Unit 11:
Russia I: 1850-1917

This Unit aims to

- Examine the economic and social conditions that gave rise to the revolutions of 1905 and 1917.
- Outline the events in Russia up to 1917.
- Discuss the positions of the various revolutionary groups within Russia.
- Illustrate the spread of anarcho-syndicalist ideas during the period.
- Analyse the development of Marxist-Leninism and the rise, and eventual triumph, of the Bolsheviks.

Terms and abbreviations

Narrodniks: The revolutionary movement in Russia from around 1861.
Russification: The process of suppressing all ethnic and non-Russian national traditions and recognise the supremacy of Russian culture,
The Pale (of Settlement): The area of Jewish settlement in Russia
Pogroms: The organised massacre of Jews.
SR: Social Revolutionaries. Peasant based revolutionary party; later to split into 'right' and 'left' factions.
RSDW: *Rossijskaja Social-demokraticeskaja Rabocaja Partija*, Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party. Marxist party formed in 1898 from the Emancipation of Labour Group.
Bund: The Jewish socialist group within the RSDW.
Workers Cause: The official representatives of the RSDW in exile.
Bolsheviks: 'The Majority'. The name adopted by the followers of Lenin after gaining control of the central committee of the RSDW at the 1903 congress.
Mensheviks: 'The Minority'. The name given to the opponents of Lenin in the RSDW.
Khleb i Volia: 'Bread and Liberty'. A monthly anarchist journal, founded in 1903, and named after Kropotkin's book. Later to become an anarchist group.
Chernoe Znamia: 'The Black Banner'. Mainly Jewish anarcho-communist group formed during the 1905 revolution. It was based in the Pale and advocated a campaign of terrorism.
Beznachalie: 'Without Authority'. Similar to Chernoe Znamia but based in St. Petersburg. Both groups contained a high proportion of students within their ranks.
Maximalists: Social Revolutionaries who argued against the idea of a two-stage revolution after 1905.
Golos Trouda: 'The Voice of Labour'. Founded in 1917, the main organ of the anarcho-syndicalists.

Introduction

The momentous events in Russia in the early 20th Century had a unique and profound effect on the development of anarcho-syndicalism. Both this and the following Unit are dedicated to Russia. Although undoubtedly there were thriving anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist movements in Russia, they remained small throughout this period. These are not the main focus for study here. Instead, we will concentrate on the tactics and actions of the Bolsheviks and in particular, Lenin. The events in Russia cast a long shadow, and it is essential that we all learn the lessons if we are to prevent the disastrous cul-de-sac that was Marxist-Leninism ever happening again.

Until the 1850s, Russia was economically backward relative to the western powers. Russian society was based on a caste system and most people in the rural population were owned as serfs by the landed gentry. The system was barbaric, old and inefficient. Economic decline took hold as the industrial revolution swept through the west, exposing the weaknesses of the autocratic Russian system. As is so often the case, it took a war to bring home the true nature of Russia's decline. Russia military failure during the Crimean war shook the Russian elite, which thereafter began to look increasingly unsteady. After the disaster of Crimea, the main concern among Russia's ruling class became industrialisation. If it was to compete with western powers it had to industrialise. Ironically, in attempting to industrialise Russia, the Tsar began the process that was to sweep away the feudal system his rule depended on.

The drive for industrialisation did initially meet with some success. Indeed, by the turn of the Century, Russia possessed some of the most modern and best-equipped factories in the world. But development was patchy - both industrially and geographically, concentrated in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Russian Poland and the Ukraine. Elsewhere, but for some oil production, economic and social conditions remained medieval and so, by 1917, Russia still lagged a long way behind Britain, Germany and the US. On the eve of the Russian revolution, 80% of the population still worked the land. Still, Russian underdevelopment was relative; its sheer size had made it a major power.

The 1861 Land Reform Act, which 'freed' the peasantry, became a source of bitter resentment. Under the agreement, the land was divided between the peasantry and the landed gentry. To many this meant that their right to work the land had been taken away from them. Even those who were 'given' the land found themselves having to pay for the very soil they had worked for centuries. After 1861, things only got worse for the peasantry. Industrialisation was not fast enough to absorb the rising population, which resulted in a dramatic rise in the number of the rural poor.

Unlike in Britain, where industrialisation led to migration to the towns and a declining rural population, in Russian the rural population grew by 20% between 1900-1914. Ever-increasing numbers of peasants were dependent on the same amount of land. At the same time, the state deliberately squeezed domestic consumption by raising prices. This was to allow production to be exported for foreign currency, to finance the foreign loans used to pay for industrialisation. The peasantry bore the brunt of these cuts. The result was increasing peasant unrest that was to continue up until the 1917 revolution. This unrest spread to the growing urban working class, who retained strong links with the countryside, often working seasonally between the two.

In the 1870s, the first workers' organisations began to emerge. The most important of these were the strike committees, which began to form within the workplace and which became the main focus of strike action. Though illegal and much targeted by state forces, these committees were to play a major role in the course of Russian history.

Narrodniks, socialists & anarchists

During the long period of unrest that followed 1861, a revolutionary tradition developed in Russia, based on the Narrodniks. This became a catch-all name for a succession of revolutionary groups within Russia. At the heart of the Narrodnik ethic was a belief that people had a yearning to be free and that this would enable them to overcome oppression and create a new world based on equality and freedom. Various Narrodnik groups used a wide range of tactics aimed at bringing about a mass uprising. Some groups of intellectuals lived among the peasantry as a way of spreading revolutionary ideas, while others decided that assassinating the Russian elite might be a way to spark off spontaneous insurrection. As news of the full horrors of European industrialisation began to arrive in Russia, the Narrodniks came to believe that Russia could bypass capitalism through a peasant uprising that would lead to the direct establishment of a democratic communist society.

The unrest and signs of upheaval were most noticeable in the periphery of the Russian Empire. Social disquiet was intensified by national and religious persecution. Non-Russians, included Finns, Estonians, Poles, Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaijanis, constituted a majority of the empire's population. A policy of *Russification,* to suppress non-Russian national traditions and recognise the supremacy of Russian culture, only served to aggravate the problem. No national or religious minority suffered more from this policy than the Jews. Around five million Jews resided in the Empire, mainly in the *Pale of Settlement,* which extended along the western borderlands from the Baltic to the Black Sea.

After the assassination of Alexander II in 1881, the anti-semites stepped up a gear. The government issued a series of decrees affecting every aspect of Jewish life. Jews were prohibited from settling in rural communities, even within the Pale. Movements from village to village were restricted and searches were introduced of Jews living outside of the Pale, which was reduced in size. Quotas were introduced to limit the number of Jewish students in secondary schools and universities to 10% inside the Pale, 5% outside, except in St. Petersburg and Moscow where the figure was 3%.

It was in the borderlands of the west and the southwest, and mainly in the Jewish towns, that the Russian anarchist and other revolutionary movements were born. In these areas, economic distress had intensified after the famine of 1891 and the depression of

1899. In response, artisans, intellectuals and factory workers had been forming clandestine groups devoted mainly to self-education and radical propaganda. First here, and then throughout Russia, they became the nuclei around which the two major socialist parties, the Marxist Social Democrats, and the neo-populist Social Revolutionaries (SR) took shape.

