Revolutionary idealists to revolutionary statesmen: Bolshevik foreign policy, 1914 to 1922

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REVOLUTIONARY IDEALISTS TO REVOLUTIONARY STATESMEN:
BOLSHEVIK FOREIGN POLICY, 1914 TO 1922.

by

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Bachelor of History
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

Revolutionary Idealists to Revolutionary Statesmen:
A Sample Abstract

by

Benjamin Carlos Montoya

Dr. Paul W. Werth, Examination Committee Chair
Professor of History
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From 1917 to 1922, the Bolsheviks conducted a foreign policy that melded their background in Marxist ideology with the exigencies of state power. The Bolsheviks believed an international revolution would imitate their socialist revolution of October 1917. When it became clear this would not happen, V.I. Lenin and his comrades chose to preserve their revolution in Russia.

The Bolsheviks believed peace would induce revolution throughout war-torn Europe. After the October Revolution the Bolsheviks immediately sought an end to the Great War. Only Germany accepted this proposal of peace, however, and the Bolsheviks were forced to accept a harsh peace treaty that stripped much of Russia’s holdings.

Despite this blow to their revolutionary drive, the Bolsheviks believed the peace with Germany allowed consolidation of revolutionary forces in Russia. Since Europe's working-
classes failed to incite a socialist uprising, the Bolsheviks incorporated state power to organize and prepare the grounds for international revolution.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I: THE GREAT WAR “SCHISM”</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II: “THE TRUE MEANING OF THE WAR”</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III: “POLITICS BY DIFFERENT MEANS”</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER IV: “THE FIRST IN A SERIES OF REVOLUTIONS”</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER V: “PEREDYSHKA: A ‘BREATHING SPELL’”</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER VI: “A RUTHLESS WAR AGAINST REVOLUTIONARY PHRASES”</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER VII: “DRAGGED AND SHOVED TO GOLGOTHA”</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER VIII: “ORGANIZING AND PREPARING”</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER IX: DEFENDING THE “SOCIALIST FATHERLAND”</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER X: “ONE GREAT GAMBLE”</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER XI: “STABILIZATION AND PREPARATION”</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Thank you all very much for everything.
"Il faut reculer, pour mieux sauter."

["You have to step back to make a better jump."]

—V.I. Lenin
INTRODUCTION

The Bolsheviks melded their background in Marxist tradition with their conduct of foreign relations during the early years of Soviet Russia. They believed their revolutionary form of foreign policy would create a foundation for international proletarian revolution envisioned by Karl Marx. Since Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels did not formulate explicitly a foreign policy agenda for revolutionary socialism, the Bolsheviks (after October 1917) had to manage a foreign policy that met both the exigencies of state power and corroborated their Marxist tradition/education. This was no easy process. Many Bolsheviks disagreed on the proper conduct of foreign policy for Soviet Russia.

Marxism states that socialist revolution is the only force that can liberate the working masses from capitalist overlords. For the realization of a genuine socialist society, Marx and Engels postulated, socialist revolution must assume an international character. Workers of one state could not be free completely if their proletarian brethren were still being oppressed in another state. Proletarian solidarity was the essential prerequisite for a Marxist revolution. The state played a vital role in this Marxist form of revolution. Despite viewing the state as the bourgeois tool of oppression over the proletariat, Marx believed state power would play a critical role in the foundation of socialism. By seizing the reins of power through revolution, the working masses could implement state power for the destruction of bourgeois influence in the world. Centralized state power comprised an essential component of Marx’s dictum for revolution by providing organization and
solidarity. Institutional power would serve as a beacon for proletarian organization by allowing the centralization of revolutionary forces against the bourgeoisie. Marx believed that after the bourgeoisie were effectively eradicated, the state as an institutional apparatus would “wither away.” Centralized power would become obsolete as a socialist society was created, and everyone lived according to their needs.

The Marxian prediction of international revolution, however, proved unfounded. Marxist revolution was supposed to be a spontaneous uprising by the proletarian masses of the entire European continent. Lenin and his comrades viewed the Great War as the socio-political crisis that would instigate international proletarian revolution; years of oppressive/total war would prompt Europe’s war-weary working-classes into spontaneous revolt against their bourgeois governments. The Bolsheviks viewed their October Revolution of 1917 as the first step in this process. By the end of the Great War in November 1918 and the demise of the German Revolution in January 1919, however, Europe’s working-classes had failed to incite international revolution. The Bolsheviks stood alone to preserve the initiative for Marxian revolution. The Bolsheviks were faced with the predicament of balancing their Marxist background with the exigencies of state power. They were faced with two scenarios: place all efforts into galvanizing (forcing) international revolution, or retreat and preserve the Russian state. Anarchic elements in the party, led by Nikolai Bukharin, believed the Bolsheviks should abandon all efforts to preserve the state apparatus, and instead replicate their revolution on a European-wide stage. “Defensist”
voices of the party, led by Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, believed state power was the only institution able to preserve the socialist revolution in Russia.

This work will demonstrate how the Bolsheviks, through their foreign diplomacy, attempted to reconcile these two imperatives: 1.) remaining true to their Marxist teachings and, 2.) preserving the revolution they had fought so hard to produce. By giving specific attention to foreign policy, I will explain how doctrinal obligations of Marxism shaped the Bolshevik’s worldview; also, I will demonstrate how socio-political exigencies shaped the ways in which the Bolsheviks (re)interpreted their Marxian philosophy regarding revolution and state power. Analysis of Soviet foreign relations will reveal how the Bolsheviks justified their revolutionary policies by rooting them in Marxian dialectics.

“Foreign policy” is difficult to define in the Soviet experience. Up to October 1917, the Bolsheviks were in no position whatsoever to conduct foreign relations on behalf of Russia. Even after the Bolsheviks gained power, the nature of their revolution in Russia lent a special character to their revolutionary policy. Socialist revolution was intended to reshape not just political structures of states, but also social structures. Therefore, the Bolsheviks sought to reshape the social character of Europe. Their revolution would initiate the process of cleansing Europe of capitalism and liberating the proletariat from their bourgeois overlords. Bolshevik foreign policy, then, had the underlying goal of inciting international revolution. During the immediate weeks after the October Revolution,

Bolshevik foreign policy consisted of agitating for proletarian revolution throughout the

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1 V.I. Lenin’s role in this debate is central to this paper. His contribution to the ultimate method of Soviet foreign policy from October 1917 to the early 1920s was indispensable. Therefore, much attention will be devoted to Lenin’s words and deeds throughout this work. Indeed, no other figure in early Soviet history was as crucial to the survival and consolidation of Soviet Russia as Lenin. Despite being hounded by criticism for the nature of his revolutionary policies between October 1917 and the early 1920s, Lenin displayed acute political skill in the maintenance of the young socialist republic.

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rest of Europe. Revolutionary foreign policy was a diplomacy to the people, over the heads of European governments. When global revolution failed to materialize preservation of the socialist state (Soviet Russia) became the prime objective for Bolshevik foreign policy. Thereafter, the Bolsheviks had to deal directly with European heads of state. Treaties and agreements were necessary to postpone the forceful downfall of revolutionary power in Russia. Despite many setbacks and “compromises” Lenin and his comrades remained committed to their goal of international revolution. They formulated a foreign diplomacy with European governments, while attempting to maintain relations with Europe's working classes. Thus, Bolshevik foreign policy had a dual character: preserving the socialist state, and provoking international proletarian revolution.

This work deals with foreign policy specifically, but has a larger overall scope. It will be a social history of the Bolshevik Party; it will demonstrate how the Bolsheviks evolved from revolutionary idealists to revolutionary statesmen. Before 1914, the Bolsheviks were just another element of a larger social-democratic movement in Europe. By 1922 they had become the vanguard of European social-democracy. Surviving years of total war, revolution and civil war, earned the Bolsheviks the right to speak for the international workers' movement. They viewed themselves as the protectors of Marxian revolution, and viewed their state (Soviet Russia) as the foundation for that revolution.

This thesis initially argued that the Bolsheviks after October 1917, categorically abandoned the initiative for international revolution by seeking to preserve state power in the form of Soviet Russia. Preserving revolution in one country, the initial argument stated, altered the international socialist movement into a specifically Russian experience,
and thereby undermined Marxian revolution. The right question was being asked but in the wrong manner. The original approach asked how Bolsheviks changed following October 1917. The administration of foreign policy seemed to demonstrate the Bolshevik shift from being idyllic revolutionaries to calculating bureaucrats. This approach neglected a central component of Bolshevik identity; a thread that ran through their interpretation of the Great War to the acquisition of state power and beyond—their Marxian philosophy. The initial argument failed to recognize that the Bolsheviks viewed every socio-political turn in European affairs through a Marxist lens. And more importantly, the original argument failed to discern that the Bolsheviks were obligated to validate their socio-political policies with the revolutionary credo of Karl Marx. Determined to maintain their credibility with proletarian constituencies, the Bolsheviks understood that revolutionary policies had to corroborate the doctrinal mandate of Marx. There could be no haphazard adjustment in tactics or philosophy. The maintenance of legitimacy was crucial for the Bolsheviks; their ultimate success depended on it. If they failed to uphold the dictum of Marx, the proletarian masses would withdraw their support and leave the Bolsheviks “in the lurch.” Therefore the revised approach asks how the Bolsheviks reinterpreted Marxism to fit their revolutionary policies. This was not always easy for the Bolsheviks, since Marx never discussed explicitly the proper course for a revolutionary government surrounded by bourgeois enemies.

The revised argument asserts that the Bolsheviks did not violate their Marxian mandate for international proletarian revolution. After October 1917, Bolshevik revolutionary policy became *ad hoc* foreign diplomacy. When an international proletarian uprising failed
to materialize after the October Revolution, it became clear to the Bolsheviks that they would have to preserve the revolutionary spirit of Marxism alone. The Bolsheviks converted their revolutionary tactic of socio-political agitation into a policy of state defense with the onset of civil war, the failure of the German Revolution in 1919 and the failure of "revolution from without" through the Russo-Polish War in 1920. Curtailing revolutionary phrases was necessary for the preparation of a proletarian uprising. Consolidating "socialism in one country" would make the international effort for revolution more possible, the Bolsheviks argued.

While examining the Bolshevik experiment with diplomacy Marxism will be seen as a flexible philosophy that allows for (re)interpretation. Marxist doctrine allows reevaluation(s) of its dialectics. It is written in such a way that central tenets of its philosophy are understood, but the methods to their fulfillment are open for discussion. This theme will be revealed explicitly in the portion discussing affirmative and negative responses to Bolshevism from contemporary socialists. All Marxists—whether Mensheviks or Bolsheviks, Nikolai Bukharin and Karl Kautsky or Rosa Luxemburg and Vladimir Lenin—believed unconditionally in Marxist doctrine. And yet these socialists interpreted Marxian philosophy in distinctly different ways.

A common perception in the historiography of Soviet foreign relations is that Lenin and the Bolsheviks, after the October Revolution of 1917, abandoned their credo for international revolution for preservation of the state. Raison d'etat, is it argued, took precedence over the promotion of socialism in Europe. Richard Debo argues that Bolshevik revolutionary policy went through a dramatic shift between 1917 and 1918. The
Bolsheviks came to power in October 1917, Debo states, expecting an international proletarian uprising in response to their socialist revolution. When it became apparent that the proletarian masses would not imitate Bolshevik actions, Lenin and his colleagues became disenchanted. Debo believes the Bolsheviks pushed their revolutionary theory into the background by seeking simple survival. “Preservation of the Soviet state became the keystone of Lenin’s new policy,” Debo states. “The effect, however, was to shift the focus of Bolshevik policy from promoting world revolution to guaranteeing the survival of the Soviet state.” 2 Lenin, according to Debo, “explicitly abandoned the great hopes of late 1917.” 3 And although Bolshevik spokesmen continued to mouth the rhetoric of 1917-18, Debo continues, there was no return to a genuinely revolutionary foreign policy. “[T]hey sought exactly the opposite . . . . [the Bolsheviks would now] build barriers between themselves and the outside world, to create defensible frontiers behind which the Soviet order could be nurtured.” 4

Piero Melograni agrees with Debo. Melograni boldly claims that those historians who state that Lenin continued to believe that world revolution was imminent from 1917 to 1920 are implying that he was “an inept politician who committed a fundamental error in foreseeing future events, thus misleading himself and others over a long period of time.” 5 Like Debo, Melograni believes the Bolsheviks altered drastically their revolutionary policy after an international revolution failed to develop. In reaction to this, Melograni argues, the Bolsheviks had to consolidate state power—what Melograni calls a “state without

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3 Ibid., 183.
4 Ibid., 407.
revolution." "Not only did [this state] block the revolutionary aspirations of Russian socialism, but it was also a state that looked inward, that closed itself up in its diversity, that gave up its designs of global revolution." 6 According to Melograni, this was a sacrifice Lenin was willing to make. He knew that Bolshevik power could only survive if there were a state power to defend it. Lenin was a realist, Melograni argues, and that is how he managed to hold on to power through the tumultuous years after 1917. After the decision was made to adopt a defensive posture, Melograni continues, Lenin may not have wanted socialist revolution in the rest of Europe. Lenin knew a "revolutionary uprising in Germany or some other European country could create serious problems for Russian Bolshevism." 7 Melograni points to the difference between the Bolsheviks and other socialist parties of the belligerent nations. He argues that Bolshevik radicalism was repulsive to socialist parties like the German Social Democratic Party.

