

E *Lenin's early reforms*

Between October 1917 and February 1918, a large number of decrees were issued in an effort to begin the work of transforming Russia into a communist society.

- An 8-hour day was introduced and a system of social insurance planned to cover old age, sickness, injury, unemployment, maternity and needs of widows and orphans.
- All titles and class distinctions were abolished and 'comrade' adopted as the normal style of address.
- All ranks were abolished in the army, and the wearing of decorations and the saluting of officers were abandoned.
- Workers took over the factories and the railways, the banks were nationalised and, in the countryside, the private ownership of land was forbidden. All estates were confiscated without any compensation to the former landlords, and the land was then shared amongst the peasants.
- All schools were taken over by the state.
- Church lands were confiscated and marriage became a civil, not a religious ceremony.

Lenin had promised 'peace, bread and land'. He realised that to keep these promises and ensure the success of the Revolution, he had to make peace with the Germans.

F *Russo-German negotiations for the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk 1918*

Early in November 1917 Lenin had issued a decree for peace in which he declared that 'the workers' and peasants' government, created by the Revolution... proposes to all the warring peoples and their governments that they immediately enter into negotiations for a just, democratic peace. A just or democratic peace, such as the majority of the workers and the toiling classes of the warring countries, exhausted, tormented and ravaged by the war, are yearning for... this sort of peace, in the opinion of this Government, would be an immediate peace without annexations and without indemnities'. Russian soldiers were ordered to stop fighting the Germans though the two countries remained formally at war. With the clear possibility of a civil war in Russia between the Bolsheviks and non-Bolsheviks, Lenin realised that he would have to make a formal peace treaty with the Germans. The German High Command indicated its willingness to agree terms for the war had reached a critical point and the Germans wanted to release armies for use on the Western Front against the French and British. Early in 1918, delegates assembled at Brest-Litovsk. The Germans imposed such severe terms that 'when the Soviet delegation heard the German terms, General Skalon, one of the Soviet experts, committed suicide on the spot. Another Soviet delegate, Professor Pokrovsky, said with tears in his eyes: 'How can one speak of peace without annexations if Russia has to

be deprived of territories equal to the size of eighteen provinces?' General Hoffmann did not contradict him' (David Shub, *Lenin*, Penguin, 1966). The Germans retaliated by continuing their advance and, when negotiations were resumed, imposed even harsher terms. Lenin's reaction to the terms was to call a meeting on 21 January 1918 between the Bolshevik Central Committee and the Bolshevik deputies to the Third Congress of Soviets to discuss the German terms. Lenin spoke in favour of signing peace even at the cost of ceding considerable territory. Trotsky, on the other hand, recommended that war be declared at an end without signing peace terms. By this device of 'no peace, no war', he hoped that the German and Austrian armies, demoralised by inactivity and revolutionary propaganda, would revolt. The third suggestion was to wage a 'revolutionary war' against Germany and her allies. 15 voted for Lenin's recommendation, 16 for Trotsky's and 32 for a 'revolutionary war'. Three days later the Central Committee again took up the question of peace. Lenin again insisted on immediate acceptance of the German terms. In his *Collected Works* he justified his decision on the grounds that, 'our impulse tells us to rebel, to refuse to sign this robber peace. Our reason will in our calmer moments, tell us the plain, naked truth – that Russia can offer no physical resistance because she is materially exhausted by a three-years war... The Russian Revolution must sign the peace to obtain a breathing space to recuperate for the struggle. The central point of the world struggle now is the rivalry between English and German finance-capital. Let the Revolution utilise this struggle for its own ends'. He knew the Russian army was in no state to challenge the German military machine; Trotsky himself had seen that the Russian trenches were virtually empty of soldiers when he had crossed the front line on his way to Brest-Litovsk. Moreover, reports in December had suggested that the only reliable Russian forces were anti-Bolshevik and this might offer an opportunity for their left-wing opponents to weaken the Bolshevik hold. The Bolsheviks recognised that there was little likelihood of support from the west in the event of the renewal of hostilities. With these various considerations in mind, the Bolshevik regime signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on 3 March 1918.

G *Terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk 1918*

The terms were harsh, with Russia losing a quarter of its territory, a third of its population, over half of its industry and four-fifths of its coalmines. It was agreed that

- Russia was to surrender to Germany her part of Poland, which she had possessed since the Napoleonic wars and the Baltic States.
- Turkey took part of the Caucasus region.
- Finland, Georgia and the Ukraine, all previously Russian possessions, were to become independent.
- Reparations of six billion marks were to be paid by Russia to Germany.

Lenin justified his acceptance of these harsh terms on the grounds that Russia was exhausted. He added, 'it is true that there are people willing to fight and die in a great cause. But they are romanticists, who would sacrifice themselves without prospects of real advantage... The Russian Revolution must sign the peace to obtain a breathing space to recover for the struggle'.

H *Consequences of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk 1918*

Despite the harsh and humiliating terms imposed on Russia they gained greater benefit from the Treaty compared with Germany. Lenin's scheming tactics and temporary retreat brought their expected reward. They gave Soviet Russia the necessary time for consolidation at a critical stage. The economic gains the Central Powers had anticipated from the separate peace remained far below the expected levels and were not enough to make any appreciable difference to the war economies of Germany and Austria-Hungary. The treaty also meant defeat for the Central Powers in another and equally sensitive field. Thousands of prisoners returned to Germany after experiencing the revolution in Russia with very different values and concepts than those that they had held in 1914.

