SR's immediately took credit, was a far cry from what the Left SR's had envisioned. The Soviet government in Moscow remained unified behind Lenin's compromising policies while workers, soldiers, and sailors sat back unmoved. Forced into an armed

confrontation with the Bolsheviks which they neither wanted nor adequately prepared for, the Left SR's in Moscow and Petrograd were isolated and crushed with relative ease. One-party government was once again a reality--a fact which inevitably further reduced the Bolsheviks' popular support, not only in Petrograd but perhaps even more important, among peasants in the surrounding countryside.

### Conclusions

In my book The Bolsheviks Come to Power I emphasized that a key factor in explaining the Bolshevik success in the struggle for power in Petrograd between February and October 1917 was the enunciation of an attractive political platform calling for the establishment of a multi-party democratic socialist Soviet government, immediate peace, fundamental economic and social reform, and early convocation of the Constituent Assembly. The apparent bright promise of the October revolution and of Soviet power enabled the Bolsheviks to withstand popular disappointment over the failure to form a more broadly based homogeneous socialist government in November 1917 and to allow the proper functioning of the Constituent Assembly in January 1918. However, in the absence of decisive socialist revolutions aboard, the often brutal, ultra-divisive policies spearheaded by Lenin and Trotsky after October led inexorably to economic and social catastrophe and, by the spring and early summer of 1918, to widespread, at times openly threatening dissatisfaction with Bolshevik policies on the part of growing segments of the Petrograd lower classes.

As was suggested at the outset of this paper, in the process of the struggle to retain power in these circumstances, some of the key characteristics of Soviet-style

Communism first emerged. In closing, let me simply list what seem to me to have been the more important of these. Among them were (1) a deeply felt siege mentality and the encouragement of violence in dealing with real and imagined class enemies; (2) strict curbs on or outright prohibition of competing parties and popular movements; (3) discouragement of meaningful dissent even within the party; (4) the bureaucratization of party organizations, soviets, factory committees, and other mass organizations; (5) the absolute political supremacy of party over soviet organs; and (6) strict subordination of lower to higher party and soviet organs. In July 1918 some of these characteristics were well advanced. Others were just beginning to take shape. Perhaps none was as yet irreversible; however, as the civil war crisis deepened, all became enduring features of Soviet life.

## FOOTNOTES

1. The term "lower classes" in this paper is used to designate factory workers employed in enterprises in or near Petrograd and, up to the time of the October Revolution, for soldiers and sailors based in Petrograd and Kronstadt.
2. The dates cited in this paper correspond to the Julian calendar until February 1918, when Soviet Russia adopted the Western Gregorian calendar. The former was 13 days behind the latter.
3. A very useful documentary account of this conference is contained in Trotsky's The Stalin School of Falsification, pp. 231-301.
4. E.N. Burdzhakov appropriately emphasized this point in his pioneering essay, "O taktike bol'shevikov v marte-aprele 1917 goda," Voprosy istorii, No. 4, 1956, pp. 274-276.
5. For a detailed elaboration of my interpretation of the June demonstrations and July uprising see A. Rabinovich, Krovavyye dni (Moscow, 1992). Still somewhat murky is Lenin's relationship to the July uprising. Although it seems apparent that he shared the view of a majority of his Central Committee colleagues that an armed insurrection against the existing government would be premature because it was likely to be opposed by soldiers at the front and peasants in the provinces, it is equally clear that following the June 18 demonstration, he had lost hope of a peaceful transfer of power to the soviets and was wary of the potential negative impact of a successful Russian offensive on prospects for the rapid development of the revolution. Bearing this in mind, in Lenin's discussions with Military Organization leaders at this time, how much leeway did he suggest they might have in deciding to launch an insurrection against the Provisional Government? Answers to such questions, if indeed they can be answered, require unrestricted access to all potentially pertinent archives.
6. According to a letter of July 1 from Sverdlov and Menzhinskaya in Petrograd to the Bolshevik Moscow Oblast Bureau, trade union representatives as well as "internationalist factions which had not yet officially broken with the defensists," were to be invited to the Congress; in a similarly moderate spirit the letter directed the Bureau to immediately begin intensive preparations for elections to the Constituent Assembly. RTsKhIDNI, f. 60, op. 1, d. 4, l. 4.
7. I have tried to analyze the results of this conference in A. Rabinovich, Bol'sheviki prikhodiat k vlasti (Moscow, 1989), pp. 83-85.
8. Akademiia nauk SSR, Institut istorii, Leningradskoe otdelenie, Raionnyye sovery Petrograda v 1917 godu, T. 2, p. 46.