Adam Ulam criticizes the Bolshevik translation of Marxism into revolutionary foreign policy. Ulam believes Marx and Engels had nothing to say about the proper form of foreign diplomacy for a socialist country. This was because "the very internationalism of the doctrine is based paradoxically on the assumption that considerations of international politics have become and will continue to be less important." 8 Centralized foreign policy was irrelevant to Marx and Engels, because they believed socialist revolution would sweep away the institution that conducted diplomacy—the state. Economic relations, characterized by class conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, were the agent of historical

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6 Ibid., xi.
7 Ibid.
change for Marx and Engels. The preparation and prosecution for international revolution were the only tasks for socialists. Ulam argues that Marx and Engels believed socialist revolution would occur in every country as it reached a high level of industrialization; this revolution would not be substantially affected by any developments on the international scene. A socialist revolution in Russia, an agrarian country, would have been inconceivable to Marx and Engels. Russia was not highly industrialized and thus did not possess a substantial working class constituency. Also, Russia did not possess a heightened sense of capitalism, had not undergone a bourgeois revolution, and was (for all intents and purposes) still a feudal society. For Ulam, this made the Bolshevik's self-appointed role as protector and prosecutor of socialist revolution problematic. The outlook of original Marxism, Ulam states, “was internationalist, and it would have been inconceivable for Marx that his policies of international socialism should be dictated by one party or one country.” The theoretical basis for Bolshevik foreign policy, Ulam argues, was fundamentally flawed from the beginning.

A closer look at the evidence shows that Lenin and cohorts did not abandon their hope for international revolution after October 1917. In some cases, in fact, they held onto it for such an extended period of time that their policies bordered on obsession. For the Bolsheviks, Soviet Russia was always viewed as a springboard for international revolution.

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9 Ibid.
10 Friedrich Engels did concede, however, that Russia was ripe for a bourgeois revolution. In a letter to a Russian socialist in 1874, Engels wrote "Russia is undoubtedly on the eve of a revolution. ... [A] revolution, which started by the upper classes of the capital, perhaps even the government itself, must be rapidly carried further, beyond the first constitutional phase, by the peasants. Russia is on the brink] of a revolution which will be of the greatest importance for the whole of Europe if only because it will destroy at one blow the last, so far intact, reserve of the entire European reaction." Robert C. Tucker, ed., The Marx-Engels Reader (New York and London, W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 675.
11 Ulam, Expansion and Coexistence, 16.
Centralized state power would serve as a conduit for a socialist uprising. The Bolsheviks believed they could consolidate the impetus for socialism, foster its growth, and unleash its power (when ready) by utilizing the state. Lenin and his colleagues were fully aware that Russia was not supposed to be the birthplace for socialist revolution; however, when their revolution succeeded, and (more importantly) when the German revolution failed, the Bolsheviks had to adapt their revolutionary policy. According to Teddy Uldricks, Lenin's *Imperialism* provided the theoretical framework for Bolshevik foreign policy. By correlating distinct national societies and global relationships alongside class conflict, Lenin correlated economic struggle with political struggle. The overthrow of the political state became just as relevant as the overthrow of the economic system. This improvised of Marxism formed a central tenet of Bolshevik revolutionary policy after the failure of international revolution. "Imperialism," Uldricks states, "supplied the theoretical justification for making necessary accommodations with the capitalist states, in addition to suggesting where the most advantageous compromises might be made." 12 Preservation of state power became the overriding task of the Bolsheviks because preservation of Soviet Russia meant the protection of socialist revolution. Any compromises were permissible as long as Bolshevik state power was maintained.

Both Jon Jacobson and R.C. Nation reject the notion of Russian nationalism during the first tumultuous years of Bolshevik state power. "[F]oreign relations," Jacobson states, "were central to the political imagination of the Bolsheviks and to their actual political behavior from the day they came to power" because Marxism was an inherently

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internationalist doctrine. 13 Jacobson believes the Bolsheviks after October 1917 utilized foreign policy to incite world revolution. When this international revolution failed to materialize, the Bolsheviks were forced to hunker down and consolidate state power. This was not so much an act of political greed as revolutionary expediency. The attempt to pursue an effective national security policy in a hostile world without sacrificing at least a "pro forma commitment" to its founding ideals is the essence of what Nation describes as the "Soviet security dilemma." 14 According to Nation, the October Revolution was originally justified as an act of revolutionary internationalism. "The Bolshevik regime," Nation claims, "based its claims to legitimacy on a set of assumptions that portrayed Soviet power as an agent of progressive social change, called down judgment on the dominant international order, and sought to negate the very idea of 'national' security as traditionally understood." 15 These aspirations were not easily surrendered, Nation continues. Hence the dilemma when the German proletariat and others left the call for revolution unanswered. Bolshevik foreign policy had to accomplish two goals simultaneously: preserve Soviet Russia as the basis for socialist revolution, and maintain Bolshevik legitimacy as the protector of Marxian socialism. Nation disagrees with historians who dismiss the Soviet approach to foreign policy as a function of fixed determinants such as geostrategic constraints or Russian national traits. The Soviet approach to security, Nation states, "was characterized by adaptability and dynamic evolution as well as by continuity." 16

15 Ibid, xii.
16 Ibid, xiv.
The Bolsheviks always kept their eye on the development of class conflict in Europe. Lenin and his colleagues were disenchanted by the failure of international revolution and they did retreat into the doctrine “socialism in one country”; however, they did not, as Debo claims, “build barriers” between themselves and the outside world. They adamantly believed their revolution in Russia would be complete only when workers from the rest of Europe emulated the actions of the Russian proletariat. The Bolsheviks, then, depended on assistance from the European working-classes, and they sought to incite international revolution through agitation and propaganda.

Contrary to Melograni’s claim that the Soviet state blocked the revolutionary aspirations of the Bolsheviks, it is more correct to argue that the state buttressed the revolutionary hopes of the Party. Throughout the immediate post-October years, Lenin and his colleagues viewed Soviet Russia as a transitory stage in the preparation for a wider, international revolution; revolution would be preserved through the strength of a centralized institution. The Soviet state was the revolution; revolution was the state. With the state playing such a crucial role in the development of international revolution, it could only follow that the foreign policy (international relations) of that state would influence greatly the fostering of a proletarian uprising. And while Ulam believes the Bolsheviks deviated from their Marxian credentials by formulating a centralized foreign policy, he does not seem to consider that that foreign policy was founded on the basis of accomplishing two fundamental components of Marxian revolution—preparation and prosecution. The Soviet state, the Bolsheviks reasoned, would serve as the spearhead for international
revolution. Soviet Russia would organize proletarian masses, and (when the time was right) prosecute international revolution.
CHAPTER I.

THE GREAT WAR "SCHISM"

The outbreak of world war in August 1914 split the social-democratic movement in Europe. A "schism" took place among those socialist parties that advocated national defense of their countries, and those parties that called for international proletarian revolution. The majority of social-democratic movements fell into the first or "defensist" category. Most notable of these groups was the German Social-Democratic Party (SPD). The SPD had been the spearhead of the European working-class movement for much of the time between German unification (1871) and the outbreak of the Great War.

Possessing the largest base of workers, who had experienced a speedy industrialization after 1871, and forming a strong center of power in central Europe, the SPD was the example all other socialist parties followed. The SPD also found legitimacy in the fact that the credo of modern socialist thought—Marxism—was developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, both of German decent.

The advent of war created an atmosphere of national solidarity in Germany that had no precedent in any other period. Carl Schorske states that "the internal tensions of German society seemed to find their release in the prospective struggle against the external enemy." 17 The SPD voted for war credits during the wave of patriotism that swept

Germany throughout July and early August 1914. This act was reciprocated by most other socialist movements throughout Europe. For the SPD, defense of Germany was synonymous with the defense of the German working-class. Supporting the homeland was the expedient way of preserving all the gains of German social-democracy: socialist representation in the Reichstag, rights to hold elections, protection of trade-unions, and legalization of the Party. To do anything less than answer the call to duty would be to undermine all the SPD had accomplished during the past forty years. The German Socialists accepted a “civil peace,” or Burgfrieden: “the voluntary suspension by the political parties of all struggle among themselves and against the government.” 18 For no other political party in Germany was there such a rapid change in strategy than within the SPD. Once the German Social-Democratic Party accepted this new position, the leaders of the labor movement had to adapt their role. Disciplining the labor movement now became the primary function of party leaders in Germany. It was the essence of the party’s new position, the historian Carl Schorske argues, “that any basic opposition to its policy was ipso facto an attack on the national war effort and the state, and vice versa.” 19 Paradoxically, Schorske concludes, it was this discipline that became a major factor in the split that would wrack European social-democracy during the Great War. 20

Very few socialist movements rejected the rally-cry from their national governments during the first days of August 1914. One group that did rebuff this call to arms was the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP). A particular element of this party—the Bolsheviks—not only rejected “defensism,” but promulgated the defeat of the tsarist

18 Ibid, 292.
19 Ibid, 294.
20 Ibid, 295.
government as their top priority. In a pamphlet written in the summer of 1915, Lenin stated that revolutionary action during a time of war encompassed one task only—the defeat of one’s own government. 21 This meant not only wishing for the defeat of one’s own government, but also facilitating the process by inciting revolution against that government. “Revolution in wartime means civil war,” Lenin stated in 1915. 22 Led by Lenin, the Bolsheviks advocated international proletarian revolution. The Bolsheviks believed only international revolution could destroy the bourgeoisie’s grip on the working classes.

Class solidarity was essential for Marxist revolution. According to Marxist theory, states are not autonomous, self-determined entities; rather, they are a conglomeration of economic forces. From the late nineteenth to the twentieth century, these states were economic forces based on capitalism. While they competed and vied with each other for foreign markets, they also buttressed each other’s power by preserving the status quo of capitalist domination. To Marxists these economic forces enslaved the capitalist system’s workers—the proletariat. For each worker, then, his own government was just as hostile as a foreign bourgeois government. The proletariat had no homeland; all they had was the fraternal alliance of all workers worldwide. Their common subjugation and oppression fused them together. And it was only through their solidarity that the yoke of capitalism could be lifted. Marx, in 1872, declared that only “when we have established [solidarity] on

22 Ibid, 276.
a sound basis among the numerous workers of all countries will we attain the great final
goal [.]” 23

It was this solidarity that the Bolsheviks called for at the outbreak of the Great War.
More than a year before the beginning of hostilities, Lenin wrote that the “one guarantee
of peace is the organized, conscious movement of the working class.” 24 For the Bolsheviks,
the first enemy was one’s own government. Defeat of that government was the necessary
prerequisite for international revolution.

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CHAPTER II.

"THE TRUE MEANING OF THE WAR"

The Bolshevik approach to international affairs was influenced significantly by this debacle of internationalism in August 1914. The Bolsheviks were disappointed at the news that the SPD and all other socialist parties in the belligerent states had adopted a defensist posture toward the war. To Lenin and his comrades, this choice was nothing short of traitorous. The most influential socialist leaders of present-day Europe, Lenin stated in October 1914, "hold views that are chauvinist, bourgeois and liberal, and in no way socialist. The responsibility for this disgracing socialism falls primarily on the German Social-Democrats." If there is anything than can hinder the revolutionary struggle of Russia's working class against tsarism," Lenin continues, "then that is the behavior of the German and the Austrian Social-Democratic leaders[]."

The RSDLP had always looked to the social-democrats of Germany as the shining example of socialism. The SPD was the inheritor of Marxist tradition, Germany had the most class-conscious workers of all nations, and the German Social-Democratic Party seemed the best-prepared body to lead the proletarian revolution Marx deemed inevitable. Therefore, many socialists believed Germany would be the birthplace of international revolution. Lenin agreed. Since the SPD was the premier social-democratic party, Germany

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25 Nation, Black Earth, Red Star, 4.
27 Ibid, 30.
would spawn a workers' revolution. German Social-Democracy, however, failed to fulfill its historical role; the foundation for European socialism crumbled. "The national principle," Nation states, "had triumphed, and socialist internationalism proved a chimera when put to the test." A different political party would have to pick up the abandoned banner of socialist revolution.