10 → CIVIL WAR

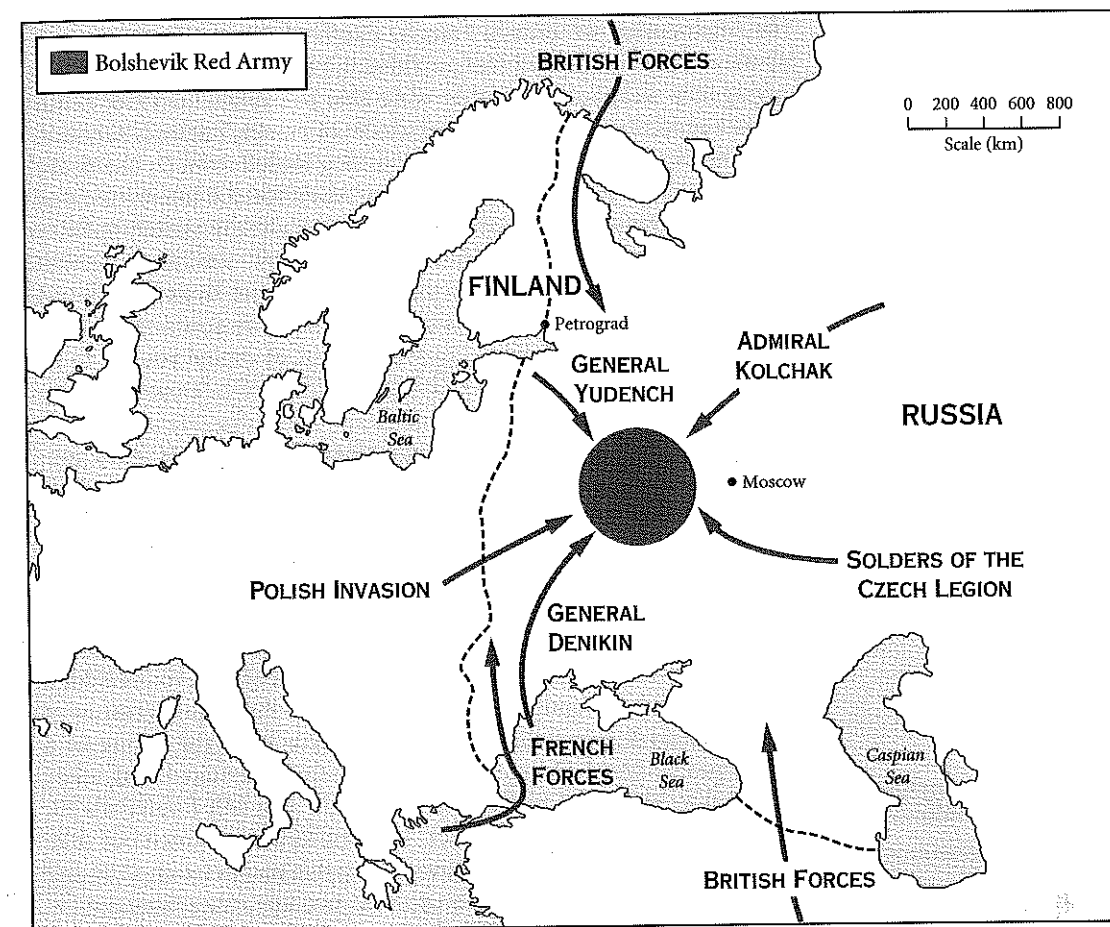
Initially the Bolsheviks were only in control of Petrograd followed seven days later by Moscow but elsewhere the country remained largely unaffected by these events. From the start, the Bolsheviks faced the threat of a counter-revolution. The elections of 12 November 1917 showed that, in the country as a whole, they did not have the massive support they expected. Lenin's decision to dissolve the democratically elected Constituent Assembly after one chaotic meeting showed that he was prepared to ignore the wishes of the Russian people. A number of anti-Bolshevik 'Provisional Governments' were set up following the Bolshevik success in October 1917. In January 1918 the Bolsheviks set out to gain control of these bodies leading to the outbreak of Civil War which lasted until 1920. This was a complex affair consisting of a number of uncoordinated campaigns fought over a vast distance. The anti-Bolshevik forces were numerous and included the Social revolutionaries, Mensheviks, *Kadets*, several generals, and the remaining loyal supporters of the tsar. Collectively, these forces were known as the 'Whites', a colour clearly opposite to the 'Red' Bolsheviks and one that is often associated with monarchist and loyalist movements. The 'Whites' received help from the involvement of allied troops but were weakened by divisions and hostilities, which benefited the Bolsheviks.

The Allies hoped for a White victory, since they had not forgiven the Bolsheviks for signing a separate peace with Germany in the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, that had seriously threatened their chances of winning the war. The Bolsheviks had confiscated property belonging to the

Allies and refused to repay loans made to the tsar's government. There was also a great deal of concern about the welfare of the tsar and resentment against the activities of the Cheka.

A *Composition of the rival armies*

In the south, General Denikin tried to set up a military dictatorship. He was supported by the Cossacks and French troops and was supplied through the Black Sea ports. In the east, Admiral Kolchak controlled a vast area. He set up a government at Omsk and gained some early victories over the Bolshevik Red Army. The Allies helped him, especially the Czech Legion, which at the start of the civil war numbered some 40 000. Mainly prisoners of war, they had asked to be taken to Vladivostok so that they could be sent back to Europe. Held up by the Bolsheviks, who hoped to recruit them for the Red Army, they became



MAP 12 *Civil War 1918–20*

SOURCE 2 R. Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime 1912-24*, 1994, p. 5

The Bolsheviks were masters only of central Russia, and even there they ruled only the cities and industrial centres. The borderlands of what had been the Russian Empire, inhabited by peoples of other nationalities and religions, had separated themselves and proclaimed independence... The Bolsheviks, therefore, had literally to conquer by force of arms the separated borderlands as well as the villages in which lived four-fifths of Russia's population. Their own power base was not very secure, resting on at most 200,000 party members and an army then in the process of dissolution.

SOURCE 3 Striking workers in the Sormovo factory, June 1918

The Soviet regime, having been established in our name, has become completely alien to us. It promised to bring the workers socialism but has brought them empty factories and destitution.