An anarchist propaganda circle had been established in 1892 by Russian exiles in Geneva. This group, which called itself the *Anarrkhicheskaia Biblioteka* (Anarchist Library), attempted to smuggle translations of the works of anarchists such as Bakunin, Kropotkin and Malatesta into Russia. In 1903, the first anarchist group, the *Bor'ba* (Struggle), appeared in Russia at Bialoystok. At the same time anarchists in Geneva produced a monthly anarchist journal, *Khleb i Volia* (Bread and Liberty), which was obtained by the anarchists of Bialoystok. They immediately appealed for more. Russian translations of anarchist propaganda were sent, as well as a few copies of Yiddish periodicals published by Jewish anarchists from London's East End. Yet even then the anarchist groups remained small. This was partly because the Social Democrats and the Social Revolutionaries, in contrast to the socialist parties of Western Europe, were militant and had effective organisations of their own.

The Social Revolutionaries were rooted in the tradition of the Narrodniks. Though influenced by Marxist thinking concerning the development of capitalism - they accepted that the next stage of Russian development would be capitalism and parliamentary democracy - they also argued that this would be quickly followed by a transition to communism. The SR theorised that, under the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the peasantry would take possession of the land from the landed gentry, prompting a further revolution, during which the workers would overthrow capitalism. As such, they saw a revolutionary role for the peasantry, in contrast with the widely-held view of most Marxists, who saw them as doomed by history.

The first Marxist organisation was the *Emancipation of Labour Group* formed in 1883. Its ideas had taken hold amongst a large section of the Russia intelligentsia, and even among the small capitalist class. Some of these saw Marxism as ideological reinforcement for their struggle against feudalism. Meanwhile, many in the liberal intelligentsia admired the Parliamentary system and were attracted to the 'scientific' approach of Marxism, including its

prediction that the next stage of Russian development would be capitalist, bourgeois revolution based on the European parliamentary model.

The authorities also looked relatively kindly upon Marxism, seeing it as a better channel for revolutionary energy than the Narrodnik groups, many of who had taken to assassination as a form of struggle. The state decided that some of the more moderate Marxist groups would be allowed to operate openly. This was notable in a country where the death sentence was rarely used, apart from against revolutionary groups.

The ideas of the Emancipation of Labour Group formed the basis of the *Rossijskaja Social-demokraticeskaja Rabocaja Partija* (RSDW, Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party). This was formed at a conference at Minsk in 1898 but the participants at the conference were quickly arrested and it soon ceased to exist as a functioning organisation. It was left to a group of exiles to re-launch the party, along with its newspaper 'The Spark', edited by Lenin. Though small, the RSDW was soon riddled by internal division. Two warring factions quickly formed; the 'economists' and the 'politicians'. These divisions were to come to a head at the 1903 congress.

Beginnings of Marxist-Leninism

The 'economists' basically kept faith with Marxist determinism. They argued that the capitalist bourgeois revolution would be spearheaded by the capitalist class, after which a mass-industrial proletariat would develop. Over a long period of experience with capitalism, this proletariat would then fulfil its historic mission to overthrow capitalism and begin the socialist transformation of society. The RSDW should therefore concentrate on the day-to-day economic struggle in order to begin building a mass party of the working class. This would then be ready to take its place in the new parliament after the capitalist revolution, where it would begin to fulfil its role as the political leadership of the working class.

The 'politicians', led by Lenin, bitterly opposed the economists' strategy. Lenin made furious attacks both in 'The Spark' and in a pamphlet written by him in 1902 entitled *'What is to be done*'. During this polemic, Lenin was to lay the groundwork for what became known to the world as Marxist-Leninism.

Lenin concentrated most of his attack on the economists' idea of spontaneity. He ridiculed the idea that through their day-to-day struggle under capitalism, workers could automatically come to see the need to overthrow capitalism. Instead, he argued, the teaching of socialism had grown out of philosophical, historical and economic theories worked out by educated representatives of the possessing class. It was the intelligentsia, not the workers, who had developed revolutionary theory. Maintaining that *"without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement",* he stressed that the role of the intelligentsia was vital to the revolutionary cause. Without the leading role of the intelligentsia, he said, workers could engage only in economic struggle and (at best) they would develop *"a trade union consciousness*", and certainly not a revolutionary one.

The party would at first be made up of the intelligentsia, who would then recruit the more advanced workers and educate them in the ideas of revolutionary theory. Lenin continuously stressed the role of 'revolutionary consciousness' within the revolutionary movement and it was the intelligentsia that would implant this revolutionary consciousness into the working class. Through this process the party would be and remain an elite organisation of revolutionaries that would lead the working class. Lenin stressed that the party must lead the workers movement and not merge with it, the party must not be a mass organisation of the working class, but instead Lenin envisaged a small party made up of professional revolutionaries who were conspiratorial in nature. These would be the revolutionary core, a *cadre*, who were to keep a tight grip, leading the masses and preparing and executing a revolutionary master plan in which the masses would, unknowingly, play a part choreographed by the party elite.

Lenin dismissed the criticisms of the economists who pointed out that his plans would create an organisation that would, by its very nature, be undemocratic. Lenin argued that the main organisational principle for the movement, "*must be strict secrecy, strict selection of members, and the training of professional revolutionaries".* In other

words, Lenin absorbed much of the specifically Russian tradition of secret revolutionary organisation and welded it to Marxism. Lenin demanded that members of the party must act as agents of the Central Committee within the workplace - as if they were members of an army. They must follow the orders of the party unquestioningly. Moreover, he maintained that the basic economic interests of workers could only be achieved by a political revolution that would, *"replace the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie with the dictatorship of the proletariat".*

For Lenin the principal role of the RSDW was to lead the workers in the overthrow of Tsarism, as a precondition for the establishment of socialism. In this not only did Lenin see a different role for the party than the economists, he disagreed with both them and classic Marxism. He argued that, due to the backward conditions in Russia, the capitalist class was too weak to overthrow feudalism and so it would be the workers, headed by the RSDW and supported by the capitalists, who would overthrow feudalism, leading to the establishment of parliamentary democracy.

Lenin did all he could to ensure the 1903 congress of the RSDW went his way. Out of the fifty-seven delegates only three or four were workers. Moreover the delegates had been elected in secret session ensuring minimal representation for Lenin's opponents. In the event, the congress did not prove as much of a walk over as Lenin expected. Firstly the *Bund*, the Jewish socialists, had to be forced out, then so did the *Workers' Cause*. In this, Julius Martov, leader of the economists, supported Lenin. It was the six votes of the *Bund* and *Workers' Cause* that were the difference between the two factions of the RSDW and this was to prove crucial. For Martov, the congress was an occasion to express and formulate the party's programme; for Lenin, it was the occasion to procure an oath of allegiance from the party's leading members to the centre. Lenin and his supporters won, and the party split into two factions, the Bolsheviks, and the Mensheviks.

1905: Revolution

For all their theorising, none of the various revolutionary parties managed to even predict the Russian revolution of 1905, let alone start it. As with later events in 1917, the 1905 revolution was a spontaneous event organised by the workers themselves. The event that sparked the unrest and led directly to revolutionary upheaval was a procession of workers carrying religious icons, headed by a priest, Father Gapon. The procession took place in St. Petersburg on January 9th, with the aim of presenting a petition drawn up by liberal intellectuals to the Tsar. In the event, troops opened fire on it, killing several people. The massacre was to become known as 'Bloody Sunday' and it caused a wave of unrest that swept the country and almost led to the overthrow of the Tsar.