In addition to the Great War experience, Lenin's famous treatise, *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, provided another foundation for Bolshevik foreign policy. This work converted Marxist revolution from a strictly economic phenomenon to a political one. Economic alienation of the working-classes was no longer the sole precondition for socialist revolution. Lenin asserted that political rupture was just as capable of unleashing proletarian uprising. According to Jon Jacobsen, it was Lenin's adaptation of Marxism in this work that placed "distinct national societies and global relationships alongside class conflict within advanced capitalist countries at the core of revolutionary theory."  

Instead of a battle between states, Lenin viewed the Great War as fight for economic sovereignty. Rather than a war for defense of the homeland against forces of evil, it was a war of domination and conquest. *Imperialism* described capitalism's insatiable appetite for expanding wealth, which necessitated the search for new markets. Lenin explained the colonization of extra-European peoples and territories by European powers as an inevitable consequence of this search for markets. Capitalism, Lenin stated, reaches the height of imperialism when foreign markets and foreign peoples are dominated by European

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capitalism, and when antagonism characterized the nature of class relationships between the bourgeoisie and proletariat back in Europe.

The sources of wealth exploited by European capitalism were not infinite. Tensions would build among the capitalist governments as their spheres of influence and routes of trade began to contrast. "In the Leninist view," Teddy Uldricks argues, "capitalism was not a monolithic entity but rather the bourgeoisie divided against itself by its own greed." These tensions transform into outright hostility, Lenin argued, as the capitalist states try to preserve their economic hegemony. Lenin believed war was the only result of this friction. The Great War, therefore, was the manifestation of the hostilities building among the European states over the past half-century. It was a war for markets, a war of competition, a war for economic domination.

According to Lenin, these imperialist belligerents drafted workers to fight their wars of conquest. Patriotism and nationalism were techniques by which the European proletariat were tricked into fighting for the expansion of capitalism. Bourgeois phrases of patriotism and national defense shattered the international fraternity of workers by convincing them that the war was a noble cause, and that their governments were worth defending. Lenin stated that the "sole actual content, importance and significance of the present war" lay in distracting the attention of the working masses from the political crises in the belligerent states, "disuniting and nationalist stultification" of the workers, and exterminating their vanguard so as to weaken the revolutionary movement of the proletariat. "The bourgeoisie of each country," Lenin believed, "is trying, with the help of false phrases about

31 Uldricks, Diplomacy and Ideology, 148.
patriotism, to extol the significance of its ‘own’ national war, asserting that it is out to defeat the enemy [.]” 33

The Bolsheviks considered it their duty to expose this bourgeois deception of workers. Socialists still loyal to internationalism had a responsibility to foster civil war worldwide. “It is primarily on Social-Democracy,” Lenin states, “that the duty rests of revealing the true meaning of the war.” 34 Otherwise, “without a decisive break with opportunism, and without explaining its inevitable fiasco to the masses,” Lenin warned, the aims of socialism cannot be fulfilled. 35

The fiercest enemy in this struggle to turn world war into civil war was the defensist capitulators. Viewing the Great War as a war of imperialism, Lenin could not fathom the SPD’s submission to defensism. “The gravest feature of the present crisis,” Lenin stated in November 1914, “is that the majority of official representatives of European socialism have succumbed to bourgeois nationalism [and] chauvinism.” 36 Why enlist workers, Lenin asked, for defense of a government which was striving to maintain the very socio-economic structure that oppresses them? By accepting calls to patriotism, Lenin argued, all social-democrats of the belligerent states have failed their working-class constituencies. For Lenin and the Bolsheviks, stifling the progress of socialism was worse than the wealth-mongering capitalists who sent workers to kill each other in the trenches.

34 Ibid., 27.
35 Ibid., 32.
CHAPTER III.

"POLITICS BY DIFFERENT MEANS"

As early as 1915, the belligerent nations began exchanging overtures for peace to each other. Depravation on homefronts, growing social discontent, and stalemate on the warfronts made European leaders consider an end to hostilities. Proponents of peace had raised their voices increasingly as the war progressed through 1916. Years of total war had resulted in deadlock, and it became increasingly difficult to justify the deaths of so many. Many viewed the war as an unfortunate consequence of arms buildup during the early portion of the century. Disarmament was seen as a way to end wars permanently. Diplomats for the belligerents sought peace, yet they could not reach agreement on the safeguarding of colonies and the annexations of foreign territories.

For Lenin and the Bolsheviks the call for peace was nonsensical. The Bolsheviks saw the bourgeoisie practicing "politics by different means" through these cries for peace and disarmament. According to Lenin, suing for peace was the latest bourgeois tactic for maintaining their oppressive hold over the working-classes. Lenin understood the war as a continuation "by violent means" of politics pursued by the ruling classes of the belligerent powers. He wrote that "peace is a continuation of the very same politics... war does not alter the direction of pre-war politics, but only accelerates their development." 37 Calls for disarmament were simply pacifist drivel that benefited only the bourgeoisie. Just as calls for

national defense were used to dupe the working classes, so “phrases about a democratic peace smuggle in the very same bourgeois lie.” 38 Without a series of revolutions and a revolutionary struggle in every country against the respective government, it was impossible to hope for “anything resembling a democratic peace.” 39 Only by turning the national war (war between political states) into an international war could a truly lasting peace come to Europe; only civil war in all belligerent countries could ignite an international revolution.

By 1916, Lenin began to reconsider his position on peace. He believed that the dragging out of war seriously endangered the possibility of proletarian revolution in Russia. “Therefore,” Lenin stated, “the revolutionary forces of Russia . . . set themselves the urgent task of ending the war as quickly as possible [.]” 40 Convinced that the schism between defensists and defeatists would never be mended, believing the war was swallowing up working men by the hundred thousands and literally killing any form of fraternal alliance among European workers, Lenin revised his original stance on peace.

Lenin did not seek a peace for peace’s sake. He still spurned the pacifist pleas for disarmament, and still detested a peace with annexations. Lenin did not believe the war could only be ended by a simple “refusal” of individuals, groups, or “casual crowds.” The war could be ended by revolution alone: “We are for the war being ended by a revolution in a number of countries, i.e., by the conquest of state power by a new class . . . by the [proletariat].” 41 Lenin viewed peace as a chance to consolidate proletarian forces, for three reasons. First, peace would end the suffering of the proletarian masses. According to a

38 Ibid., 164. [Emphasis Lenin’s]
39 Ibid., 294.[Emphasis Lenin’s]
40 “Is There a Way to a Just Peace?” Lenin, CW: vol. XXVII, 6/20(7)/17, 55.

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"decree of peace" passed by the Bolsheviks, an overwhelming majority of the workers and laboring classes of all belligerent countries were "exhausted, tormented, and racked by war," and longed for a "just and democratic peace." The senseless slaughter of Lenin's socialist constituency had to end. Second, peace would break the seal on social discontent and undermine the economic gains of the imperialist belligerents. "The capitalists fear peace," Lenin argued, "because they know they will have to render an account to their people. They are trying to postpone the hour of their final bankruptcy." Third, Lenin believed peace would—after a respite for consolidation of the masses—provide the opportunity of instilling class-consciousness into the proletariat.

The February Revolution of 1917 left the issue of peace unresolved. Substantial political gains, however, were accomplished by the new Provisional Government. Three hundred years of autocratic rule ended in Russia when Tsar Nicholas II abdicated his thrown on 2 March. Also, the new government—comprised of Constitutional Democrats (Kadets), moderate socialists, and radical socialists like the Mensheviks—proclaimed the inviolability of basic civil liberties, the end of political censorship, and an amnesty for political and religious prisoners. It also guaranteed freedom to join workers' unions and to strike, and provided the right of all Russian citizens to participate in the planned elections for a Constituent Assembly. However, the issue of peace went unsolved. Moderate and liberal groups in the Provisional Government wanted to continue the war.

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43 "Appeal from the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs to the toiling, oppressed, and exhausted peoples of Europe." Degras, Soviet Docs.: vol. I, 12/19/17, 20.
45 Ibid.
against German militarism. The Mensheviks were the most outspoken supporters of war from the radical left. They believed it was the only way to protect the democratic gains of the February Revolution. The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, remained adamantly against the continuation of war. Immediate peace was viewed as the only path available to prepare Russia for a proletarian revolution.

The Bolsheviks gained power in October 1917 in large part through their promise for “land, bread, and peace.” Getting Russia out of the war was a major part of the Bolshevik platform. Lenin and his comrades understood that peace was essential for the Bolsheviks to maintain power. And their call for peace extended beyond Russian borders. An appeal from the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs declared that only after the imperialist war ended, could the “working class in all lands . . . overthrow the rule of capital and . . . seize political power in order to reconstruct Europe and the whole world on democratic and socialist lines.” 46 In a note to all the neutral countries of Europe, Leon Trotsky declared that the “demand for an immediate peace is . . . the demand of the mass of the people of all countries, belligerent or neutral. The Soviet government firmly counts . . . on finding the most resolute support in its struggle for peace among the [laboring] masses of the neutral countries [.]” 47 By appealing to all the “oppressed” and “toiling” peoples of Europe, the Bolsheviks hoped to incite international revolution through peace. Much as they had attempted to inflame workers into turning their arms against the bourgeoisie, now the leaders of Revolutionary Russia sought to ignite revolution through the laying-

46 “Appeal from the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs to the toiling, oppressed, and exhausted peoples of Europe.” Degras, Soviet Docs.: vol. I, 12/19/17, 19.
47 “Note from Trotsky, Peoples Commissar for Foreign Affairs, to the representatives of Norway, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, Denmark, and Sweden on the opening of Peace Negotiations,” Ibid., 11/23/17, 10.
down of arms. Peace would produce working-class solidarity; peace would expose the grievous capitalist oppression of the proletariat. The Bolsheviks, then, extended high-sounding overtures for peace without "indemnities" and "annexations." It was going to be a peace for the people—the working people (the only constituency that mattered). The new revolutionary government, Soviet Russia, appealed to the belligerent states to immediately engage in talks for peace.
CHAPTER IV.

"THE FIRST IN A SERIES OF REVOLUTIONS"

The October Revolution was a seismic shift in European history, and the Bolsheviks viewed it as such. By taking the reins of power and adopting the gains of the February Revolution, the Bolsheviks considered themselves the harbingers of a new world order. But the Bolsheviks did not consider their revolution an anomaly. The October Revolution was viewed in the materialist streamline of history, as promulgated by Karl Marx. According to the Bolsheviks, the Russian Revolution was the first spark of a socialist uprising that would ignite all of Europe. The Bolsheviks believed workers of other European states would follow their lead and seize state power from the bourgeoisie. The October Revolution, a Party statement proclaimed, is "the first in a series of revolutions and uprisings by the proletariat which the imperialist war will inevitably engender [.]" 46 The statement declared that the Bolsheviks were obligated to call on all the proletarian masses "to rise up against their own governments and thus support the revolutionary movement in Russia [.]" 47 The Bolshevik precedent would guide the way for international class war. "The example of the Russian workers," Lenin stated, "will be followed inevitably, perhaps not tomorrow

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46 Ralph C. Elwood and Richard Gregor, eds. Resolutions and Decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), "On War and Peace," vol. 1, 3/22/17, 205. This source will hereinafter be referred to as CPSU.

47 Ibid.
(revolutions are not made to order), but inevitably all the same by the workers and all the working peoples 

For Marx and Engels, revolution was the herald of change. The radical adjustment in socio-economic class relations redirected the course of history. The French Revolution, according to Marx and Engels, was the first revolution of modern history. Feudalism was destroyed; the capitalist phase of history begun. "The bourgeoisie broke up the feudal system," Engels stated in 1880, "and built upon its ruins the capitalist order of society."  

Class relationships became more defined as bourgeois industrialists superceded the feudal landlords. Tillers of landed estates were transformed into workers under the employ of wealthy industrialists. The French Revolution brought the realization of socialism one step closer. Less than one hundred years later in 1871, and also occurring in France, the Paris Commune signaled the inception of Marx's last historical epoch—socialism. Despite its failure, Marx viewed the Commune as a precursor to the international socialist revolution.