SOURCE 4 C. Read, *From Tsar to Soviets: The Russian People and their Revolution 1917-21*, 1996, p. 178

There was significant opposition to the uprising from within the Soviet itself. No major Soviet leader or group rallied to the Bolsheviks... The Menshevik leaders organized forces loyal to themselves to put pressure on the Bolshevik leaders to relinquish their power and to share it more broadly. In particular, through the railwaymen's union, they threatened a paralysing strike.

SOURCE 5 Bolshevik moderates

It is vital to form a socialist government from all parties... We consider that a purely Bolshevik government has no choice but to maintain itself by political terror... We cannot follow this course.

SOURCE 6 A speech by Lenin, 14 September 1917

Power to the Soviets means the complete transfer of the country's administration and economic control into the hands of workers and peasants, to whom nobody would offer resistance and who, through practice, through their own experience would soon learn how to distribute land, products and grain properly.

SOURCE 7 O. Figs, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891-1924*, 1997, p. 494, describing what happened when the crowds found thousands of bottles of alcohol in the Tsar's wine cellars in the Winter Palace

The drunken mobs went on the rampage... Sailors and soldiers went round the well-to-do districts robbing apartments and killing people for sport... The Bolsheviks tried to stem the anarchy by sealing off the liquor supply... They posted guards around the cellar - who licensed themselves to sell off the bottles of liquor. They pumped the wine on the street but crowds gathered to drink it from the gutter... Machine guns were set up to deter the looters - but still they came. For several weeks the anarchy continued - martial law was even imposed - until, at last, the alcohol ran out with the old year, and the capital woke up with the biggest headache in history.

5

How did the Bolsheviks survive the first few months in power?

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Lenin found that running a government after the October Revolution was beset with problems. There was a great deal of opposition to one-party rule and the emerging Bolshevik dictatorship. The working classes in the cities supported soviet power but not necessarily Bolshevik power. Most people, including some leading Bolsheviks, expected a socialist coalition to emerge from the ruins of the discredited Provisional Government. But Lenin had always intended to rule alone and the Bolsheviks were prepared to be ruthless in establishing their power base. The newly elected Constituent Assembly posed a serious threat to the government, as did the knotty problem of reaching an acceptable peace settlement with Germany.

- A** How did Lenin get his new government on its feet? (pp. 71-72)
- B** How did the Bolsheviks deal with the threat from people who opposed them? (p. 73)
- C** How did Lenin deal with the threat posed to his government by other socialists? (p. 74)
- D** How did Lenin deal with the problems posed by ending the war? (pp. 75-76)
- E** Review: How did the Bolsheviks stay in power in the first few months? (pp. 77-78)

ACTIVITY

What do you think Lenin would do to try to consolidate his position and stay in power in the months immediately following the October Revolution? His opponents thought that he would stay in power for only a few weeks at most. Decide which of the alternatives in the table below you would expect him to follow. Be prepared to explain your choice.

| Issue | Radical option | Cautious option |
|--|---|--|
| a) Main instrument of government | Form his own new government | Govern through the Soviet in the name of which he had taken power |
| b) Elections to Constituent Assembly | Call them off as his party might not be in the majority | Allow them to go ahead |
| c) Press | Ban newspapers of opposition parties | Allow them to be published |
| d) Role of other socialist parties in government | Rule alone | Bring other socialist parties into the government |
| e) Peace with Germany | Agree a separate peace straightaway, whatever the Germans demand | Hold out for a peace deal which would not require giving up too much territory |
| f) Land | Give land to peasants immediately to parcel out amongst themselves to secure their support | Set up state agencies to allocate land fairly and keep some large estates for government control |
| g) Political parties | Ban other parties: go for one-party state | Ban Kadets and right-wing parties but allow other socialist parties |
| h) Trade unions | Ban trade unions | Allow them to continue but with reduced power |
| i) Army | Democratise army: no ranks, saluting, etc. Power to committees | Keep army structure intact against attacks from outside or inside Russia |
| j) Women | Introduce full equality immediately | Introduce equal opportunities measures slowly |
| k) Banks | NATIONALISE banks | Introduce measures to control the banking system but leave banks in private hands |
| l) Industry | Allow workers' committees to run factories | Give power to workers, eight-hour day, etc., but leave control of factories in private hands |
| m) National minorities | Grant right of SELF-DETERMINATION to non-Russian groups (Georgians, Ukrainians) in old Russian empire | Retain the boundaries of the old Russian empire but give more rights to non-Russian minorities |

NATIONALISE
To take industries and banks out of private ownership and put them under the control of the state.

SELF-DETERMINATION
Principle of nation states ruling themselves.

FOCUS ROUTE

How well did Lenin deal with the problems and threats facing his new government in the early months? As you read through this chapter, fill in a table like the one below or use the headings to make your own notes and evaluation.

| Problems | What was the problem? | How did Lenin deal with it? | How effectively did he deal with it? (Give a mark out of ten.) |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Getting new government on its feet | | | |
| Land ownership | | | |
| Running industry | | | |
| Opposition | | | |
| Other socialist parties | | | |
| Peace with Germany | | | |

A How did Lenin get his new government on its feet?

Lenin had proclaimed Soviet power but he did not exercise power through the Soviet. The Soviet could easily have become the main body of the government and many people expected it to be so. But Lenin formed an entirely new body – the Council of the People's Commissars, or the SOVNAKOM. It was exclusively made up of Bolsheviks (although some left-wing Socialist Revolutionaries were invited to join later). The reason for this was clear: Lenin had no intention of sharing power with the Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries and other socialist groups in the Soviet.

SOVNAKOM
Council of the People's Commissars; the Bolshevik governing body (30–40 members) set up after the October Revolution in 1917. It operated until 1941 but became much less influential after the Politburo was formed in 1919 (7–9 members). The Commissars in Sovnakom ran commissariats.