The unrest was sparked and co-ordinated not by the political parties, but by works committees elected directly in the workplace. Strikes were called spontaneously often spreading beyond a single factory to become local or regional general strikes. As this level of action proved its worth, workers began to elect delegates on local factory committees to co-ordinate action within the locality. These committees became the embryo from which would grow the Councils of Workers' Deputies, which were later to become known as the soviets.

One of the most important early examples of works committees was in Moscow. In May 1905, a strike broke out in the textile district, where working and living conditions were terrible. At first, the demands were purely economic, including a monthly minimum wage and the abolition of night shift-work. Soon, wider demands were raised, including the elimination of factory police, and the granting of rights of free assembly and free speech. On May 12th, a mass demonstration was organised, at which the decision was made to elect delegates from all the factories that were on strike to form a workers' council to co-ordinate action across Moscow. Throughout the strike, the workers' council organised numerous meetings, during which the demands were extended widely to include those as diverse as the regulation of workers' pensions, and the establishment of a constitutional assembly based on universal suffrage. Though the strike ended in failure in July, the idea of a workers' council was soon spread to the capital, St. Petersburg.

In October 1905, a national strike by the newly organised All Russian Union of Railway Workers led to workers in St. Petersburg

coming out in support. From here, the strike spread across Russia, until every major city and town in the country was involved, and a national general strike ensued. The strike had been highly political from the start, with the railway workers demanding a constitutional assembly. Once the majority of Russia's trains, trams, electricity, telephones and newspapers ground to a halt, the government conceded defeat and announced its intention to set up a constitutional assembly, the Duma.

During the strike, workers' committees were formed in workplaces across St. Petersburg. These began to form links with other workers initially in the same industry. Next came the idea of a city-wide council of workers based on the model that had been developed in Moscow. On October 13th , a committee was formed of 226 delegates from 96 factories. This became the St. Petersburg Soviet of Workers Deputies and it was to form the model for the soviet system that was later to spread across Russia. Rather than dissolve after the strike had ended in victory, it was decided that the soviet should continue to act as a centre for workers' struggle.

Over 50 soviets were established throughout Russia in 1905, based on the St. Petersburg model. Though there were local variations, many aspects were common, such as the rule that matters of importance were dealt with by a general assembly of all workers. Commissions were often established, to publish newspapers and other publications, collect and administer strike funds, or even to collect arms. Not surprisingly, the soviets and peasant organisations began to build up a nationwide network, at the centre of which was the St. Petersburg Soviet.

As confidence and numbers grew, the St. Petersburg Soviet began to usurp government functions. For instance, on October 19 th it declared a new 'freedom of the press'. Its militia began to give orders to the local police. In the eyes of the head of secret police at the time, it was becoming a 'second government'. As time went on, it rapidly became clear that a major confrontation between the government and the emerging soviet system was inevitable.

On the 26th November, with the St. Petersburg Soviet preparing for confrontation with the Tsarist regime and sailors at the nearby city port of Kronstadt in open mutiny, the state moved to eliminate the growing threat. All the delegates to the St. Petersburg Soviet were arrested. Immediately, a new St. Petersburg Soviet was elected, and

called for a national general strike. Unfortunately the resultant strike was fragmented and, by December 19th , the strike in St. Petersburg was called off as workers began to drift back to work.

In Moscow the situation was different, and the talk was of insurrection. The Moscow Soviet, which had called a general strike in support of the St. Petersburg Soviet, declared from the outset that the workers should aim to overthrow the Tsar. Unfortunately, they had counted on the state troops refusing to obey orders. The Tsar, fearing that the troops in Moscow may support the strikers, moved loyal troops in from St. Petersburg. With open fighting, and thousands involved, the state's tactics were to carve up the city and cut communication between various districts of the Soviet. With weakened co-ordination and separate battles taking place throughout the city, the army was able to crush the uprising district by district. After ten days of desperate street fighting, the insurrection was over. Now that the soviets in both Moscow and St. Petersburg were destroyed, the Tsar unleashed a wave of oppression. The resultant sustained, widespread and bloody state campaign eventually led to the virtual eradication of the soviets.

Anarchist Organisations

During the Revolution of 1905, according to a leading member of the Bor'ba in Bialoystok, anarchists groups *"sprang up like mushrooms after a rain."* Many disaffected Social Revolutionaries or Social Democrats formed, or joined, small anarchist circles. These began in the western provinces, the south and in the *shtetls* (market towns) that dotted the Pale then spread throughout Russia. Although the common object of these new anarchist organisations was the total destruction of capitalism and the state, there was a profound disagreement on how this was to be achieved, centring on the place (or not) for terror in the revolution.

On the one side stood two similar groups, *Chernoe Znamia* (The Black Banner) and *Beznachalie* (Without Authority), which advocated a campaign of unmitigated terrorism against the world of the bourgeoisie. While the *Chernoe Znamia* operated mainly in the west and south the *Beznachalie* were centred in St. Petersburg. Both advocated "motiveless" terror as a means of stimulating the mass of the people for vengeance against the ruling class.

Secondly there were smaller groups such as *Khleb i Volia* that concentrated on distributing propaganda, scornfully dismissing the claim of the socialists that the 1905 upheaval was merely a democratic revolution. They attacked the Marxists and their ideas of a centralised party, arguing they were no more than present day Jacobins who aimed to use the workers to capture power for themselves. They were inspired and supported by Kropotkin, who was still living in the west. He argued against campaigns of terrorist violence waged by tightly-knit conspiratorial groups operating in isolation from the mass of the people. The *Chernoe Znamia* and the *Beznachalie* were, for all their admiration of Kropotkin's goals, were suspicious of his followers, who they saw as timid and compromising. But despite these doubts Kropotkin, and the *Khleb i Volia,* continued to sanction acts of violence that they saw as being impelled by outraged conscience or compassion for the oppressed. They approved of 'defensive terror' against police units or against the Black Hundreds, who launched frightful attacks against Jewish communities in 1905.

While both the 'propagandists' and the 'terrorists' identified themselves as anarchist-communist, the severest critics of terrorist tactics were the anarcho-syndicalists. They were mainly influenced by the ideas of the French syndicalists and originated in the *Khleb i Volia* group. According to one, Maria Korn, at the beginning of the Century there had been no Russian word for 'sabotage' and that a Russian who talked of a general strike would have seemed to be speaking "in some strange, incomprehensible language." But the strikes that had begun in 1903 and the general strike of October 1905 had radically altered the situation. The anarcho-syndicalists proposed the formation of workers' unions along the line of the *bourse du travail* leading to a general confederation of labour organisations along the lines of the (then) CGT.

The anarcho-syndicalists welcomed the formation of workers' councils and soviets during the 1905 revolution as an expression of the spontaneous generation of local cooperative institutions. They saw the soviets as versions of the *bourse du travail* but with revolutionary functions to suit the Russian conditions. Open to all leftist workers, regardless of political affiliation, the soviets were to act as non-partisan labour councils, controlled from below on the district and city levels, with the task of bringing down the old regime. This syndicalist conception of the soviets was an anathema to the Marxists, who strove to exclude anarcho-syndicalists from the soviets, trade unions and workers' councils. In November 1905, after the general strike had begun to subside, the executive committee of the St. Petersburg voted to bar all anarchists from entering its organisation. This action increased the determination of the anarcho-syndicalists to build their own revolutionary unions.