The Bolsheviks, then, believed their revolution was completing Marx's historical prophecy. The foundation for their revolution's success was the French Revolution and the Paris Commune. According to Dmitry Shlapentokh, many Russian intellectuals not only assumed the October Revolution was similar to that of the French in its political and social outlines, but also concluded that the Russian Revolution was a "carbon copy" of the events in France. 52 Many Russian intellectuals were filled with a "messianic fervor," Shlapentokh states. "These intellectuals believed that Russia should adopt certain ideas (e.g., freedom, 

50 "Is There a Way to a Just Peace?" Lenin, CW: vol. XXVII, 6/20(7/17), 56.  
equality, and brotherhood) that Europe had begotten but had abandoned long before.” 53 Lenin described a likeness between the Jacobin and Bolshevik Revolutions. Like the Jacobins, the Bolsheviks had declared war on “the allied tyrants directed against the Republic.” 54 According to Lenin, the Jacobins were a “great historical example of a truly revolutionary struggle against the class of the exploiters by the class of the working people and the oppressed.” 55 Shlapentokh states that Russian revolutionaries were fascinated with the French Revolution, which provided an operational model. “Those who advocated spontaneous, grass-roots movements praised the French Revolution as the example of spontaneous popular action.” 56

Lessons from the Paris Commune were particularly important to the Bolsheviks. Since the Paris uprising was the first proletarian revolution to affect a modern European nation, the Bolsheviks emulated much of the spirit and action of the Paris Commune. For many Bolsheviks, their revolution was simply an extension of the Commune’s legacy and also a corrective to its mistakes. According to Robert Tombs, Marxists saw the Paris Commune as a revolutionary “prototype” to be examined and diagnosed in order to produce a successful future model. 57 Lenin and the Bolsheviks did not consider the failure of the Commune inevitable; instead they believed it was the result of strategic mistakes. Whereas socialist critics like Karl Kautsky believed the Commune failed by taking power prematurely, the Bolsheviks believed failure was due to the pursuit of “contradictory tasks”—both patriotism

53 Ibid.
54 “The Enemies of the People,” Lenin, CW: vol. XXV, 6/20(7)/17, 57.
55 Ibid., 58. [Emphasis Lenin’s]
and socialism. 58 The Communards, the Bolsheviks argued, should have thrown off all bourgeois phrases of patriotism and turned their struggle into a class war.

The proletarian revolution that would implement Marx's materialist conception of history, however, was not supposed to happen in an agrarian state like Russia. Over 80 percent of the population was landed peasantry. The only industrial infrastructure to speak of was based in two cities, Moscow and Petrograd. Compared with Germany, Russia's working-class population was minuscule. And the RSDLP was an illegal party, which had emigrated throughout Europe during most of the war to avoid tsarist authority. The spark for international revolution was supposed to occur in Germany. That country was the most industrialized state in Europe; it had the largest working-class of any other country, and it possessed the most graduated political representation in the SPD. Marx predicted that only a state with a highly-industrialized infrastructure could foster the ignition of a proletarian revolution. Why then did Russia become the locomotive of Marxist revolution?

Lenin believed Russia's significance lay in its "backwardness." Its antiquated form of Oriental despotism, feudal standard of agrarian economics, infantile development of capitalism, and its inefficient enforcement of centralized power all made the waging of revolution in Russia "simple." For Lenin this was an alternative route to the same destination. While class-conflict developed in the more industrialized states of Europe, proletarian revolution could rest on the foundation of Soviet Russia. This was the innovated interpretation of Marxism that the Bolsheviks adopted. For them, the alteration was precluded by German Social-Democratic defensism. The SPD had forfeited its Marxian mandate for revolution by voting for war credits. With their vote for war, their

58 Ibid., 200.
responsibility for proletarian uprising crumbled. A new basis, a new representative was needed.

The Bolsheviks believed they were the ones to fulfill this role. Throughout years of war, they had remained faithful to international revolution, and had rejected the taint of bourgeois defensism that infected so many of their socialist colleagues throughout Europe. The Bolsheviks, as early as 1915, postulated themselves as the vanguard of European socialism. "Our Party," Lenin declared in September of that year, "will preserve the slogan of 'transform the imperialist war into a civil war,' i.e., the slogan of the socialist revolution in the West." In that same month Lenin boldly claimed that Russia would serve as a conduit of international socialist revolution. Two years later, the Bolsheviks made good on their claim by establishing the first proletarian-led government since the Paris Commune. In the May First Manifesto of 1918, the Party declared that Russia had set an example of power for all working classes, and that her example would be followed by all other countries. "Our example will create enthusiasm, the will for effort, and the determination to win victory over the enemies in the hearts of all workmen of the world.*

Marx's conception of history—with its inception in Paris of 1789 and its dénouement in Petrograd of 1917—was now complete. The overthrow of absolutism and feudalism was the "chief content" of the period between 1789 and 1871. "The period of 1789-1871 left behind it deep marks and revolutionary memories," Lenin stated. "There could be no

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59 "The Defeat of Russia and the Revolutionary Crisis." Lenin, CW: vol. XXI, 9/15, 381
60 "Through the defeat of Russia, towards a revolution in Russia and, through that revolution and in connection with it, towards a civil war in Europe." in "The Defeat of Russian and the Revolutionary Crisis." Lenin, CW: vol. XXI, 9/15, 382.

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development of the proletarian struggle for socialism prior to the overthrow of feudalism [and] absolutism ."

Lenin further tied the 1905 Russian Revolution within to revolutionary legacy of France. "The imperialist war [has] linked up the Russian revolutionary crisis, which stems from a bourgeois-democratic revolution, with the growing crisis of the proletarian socialist revolution in the West . . . . The Russian bourgeois-democratic revolution [of 1905] is now not only a prologue to, but an indivisible and integral part of, the socialist revolution in the West." According to Lenin, the 1905 revolution consummated the bourgeois revolution in Russia. The 1905 experience also presented Russia as European, and not much different from the West. The Revolution of 1905, Shlapentokh argues, was the first Russian revolution of the European type. It demonstrated that Russia, though it lagged behind in fixing its problems, solved sociopolitical tensions according to the Western model. Consequently, Shlapentokh states, the French Revolution and Paris Commune were "not only relevant to Russia, but became the most popular subject in discussions among those who espoused the idea of a basic similarity between Russia and the West." Now, in 1917, the urgent task lay in broadening proletarian revolution in Russia into international proletarian revolution in Europe.

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64 Shlapentokh, "French Revolution in Russian Life," 79.
65 Ibid.
CHAPTER V.

"PEREDYSHKA: A ‘BREATHING SPELL’"

By December 1917, it became clear to the Bolsheviks that their call for peace would only extend as far as Germany. Europe’s working classes did not rise up to support Revolutionary Russia. Soldiers on the front did not turn their arms against their bourgeois overlords. The pitiful war continued. The governments of Great Britain and France felt betrayed by their Russian ally. As far as they were concerned, a Bolshevik refusal to continue the war effort left them to bear the full brunt of German steel upon the Western Front. Germany, on the other hand, was happy to conduct peace negotiations. But not to the degree of conceding their massive gains in the East. Why settle for a “peace without annexations” when a final offensive push would end the war in the East anyway? And negotiations with Germany would not be conducted through representatives of the German working-class (as the Bolsheviks had hoped), but instead via the German military machine.

Even before reaching the negotiating table, Lenin and the Bolsheviks were in an unfortunate position. German troops had all but defeated the Russians on the Eastern Front. The Central Powers had nothing to lose and everything to gain in formulating a peace with Soviet Russia. Peace on the Eastern Front would allow the transfer of German regiments to the West, and the destabilized Soviet Republic would be hard-pressed to re-
occupy the vast tracts of land annexed by Germany. So when talks began at Brest-Litovsk on 22 December 1917, the Germans rejected at the Bolshevik demand for “peace without annexations.” 

According to John Wheeler-Bennett, it mattered little to the Bolsheviks if the Germans gained further sources of territorial and material strength (i.e. the Bolshevik delegation was unconcerned about maintaining the pre-war borders of the former tsarist empire). What did matter was the struggle of the Eastern European proletariat. Ceding vast tracts of territory to Germany would be the same as surrendering working-class constituencies to imperial-capitalist enemies. "The battle-ground was that of social struggle," Wheeler-Bennett states, "and therein frontiers mattered little in comparison with the fight of the proletarian against the capitalist." Soviet Russia, however, was in no shape to enforce a peace without annexations. Its army was in shambles and German troops physically occupied much of the land concerned in the conference. "The socialist government of Russia is faced," Lenin wrote in early January 1918, "with the questions . . . of whether to accept this peace with annexations now, or to immediately wage a revolutionary war." 

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66 John Wheeler-Bennett illuminates excellently the diametrical difference between the negotiating parties at Brest-Litovsk. "No two groups could have thought more differently. The Central Powers spoke the ancient language of diplomacy, time-honored [sic] and crusted with tradition. They thought in terms of strategic lines, of provinces ceded, of economic advantages to be gained. Not so the Bolsheviks. Theirs was not a parlance of frontiers and concessions. This was the first contact of Bolshevism with the Western World, and it was the aim of the Soviet representatives to utilize the meeting as a sounding-board for the propagation of their doctrine. In their principles of a general European peace they were not concerned with geographical terms and expressions. They banked upon the immediate effect of their propaganda on the war-weary masses of Europe to achieve . . . the World Revolution and the replacement of Imperialism by ‘rule of the proletariat.’" John Wheeler-Bennett, Brest-Litovsk: The Forgotten Peace, March 1918. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1938), 115.

67 Wheeler-Bennett, Brest-Litovsk, 116.

68 Ibid.

69 "On the History of the Question of the Unfortunate Peace." Lenin, CW: vol. XXVI, 1/7(20)/18, 444.
The Bolshevik delegation, led by Leon Trotsky, remained resolute until negotiations cooled in late January and early February. Many Bolsheviks believed acceptance of such a peace, which equaled the loss of a third of the former empire, would discredit their claim to power. On 10 February, Trotsky boldly—and somewhat naively—proclaimed to the conference what became known as “No War, No Peace.” According to this document Soviet Russia, due to German intransigence, discontinued hostilities but refused to accept officially a dictatorial peace. “We cannot,” Trotsky decreed, “enter the signature of the Russian Revolution under conditions which carry oppression, sorrow, and suffering to millions of human beings[.]” The Bolsheviks would simply quit the scene.

An obviously unusual form of diplomacy, Trotsky’s proclamation was an attempt to conciliate rivaling stances on peace among the Bolsheviks. “No War, No Peace” was to serve as a compromise between those Bolsheviks who demanded a revolutionary war, and those Bolsheviks who called for a “breathing spell” through peace. Neither faction was satisfied. Those advocating war—angry that Soviet Russia was negotiating with German jingoists in the first place—believed Trotsky was displaying an irresoluteness that would undercut the revolutionary mandate of the party. Advocates for peace believed Trotsky’s action eliminated any hope for an acceptable peace, and feared the resurgence of hostilities.

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71 Wheeler-Bennett describes the scene after Trotsky finished his diatribe. “When the last echoes of Trotsky’s powerful voice died away, no one spoke. The whole conference sat speechless, dumbfounded before the audacity of this coup de théâtre. The amazed silence was shattered by an ejaculation from [Major General for German forces on the Eastern Front Max] Hoffman: ‘Unerhört!’ (‘Unheard of!’)[.]” Wheeler-Bennett, Brest-Litovsk, 227.
This was the dilemma faced by the Bolsheviks when negotiations with Germany reached an impasse in early 1918. To continue the revolution unabated or delay with the hope that peace would provide leverage for international revolution? Revolutionary determination formulated the Bolshevik stance on foreign diplomacy prior to 1917. Foreign relations were consequential only in their relation to international revolution. Marxist doctrine had never been explicit about a revolutionary form of diplomacy. Diplomacy was comprised of overthrowing the system of bourgeois states, the very institutions that practiced foreign relations. So when the proletarian masses failed to respond to the call for revolution, the Bolsheviks had to improvise. Would they become statesmen or remain revolutionary idealists? Initially, peace was not an unacceptably tactic for the Bolsheviks. Their revolutionary sentiments were not violated because the laying-down of arms was viewed as an alternate road to the ultimate goal of international revolution (all discussed above). Lenin and the Bolsheviks were sure the proletarian masses would come to aid their revolution. But the revolution(s) did not come. The Bolsheviks faced a dilemma. They were the first proletarian government since the Paris Commune, and they—as guarantors of Marxist dialectics—possessed the revolutionary mandate. The Bolsheviks, however, also found themselves the administrators of a crumbling state power on the brink of chaos. Civilians on the homefront were starving because of poor food distribution, and mutinous soldiers were too weary to be organized. For many Bolsheviks, this was a prime opportunity to complete the revolution in Russia. The state was crumbling, the bourgeoisie was scattered, and the workers were in power. To less idyllic observers like Lenin the situation was more precarious. First, Bolshevik power rested on
the promise for peace and not much else. Rescinding this promise could undermine their standing (and all their revolutionary goals) and provide impetus for another coup d'état by one of their many enemies. Second, and most important, promulgating a peace program would insinuate a defensist mode of foreign diplomacy. Revolutionary goals of the party would be compromised by obligations to state defense.

Lenin did not believe he would be stifling his revolutionary endeavors by adopting a "defensist" form of diplomacy. He understood that the condition of the revolution would need revision, yet he believed this delay was necessary. With the revolution relegated to one country, bourgeois belligerents would easily extinguish all Bolshevik gains. Suing for peace, Lenin reasoned, would provide peredyshka (a "breathing spell") during which Soviet Russia could strengthen its revolutionary power. Credibility for the regime could also be gained by displaying temperance. A firm basis in Russia would provide a foundation for revolution in the rest of Europe.