Yakov Sverdlov (1885–1919)
Another key Bolshevik at this time was Sverdlov, a great organising genius. Born into a working-class Jewish family, he became a Social Democrat in 1905. He was exiled to Siberia with Stalin but they did not get on. He played an important part in organising the October uprising with Trotsky. He was totally loyal to Lenin, who valued Sverdlov's reliability and dependability. After the revolution he was given the job of building up the party secretariat and establishing a network of party officials and local secretariats throughout Russia, all reporting to Moscow. He would almost certainly have been made General Secretary of the party in 1922 – the job which gave Stalin so much power – but he died of flu in 1919.

5A Some key posts in the Sovnakom

| | |
|---|---|
| Chairman | Lenin |
| Commissar for Foreign Affairs | Trotsky until February 1918, then Chicherin |
| Commissar for War | Trotsky from February 1918 |
| Commissar for Internal Affairs | Rykov, later Dzerzhinsky |
| Commissar for Nationalities | Stalin |
| Commissar for Social Welfare | Alexandra Kollantai |
| Commissar for Popular Enlightenment (Education and Culture) | Lunacharsky |

The government's position was extremely precarious – one Socialist Revolutionary leader gave it 'no more than a few days', the Menshevik leader Tsereteli gave it three weeks. Its power was strictly limited: many soviets and bodies such as public safety committees were still in the control of Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries or non-socialists, and in the countryside the Bolshevik presence was virtually non-existent. Even in the soviets controlled by the Bolsheviks, there was no guarantee that the central government could get its decisions carried out; some were a law unto themselves. All over the capital, civil servants mounted protest strikes and, even worse, the State Bank refused to hand over any money. It took ten days and armed force to make the bank staff open the vaults so that the government could get its hands on much needed roubles (Russian currency).

So how did Lenin and his government manage to survive the first few months? Lenin could not afford to ignore the tide of popular aspiration that had swept away Kerensky and the Provisional Government, so he gave the workers and peasants what they wanted. Edward Acton says: 'No Russian government had ever been more responsive to pressure from below or less able to impose its will upon society.' Power was thrown out to local soviets to manage their own affairs, even though at this stage they were not, in the main, under central control.

SOURCE 5.1 Lenin to a delegation of workers and peasants
You are the power – do all you want to do, take all you want. We shall support you.

The Sovnakom ruled by decree without going to the Soviet for approval. The early decrees are summarised in Chart 5B (page 72). In key areas, the Bolsheviks compromised their principles to keep popular support:

- **Land decree** This gave peasants the right to take over the estates of the gentry, without compensation, and to decide for themselves the best way to divide it up (since they were doing this anyway). Land could no longer be bought, sold or rented; it belonged to the 'entire people'. It was not what the Bolsheviks wanted. Privately owned land was not part of their socialist vision.
- **Workers' control decree** Factory committees were given the right to control production and finance in workplaces and to 'supervise' management. This decree did not give direct management to the workers but some committees took it to mean that. This went far beyond what many Bolshevik leaders wanted, but they could not resist the strength of workers' pressure for reform.
- **Rights of the People of Russia decree** This gave the right of self-determination to the national minorities in the former Russian empire. Of course, the Bolsheviks did not have control of the areas in which most of these people lived, so this was nothing more than a paper measure.

■ 5B Early decrees issued by the Sovnakom

October 1917

- Maximum eight-hour day for workers
- Social insurance (old age, unemployment, sickness benefits, etc.) to be introduced
- Opposition press banned
- Decree on Peace
- Decree on land

November 1917

- Right of self-determination granted to all parts of the former Russian empire
- Abolition of titles and class distinctions
- Workers to control factories
- Abolition of justice system
- Women declared equal to men and able to own property

December 1917

- CHEKA set up (see page 73)
- Banks nationalised
- Democratisation of army – officers to be elected, army to be controlled by army soviets and soldiers' committees, abolition of ranks, saluting and decorations
- Marriage and divorce became civil matters, no longer linked to the Church
- Church land nationalised

January 1918

- Workers' control of railways
- Creation of Red Army
- Church and state separated

February 1918

- Nationalisation of industry
- Socialisation of land

CHEKA

The All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Struggle against Counter-Revolution and Sabotage; the Soviet secret police from 1917–22.

■ Learning trouble spot

What happened to the Soviet?

The passing of decrees by the Sovnakom without seeking the approval of the Soviet was a clear breach of soviet power. But Lenin had no intention of discussing his policy initiatives with non-Bolshevik socialists. Important measures, such as the initiation of peace talks, were passed without consulting the Soviet at all. The Soviet Executive began to meet less frequently, whereas the Sovnakom met once or twice a day. As the main source of power the Soviet was a dead duck, although it continued to meet well into the 1930s. The local soviets did form the basis of the governmental structure in the Soviet Union but were increasingly dominated by the Communist Party (see pages 115–117).

WHAT DID LENIN THINK WOULD HAPPEN AFTER THE REVOLUTION?

In *State and Revolution*, finished just before October, Lenin suggested that the general will of the people would support the revolutionary government. Problems would be solved fairly easily because the people would recognise that the party was ruling in their interests. He thought that there would be a vast expansion of democracy and that the people would be able to run their own affairs (see Source 6 on page 68). Therefore there would be less need for bureaucracy. This view seems to be reflected in the decrees giving workers control of the factories and peasants control of the land.

Some historians, however, feel that Lenin let people take control of factories and the land initially because he had no means of preventing them from doing so, and always intended to exercise strong central control over these areas when he was able.

Lenin also stressed in *State and Revolution* the need for a strong and repressive party state to crush the remnants of bourgeois power. There would be a period, called 'the dictatorship of the proletariat', during which the bourgeois state would be crushed and bourgeois attitudes and values squeezed out of society.