Many anarchists continued to criticise the anarcho-syndicalists claiming that, *"all reforms and partial improvements were a threat to the revolutionary spirit of the working masses."* Although this difference continued to brew for more than a decade in the aftermath of the revolution it was clear that the heyday of terrorism had passed. There was a rapid shift from the romanticism of terrorist deeds to a pragmatic strategy of mass action and, as government reprisals against terrorism mounted, the need for organisation became painfully evident. Between 1905 and 1907 anarcho-syndicalists groups grew, mainly in the large cities of the Ukraine and the south. They forged links with groups in Moscow and elsewhere and set up an 'organisational commission' to coordinate activities.

Marxists & Soviets

The various revolutionary parties viewed the spontaneous birth of the soviets from different perspectives. The Mensheviks wholeheartedly supported them and were partly instrumental in the setting up of the St. Petersburg Soviet. Indeed, they had some influence within it, and Trotsky, then a supporter of the Mensheviks, sat on the Executive. However, the soviets did not fundamentally change the Mensheviks' thinking. Although they accepted that the Russian proletariat would lead the fight for the constitutional assembly, they argued that the 1905 revolution was the first stage of a capitalist revolution that would result on in the establishment of a western style parliamentary democracy. They saw in the soviets revolutionary organs that would fade and hand over power to the constitutional government once it had been elected. They favoured the creation of the soviets, as organs through which they could build a mass party and from which they hoped a mass trade union movement would begin to emerge.

The Bolsheviks' reaction to the emergence of the soviets was confused. They fully supported the soviets in the early stages, when they were seen as merely committees that co-ordinated strike action. Later, as they began to take on political as well as economic functions and became revolutionary bodies in themselves, their attitude changed. From October onwards, the St. Petersburg Bolsheviks were hostile to the soviets. They passed a resolution demanding that the soviets must officially accept the Bolsheviks programme, since non-partisan organisations such as the soviets could not steer a specifically proletarian course and were therefore harmful. On October 27th, the Bolshevik Central Committee passed the same resolution, making it the official binding on all Bolshevik organisations.

On his arrival back in St. Petersburg, Lenin attempted to adopt the new revolutionary phenomenon of the soviets into his theory and tactics. He argued for participation in the soviets but that the unity and independence of the Bolshevik Party should never be jeopardised and that delegates should be under the strict control of the Central Committee. Generally, it was felt that paralleled existence of the soviet and the party was impossible in the long run. The majority of Bolsheviks argued that the soviets should exist as a trade union organisation or they should not exist at all.

In 1907, Lenin attempted to define the soviets. He wrote a draft resolution to the party conference entitled 'On the Unaffiliated Workers' Organisations in Relation to the Anarcho-Syndicalist Tendencies among the Working Class'. In it he restated the Bolsheviks' claim to be the only true leaders of the workers' movement. He stated that the participation of the Bolsheviks in all-party councils of workers is permissible on the condition that party interests are strictly preserved and that the party is strengthened and consolidated. He also argued that soviets could prove superfluous if the party comes to understand better how to organise the proletarian masses.

One of the more telling parts of Lenin's treatise on the soviets was contained within his references to anarcho-syndicalists. He delivered the stern warning that the soviets harboured anarcho-syndicalist tendencies, which should be fought at all costs. The threat they posed to the party's purity and dominance was seen as a grave one. At a conference in 1906, the anarchists argued that a revolution in Russian would bypass capitalist exploitation. The Russian peasantry and proletariat would come together to overthrow the Tsar and create a communist society based on independent communes federated nationally and, eventually, internationally. The anarchists argued that there was no need for state bureaucracy. Where possible, people should exercise direct control and, where necessary, delegates should be elected and subject to recall. Thus, the functions of the state would be replaced by democratic structures.

Workers' control and direct democracy, coupled to the ideas of economic equality and liberty, was clearly a basis on which the soviet system could operate free of the need for politicians and political parties. Anarchist ideas could be used to provide the existing soviets with their own economic and political philosophy. Lenin was quick to realise that the ideas of anarchism were capable of delivering the soviets an internal 'ideology'. This was at the root of his dire warnings against 'anarcho-syndicalist' tendencies of the soviet system. He realised that the potential existed for the soviets to gain their own political direction through the ideas of anarchism. This would undermine the need for the Bolsheviks, since the workers would be politicised and would be able to run their own society for themselves, with no need for leaders or parties.

The main method Lenin advocated to fight anarcho-syndicalism within the soviets was to subordinate the soviets to the party. This was a forerunner of the approach Lenin was to adopt in 1917, with

the soviets being viewed as instruments by which the masses could be controlled by the party, rather than (as the anarcho-syndicalists saw them) as an embryonic form of a workers' direct democracy. Lenin's arguments concerning the soviets received little attention, and discussion about them within the Bolsheviks soon faded after 1905.

Marxist-Leninism after 1905

One area where the events of 1905 did profoundly change Lenin's views was in his attitude towards the peasantry. In 1898, in a pamphlet entitled *'The Task of Russian Social Democrats',* he had argued that workers would defeat feudalism with the aid of the capitalist class. After the events of 1905, in a pamphlet entitled *'The Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution',* his view had changed. Now, he argued that, in overthrowing feudalism, the still small Russian proletariat would be aided by the peasantry rather than the bourgeoisie. Traditionally, Marxists held that the peasants were intrinsically reactionary and, as a class, they would disappear with the defeat of feudalism. However, Lenin argued that, though they wanted to preserve private property, the Russian peasantry was also driven by the desire to take the land away from the feudal aristocracy. Therefore, they could be relied upon to rally to the industrial workers cause in their fight against Tsarism.

Once the Tsar was defeated, Lenin envisaged that the socialist parties would form a coalition to take up the struggle against capitalism. Within this coalition, Lenin argued that the Bolsheviks should take the leading role. Regarding the capitalist class, he argued that the defeat of the Tsar and feudalism would allow the workers' new enemy, capitalism, to become much stronger. This would, in turn, intensify the struggle by the proletariat for the transition to a socialist society, and so there would only be a very short period of capitalism in Russia. He went on to say that, due to the shortness of this period, the Russian proletariat would not have developed enough to fully carry out the transition to socialism. They would need help

from the western proletariat to rally to the Russian workers' aid by overthrowing capitalism in their own country. In this way, Russia would be the spark that would trigger a world revolution.

It was during this time, in an article entitled *'The Relation of Social Democracy to the Peasant Movement'*; Lenin developed further his idea of permanent revolution. He stated that, after the transition to capitalist democracy;

"...we shall begin immediately and within the measure of our strength...to make the transition to socialist revolution. We stand for uninterrupted revolution. We shall not stop half way."

Here Lenin gets close to the idea of a permanent revolution in which the party, at the forefront of the struggle, would lead workers in defeating the Tsar and then immediately attack and defeat capitalism. This was to be the position he would argue within the party in 1917, and which led to the Bolsheviks assuming the leading role within the Russian revolutionary movement. After 1905, Lenin did not refer to the idea of permanent revolution again. However, he had demonstrated that, in a time of upheaval, he was quite prepared to bend Marxist determinist thinking in order to ensure power for the Bolshevik party. Lenin's gift was not as a Marxist theoretician, but as a political strategist capable of reading the political situation and taking best advantage of it for the party.