9. Rabinovich, Bol'sheviki prikhodiat k vlasti, pp. 209-213.
10. Ibid., pp. 218-234.
11. The decision to schedule the Congress of Soviets was adopted on September 23. Bolshevik tactics aimed at transfer of power to the Soviets at the Soviet Congress were formalized at a meeting on September 24 attended by members of the Central Committee, representatives of the Petersburg Committee, and Bolshevik leaders from around the country in Petrograd for the Democratic State Conference. Judging by the text of an announcement regarding the party congress sent to the Bolshevik Moscow Oblast Bureau, it seems probable that this meeting also endorsed linking convocation of an emergency party congress with the projected soviet congress. RTsKhIDNI, f. 60, op. 1, d. 26, l. 23, 23 ob.
12. Rabinovich, Bol'sheviki prikhodiat k vlasti, pp. 291-292.
13. Rabinovich, Bol'sheviki prikhodiat k vlasti, pp. 285-286, 311-312.
14. See TsGAOR SSSR, f. 5498, op. 1, d. 67, l. 1-39 for protocols of Vikhzel sponsored negotiating sessions on October 29, October 30, and November 3. See also P. Vompe, Dni oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii i zheleznodorozhniki (Moscow, 1924).
15. Institut marksizma-leninizma pri TsK KPSS, Protokoly TsK RSDRP (b). Avgust 1917-fevral 1918 (Moscow, 1958), pp. 122-123.
16. Protokoly zasedanii VTsIK II sozyva (Moscow, 1918), p. 10.
17. Even the Bolshevik press now conveyed the impression that an agreement on reconstruction of the government was close at hand (although it was vague on details).
18. This view was reflected in a resolution passed at a conference of 112 Bolshevik district party activists on November 4 (see RTsKhIDNI, f. 67, op. 1, d. 46, l. 173-175) and in the behavior between October 31 and November 9 of individual trade unions represented in the Petrograd Trade Union Council (see A. Anskii, Protokoly Petrogradskogo soveta professional'nykh soiuzov za 1917 g. [Leningrad, 1927], pp. 129-130, 136, 137).
19. O.N. Znamenskii, Vserossiiskoe uchreditel'noe sobranie [Leningrad, 1976], table 1.
20. Novaia zhizn', November 16, 1917.
21. TsGASP, f. 9618, op. 1, d. 185, l. 50-51.
22. Materialy po statistike truda, vyp. 5, Petrograd, 1919, p. 33.