TALKING POINT

Look back at your choices on issues a), c), f), j), k), l) and m) in the Activity on page 70. Compare them with the measures the new government took, as shown in the text and in Chart 5B. Did you predict Lenin's choices correctly? What have you learned from discovering that Lenin made different choices? Did Lenin's choices surprise you?

B How did the Bolsheviks deal with the threat from people who opposed them?

While one element of the Bolsheviks' strategy to stay in power was to go along with the popular demands, the other was to build its forces of terror and wipe out opposition. One of the first measures of the new Bolshevik regime was to close down the opposition press: first the newspapers of the centre and the right, and later the socialist press. The Bolsheviks, who had pumped enormous amounts of money into their papers and periodicals during 1917, knew the problems that a hostile press could cause them.

Next, attention was turned on opposition political parties. The Kadet Party, which had done quite well in the Constituent Assembly elections, was denounced and outlawed. Leading Kadets were arrested and two were brutally beaten to death by Bolshevik sailors. They were soon followed into prison by leading right-wing Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks – all this before the end of 1917. The engine of political terror was being cranked up.

On 7 December, Lenin set up the main instrument of terror – the Cheka, or Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage. This force of dedicated Bolshevik supporters provided dependable security, bringing units of the Red Guard and military units under its control. It soon proved itself an effective mechanism for dealing with any opposition (see pages 97–98).

Lenin actively encouraged class warfare as a means of intimidating the middle classes and terrorising them into submission. It started with attacks on the Kadets, as the leaders of the bourgeois counter-revolution, but the net soon widened. The legal system was abolished and replaced by revolutionary justice, which was arbitrary and violent in character. Anybody accused of being a *burzhui* (bourgeois) was liable to be arrested, and any well-dressed person found on the streets (including Bolshevik leaders until they could prove who they were) was at risk of being labelled a *burzhui*. Even if not arrested, *burzhui* could be beaten and robbed.

Lenin's use of class warfare played well in Russia. Workers, soldiers and peasants supported the end of privilege and the moves to a more egalitarian society. The abolition of titles and the use of 'comrade' as the new form of address gave power and dignity to the once downtrodden. Workers and soldiers became more cocky and assertive, rude to their 'social betters'. The socialist press encouraged the perception of the *burzhui* as the 'enemies of the people'. They were condemned as 'parasites' and 'bloodsuckers'. The state licensed and encouraged the people to plunder the houses of the middle classes, to 'loot the looters'. There were elements in Russian society that did not need much encouragement to do this.

Striking civil servants, who were causing the emerging Bolshevik government so many problems, were arrested and the civil service was thoroughly purged. Junior officials willing to support the Bolsheviks were promoted and Bolshevik officials were brought in. Often third-rate people or corrupt opportunists were put into positions of real power. The bureaucracy that developed was of poor quality but it was obedient.

There was some opposition to the Bolsheviks and there were demonstrations. But the opposition was weak and unco-ordinated. Mensheviks and right-wing Socialist Revolutionaries did not want to get involved in organised violence because they were still acutely aware of the dangers of civil war. Moreover, they still had hopes for the Constituent Assembly and an all-socialist government. They did not really expect the Bolsheviks to survive.

ANARCHY

It is important to understand how chaotic life in Russia was after the October Revolution. The urban revolution had degenerated into violence and lawlessness. A good example is described in Source 7 on page 68. A hooligan and criminal element joined in the social revolution and there was little the Bolsheviks could do about the situation. Maxim Gorky (the famous Russian novelist, socialist and friend of Lenin), in particular, spoke out against the urban violence which he associated with the Bolsheviks, condemning it as a 'pogrom of greed, hatred and violence' rather than social revolution. He pleaded with Bolshevik leaders to save buildings and works of art from being destroyed.

Outside the capital, in the provinces, the establishment of Bolshevik power was often accompanied by violence and the plundering of the houses and shops of the bourgeoisie. Lenin's class war gave Bolshevik soldiers and sailors free licence to loot the *burzhui* and sometimes carry out unspeakable acts of violence. In one town, Red Guards threw 50 military cadets one by one into the blast furnace of a metal factory.

■ Learning trouble spot

Who was a *burzhui* (bourgeois)?

This term did not apply only to the middle classes. It was a form of abuse used against employers, officers, landowners, priests, Jews, merchants or anybody seemingly well-to-do. It referred not so much to a class as to any internal enemy, whom workers and peasants blamed for their problems. It later became synonymous with people suspected of speculating or hoarding food.

WHY WOULDN'T LENIN JOIN A SOCIALIST COALITION?

Lenin knew that if a socialist coalition were formed then he would most probably be excluded from it. Other socialist groups would not work with him because of his personality and previous actions. Bolshevik leaders like Kamenev would most probably have taken a major role in a coalition. But there was more to it than this. Lenin saw the revolution as a turning point in world history. He had a vision of a utopian world order that he wanted to make real. He was not prepared to see his vision diluted by compromise with other socialists. He wanted Bolshevik policies carried out.

TALKING POINT

Was Lenin wrong not to enter a coalition? It meant that the new government lost a democratic base of support which might have ensured less dictatorial government and a shorter civil war. Socialist leaders outside Russia criticised Lenin. The leading German socialist Rosa Luxemburg warned that press censorship and the suppression of democratic elections would lead to dictatorship. What do you think about Lenin's actions?

C How did Lenin deal with the threat posed to his government by other socialists?

There was enormous pressure on the Bolsheviks to form a democratic government representing all the socialist parties. Hundreds of resolutions and petitions flooded in from factory committees, army units, and Moscow and provincial towns, demanding that there be co-operation between the parties to avoid factional strife and civil war. A petition from the 35th army division made this clear: 'Among the soldiers there are no Bolsheviks, Mensheviks or Socialist Revolutionaries, only Democrats.' People did not want to lose the gains of the revolution because the socialist parties were fighting amongst each other. They were in favour of Soviet power, not one-party rule.