While the Party debated the best course, the German military brought the matter to a head. With the armistice expired, and after Trotsky's inexplicable denouement of negotiations, German troops were ordered on 17 February to advance towards Petrograd. In a matter of 24 hours German troops covered 150 miles over practically non-existent roads and in the face of the Russian winter, capturing over two thousand guns, many thousands of prisoners, and a "goodly haul" of motorcars, locomotives, and trucks. 72 Lenin recognized it was time for a decision. "The worst, the very worst, had happened," Wheeler-

72 Wheeler-Bennett, Brest-Litovsk, 245.
Bennett declares. "All that [Lenin] had dreaded and warned against had come true. There was no more time for talking." 73

The Bolshevik formal acceptance of peace reached Berlin on the 21 February; two days later the Germans replied with new and harsher terms presented in the form of an ultimatum. 74 On the 24 February the Bolsheviks accepted German terms and finally, on the 26th, the German advance (which had reached Lake Peipus and Narva) was halted and the Bolsheviks were directed to send to Brest-Litovsk a delegation authorized to sign a peace. 75 Georgi Chicherin replaced Trotsky as head of the Bolshevik delegation, and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed on 3 March 1918. By this agreement Russia lost 34 percent of its population, 32 percent of its agricultural lands, 54 percent of its industrial complex, and 89 percent of its coal mines. Germany had won the war on the Eastern Front. 76 "The Revolution had placed the achievement of peace at the head of [Bolshevik] ambitions," Wheeler-Bennett concludes, "and now at last peace had been achieved—a peace that passed all understanding." 77

In a statement to the German delegation after the signing of the Peace, the Russian delegation declared that the "peace by agreement" was in fact an imperialistic peace—"a

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73 Ibid., 257.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid., 246.
76 According to Adam Ulam, Brest-Litovsk ended the age of innocence for the Bolsheviks. "[The Bolsheviks] went into the negotiations as world revolutionaries; they emerged as men solicitous mainly about their own state and power." (Ulam, Expansion and Coexistence, 75.) October marked the birth of the Bolshevik Revolution, but the signing of the humiliating and costly Peace marked the real beginning of the Soviet state. (Ibid.) R.C. Nation, however, believes the Bolsheviks still considered world revolution to be the Soviet regime's most important ally in its long-term confrontation with imperialism. (Nation, Black Earth, Red Star, 14.)
77 Wheeler-Bennett, Brest-Litovsk, 269.
peace dictated at the point of a gun.” 78 Under the circumstances, Soviet Russia had no choice but to accept the peace since their state was in shambles and their defenses were completely dilapidated. Despite their inability to resist a German armed offensive, the Bolshevik delegation had “no doubt that the triumph of imperialism and militarism over the international proletarian revolution” would prove to be “temporary and ephemeral.” 79 Lenin did not believe Bolshevik ideals were violated by the acceptance of the peace. He remained convinced that Soviet Russia would pass from a period of surrender to a stage of resurgence through a “great patriotic war.” 80 It would not be a national chauvinist war in the bourgeois sense, but rather a patriotic war “for a socialist fatherland, for socialism as a fatherland, for the Soviet Republic as a contingent of the world army of socialism.” 81

79 Ibid., 523.
81 Ibid.
CHAPTER VI.

"A RUTHLESS WAR AGAINST REVOLUTIONARY PHRASES"

Although Lenin had managed to halt the German advance through expedient diplomacy, his acceptance of the peace was very unpopular among his Bolshevik comrades. When the peace came up for approval by the Central Executive Committee (CEC), it became obvious that Lenin would have to convince his colleagues that peace was imperative. Jeers and cries of "traitor" greeted Lenin as he rose to address the CEC on the night of 23 February. "Let us beware of becoming the slaves to our own phrases," Lenin stated. "You must sign this shameful peace in order to save the world Revolution, in order to hold fast to its most important, and at present, its only foothold—the Soviet Republic [.]"

According to Wheeler-Bennett, the CEC was "listening spellbound" to Lenin; all their passionate phrases about revolutionary war had been silenced. Lenin continued his pedagogic homily.

"You think that the path to the proletarian Revolution is strewn with roses? That we will march from victory to victory with waving flags, to the strains of the 'Internationale'? Then it would be easy to be a revolutionary! The Revolution is not a pleasure trip! The path of revolution leads over thorns and briars. Wade up to the knees in filth, if need be,

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82 Wheeler-Bennett, Brest-Litovsk, 260.
crawling on our bellies through dirt and dung to Communism, then in this fight we will win [.]”

After Lenin finished his speech, the CEC discussed the matter. At the end of nearly three hours, a vote was called. The CEC voted to sign the peace by 116 to 85 with 26 abstentions. Although his argument had swayed enough delegates to gain peace, Lenin had not captured the loyalty of his opponents, and he left the meeting hall amid shouts and howls of “traitor,” “judas,” “you have betrayed your country!” “German spy.”

Many Bolsheviks believed the peace was a betrayal of Marx’s revolutionary directive. Preservation of the revolution superceded preservation of the state in any form. If Soviet Russia would initiate the revolutionary process, the proletarian masses of Europe were sure to follow. As explicated in the Marxist principle (later expounded upon by Trotsky) of “Permanent Revolution,” this was the only way to liberate the working-classes. Nikolai Bukharin and other “Left” Bolsheviks believed Lenin was selling the proletarian revolution short. By approving the peace, Bukharin and his followers argued, the “Right” was subjugating the international revolution to German junkerdorm. Soviet Russia’s conclusion of the Peace with Germany, the Left Communists declared, “weakened the strength of the international revolution and strengthened international imperialism.” These critics also asserted that the Peace was that it countermanded the revolutionary zeal of the international working-class, and undermined the premier party status of the Bolsheviks. Attempts at diplomatic maneuverings could not inspire the European working classes since these maneuvers, critics of the Peace argued, “demonstrate not the strength, but the

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83 Ibid.
84 Ibid., 261.
weakness of the revolution." 86 Left Social Revolutionaries and Left Bolsheviks unanimously viewed the Peace as capitulation to the enemy, and they believed all workers viewed it as such. Because Soviet Russia had been denied the right to fulfill its historical role of initiating international revolution, the workers of the belligerent states would be discouraged from answering the revolutionary call. Both of these sentiments found voice at the 7th Bolshevik Party Congress, held less than a week after the Brest signing. According to the Minority Resolution of the Congress, the Brest Treaty "nullifies the international importance of the Russian Revolution, and converts the Soviet Republic into a tool of imperialistic politics."

87 Regarding a "breathing spell," the Resolution continued, the signing of the Peace "demoralizes the revolutionary will of the proletariat and retards the development of the international revolution." 88 Lenin himself, the Left argued, had curtailed the revolution and denied the realization of Marx's materialist history.

Lenin, on the other hand, remained convinced that peace was the only way to preserve the revolution in Russia. And since revolution in the belligerent countries failed to materialize, he rejected expending the young revolution on a conflict the Bolsheviks were sure to lose. "[I]t would be a very bad policy," Lenin stated, "to risk the fate of the Socialist Revolution on the chance that a revolution might break out in Germany by a certain date. Such a policy would be adventurous [.]." 89 Unlike his war-mongering comrades, Lenin appreciated Clausewitz's famous axiom, "politics by different means." Just as Clausewitz

86 Ibid., 109.
88 Ibid.
89 "Revolutionary War and Peace," Ibid., 1/20/18, 504.
argued that war is the extension of a belligerent country’s political agenda, Lenin believed the Peace was an extension of Soviet Russia’s political agenda. As discussed above, peace could be used to accomplish the revolutionary goals of the Bolsheviks. By granting time for consolidation, organization and education, the working classes would be prepared to start their revolution. More importantly, peace would provide a “breathing spell” during which Soviet Russia could form a solid base for international revolution.

Lenin was acutely aware the international revolution would not soon materialize. He understood that Soviet Russia would have to maintain the revolutionary precedent for some time to come. “The position of the socialist revolution in Russia must form the basis of any definition of the international tasks of our Soviet power, for the international situation,” Lenin wrote, “is such that is it quite impossible to predict the outbreak of revolution [.]” While most Bolsheviks expected the proletarian uprising in a matter of weeks or months, Lenin knew it could be years before such a revolution occurred. Throughout the early months of 1918, Lenin considered any attempt to predict the coming revolution as a “blind gamble.” Therefore, Lenin argued that the party had to adjust its tactics. Soviet Russia, he stated, must be prepared to make concessions. The Bolsheviks must accept the despicable setbacks, such as the Peace. Adaptation became a key component of Lenin’s overarching strategy for fomenting international revolution.

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90 “Wars are . . . the expressions or manifestations of policy itself. The subordination of the political point of view to the military would be contrary to common sense, for policy has declared the War; it is the intelligent faculty, War only the instrument, and not the reverse. The subordination of the military point of view to the political is, therefore, the only thing which is possible. . . . “War is an instrument of policy; it must necessarily bear its character, it must measure with its scale: the conduct of War, in its great features, is therefore policy itself, which takes up the sword in place of the pen, but does not on that account cease to think according to its own law.” Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, 1832, 405 & 410.
Addressing the 7th Party Congress days after the signing of the Brest Peace, Lenin stated that “[we] must know how to retreat [.]” His further comments explicated fully his diplomatic intentions regarding the Peace:

“We must know how to retreat . . . . If you cannot adjust yourself, if you cannot bring yourself to crawl on your belly in the mud, you are no revolutionary, but a chatterbox . . . . [P]eace is a way to gather strength . . . . History suggests that peace is a breathing space between wars . . . . Every such revolutionary will justify us, will recognize the acceptance of a shameful treaty as right, because it is in the interests of the proletarian revolution and the revival of Russia . . . . We must learn to work along new lines . . . . We shall not take the risk now, but we shall learn to work in difficult conditions, with an unprecedentedly humiliating treaty . . . . for such an historic crisis is not resolved by one war or by one peace treaty.”

Lenin believed that the task of a truly revolutionary party was not its renunciation of all compromises, but rather, “through all compromises, when they are unavoidable, to remain true to its principles, to its class, to its revolutionary purpose, to its task of paving the way for revolution and educating the mass of the people for victory in revolution.” In its conduct of foreign policy, therefore, Soviet Russia would display the greatest discretion and restraint to avoid provoking counter-revolutionary reaction from the belligerent states. For Lenin, only restraint and work to establish proletarian discipline could “protect Soviet power at this moment, one of the most difficult and dangerous periods of transition,

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unavoidable owing to the delay of the revolution in the West." 95 It was imperative that the Bolsheviks change their revolutionary approach. The Bolsheviks, Lenin argued, now had to adopt a "serious attitude" toward Soviet Russia's defense. It was necessary to "declare a ruthless war against revolutionary phrases about revolutionary war." 96 The Bolsheviks had to practice patience; for in this way only could the socialist revolution be maintained in Russia.

Throughout this episode Lenin balanced political pragmatism with Marxist idealism. Although unbridled revolution was a primary tenet of Marxism, Lenin also understood that Marx held class solidarity as a necessary precondition for revolution. Marx assumed, once the spark of revolution was lit, all of Europe would ignite into revolution. The Bolsheviks, then, were theoretically correct to continue the war against Germany. But Marx did not stipulate the proper course of action in the case that international revolution did not materialize.

Marx and Engels did address the issue of the state. They argued that the state served a purpose for the proletarian revolution. It was the centralized institution socialist revolutionaries could use to eradicate bourgeois power. According to Engels, state centralization was in direct harmony with the concept of revolution. "Revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is," Engels argued. "It is the act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets, and cannon [.]" 97 Marx deemed this co-opting of bourgeois state power as the "dictatorship of the proletariat." The proletariat could not simply overthrow the bourgeoisie one day

95 "Theses on the Present Political Situation," Lenin, CW: vol. XXVII, 5/12-13/18, 364.
96 "A Painful but Necessary Lesson," Ibid.: 2/25/18, 64.
and create a socialist way of life the next. Marx believed there had to be a transitory phase between the inception and completion of revolution. In his Critique of the Gotha Program Marx stated that between “capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. There corresponds also a political transition period which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.” The dictatorship of the proletariat was this transitory period. After the proletarian revolution had completely eradicated all elements of bourgeois influence and power, Marx and Engels argued, the dictatorship of the proletariat would be obsolete; the state would wither away. The state “renders itself unnecessary” as it becomes the representative of the whole society, Engels stated. “As soon as there is no longer any social class to be held in subjection; as soon as class rule . . . [is] removed,” Engels declared, “nothing more remains to be repressed, and a special repressive force, a state, is no longer necessary. . . . The state is not ‘abolished.’ It dies out.” Class conflict would be absent because there would be only one socio-economic class, and everyone would live according to their needs in a socialist society.