23. Statisticheskii sbornik po Petrogradu, p. 42.
24. Novaia zhizn', March 27, 1918, p. 3.
25. Ts GAIPDSP, f. 1, op. 4, d. 116, l. 1.
26. K.I. Shelavin, "Iz istorii Peterburgskogo komiteta bol'shevikov v 1918 g.", Krasnaia letopis', no. 2 (26), 1928, pp. 108-24. Petersburg Committee protocols for this period support Shelavin's view. (See Pervyi legal'nyi Peterburgskii komitet RSDRP (b), [Moscow - Leningrad, 1927, pp. 329-387].)
27. Kommunist, March 5, 1918, p. 4; Nash vek, February 21, 1918, p. 2; Russkie vedomosti, February 21, 1918, p. 2.
28. F. Dingel'shtedt, "Iz vospominanii agitatora Peterburgskogo komiteta RSDRP (b)," Krasnaia letopis', No. 1 (22), 1927, pp. 55-68.
29. For example, see the remarks on this subject of K. Shelavin at the Seventh National Bolshevik Party Congress on March 7 (Sed'moi ekstremnyi s'ezd RKP (b) [Moscow, 1962], p. 90.)
30. Kommunist, March 14, 1918, p. 3.
31. Fairly complete files of the Extraordinary Assembly (including a full set of stenographic accounts of general meetings, protocols for many but not all meetings of the Assembly's Bureau, membership lists, financial records, etc.) are to be found in TSGAIPDSP, f. 3390, op. 1, d. 1-21.
32. TsGASP, f. 3390, op. 1, d. 17, l. 5.
33. Thus one of the Assembly's first acts was to dispatch a delegation to the Fourth All-Russian Congress of Soviets in Moscow.
34. TsGAIPDSP, f. 2, op. 1, d. 4, l. 3.
35. Ibid.
36. TsGAIPDSP, f. 4000, op. 7, d. 814, l. 52.
37. In many cases, conference representatives from district soviets were designated without even the pretense of an election. Moreover, continuing worker demands for reelections to factory committees were usually rebuffed; thus, generally speaking, their composition had remained unchanged since the October revolution.

38. A surprisingly full stenographic account of this conference was published in book form (see Pervaia konferentsiia rabochikh i krasnoarmeiskikh deputatov 1-go gorodskogo raiona [Petrograd, 1918].
39. Reports from worker delegates were interspersed with expressions of fervent loyalty by representatives of district-based Red Army units; however, the latter appear to have been hand-picked.
40. TsGAIPDSP, f. 76, op. 1, d. 1, l. 33-34, 227.
41. TsGASP, f. 3390, op. 1, d. 17, l. 168.
42. RTsKhIDNI, f. 5, op. 1, d. 2858, l. 6-6 ob.
43. RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 4, d. 10, l. 12.
44. This was the first comprehensive reelection of Petrograd Soviet deputies since March 1917.
45. Gazeta-kopeika, June 19, 1918, p. 3.
46. TsGASP, f. 9672, op. 1, d. 246; Baltiiskii flot v Oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii i grazhdanskoi voine (Moscow - Leningrad, 1932), pp. 120-129; M. Shkarovskii, "Beskrovnyi Miatezh", pp. 4-12 (unpublished manuscript).
47. TsGASP, f. 3390, op. 1, d. 17, l. 225.
48. A. Rabinowitch, "The Petrograd First City District Soviet during the Civil War," in Party, State, and Society in the Russian Civil War, pp. 142-143. Enhanced accessibility to archives may finally make it possible to prove or disprove charges made at the time that the high Bolshevik factory vote was inflated by bogus voting at shutdown factories.
49. Novaia zhizn', July 2, p. 1.
50. RTsKhIDNI, f. 564, op. 1, d. 5, l. 74-75.
51. For example, see discussions at Sovnarkom meetings on December 19 and 21 which bore on the Left SR Commissar of Justice I. Shteinberg's prerogatives versus those of the Cheka headed by Dzerzhinskii (RTsKhIDNI, f. 19, op. 1, d. 30 and 32).
52. RTsKhIDNI, f. 564, op. 1, d. 4, l. 165, 201, 335. Spiridonova, for one, was convinced that a significant number of Bolshevik factory delegates came from closed and even evacuated factories.

53. See Krasnaia kniga VCHEKA, Vol. 1 (Moscow, 1989), pp. 185-186.
54. Maria Spiridonova articulated this view in a major speech at the Congress (in January, she had supported acceptance of Germany's imperialist peace terms). Prostiian also emphasized that the moment to break with Brest had arrived. (See RTsKhIDNI, f. 564, op. 1, d. 4, l. 186-189, 247-248, 332-333.).