The railwaymen's union, backed by the post and telegraph union, threatened to cut off communications if the Bolsheviks did not hold talks with other parties. They could paralyse food supplies to Petrograd as well as contact with other cities. This pressure forced Lenin, unwillingly, to send representatives to talks with other parties about a power-sharing government. It also persuaded Lenin, again unwillingly, to allow the planned elections to the Constituent Assembly to go ahead at the end of November. The Bolsheviks knew that there would be an unstoppable backlash if they did not go ahead with the elections, particularly as before October they had attacked Kerensky for postponing them.

Quite a few leading Bolsheviks, including Kamenev and Zinoviev, were in favour of a socialist coalition government. They believed that an isolated Bolshevik Party would have to maintain itself by terror and would almost certainly be destroyed by the civil war that would inevitably follow. So they were happy to be involved in talks with other parties. It seems likely that they were duped by Lenin into thinking he was serious about a coalition, and they temporarily resigned when they found out he was not.

Lenin had always intended the Bolsheviks to rule alone and he engineered the collapse of the talks. He did, however, make an alliance with the Left Socialist Revolutionaries and brought them as junior partners into the Sovnatom. He saw this as useful because, with them in his government, he could claim to represent a large section of the peasantry. The Left Socialist Revolutionaries had, for some time, been closest to the Bolsheviks, particularly on the land issue; indeed they claimed, with justification, that Lenin had stolen this policy from them.

The Constituent Assembly

The Constituent Assembly posed a bigger threat to Lenin. Elected by the people in the first free elections in centuries, it could claim to be the legitimate body to decide the make-up of the future government of Russia. When the election results became known (see Source 4.13 on page 62), the Bolsheviks found they had won only 175 seats against 410 for the Socialist Revolutionaries (including 40 Left SRs) and nearly 100 for other parties. However, Lenin asserted that his Soviet government represented a higher stage of democracy than an elected assembly containing different political parties. He said that the Constituent Assembly smacked of bourgeois parliamentary democracy and declared it redundant. The Assembly was allowed to meet for one day - 5 January 1918 - then the doors were closed and the deputies told to go home. A crowd which demonstrated in favour of the Assembly was fired on by soldiers loyal to the Sovnatom, the first time that soldiers had fired in this way on unarmed demonstrators since February 1917.

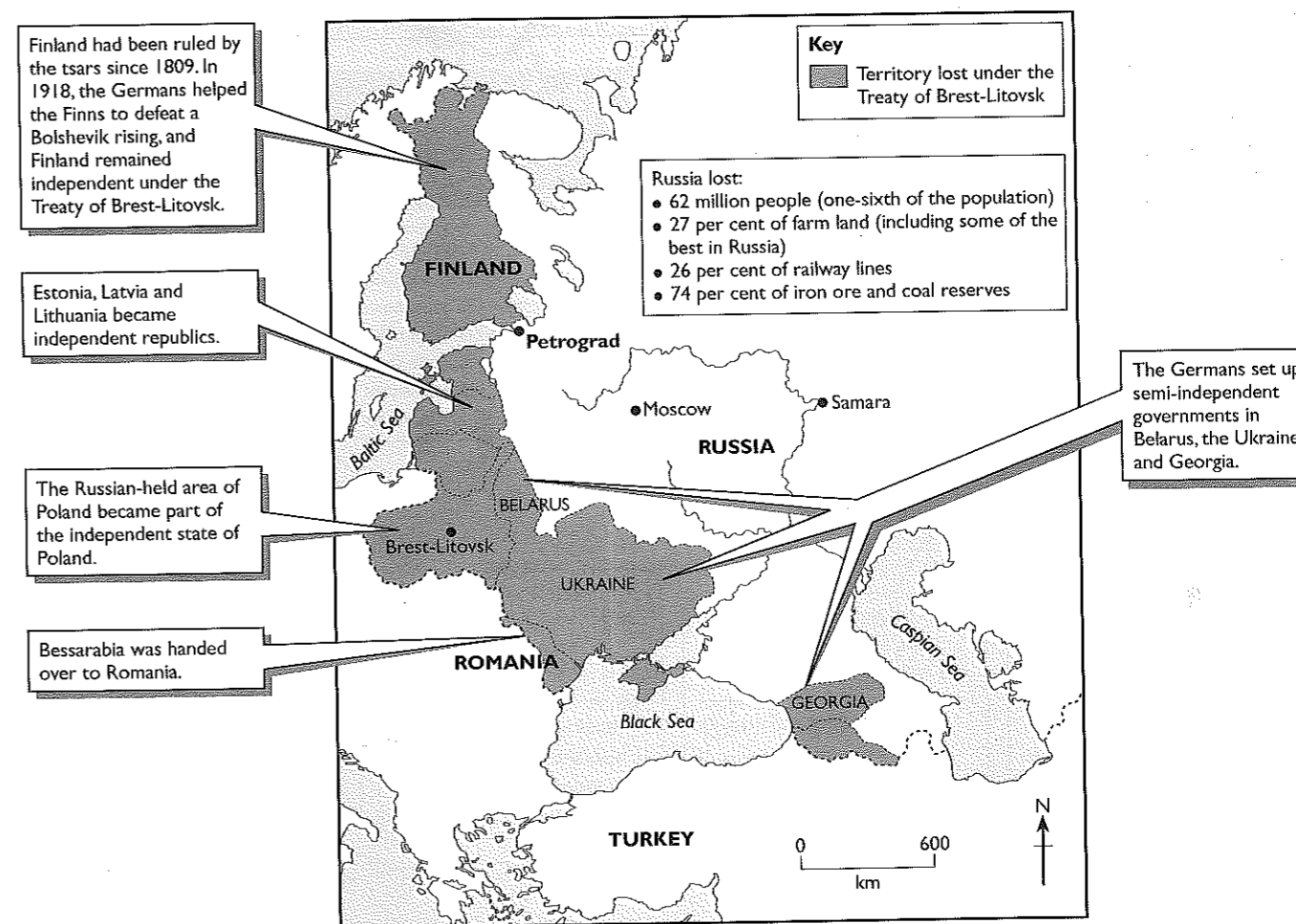
D How did Lenin deal with the problems posed by ending the war?