Armed with this doctrinal weaponry, Lenin defended his call for peace. Peace would preserve the Russian revolution to the benefit of all workers. Lenin, like the Left Bolsheviks and Left SRs, believed the decision for peace was horrible and had global ramifications for the working-classes. Whereas his opponents accused him of extinguishing the revolutionary spirit of the proletariat, Lenin thought it would be more shameful to follow blindly Marx’s doctrine of unbridled revolution without considering contemporary

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96 Ibid., quoting Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Program,” 5/1875. 538. [Emphasis Marx’s]
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socio-political consequences. The gains of the Russian Revolution would be uselessly expended in an unwinnable war. "From the point of view of the defense of the fatherland," Lenin argued in late February 1918, "we have to conclude the most harsh, oppressive, brutal, disgraceful peace—not in order to 'capitulate' to imperialism but in order to learn and prepare to fight against imperialism in a serious and effective manner." Patience and compromise were the order of the day. According to Lenin, the Party's mission was the "systematic, unrelenting, all-round building up of the country's defense potential, self-discipline everywhere, [and] the use of grievous defeat to improve discipline in all spheres of life for [consolidating] Soviet power." The goal of international revolution remained tantamount, however, Lenin was not ready to carelessly sacrifice the revolution for which he had spent decades preparing. Following blindly a strategy of unrestrained revolutionary war would make it easier, Lenin argued, "for German imperialism to crush the Soviet Republic [.]") In the end, this outcome would hurt the international socialist movement more than the acceptance of a grievous Peace ever could. If the socialist revolution were extinguished in Russia, all hope for an international uprising would be eradicated.

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100 Commenting on Lenin's sagacity, Richard Debo states that as a Marxist who would have to justify his proposals to other Marxists, Lenin developed his policies "within theoretical framework of dialectical materialism, class conflict, and the heritage of the European and Russia revolutionary movements. Unlike some of his colleagues, [Lenin's] Marxism was not a thin excrescence covering a philosophic void of a dogmatism which mindlessly tied him to every work of his mentor. He used the work of Marx and Engels as a guide rather than a detailed road map and made special use of their method of social-political analysis to construct his policies. As such, Marxism served him well, for through it he identified his adversaries, analyzed their concrete interests and plotted the political direction in which they were moving." (Debo, Revolution and Survival, 411.)

101 "A Painful but Necessary Lesson." Lenin, CW: vol. XXVII, 2/25/18, 64.


103 Ibid.
permanently. "If we are not prepared to make fresh sacrifices and do not hold out," Lenin
warned, "it will be said that our revolution was historically unjustified." 104
CHAPTER VII.

"DRAGGED AND SHOVED TO GOLGOTHA"

Many contemporary socialists responded negatively to the Bolsheviks and their revolution. Maxim Gorky, a prominent Russian socialist, looked unfavorably upon the Bolshevik revolution. He considered it an autocratic power comparable to the tsarist example. The October Revolution "cast aside all the intellectual forces of democracy" that had sprung to life after the February Revolution. Gorky believed a successful socialist revolution was untenable in Russia. It was impossible, Gorky states, "to make socialists out of the eighty-five percent peasant population of the country." For Gorky, the Bolsheviks were making an "insane experiment of Russia." He believed the working class—"the vanguard of the revolution"—would suffer the most from this experiment. "The best forces and hopes" for revolution would be "crushed and destroyed." Gorky also attacked the Bolshevik explanation that Russian "backwardness" fertilized the seeds of revolution. He feared the Bolshevik claim that Soviet Russia would be the leader of international revolution. "[T]his weak, ignorant people, with an inborn inclination toward anarchism," Gorky contended, "is now called to be the spiritual leader of the world, the Messiah of Europe." This spelled disaster for Gorky. How could Russia, exhausted from

106 Ibid., #198, 12/10(23)/17, p. 106.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid., #43, 3/16(3)/18, p. 141.

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three years of total war and reeling from the revolutionary regime changes of 1917, effectively lead a socialist transformation in Europe? Gorky did not believe Russia was fit to perform the socialist "messianism" of the Bolsheviks. "[T]his unfortunate Russia," Gorky bemoans, "is being dragged and shoved to Golgotha to be crucified for the salvation of the world." 109

Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs) and Mensheviks, other socialist parties of the RSDLP, rejected the Bolshevik claim to power after October 1917. They were committed to parliamentary democracy, and considered the Bolshevik seizure of power as madness, 110 and believed Russia had no option but to fight a defensive war against Germany. However, unlike the Left SRs and Left Communists, the Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks did not advocate a revolutionary war. 111 Menshevik and SR leaders believed a defensive war offered an opportunity to halt the escalation of civil strife in Russia and to mobilize support for national unity and for the Constituent Assembly. 112 Also, they held that the bargaining position of a Russian government vis-à-vis the Germans would be stronger if a legitimate government formed by the Constituent Assembly were in power. 113 "The seizure of power carried out by the Bolshevik Party," an SR declaration claimed, "is a crime against the motherland and the Revolution." 114

109 Ibid.
112 Brovkin, Mensheviks after October, 67.
113 Ibid., 65.
114 Ibid., 2.
For the socialist opposition in Russia, the Bolshevik claim to power would incite civil war and break-up the Constituent Assembly. Like Gorky, the SRs considered the socialization of Russia untenable. They believed the Bolsheviks would only exhaust the working-class and thwart the revolution. The SRs predicted a catastrophic end to the Russian Revolution when Bolshevik promises failed to materialize.

Mensheviks and SRs further asserted that the Bolsheviks enforced “dictatorship of the proletariat” as a means to preserve their monopoly of power. From the Menshevik point of view, the Bolsheviks had demonstrated with the Brest Peace that their top priority was the survival of their party dictatorship and not the defense of Russia. A Menshevik/SR manifesto against the Bolsheviks declared that “the Bolshevik Government has now no other aim than to preserve its own power at all costs, and that to gain this object it is ready to sacrifice all the conquests of the Revolution[.]” The “sheer dictatorship” of the Bolsheviks created a situation in which the only solution, as was the case under tsarism, was the forcible overthrow of Bolshevik power.

Karl Kautsky, a prominent German socialist, gave the most fundamental criticism of the Bolshevik Revolution in his pamphlet The Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Whereas Lenin distinguished the social-democratic “schism” between defensism and defeatism during the war, Kautsky differentiated between democracy and dictatorship. Socialism was unthinkable without democracy. He did not accept that the working-classes would be emancipated only after the eradication of bourgeois power; rather, the organization of

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115 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid., 71.
118 A Socialist Revolutionary and Menshevik Manifesto against the Bolsheviks,” Wade, Documents of Soviet History: vol. I, 7/29/18, 205.
119 Ibid., 206.
workers through political participation (suffrage) and action (elections) would free the proletariat. Democracy was essential for the building of a socialist system of power. "Only under the influence of democracy," Kautsky stated, "does the proletariat attain that maturity which it needs to be able to bring about Socialism, and democracy supplies the surest means for testing [Socialism's] maturity." 120

Kautsky also criticized the revolutionary foreign policy of the Bolsheviks. He attacked the Bolshevik postulation that Russia was the starting point for general European revolution. With that supposition not yet realized, Kautsky did not blame Europe's proletariat for leaving the Russian Revolution by leaving it "in the lurch." 121 Kautsky referenced Marx in saying that revolution cannot be made, but must arise out of conditions. The Bolsheviks did not appreciate, Kautsky stated, that the conditions in Western Europe "were so different from those of Russia that a revolution there [in Russia] would not necessarily provoke one here [in Western and Central Europe]." 122 It came as no surprise to Kautsky, then, that Lenin and his cohorts were forced to curtail their mandate for unbridled revolution. By staking all on the "card of the general European Revolution," the Bolsheviks adopted a course which brought them up against insoluble problems. 123 An egregious peace had to be accepted, Kautsky argued. The weaker the material and intellectual conditions needed for creation of a socialist society, the more the Bolsheviks felt obliged to replace what was lacking by the exercise of naked power, by

121 Ibid., 63.
122 Ibid.
123 Ibid., 64.
dictatorship. “So it became inevitable,” Kautsky concluded, “that [the Bolsheviks] should put dictatorship in place of democracy.”

Kautsky concluded his work by stating that the Bolsheviks had misinterpreted Marx’s conception of proletarian dictatorship. Whereas Marx promulgated the “dictatorship of the proletariat” as a political condition and not a form of government, the proletarian dictatorship of Soviet Russia was nothing but a “grandiose attempts to clear by bold leaps” the obstacles offered by the successive phases of normal development. Kautsky ended his pamphlet by posing a metaphor between Bolshevik revolutionary policy and a pregnant woman, “who performs the most foolish exercises in order to shorten the period of gestation, which makes her impatient, and thereby causes a premature birth.”

Rosa Luxemburg responded more favorably to the October Revolution and the revolutionary policies of the Bolsheviks. Whereas Kautsky fell into the defensist camp of the SPD, Luxemburg was one of the few prominent socialists who—like Karl Liebknecht—rejected the wartime stance of the SPD, and favored the provocation of international revolution. Throughout the war, Lenin and the Bolsheviks referred repeatedly to Luxemburg as one of the few socialists who could effectively lead a proletarian revolution in Germany. By the time of the October Revolution, Luxemburg openly opposed the defensism of the SPD and favored an immediate revolution in Germany. She viewed the Bolshevik revolution as a ray of hope for international socialism. In her pamphlet The Russian Revolution, she analyzed the significance of Bolshevik ascendancy in Russia.

124 Ibid., 65.
125 Ibid., 140 & 98. [Emphasis Kautsky’s]
126 Ibid., 98.
Whereas Lenin based Russia’s maturity for revolution on its “backwardness,” Luxemburg believed the German proletariat displayed true backwardness by not fulfilling its “historic task” of igniting international revolution. Like Lenin, Luxemburg believed the Bolsheviks fulfilled the historic mission abandoned by the German proletariat. According to Luxemburg, the Bolsheviks performed “the historic service of having proclaimed from the very beginning, and having followed with iron consistency, those tactics which alone could . . . drive the revolution ahead.” The Bolsheviks were the only group that really carried on a socialist policy.

Unlike Kautsky, Luxemburg supported a rapid revolutionary process. Non-violent revolution was unfeasible. Marx had stipulated that in most European countries “the lever of our revolution must be force; it is force to which,” Marx continues, “we must someday appeal in order to erect the rule on the labor [. ]” For Luxemburg there was no time for the peaceful development of socialism through democracy. “[E]ither the revolution must advance at a rapid, stormy and resolute tempo,” Luxemburg stated, “or it is quite soon thrown backward behind its feeble point of departure and suppressed by counter-revolution.” 

Adopting a famous Marxian metaphor, Luxemburg likened the progress of revolution to a driving locomotive. Either the rushing locomotive drives forward “full steam ahead” to the most extreme point of its “historical ascent,” or it “rolls back by its own weight” to the “starting point at the bottom.” Those who would stifle revolution

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128 Ibid., 34-5.
129 Ibid., 35.
131 Luxemburg, The Russian Revolution, 36.
132 Ibid., 38.
“half way up the hill,” Luxemburg continued, will be dragged down with it “irredeemably into the abyss.” 133 Luxemburg commended the Bolsheviks on their seizure of power and installation of a revolutionary program. Because the Bolsheviks went beyond simply protecting bourgeois democracy by creating a proletarian dictatorship, Luxemburg stated, the “October uprising was not only the actual salvation of the Russian Revolution [but] was also the salvation of the honor of international socialism.” 134

Luxemburg praised the Bolsheviks for fulfilling the “immortal historical service” of having marched at the head of the international proletariat, with the conquest of political power and “the practical placing of the problem” of socialism’s realization. 135 The October Revolution was only the beginning, Luxemburg stated. The problem of socialism could only be posed, not solved, in Russia. And in this sense, Luxemburg concluded, “the future everywhere belongs to ‘Bolshevism.’” 136
CHAPTER VIII.

"ORGANIZING AND PREPARING"

Bolshevik party policy changed with the adaptation to revolutionary defensism. Party organization and discipline became the main objectives for the Bolsheviks. Marx himself had stated that "to be able to fight at all the working class must organize itself at home as a class, and that its own country is the immediate arena of its struggle." 137 Only with proper organization and party discipline could the Bolsheviks effectively export their Marxist revolution. The Bolsheviks understood that they were preparing for an international class war. The Bolsheviks stipulated their revolutionary tasks at the 6th Party Congress in August 1917. The Party was to take on the role of the "foremost fighter" against counter-revolution. It must defend "all the rights and liberties won"; must defend "all mass organizations"; and must devote all its efforts "to organizing and preparing its forces" for the ideal revolutionary moment. 138 "It will then be the task of these revolutionary classes," concluded the Congress, "to devote all efforts to taking the state power into their own hands and to guiding the state, in alliance with the revolutionary proletariat of the advanced countries, toward peace and the socialist reconstruction of society." 139 The quality

138 "On the Political Situation (resolution of VI Party Congress)," CPSU: vol. 1, 8/3/17, 254-55.
139 Ibid.
of their revolutionary response would determine the overall success of socialism over capitalism.