The Social Revolutionaries

The events of 1905 also provoked change within the SR. Indeed, the tension would later lead to two competing factions arising within it, a 'left' and 'right' wing. The first sign of this was the split from the SR of the 'Social Revolutionary Maximalists' in 1906. As the name implies, they argued against the idea of a two-stage revolution, and instead envisaged one series of events leading to *"a republic of working people*" based on universal economic equality. The Maximalist paper 'Kommuna' called for the forced expropriation of land, factories and workshops and their transformation to self-management by the workers. They argued that the *"proclamation of a people's republic in Russia"* would lead to a worldwide uprising of labour against capital. Though this split was small in 1906, the Maximalist position was to be taken up to an extent by the 'left' social revolutionaries during the events of 1917. The Maximalist position was a step closer to that of the anarchists but differed fundamentally from them in that the Maximalists still saw a role for the state.

1905-16

With the failure of the 1905 insurrection and the subsequent state oppression, the various revolutionary groups were forced underground. The modest economic gains evaporated, defensive strikes were crushed mercilessly, and the soviets and works committees collapsed as Tsarist repression took hold.

The anarchists were mercilessly targeted by the secret police. The more fortunate escaped to Western Europe and America but hundreds of others were executed after summary trials, imprisoned for long terms or exiled. In 1907 an Anarchist Red Cross was organised to aid their imprisoned comrades, with headquarters in London and New York. In 1911, there were signs of an anarchist revival in Moscow and this led to the formation of the Moscow Group Of Anarchist-Communists in 1913. They were pro-syndicalist and succeeded in gaining members in the factories of Tula and Briansk as well as having links with a new group based in the cotton mills of Ivanovo-Voznesensk, the Russian Manchester.

The Bolshevik party also collapsed under the reactionary conditions and, after 1905, was left it with a tiny number of militants. These militants, hardened by sacrifice, welded together by conviction, and entirely free of moral obligations outside the party, were the embodiment of Lenin's concept of professional revolutionaries. Over the next few years, the Bolsheviks slowly re-grouped around a solid, ruthless and highly disciplined core. Unity became cemented to the point where members really could speak with one voice – the voice of the party. By the early 1914, with strike action reaching the levels of 1905, the Bolshevik party had been able to build a small but formidable organisation.

The outbreak of the First World War brought an end to the growing industrial unrest, as a wave of working class patriotism immediately followed the announcement of war. St. Petersburg, a German name, was renamed Petrograd. The Bolsheviks were virtually alone among the Russian revolutionary movement in calling for the *"imperialist war to be turned into a civil war*". Though unpopular at first, their total opposition to the war was to stand them in good stead as, soon enough, support for the war began to evaporate. The majority of the Moscow anarchists followed the example of Kropotkin and supported the allied cause against German militarism. The minority embraced anarcho-syndicalism and called for the transformation of the imperialist war into a social revolution. They established a presence within the large factories of the Zamoskvorechie district and within three Moscow trade unions, the printers, leather workers and railwaymen.

Russia's ramshackle war machine had suffered a series of disasters and the Russian soldiers were poorly supplied and cut off from allied support. The Russian economy was not developed enough to supply the army with modern weaponry and the morale of the army collapsed. Soldiers were sent to the front without guns; they literally had to wait to take firearms from the dead and wounded. Poorly armed and half-starved at the front, with acute economic deprivation at home, it is not surprising that the Russian workers quickly became disillusioned with the war. Workers' unrest again began to grow and, in 1916, the number of strikes began to rise dramatically. Invariably, these strikes were political in nature, with workers demanding an end to the war.

1917 Revolution: February

On February 18th 1917, a strike by workers at the Putilov Works in Petrograd quickly spread and, by February 22nd, the 22 factories were on strike. By February 25th the strike was widespread. On February 27th troops were ordered in to crush the now general strike, but they mutinied and joined the workers. Suddenly, the Russian revolution was underway.

Tsar Nicholas II was now isolated, with large sections of the elite favouring constitutional change. On March 2nd he abdicated in favour of his brother, who immediately renounced the throne, pending the election of a constitutional assembly. The Tsarist monarchy was overthrown and the first stage of the revolution had been won with scarcely a shot fired in anger. As in 1905, the events of February 1917 were spontaneous. They had no party involvement, but instead simply burst forth from the masses. Though later Soviet Union historians were to claim the Bolsheviks led the uprising, this is certainly and clearly not the case. Indeed Lenin stated his belief that the British and French had engineered the revolution.

The revolution quickly spread. In the provinces, the old Tsarist administration was swept away. From the provincial governor to the village policeman, huge numbers of the old regime were deposed or arrested within weeks. Despite pleas from the provisional government to wait for the constitutional assembly to bring about land reform, the peasantry across Russia immediately set about seizing the land from the autocracy. Rural land committees were established which were similar to the soviets, though they did not emerge as rapidly.

The February revolution was at first welcomed by many sections of Russian middle and upper class society. They set up a provisional government made up of constitutional party members, the liberal autocracy and disillusioned officials of the old Tsarist regimes. The Mensheviks were quick to respond, seeing the development of the provincial government as the first step in the capitalist revolution that would lead to a western style parliamentary democracy. They saw the soviets as the embryo workers' opposition, which they would lead in the future, and hastily got a large number of Mensheviks elected onto the Petrograd Soviet. They then used this influence to argue that it should support the provincial government as the first stage of the revolution. Duly, in late March, the Petrograd Soviet responded to numerous enquires from the provincial soviets as to what attitude should be taken to officials being dispatched from the provisional government to the regions by stating:

"As long as the agreement between the Petrograd Soviet and the provisional government is not breached, the provisional government must be regarded as the sole legal government for all Russia."

To fit their determinist Marxist theories, the Mensheviks were willing to cede power to the provincial government. They maintained that the revolution was capitalist and must be followed by capitalist-based democracy. To them, the provisional government was the embryo of a future capitalist regime, which would bring about constitutional change. Under this, a new proletariat would emerge and mature, and be led by the Mensheviks. Unfortunately for the Mensheviks, the reality on the ground was very different. The provincial government actually had little real power. In many areas, the soviets were administrating society and ignoring decrees put out by the provisional government. Even in the capital, the government could do little more than endorse decisions made by the Petrograd Soviet.

Soviets and Factory Committees

The outbreak of the February revolution had at first caused deep divisions within the Bolsheviks. On February 26th, they had issued a manifesto which did not mention the soviets. Instead, it called for the establishment of a *'revolutionary provincial government',* which would establish reforms, such as the eight-hour day, and lead to the creation of a *'constitutional assembly based on universal suffrage*'. The Petrograd Bolsheviks, who argued that a radical challenge to the provisional government would be wrong and would lead to Bolshevik isolation, condemned even this modest proposal. Open warfare broke out between the Central Committee and the Petrograd Bolshevik committee, and the party was suddenly in danger of slipping into disarray.

Meanwhile, as the soviet system expanded to include soldiers drawn from the peasantry, the Petrograd Soviet renamed itself the 'Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies'. The SR, whose main support came from the peasantry, which made up the bulk of the new soldiers deputies, began thus to gain influence within the emerging soviet system. At the same time, further democratic structures were being developed in the form of the factory committees. Elected direct from the workplace, these were able to function largely free from the manoeuvrings of the political parties. At first, the factory committees concentrated on improving conditions within the factory. However, as Russian capitalists responded by locking out workers, the factory committees began to develop increasingly militant responses. They began to seize control of factories and bring them under direct control. The factory committees soon became the focal point for the movement for direct workers' control. A structure of factory committees quickly began to take shape, with organisations being based on locality, and each local electing delegates to regional councils. In areas where soviets had been assimilated by the political parties, such as Petrograd, where the Soviet was beginning to function as a local parliament, rather than a body of delegates carrying out the wishes of workers, the factory committees began to openly compete with the soviets.