The promise that had brought so many people to the Bolshevik banner was the pledge to end the war. The Decree on Peace was signed on 26 October with a plea to other nations for a just peace with 'no annexations, no indemnities'. Lenin was convinced that revolutions in Europe would ensure that equitable peace settlements would be reached.

But the practical resolution proved more difficult. The Russian army at the Front disintegrated rapidly; the soldiers had no desire to die in futile last-minute fighting and wanted to get back home. This represented both good and bad news for the Bolsheviks. The good news was that the army could not be used against them by Russian generals. The bad news was that the German army was free to walk into Russia and take what it wanted. At the peace negotiations held at Brest-Litovsk, the German demands were excessive. Trotsky, the Bolshevik negotiator, withdrew from the negotiations saying that there would be 'neither war nor peace', meaning that the Russians would not fight the Germans but would not sign the treaty either.

Lenin, however, knew that he had to have peace at any price to ensure the survival of the fledgling regime. Opposition to the war had been a key factor in the Bolshevik success in October and he had to honour his promise. Furthermore, there was now no army to fight the Germans, who began to advance into the Ukraine. Lenin even feared that they might move on Petrograd and throw him and his government out. Under pressure from Lenin, representatives of the Bolsheviks reluctantly signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on 3 March 1918. Trotsky refused to go to the final meeting.

5C The terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk



Consequences of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk

Signing the treaty had serious consequences for the Bolsheviks:

- Patriotic Russians were horrified by the terms. Giving away large chunks of the Russian homeland antagonised many Russians across the class and political spectrum and encouraged them to join anti-Bolshevik forces. It was anathema to the Kadets and conservative forces on the Right.
- It caused more splits in the Bolshevik Party. Bukharin and the left wing of the party wanted to prosecute a revolutionary war to encourage a European socialist revolution. Some thought the international revolution more important than the one in Russia. To them, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk seemed a shameful peace that helped Germany survive as an imperial power.
- The left wing of the Socialist Revolutionaries, who also wanted to fight a revolutionary war like the Left Bolsheviks, left the Sovnarkom in protest. The Bolsheviks now really were on their own.

All the opposition to Brest-Litovsk made civil war almost inevitable.

Learning trouble spot

The Bolsheviks and world revolution

The Bolsheviks were sure that other countries in Europe would follow their lead. They believed that the war would collapse into a series of civil wars in European countries as the working class fought with the bourgeoisie. As far as they were concerned, the revolution in Russia could not survive without the support of workers' revolutions in advanced capitalist societies. The Bolsheviks tried to stretch out the negotiations with the Germans as long as they could to give these revolutions time to get started. But they did not materialise. Lenin seems to have made a decision to put the international revolution to one side and save his revolution in Russia.

Thinking Point

You have seen how difficult it was for the Bolsheviks to negotiate a peace treaty and the unpleasant consequences of signing the treaty. Does this throw a different light on the problems the Provisional Government faced when trying to resolve this issue?

E Review: How did the Bolsheviks stay in power in the first few months?

ACTIVITY

- 1 Look at the statements in the speech bubbles. Match each comment to one of the people to show how you think the people shown might have responded to the first measures and actions of the new regime.
- 2 What does this suggest about:
- which groups would be likely to support the Bolshevik government
 - which groups might oppose the Bolsheviks?



(i) Worker at the Putilov engineering works



(ii) Army officer



(iii) Peasant



(iv) Railway worker



(v) Owner of a small factory



(vi) Left-wing Socialist Revolutionary leader



(vii) Moderate socialist leader



(viii) High-ranking civil servant

A I was in favour of the Bolsheviks taking power and I am pleased that we have more power to control our workplaces. No longer will we be humiliated by our employers. Now we are all equal. No more 'bowing and scraping' before our lords and masters. The tables have turned.

B They won't be able to run the country without us; they have no experience of government. They need the middle classes and they shouldn't encourage the mobs to attack us in the streets and plunder our houses.

C I supported the Soviet, not the Bolsheviks. I don't want one party to run everything. I demand that the different socialist parties get together to form a government that represents everybody. I don't want to see a civil war.

D You can't put the workers in control of the factories. They don't have the know-how to buy materials and sell them in the marketplace. Already they are stealing materials and giving themselves huge pay rises. It will all end in disaster.