Already viewing themselves as the vanguard party of European socialism, the Bolsheviks amplified their primacy over the global social-democratic movement by declaring themselves the Russian Communist Party (RCP) on 8 March 1918. They did this for two reasons. First, they detached themselves from a social-democratic movement that had been demolished by the Great War. The RCP’s principle task would now be “to unite the scattered Communist forces, [and] to form a single Communist Party in every country . . . in order to increase tenfold the work of preparing the proletariat for the conquest of political power [.]”\(^{140}\) The Bolshevik split with their social-democratic colleagues around Europe was complete. There was no more room for a rapprochement in relations. The SPD and the like were irrelevant to the Russian Communists. Second, changing the party name solidified the Bolshevik claim as inheritors of Marxist tradition. By adopting “Communist” as their party name, the Bolsheviks invoked a Marxian reference dating from the mid-nineteenth century. In Marx’s famous Communist Manifesto, “the Communist Party” is the revolutionary body that will liberate the working masses from bourgeois oppression. The Manifesto declared the Communists “the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country [and] that section which pushes forward all others [.]”\(^{141}\) Marx stated that the Communist Party had the advantage of “clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results” of the

\(^{141}\) Tucker, Marx-Engels Reader, quoting Marx, “Communist Manifesto,” 2/1848, 484.
According to Marx, Communists are distinguished from other working-class parties in two ways. First, Communists reveal through national struggles the "common interests of the entire proletariat." Second, Communists "always and everywhere" represent the interests of the socialist movement as a whole throughout the various stages of the proletarian struggle against the bourgeoisie.

The Bolsheviks, then, were making a bold statement to the world. Changing their party name signaled to all working-class constituencies of Europe the new party's primary role as the protagonist for socialist revolution. There would be no higher authority on the prosecution of revolution than the RCP. Lenin stated that it was only "under the leadership of [the Communist Party] that the proletariat is capable of displaying the full might of its revolutionary onslaught ."

International revolution would occur only under the leadership of the RCP. In a statement by the Communist International in July 1920, political revolution could be implemented only by a political party; workers could not carry out revolution without having an independent political party to represent them.

The necessity of a political party for the proletariat would cease when a complete abolition of classes occurred; until then, the "international organization of the proletariat will be strong only if . . . party organization and activity are firmly established." The Bolsheviks were no longer a voice solely for the working-class of Russia, but were now the

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142 Ibid.
143 Ibid.
144 Ibid.
147 Ibid., 107.
voice for the entire European working-class. International proletarian revolution hereafter accord with the dictates of the Communist Party in Soviet Russia.
CHAPTER IX.

DEFENDING THE "SOCIALIST FATHERLAND"

Revolutionary defensism was quickly put to the test when civil war broke out in Russia in mid-1918. According to Lenin, the Bolsheviks had been defensists since the October Revolution. Since 25 October 1917 (November 7th), Lenin argued, the Bolsheviks championed the defense of the fatherland because "we have shown by deeds that we have broken away from imperialism. . . . We are in favor of defending the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic." 148

Bolshevik forces—"Reds"—defended their claim to power against a conglomeration of opposition. Collectively known as the "Whites," forces loyal to the tsar, disgruntled peasants, Russian nationalists, and socialist opponents all comprised the opposition to Soviet rule. This opposition was buttressed by the intervention of a European and extra-European alliance. Great Britain, France, the United States, Japan, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Ukraine, Finland and others deployed troops and lent battle materials to the effort of eradicating revolutionary power in Russia. Soviet Russia posed an ideological menace to powers like Great Britain and France. The Bolshevik demand for international proletarian revolution threatened the maintenance of power in post-war Europe. For newly-founded states like Poland, Finland, and Ukraine, Soviet Russia was a national threat. These young

148 "A Painful but Necessary Lesson," Lenin, CW: vol. XXVII, 2/25/18, 64.
states were desperate to uphold their national integrity, and feared a resurgence of Russian
imperialism (regardless of its ideological foundation).

"White" opposition suffered from a lack of centralized organization. Other than
opposing the Bolsheviks, this collection of forces held no central ideology that bound them
together. Imperialists despised their fall from power, and peasants feared the
collectivization of their agricultural stocks by the Bolsheviks; however, each of these
factions fundamentally opposed the theoretical goals of the other. Imperialists were
unlikely to fight for the defense of peasant holdings, and peasants were unlikely to fight for
the reinstatement of empire in Russia. Moreover, the allied powers lacked any form of
cohesion. There was no coordination among the great powers on their objectives in Russia.
Each fighting force deployed to their respective area, maintained a sphere of influence, but
failed to coordinate their local directives into larger objective of defeating the Bolsheviks.
According to Richard Debo, this incoherent allied policy enabled Lenin and the Soviet
government to strengthen their position. "Continued intervention provided the Bolsheviks
with the opportunity to broaden the base of their government and enlist the active
cooperation of many individuals in particular, who had previously opposed the Soviet
regime." 149 This collective, relative indifference to the Bolsheviks was due not only to more
pressing concerns but also to the deeply entrenched and widely held assumption that the
life expectancy of the Soviet government was minimal.150

The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, possessed a centralized ideology that sustained
them throughout the desperate years of civil war. Much Bolshevik strength, Debo argues,

149 Richard Debo, Survival and Consolidation: The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia, 1918-1921 (Montreal
and Buffalo, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 8.
150 Ibid., 402.
"came from the ability to monopolize political power in Soviet Russia." 151 The simple
message of social justice, class warfare, and an end to imperialism appealed deeply to
people weary of war and oppression. 152 By offering land to the peasants, factories to
workers and self-determination to all nationalities of the old empire, the Bolsheviks
appealed to the people in ways its rival parties could not. Surrounded by local and foreign
enemies, the Bolsheviks viewed Soviet Russia as a fortress of socialism. Just as the
Muscovites held to Moscow as a "great magnet attracting all parts of the periphery," so the
Bolsheviks "entrenched themselves in the economic fastness of old Muscovy" and halted all
enemies who tried to root them out. 153 Soviet Russia was the only bastion for international
revolution, and it was the duty of the Bolsheviks to maintain the Marxian credo against all
opposition. Vastly inferior in numbers and equipment, the Bolshevists' common purpose
was their only reliable weapon during most of the civil war. And the Bolsheviks were easily
able to discredit their adversaries as paid agents of foreign powers because of allied support
for the "Whites." 154 The Soviet government was free to speak in the name of Russia—a
Soviet Russia to be sure—but Russian all the same.155

This fortress mentality left an indelible mark on the conduct of Bolshevik foreign
policy. Allied intervention only enhanced the symbiotic relationship between Soviet Russia
and international proletarian revolution. Civil war also shored up inter-party friction.
Whereas late 1917 and early 1918 witnessed a rupture over the proper course for
revolutionary foreign policy, the civil war mended this inter-party hostility. All elements of

151 Ibid.
152 Ibid., 4.
153 Ibid., 400.
154 Ibid., 406-7
155 Ibid., 407.
the Party rallied behind the call to defend the "Socialist Fatherland" when they saw foreign
interventionists and recalcitrant imperialists allying for the defeat of Soviet Russia. By
1919-20, the extortionate Peace of Brest-Litovsk was hailed as a triumph of Soviet foreign
policy because it had allowed the Bolsheviks to retain power in Russia.
CHAPTER X.

"ONE GREAT GAMBLE"

The Bolsheviks watched the Great War with bated breath throughout 1918. By October, when it became clear the Central Powers would lose the conflict, Soviet Russia expected international revolution to rescue it from the depths of civil war. When the German revolution finally erupted in early November 1918, the Bolsheviks believed their hopes had been achieved. A radiogram from Moscow proclaimed that German soldiers had arrested their generals, that Kaiser Wilhelm had abdicated, and that general strike had swept major cities in Germany.\(^\text{156}\) The All-Russian Central Executive Committee promptly annulled the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. It was believed that now "a true peace among nations" would be built upon the principles conducive to the "fraternal relations between the toilers of all countries."\(^\text{157}\) Such an international compact among the proletariat of Soviet Russia and the Central Powers would "create and consolidate a socialist order upon the ruins of militarism and economic slavery."\(^\text{158}\) The Bolsheviks believed their work and preparation would support the revolting masses in Germany.

The German Communist revolution did not last. "Though sporadic outbreaks have taken place, particularly in Berlin" a British observer wrote, "the comparative ease with which these conflagrations have been suppressed by a government as weak and vacillating

\(^{156}\) "Radiogram from Moscow to one and all," Lenin, \textit{CW}: vol. XXXVI, 11/10/18, 495.


\(^{158}\) Ibid., 125.
as the present German one proves that Bolshevism is not a plant which flourishes on
German soil." The murder of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg and the subsequent
failure of the Spartacist (German Communists) movement proved that there was a strong
anti-Bolshevik feeling in Germany. To be sure, the Imperial regime was replaced by the
socialist government of Friedrich Ebert; however, Ebert and his colleagues were the same
socialists who adopted a defensist posture towards the war. The Weimar government (as
Ebert's regime came to be known) would not be a useful instrument for proletarian
dictatorship in central Europe. Ebert's regime strove to maintain the German state and a
German sense of national pride. It called for a more democratic political process, and
attempted to appease all elements of dissent by allowing political representation for the
demographically diverse German population. For Lenin and his comrades, this was petty-
bourgeois socialism. No government, the Bolsheviks argued, could effectively root out
imperial-bourgeois influence when those elements were allowed to exist. Socialism could
only be accomplished when the capitalists and landowners were completely destroyed.

By the end of January 1919, it became clear that the German revolution would not
follow the example of Soviet Russia. Germany had once again failed to fulfill the socialist
goal assigned to it by Marx. Soviet Russia was now a socialist island in a sea of capitalism.
The predictions of war-induced revolutions throughout Europe proved partially correct.
Several other European countries experienced post-war turmoil. France faced mutinies in
its army and England faced an insurrection in Ireland. The most notable post-war turmoil

159 Kenneth and D. Cameron Watts, eds. British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from
the Foreign Office, Confidential Print. Part II, Series A: The Soviet Union 1917-1939 (Frederick:
University Publications of America, 1984-1986), "An Appreciation of the Internal Situation in Russia by
the General Staff, War Office," Vol. 1, 4/25/19, 104. This source will hereinafter be referred to as Watts and
Watts, British Documents.

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came with the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire into four autonomous states: Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia. Still, post-war trauma failed to overhaul the socio-economic system and colonial oppression of European capitalism. The Bolsheviks stood alone to defend themselves against counter-revolution.

During 1920, amid the turmoil of civil war, the Bolsheviks attempted to export their revolution to the rest of Europe. Conflicts with Poland led to war that featured Bolshevik efforts to produce "revolution from without." There is no consensus on the origin of the Russo-Polish War. Beyond dispute was the ambition of Polish ruler Jozef Pilsudski to extend Poland's boundaries, and to exploit the weakness of the Soviet Republic. The Soviets viewed Pilsudski's attack as part of the larger "White" effort to dislodge revolutionary power in Russia. The Soviets hoped to settle the border dispute to their advantage by taking the war to Poland. Also, Polish aggression provided an opportunity to eliminate a security risk by allowing the Red Army to assist the Polish proletariat in seizing power. Even more tantalizing was the prospect of creating a "bridge" across Red Poland to the revolutionary proletariat of Germany and seizing the elusive world revolution by major force. "Across the corpse of 'White' Poland," an order to Red Army soldiers read, "shines the road to world conflagration. On our bayonets we will carry peace and happiness to laboring humanity."

The Red Army drove across Poland throughout the summer of 1920 and reached the outskirts of Warsaw in August. Polish forces put up a spectacular defense on the Vistula

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160 Nation, Black Earth, Red Star, 27.
161 Ibid., 28.
162 Ibid.
163 Ibid.
and forced the Red Army into retreat by 16 August. On 12 October, after Soviet forces had pulled back beyond the Nieman, an armistice was concluded. The Treaty of Riga, which officially ended the war on 18 March 1921, defined a territorial settlement to Poland’s advantage. More importantly, though, the Treaty of Riga ended the Bolsheviks’ “one great gamble” on behalf of the world revolution. It became starkly clear to the Bolsheviks that international revolution could not be precipitated with a little push. Proletarian uprising was something that could not be predicted or forced.