By May, the Petrograd Council of Factory Committees passed a resolution calling for Russian industry to be brought under workers' control. The factory committees soon formed into a national organisation, which agreed at its national congress that;

"the economic life of the country's agriculture, industry, commerce and transport must be subject to one unified plan constructed so as to satisfy the individual and social requirements of the wide mass of the people".

The factory committee movement soon drew up such a plan that could form the basis for the co-ordination and planning of the Russian economy under the direct control of the workers themselves. It was never to be implemented. In the immediate aftermath of the revolution, the anarchists began to pick up support. For the first time, the anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist papers such as *Golos Troud*a (The Voice of Labour), *Burevestnik* (The Stormy Petral) and *Anarchiia* (Anarchy), based in Moscow and Petrograd, began to reach a mass readership. In contrast to 1905, when anarchism was strongest in the border regions, the movement was now centred in Petrograd and Moscow. Russian anarchist writers such as Bakunin and Kropotkin, now back in Russia, began to be read widely. In Petrograd and other large cities the anarchist groups attracted their membership from the working class and anarcho-syndicalist ideas quickly spread within the factory committee movement. Some anarcho-syndicalists argued that the factory committees, in conjunction with local peasants' committees, should provide the basic administration of the future society, as opposed to the soviets, which some anarchists recognised as flawed in that they were increasingly coming under the control of political parties. In view of later events it is worth noting that one of the heaviest concentrations of anarchists was in the port and naval base of Krondstadt in the Gulf of Finland, where anarchist workers were joined by a considerable number of sailors of the Baltic Fleet.

The main organ of the anarcho-syndicalists was the *Golos truda,* which stated that its principal goal was a revolution, "anti-statist in its methods of struggle, syndicalist in its economic content, and federalist in its political tasks". They sought the replacement of a centralised state with a free federation of peasant unions, industrial unions and factory committees. Although the anarcho-syndicalists endorsed the soviets as "the only possible form of non-party organisation of the 'revolutionary democracy'," they pinned their greatest hopes on the local factory committees, which they saw as the cells of the future socialist society.

The factory committees had arose spontaneously after the

February revolution and spread from Petrograd into every industrial centre of Russia. From the beginning the factory committees did not limit their demands to higher wages and shorter hours they also demanded a role in the actual running of the factories. They sought, as in the Petrograd Radiotelegraph Factory, to "work out rules and norms for the internal life of the factory." Overnight embryonic forms of workers control over production and distribution appeared in the larger enterprises. The slogan of 'workers control' caught on and spread from factory to factory. Soon, the more militant workers grew impatient with the moderate socialists who supported the Provisional Government and their continuation of the war and the capitalist system. Only the anarcho-syndicalists and the Bolsheviks were proclaiming what a growing number of workers wanted to hear. Lenin remarked that the Russian workers stood a thousand times more to the left of the Mensheviks and a hundred times more left than the Bolsheviks themselves. It was, in fact, the anarcho-syndicalists that came closest to the spirit of the Russian workers.

Both the anarcho-syndicalists and the Bolsheviks successfully resisted attempts by the Mensheviks to absorb the factory committees into the trade unions. Although the influence of the anarcho-syndicalists increased, and was disproportionate to their actual numbers, it was the Bolsheviks with their centralised organisation and leadership that gained the most ground. The anarcho-syndicalists consoled themselves with the view that at least it was "the Bolsheviks and not the Mensheviks are everywhere on the rise", but the gains of Lenin's party did provoke a feeling of unease within the anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist ranks. They recognised that their movement needed a greater degree of organisation and a number of local and provincial conferences were hastily summoned.

Gains were made and anarcho-syndicalist influence continued to spread. They called for 'total' workers' control embracing all plant operations and argued that, only then, could it serve as a transitional phase during which the workers would learn how to be their own bosses. At the All-Russian Conference of Factory Committees, which met in Petrograd on the eve of the Bolshevik insurrection, an anarcho-syndicalist from Odessa argued that the factory committees must be,

"the cells of the future, which even now are preparing for the transfer of production into the hands of the workers"

Lenin: April Thesis

With the proletariat beginning to take control of industry and the peasants taking possession of the large estates, Lenin returned to Russia in early April. On his return, he shocked the Bolshevik leadership by announcing that the party should immediately begin to organise around the slogans *'down with the war'; 'the land to the peasantry*'; *'factory to the worker'* and *'all power to the soviets*'. The announcement was made as part of his April Thesis, which he first outlined to a small group of the Bolshevik leadership. Upon hearing his ideas, several immediately denounced him as *'inheriting the throne left vacant by Bakunin*'.

This was hardly surprising, for on the face of it, arguing for 'all power to the soviets' meant arguing for what in effect was a decentralised system under which society was controlled directly by the workers. According to Marxist theory, this would only come about after a long transitional period under which the state would take control of society while the workers acquired the skills and political sophistication needed to administer a classless society based on self-management. Furthermore, like the Mensheviks and the 'right' SR, they argued that current events were in essence a capitalist revolution. They were still arguing for a provisional government made up of a coalition that would ensure the creation of a constitutional assembly. Many anarchists, although still suspicious of Lenin's pre-occupation with political power, found his call for Soviet power as a basis for cooperation. However, behind the populist slogans, what Lenin argued for in his April Thesis was worlds apart from the anarchism that he had bitterly opposed all his political life.

Lenin had decided that Russian capitalism was too weak to take control in Russia. Instead, the revolution was moving towards a soviet system, and it was only a question of time before it came into direct conflict with the provisional government and defeated it. In arguing for all power to come under soviet control, he had returned to an idea he had first outlined in the immediate aftermath of the 1905 revolution. Namely, the workers and peasants had successfully completed the first stage of the revolution and, given the weakness of the capitalists, the poor peasantry must immediately begin the fight for the socialist transition of Russia. He argued that the focal point of the struggle would be the workers' and peasants' soviets. The task of the party should be to take control of the soviets in order to lead the revolutionary masses. Lenin sought to bring the soviets under

Bolshevik control and his use of the soviets was never a case of doctrine or principle, but one of expediency. They were the instruments through which the Bolsheviks could implant their programme on, and so control, the masses. As Trotsky, who was now close to Lenin's thinking, argued at the time:

"..the soviets in themselves do not yet solve the problem...depending on program and leadership they serve various purposes...The program will be given to the soviets by the party."

Nor was Lenin advocating that a communist society would be established in Russia. His April Thesis argued for a political revolution under the most advanced section of the workers, the Bolshevik Party, who would take control of the state, through which they would regulate the economy. Lenin may have proclaimed workers' control but, behind the populist slogans, he was arguing for something very different - limited state regulation of the economy.

Only the land, Lenin argued, should be nationalised, and come under direct state control, with the creation of large-scale factory farms. In industry, Lenin argued for very limited state control. However, he tended to muddy the water somewhat for tactical reasons, by constantly calling for 'workers control'. He 'interpreted' this phrase to mean that workers should be given the power to regulate capitalism. In general, from April onwards, the Bolsheviks used the slogan of 'workers control' without ever really defining it. Lenin himself stated, he sought;

"..not the introduction of socialism...merely the control by the soviets...over the social production and distribution of products."