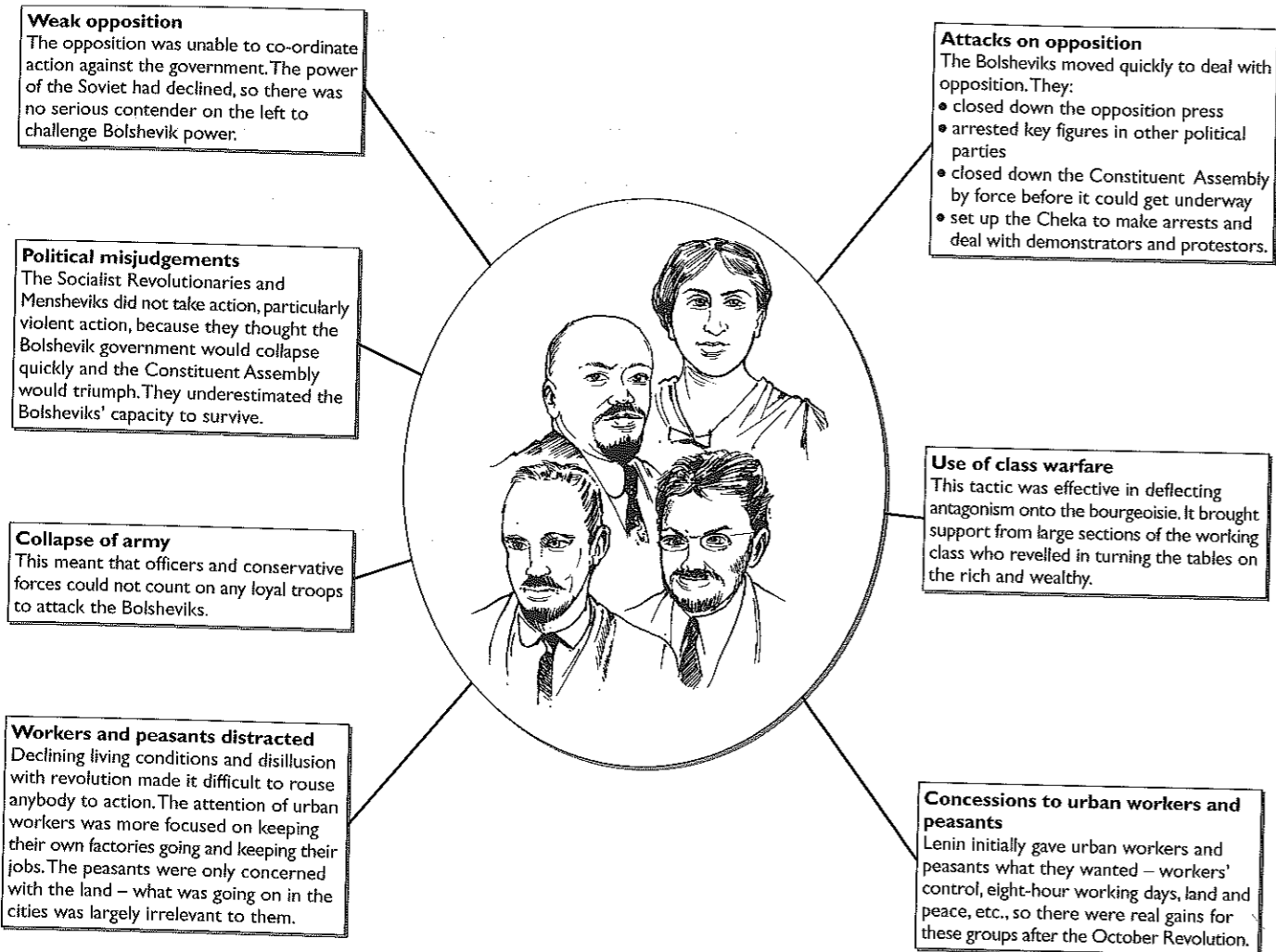
E The behaviour of the Bolsheviks has been disgraceful. They have closed the newspapers. They have arrested Kadets and Socialist Revolutionaries and fired on demonstrators protesting about the closure of the Constituent Assembly. The Assembly is the legitimate government of Russia. The Bolsheviks are tyrants.

F The Bolsheviks have betrayed the revolution. They have helped the German empire when German workers are crying out for revolution. They have handed over peoples who should have freedom to govern themselves. The Brest-Litovsk Treaty is a shameful peace.

G Now the army really will fall apart. You can't run an army without ranks and discipline. It's happening throughout Russian society. And they have sold Russia to the Germans. Our country must remain 'one and indivisible'. I am off to join the armies forming against the Bolsheviks.

H Now we have what has always been ours. We work the land, it belongs to us. I don't know who the Bolsheviks are and I don't much care, but they have done what we wanted and now they can leave us alone to mind our own affairs.

5D How did the Bolsheviks stay in power?



ACTIVITY

Look at Chart 5D and the table you have completed for the Focus Route activity on page 70. Write a short essay of four or five paragraphs weighing up how well Lenin dealt with the problems and threats facing him in the first months in power. In each paragraph:

- identify the problem or threat
- explain what Lenin did
- evaluate his performance – did his actions achieve what he wanted and what, if any, were the drawbacks/disadvantages?

KEY POINTS FROM CHAPTER 5 How did the Bolsheviks survive the first few months in power?

- The Bolshevik government was in a fragile condition in the first few months, facing strikes and protests from other socialists over one-party rule.
- There were divisions within the party over a proposed socialist coalition. Some leading Bolsheviks temporarily resigned in protest at Lenin's failure to support the coalition idea.
- Lenin always intended to rule on his own and asserted this in his own party and in government.
- Lenin's early policies had to be modified in response to pressures from the masses.
- The Bolsheviks crushed opposition and developed forces of terror and coercion, especially the Cheka.
- Lenin persuaded the Bolsheviks to sign the unfavourable Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. He knew he had to have peace for his government to survive.

6

How did the Bolsheviks win the Civil War?

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

For three years between 1918 and 1920, a bitter civil war was fought between the Bolsheviks and their enemies. Following on immediately from the First World War, which had already brought Russia to its knees economically, it was fought in conditions of extreme hardship and deprivation. The overall death toll, including civilian deaths from hunger and epidemics as well as those caused by military action, may have been as high as ten million. The Bolsheviks won the war largely due to the geographical advantages of the Red Army, the lack of unity among the opposition forces and the organisational abilities of Leon Trotsky. Lenin pursued a ruthless policy of War Communism to keep the Bolshevik state afloat.

- Who was on each side? (p. 80)
- The course of the Civil War (pp. 81–83)
- What was the role of other countries in the Civil War? (p. 84)
- How important was the role of Trotsky in the Civil War? (pp. 85–87)
- Why were the Whites divided and lacking in support? (pp. 88–89)
- Why did the Reds win? (pp. 90–93)
- What was life like in Russia during the Civil War? (pp. 94–95)
- Why did Lenin adopt War Communism? (pp. 95–99)
- What was life like in Bolshevik cities under War Communism? (pp. 100–102)