The RCP had to concede that international revolution was not in the foreseeable future. “[T]he international situation,” Lenin stated to the 10th Party Congress, was “defining itself by an extremely slow development of the world’s revolutionary movement, and we in no way presume on a speedy victory of our policy.” Soviet Russia would have to preserve single-handedly the cause of revolution.

This was the final transformation of revolutionaries into statesmen. Thereafter, preservation of the state took top priority for the RCP. The state was the revolution; revolution was the state. Russian Communists had no choice but to accept their transformation. The Russian Revolution stood alone; the promise of an international uprising of the proletariat proved groundless. The RCP understood that it could not equate the socio-political developments of the present to the materialist tradition of Marxism. In the early 1920s the RCP was in uncharted territory. Any action was justifiable, so long as Soviet Russia remained true to its Marxist roots. That Marxist tradition, in turn,

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164 Ibid., 31.
165 Ibid.
became inextricably bound up with the condition of Soviet Russia. Marx’s warning that socialist revolution would suffocate if relegated to one country was essentially superceded by the RCP’s predicament. “Socialism in one country” became the theoretical revision that underlined the Communist agenda into the early 1920s.

Now Soviet Russia would seek legitimacy among the states of the world. This was a policy both of appeasement and defiance. By ceasing their hasty proclamations for international revolution, the RCP hoped to ease the tensions between it and the capitalist states of Europe (and thereby halt the threat of concerted bourgeois counter-revolution). Conversely, Russian Communists hoped the survival of Soviet Russia would demonstrate to the masses of the world—not just workers in Europe—the vitality and promise of socialism. The Soviet Socialist Republic would be the ultimate form of propaganda. 

Rapprochement became the revolutionary policy of the RCP.
CHAPTER XI.

"STABILIZATION AND PREPARATION"

The Genoa Conference, held in the late Spring of 1922, was the first European-wide meeting convened to address socio-political fallout in Europe after the end of the war. Normalization and stabilization of economic trade relations among European states was the meeting's primary objective. The Genoa Conference was the first diplomatic assembly which invited delegates from Soviet Russia. It was also the first diplomatic conference since the end of the Great War to host Communist representatives of Russia. While the Western powers were uneasy about granting \textit{de jure} recognition to the Soviet state, the settling of war debts took precedence.

The RCP had its own agenda for the Genoa Conference. Lenin and his colleagues viewed the Conference as a prime opportunity to improve their diplomatic standing among European states. The Genoa Conference granted Soviet Russia a chance to display its right to a "fundamental international existence in the network of capitalist states."\footnote{\textit{"Our foreign and domestic position and party tasks,"} Lenin, \textit{CW}: vol. XXXI, 11/21/20, 412.} The Socialist Republic had managed to maintain power throughout three years of civil war. Although the hope for international socialist revolution failed to materialize, the possibility of proletarian rule had been maintained. In this respect, Lenin stated to a meeting of RCP officials in November 1920, the "Republic's international position today provides the best
and most precise confirmation of all our plans and all our policy." Since Soviet Russia had managed to thwart all challenges to its existence, Lenin and his colleagues believed their socialist movement and program was "historically justified." How could it be, Lenin asked in a speech given in late December 1921, that the "efforts of three years to crush us have all come to nothing?" The answer lay in "the laboring masses of the world." Although Soviet Russia had not received the "speedy direct support" from the international proletariat against capitalist aggression, the RCP believed it received support of "another sort," namely, the sympathy of those laboring masses in countries hostile to the Socialist Republic. This sympathy, from the laboring masses still under bourgeois oppression, rendered futile all attacks upon Soviet Russia.

The Socialist Republic of Russia was now the undisputed spearhead of international socialism and the RCP, consequently, was the spokesman for all the working classes of Europe. The "breathing spell" was over. Soviet Russia had effectively staved off counter-revolutionary forces which had encircled it for three years. "Today we can speak," Lenin declared, "not merely of a breathing space, but of a real chance, of a new and lengthy period of development." The task of the Party, therefore, required modifications. It was time, as Lenin metaphorically described it, that "the train" should be switched over to other rails. "The switching of this heavy load on to other rails, along a track on which there

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168 Ibid., 411.
169 "Digest of Lenin’s Speech on December 23, 1921," Watts and Watts, British Documents: vol. VI, 12/23/21, 118.
170 Ibid.
171 "Our foreign and domestic position and party tasks," Lenin, CW: vol. XXXI, 11/21/20, 413.
are no rails at all in places," Lenin stated, "calls for concentrated attention, knowledge and
to the workers' government. 174 Chicherin believed Soviet Russia had to practice a policy of "stabilization and preparation." Stabilization of Soviet Russia's international position among the community of states; preparation for the international revolution. These two policy goals were simultaneously contradictory and complimentary, and were based in two separate institutions. On one hand the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (Narkomindel), led by Chicherin, sought diplomatic peace with capitalist states of the West; on the other, the Third Communist International (Comintern) continued propagandizing the motive for international revolution. While one Communist institution strove to find its place among capitalist states of the West, the other institution worked to destroy the global capitalist system.

172 Ibid., 421.
174 Ibid., 259.
This dual nature of Soviet foreign policy proved problematic by early 1921. In late January, the Narkomindel conceded that the “attempt to run two organizations parallel and independent has proved a failure [.]” Conflicts and misunderstandings between official Soviet representatives and the Comintern had a “bad effect on the general work of the Foreign Office abroad,” and the only solution lay in the “absolute subordination” of the Third International to the interests of the Narkomindel. This subordination of the Comintern became apparent by that following summer. In its program for the year 1921-1922, the Third International decreed that it would be “the incarnation of peaceful struggle.” In this search for “stabilization and preparation” toward the West, the Comintern forfeited all authority to the Socialist Republic of Russia. “For the strengthening of our peaceful conquests it is true that real force is necessary, but let the exercise of that force belong to the State ... which is the embodiment of world-power for the workers and toilers of all countries.” A week earlier Lenin corroborated this view on Soviet Russia’s preminence, in a speech to the Third International.

“The birthplace and only home of Communism is Russia. The dictatorship of the proletariat in this country represents a guarantee of the ultimate success of Communism throughout the world. While the Soviet power holds Russia, so long will it be possible to speak of a Communist movement in the whole world. [T]he power of the Soviet Government in Russia must be upheld by all possible means.”

176 Ibid.
178 Ibid., 223.
This was the dialectical background for Soviet Russia's participation at Genoa. The Soviet delegation—led again by Chicherin—strove to create a relationship of peaceful coexistence between them and the rest of Europe. After a week's discussion failed to settle the war debt issue between Russia and its former Allies the Soviet delegation signed the Rapallo Treaty with Germany on 16 April 1922. This agreement consisted of six articles providing for the immediate establishment of diplomatic and consular relations, and the mutual repudiation of claims for war costs and damages. With this treaty, Germany accorded Soviet Russia full and unconditional recognition.

The Rapallo Treaty, while it normalized relations with Germany, did not imply international reconciliation or a policy of "live and let live." As Jacobson argues, in the Bolshevik theory of foreign relations, "socialist and capitalist systems remained antagonistic; neither would nor could be transformed by coexisting peacefully." Peaceful coexistence referred to the rapprochement of diplomatic relations between Soviet Russia and the industrialized capitalist states of Europe. "Peaceful coexistence," Jacobson explains, "was a state of international relations . . . not a policy." Ulam concurs. While Soviet Russia had taken the first step in reconciling itself with the community of nations, Ulam argues that the RCP was returning under their own conditions. Soviet Russia was not giving up "her role as the center of a world-wide revolutionary organization dedicated to

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\(^{181}\) Ibid.


\(^{183}\) Ibid. [Emphasis Jacobson's]

\(^{184}\) Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence,* 129.
propaganda and other activities to overthrow ultimately every other form of
government."^185

While maintaining its revolutionary mandate, the RCP relied upon traditional
diplomacy to reach socialist ends. According to Uldricks, the tactic of allying with a great
power was hardly a Marxian concept. "It was the same balance of power strategy employed
by the most able diplomats of the Old Regime."^186 R.C. Nation believes Soviet Russia
came to terms with the "dilemma of coexistence" at Rapallo. ^187 By allying itself with a
major European power, Nation argues, Soviet Russia broke the ring of isolation that had
been cast around it by the civil war intervention. ^188

Marxist revolution was now fully incorporated into the Bolshevik state. The RCP
believed Soviet Russia would be the herald and guardian of international socialist
revolution. Domestic issues and foreign relations of the state were actually the
international concerns of all workers in the world. Preservation of a socialist state
correlated with the safeguarding of international socialism. De facto recognition was not
enough. Soviet Russia already received that at the Brest-Litovsk negotiations with Germany
in 1918. For the RCP, de jure recognition of Soviet Russia confirmed the sagacity of their
revolutionary policies—and shifts—from October 1917 to April 1922. The acknowledgment
of Soviet sovereignty marked the international acknowledgment that the Bolsheviks had
won the Russian Civil War. ^189

^185 Ibid., 129-30.
^186 Uldricks, Diplomacy and Ideology, 148.
^187 Nation, Black Earth, Red Star, 43.
^188 Ibid.
^189 Debo, Survival and Consolidation, 342.
CONCLUSION

Through their foreign diplomacy, Lenin and his comrades balanced their foundation in Marxian philosophy with raisond'etat. Accepting defeats, dragging their bellies in the mud, and making compromises were necessary measures to protect Marx's revolutionary mandate. Lenin and his colleagues, throughout strenuous years of revolution, civil war, and invasion, always kept international socialist revolution as their ultimate goal. The foreign policy of Soviet Russia was always formulated under the rubric of inciting an international uprising that would liberate the proletarian masses from bourgeois domination.

Between August 1914 and October 1917, the Bolsheviks were intent on producing international socialist revolution. They believed civil war in all European states was the most expedient method for igniting such an international uprising. Lenin and his Russian comrades became disenchanted when their socialist counterparts (particularly German Social-Democrats) throughout Europe failed to contribute to the dissemination of international revolution. A "schism" divided those socialists who defended their national loyalties ("defensists") and those who prescribed to international loyalties ("defeatists"). Throughout this schism, the Bolsheviks began viewing themselves as the protectors of Marxist doctrine; the believed the SPD and other European socialist parties had failed their theoretical mandate to promulgate Marxian revolution.
Lenin and his comrades viewed the Russian Revolution of October 1917 as the first act in the development of an international revolution. When it became strikingly clear an international uprising would not occur after both the end of the Great War and the outbreak of civil war in Russia, the Bolsheviks adjusted their revolutionary strategy. They adopted a defensist stance in the interest of preserving their socialist revolution, and they were forced to formulate a foreign policy that reflected both their commitment to Marxist ideals and their obligation to protect Soviet Russia. Initially, through a foreign diplomacy based on compromise, Lenin and his comrades accepted the harsh Peace of Brest-Litovsk because they believed Soviet Russia was the only stalwart foundation for socialism in war-torn Europe. They deemed it irrational to expend the gains of the October Revolution in a unilateral revolutionary war against much-stronger capitalist enemies. By accepting the Brest Peace, Lenin believed Soviet Russia would receive a "breathing spell" during which it could strengthen and prepare proletarian forces for international class war against the bourgeoisie.

During this respite, the Bolsheviks heightened their relevance to the entire social-democratic movement of Europe by proclaiming themselves the Russian Communist Party. This action underscored the fact that Lenin and his comrades had become the socialist vanguard not just of Russian workers but of the entire European proletariat. The RCP claimed to be the undisputed herald of socialist revolution. They, as protectors of Marxist revolution, would dictate the opportune moment for proletarian uprising. Until then, Soviet Russia would serve as the epicenter for revolutionary Marxism.
By the early 1920s, after surviving three years of civil war, Soviet Russia strove to stabilize relations with the capitalist states of the West. Post-war turmoil and Soviet propaganda had failed to engender an international socialist revolution in Europe. The new diplomatic goal for Lenin and his comrades was to attain an equal footing among the community of nations. This was pursued not as a submission of revolutionary goals, but as a way to protect Soviet Russia’s resilience through years of revolutionary crisis and international assault. Finding equal footing among the community of nations would promulgate the attributes of socialism to workers still under capitalist oppression, and would demonstrate to those bourgeois governments that Soviet Russia was a permanent member of the international community. The Treaty of Rapallo signified this new posture in Soviet foreign diplomacy.

A great breath of experience separated the Russian Communists of 1922 with the Bolsheviks of 1914. Through world war, revolution, and civil war, Lenin and his comrades managed to scale insurmountable odds in the interest of Marxist revolution. Soviet Russia had graduated from an infantile and isolated revolution in a crumbling state in late 1917, into a burgeoning center of revolutionary Marxism by 1922. And the Bolsheviks had been transformed from a hothead menagerie of revolutionary émigrés scattered throughout Europe in 1914, into revolutionary statesmen who had successfully incorporated socialist revolution into state power.
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