So, Lenin's April Thesis was a rehash of ideas he first developed in the immediate aftermath of the 1905 insurrection; the revolutionary process should be permanent, under which the workers continue the struggle for the socialist society.

Lenin got his April Thesis adopted by the party, by appealing directly to the rank and file of the party over the head of the leadership. At the April conference, a motion supporting Lenin's call for the soviets to assume power was duly passed, though it should be noted that the motion also included a call for the establishment of a constitutional assembly. This clause was partly to pacify the rest of the party leadership but was also supported by Lenin himself. For

tactical reasons, he refused to rule out the idea of a constitutional assembly at this stage.

Lenin reaffirmed these views in September 1917 when he drafted his famous pamphlet, *The State and Revolution.* Once again he called for the proletariat and the poor peasants to *"organise themselves freely into communes,"* and, though he derided the anarchists for wanting to dissolve the state "overnight" he did stress the similarity between Marxism and anarchism in stating;

"So long as there is a state there is no freedom; when there is freedom there will be no state."

1917 Revolution: October

During the months after April it seemed that the anarchist and Bolshevik efforts were aiming for the same goal. Though a degree of wariness exited there did develop a kind of camaraderie engendered by their common purpose. The Bolshevik influence within the soviets began to grow rapidly. There was mounting discontent with the Provisional Government and the mood of the workers was growing more radical. Trotsky observed that the response of the masses to the anarchists and their slogans served the Bolsheviks as *"a gauge of the steam pressure of the revolution."*

In April, an attempt was made by the provisional government to stamp its authority on the soviets. In May the Mensheviks, who still rigidly adhered to Marx's historical framework, insisted that Russia was still in a 'bourgeois-democratic' period of development, announced that they would join the provisional government in an attempt to shore up its failing authority. Right wing members of the SR joined them, but this was a major tactical error. By joining the provincial government, Mensheviks and SR were seen to be joining the ranks of the bourgeoisie. This caused splits within the Mensheviks and further divided the SR. Most importantly of all, the Bolsheviks were the only party who were not compromised by

participation in the feeble provisional bourgeois government. This was to be the start of their bid for power.

Then in June, the provisional government ordered a new campaign against Germany in a last-ditch effort to turn the tide of the war in Russia's favour. Its failure shattered what was left of Russian morale and led to mass demonstrations and calls for the overthrow of the provisional government. Sailors and workers in the naval port of Kronstadt announced that they no longer recognised this government, and stated that *"...the sole power in the City of Kronstadt is the Soviet*." They argued that a soviet system should be established throughout Russia, with Kronstadt leading the way. The 'July Days' surprised Lenin and the Bolsheviks. They did their best to prevent the demonstrations turning into an armed rising as they felt they still did not have sufficient influence to seize power. Anarchists together with many rank-and-file Bolsheviks supported a rising but the Petrograd soviet refused to endorse the rebellion and the government was able to suppress it without too much difficulty.

In August, the workers and soldiers in Petrograd prevented an attempt at a counter-revolutionary coup by General Kornilov, tacitly aided by the leader of the provisional government. The 'Red Guard' took a leading role in the defeat of the coup. This was a militia set up by revolutionary workers, but which had been targeted by the Bolsheviks and had already come under their control. As a result, the Bolsheviks were rightly credited in playing a major role in putting down the attempted coup. This proved to be a telling boost to their standing. By September, they had mass support amongst some of the most vehement revolutionary elements within the Russian revolution. Crucially, they now controlled both the Petrograd and Moscow Soviets.

Although the anarcho-syndicalists had shared Lenin's determination to destroy the Provisional Government they remained wary of the Bolsheviks. Their suspicions of the Lenin's motives increased in September 1917 after the Bolsheviks won majorities in the Petrograd and Moscow Soviets. They feared that the soviets were being reduced to vehicles of political power and argued strongly in favour of; *"complete decentralisation and the very broadest self-direction of local organisations".*

With revolution in the air, the Mensheviks and SR moved to the left. The 'left' faction of the SR succeeded in getting a motion passed

which committed the SR to Lenin's call for the Soviets to take control. Lenin, again in exile, now called for decisive action. He argued in his letters that since the Bolsheviks controlled both metropolitan soviets, they must now seize power. His logic was that the party alone could now plan and lead an insurrection. He insisted that *"...the insurrection must be treated like an art."* His idea of taking power through the soviets had now been dropped. He first proposed an insurrection to begin in Moscow, then in Finland. However, the Bolshevik leadership did nothing.

With the Red Guard now in open revolt, Lenin grew increasingly alarmed that the chance to seize power would be missed. He got so incensed he threatened to resign from the central committee if his plans for insurrection were not instigated immediately. The rest of the central committee was appalled by his plans for insurrection, burning his letters for fear they would become public knowledge. Frustrated at being ignored, Lenin returned to Moscow in early October and again managed to convince the bulk of the party over the heads of the leadership. This time, it was to back his call for an uprising. The focal point now became Petrograd and the 2nd All Russian Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Soviets, which was due to take place on October 25th.

It was now generally accepted that the congress would vote to oust the provisional government, which, after the failed coup attempt, was totally discredited. Lenin continued to insist that the party should seize power. His logic was that the role of the party was to lead the workers and that it should place itself at the head of the soviets by taking power. He was countered by Trotsky, who accepted that this was the party's destiny, but argued (as Lenin had done earlier) that the bid for power could be 'camouflaged' by the soviets. Trotsky, now a convinced Bolshevik, was leader of the Petrograd Soviet. He was about to play a decisive role in the future of the Russian revolution.

On the eve of the Congress, he ordered the Petrograd garrison to occupy strategic positions throughout the city. The measure, he explained, was needed to defend the All Soviet Congress from any attempt at a counter-revolutionary coup by forces loyal to the provisional government. He then ordered the Red Guards to arrest members of the provisional government itself. Kerensky, its head, feared for his life and fled the city. By the start of the first session of the Congress the following day, the capital was already under

Bolshevik control. When the Congress demanded to know why the Bolsheviks had seized control instead of waiting for Congress itself to assume power, Trotsky argued that the party had acted in order to prevent counter-revolutionaries from taking power and was now handing power to the Congress. Neither the Mensheviks nor the 'right' SR were convinced by this explanation.

Bolsheviks' Triumph

The Mensheviks and 'right' SR stormed out of the Congress of Soviets in protest at the Bolshevik insurrection. When the second session opened on the evening of October 26th, only the Bolsheviks and 'left' SR were in attendance. At this session, Lenin made his first triumphant appearance. Elections took place for a Central Executive. It was made up of 62 Bolsheviks, 29 'left' SR and 10 other socialists.

From this point, Lenin was portrayed as the saviour of the revolution. He and his party had saved the soviets from counter-revolutionaries. It was the party that had ensured soviet power. The prestige of Lenin's name had been firmly established. A Council of People's Commissars (CPC) was appointed, again headed by Lenin, to act as an executive body to carry out the decisions passed by the All Russian Congress. In the weeks and months to follow, the Bolsheviks were to use the CPC to ensure single party rule across Russia. In December 1917, at the All Russian Congress of Peasants, a speaker summed up the situation:

"Comrade Lenin knows that if you disagree with him, he will scatter you with bayonets ...You speak of the power of the soviets and, in the meantime, the actions of the commissars undermine the power of the soviets. In place of soviet power, we have the power of Lenin, who is now in the place occupied by Tsar Nicholas."

This was only the beginning, as we shall see in Unit 12, when we trace just how accurate these prophetic words turned out to be.

Key points

- The drive for industrialisation to compete with the west.
- Three revolutionary traditions arose from the Narrodniks. The Marxist represented by the RSDW, the Social Revolutionaries and the anarchists.
- Lenin envisaged a new form of Marxist party based on clandestine, professional revolutionaries.
- The 1905 revolution was a spontaneous uprising unforeseen by any revolutionary group.
- The idea of soviets grew out the revolution as a means of carrying through revolutionary change in society.
- Anarchist groups were divided over the issue of terrorism.
- The February revolution was born out of the frustrations of the Russians with the war.
- The various socialist parties were divided over their attitude to the creation of soviets and factory committees.
- Lenin's 'April Theses' signalled a change in Bolshevik policy to prepare for a seizure of power.

Checklist

1. What were the main differences between Lenin and the 'economists' in the RSDW?

2. What were the main workers' organisations thrown up by the 1905 Revolution?

3. What effect did the 1905 Revolution have on the anarchist movement in Russia?

4. How did Lenin's ideas change after 1905?

5. What was the attitude of the various revolutionary groups to the soviets and factory committees after February 1917?

6. What were the main points of Lenin's 'April Thesis'?

Answer suggestions

1. *What were the main differences between Lenin and the 'economists' in the RSDW?*

The economists adhered to basic Marxist determinism and so argued that a capitalist bourgeois revolution would be needed after which a mass-industrial proletariat would develop. The proletariat would then fulfil its historic mission to overthrow capitalism and begin the socialist transformation of society. The RSDW should therefore concentrate on the day-to-day economic struggle in order to begin building a mass party of the working class. This would then be ready to take its place in the new parliament after the capitalist revolution, where it would begin to fulfil its role as the political leadership of the working class. Lenin stressed that the intelligentsia was vital to the revolutionary cause and should take a leading role. Workers could only develop "a trade union consciousness", and not a revolutionary one so the party, made up of the intelligentsia, would implant a revolutionary consciousness into the working class remaining an elite organisation of revolutionaries that would lead the working class. The party would be made up of professional revolutionaries who were conspiratorial in nature. It would be the workers, headed by the RSDW and supported by the capitalists, who would overthrow feudalism, leading to the establishment of parliamentary democracy as a precondition for the establishment of socialism.

2. *What were the main workers' organisations thrown up by the 1905 Revolution?*

Local committees were formed to coordinate strike action in St. Petersburg and Moscow at the beginning of the Revolution. These workers' or factory committees became the embryo from which would grow the Councils of Workers' Deputies, which were later to become known as the soviets.

3. *What effect did the 1905 Revolution have on the anarchist movement in Russia?*

Before 1905 there had been little anarchist activity but in the wake of the revolution groups sprang up especially in the Jewish Pale. Many disaffected Social Revolutionaries and Social Democrats joined the anarchists. There were two kinds of groups; the terrorists and the propagandists. The propagandist wing included the anarcho-syndicalists.

4. *How did Lenin's ideas change after 1905?*

After the events of 1905 Lenin changed his attitude towards the peasantry. He now argued that, in overthrowing feudalism, the Russian proletariat would be aided by the peasantry rather than the bourgeoisie. He envisaged that, with the Tsar defeated, the socialist parties would form a coalition to take up the struggle against capitalism with the Bolsheviks taking the leading role. Due to the shortness of this period, the Russian proletariat would not have developed enough to fully carry out the transition to socialism. They would need help from the western proletariat to rally to the Russian workers' aid by overthrowing capitalism in their own country. In this way, Russia would be the spark that would trigger a world revolution.

5. *What was the attitude of the various revolutionary groups to the soviets and factory committees after February 1917?*

The Mensheviks, although taking part in the factory committees and soviets, still regarded them as secondary to the establishing of a Constituent Assembly. The Bolsheviks saw them as a way of seizing power and so supported them although they too argued for a Constituent Assembly. They used the slogan of workers' control without ever really defining what they meant by it. The anarcho-syndicalists were the main supporters of the factory committees and soviets and fought to keep them independent. They saw workers' control as vital to the success of the revolution.

6. *What were the main points of Lenin's 'April Thesis'?*

In his April Thesis Lenin declared that the party should immediately begin to organise around the slogans *'down with the war'; 'the land to the peasantry'*; *'factory to the worker'* and *'all power to the soviets*'. He argued for 'all power to the soviets' because he had decided that Russian capitalism was too weak to take control in Russia and the revolution was moving towards a soviet system, so it was only a question of time before it came into direct conflict with the provisional government and defeated it. He argued that the focal point of the struggle would be the workers' and peasants' soviets and the task of the party should be to take control of the soviets through which the Bolsheviks could exercise control. Lenin may have proclaimed workers' control but he was arguing for something very different - limited state regulation of the economy.

Discussion points

- How do modern Marxist-Leninist parties compare to the Bolsheviks of 1917?
- How can anarcho-syndicalists prevent a seizure of power by a party in a revolutionary situation if it developed today?

Further Reading

H. Carr. The Bolshevik Revolution E. MacMillan. 1950. -LI-

A multi-volume epic, dealing with Russia from the 18th Century up until 1928. This heavyweight and meticulously detailed academic text is what many other historians use as their main reference point. Verging on the 'apologetic for the Bolsheviks', and underestimates the movement for workers' control.

A. Berkman. The Russian Tragedy. ISBN 0948984007. Phoenix Press. £4.50 -AK- -LI-

Berkman is a good writer, although this particular work is a bit scrappy in parts. Nevertheless a useful, affordable and contemporary anarchist viewpoint, and a damning indictment of the Bolsheviks.

O. Anweiler. The Russian Peasants' and Workers' Soviets. 1929. Pantheon Press. -LI-

Now sadly hard to find outside good university libraries, Oscar Anweiler's book remains the most detailed and best academic text on the soviets up to and during the Russian revolution. Worth the search.

G. Maximoff. The Guillotine at Work. 1979. Cuinfuegos Press. ISBN 0904564223. -LI—SE-

Gregory Maximoff was an anarchist condemned to death by the Bolsheviks. This is an angry but highly cogent and detailed attack on Lenin and scientific Marxism generally, leaving you in no doubt about the Bolsheviks' motives.

D. Guerin. No Gods No Masters: Book One. AK Press. ISBN 1873176643. £11.95. -AK- -BS-

This reader contains various bits and pieces of relevance to the Russian revolution, including 'Kropotkin in the Russian Revolution'.

Note 1: For more further reading on the Russian revolution, see Unit 12.

Note 2: The further reading outlined is not an exhaustive bibliography or a prescriptive list. It is always worth consulting local libraries for general history texts, although they invariably understate the level of working class organisation and activity. To assist Course Members, an indication is given alongside each reference as to how best to obtain it. The codes are as follows: -LI- try libraries (from local to university), -AK-available from AK Distribution (Course Member discount scheme applies if you order through SelfEd, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester M15 5HW), -BS- try good bookshops, -SE- ask SelfEd about loans or offprints).