

their original peasant way of life. Submitting to the "power of the land," their sansculotte communism was fading away. Now the Bolshevik government, in its fight for power, has taken a number of steps that will inevitably lead to a total break with the peasants. To feed the starving population in the cities, they began to preach a "crusade against the village" to take away grain from peasants by force. The peasants did not want to sell grain at the fixed price (which is, by the way, ridiculously low in view of the devaluation of paper money).

Aiming first and foremost at broadening their base in the Civil War. Lenin and his comrades have turned this crusade into a punitive expedition [*dragonada*]. They hire the lumpen proletarians and send them with unlimited authority into the villages to requisition grain. A number of bloody clashes have already taken place. At present, this measure is being supplemented by another. In addition to the village soviets, they will create "committees of the poor," whose task will be to take away any "surplus" grain from the well-to-do peasants and deliver part of it to urban detachments. The other part they can keep for themselves. One can easily imagine the kind of carnage that will break out because of this.

At the present moment, according to all indications, we find ourselves at a turning point. The Czechoslovak uprising, apparently endorsed by the Allies, has every chance of not being quickly suppressed by the Bolsheviks. Encouraged by this uprising, various social groups—the bourgeoisie, the petit bourgeois intelligentsia, and the active part of the middle peasantry—have begun to rally around on the Volga, in the Urals, and in Siberia. The convocation of the Constituent Assembly remains their slogan. For how long is hard to say. The danger is that a new government may be formed on Russian territory, a government backed by the Allies and maybe even by the Japanese or some other expeditionary force. This danger will make the Germans either broaden their occupation [of Russia] or offer Lenin an "honest alliance" for the preservation of his power and suppression of enemies on the Volga and in Siberia. It is also possible that the Skoropadsky affair will be replayed in Saint Petersburg and Moscow as well. Or a final "Bonapartism" of Lenin's dictatorship will take place if he decides to break with the ideology of "communism" in one stroke and to form a government of pro-German orientation as a counterpart to the democratic or Kadet-Octoberist government in the East [Siberia] with a pro-Allied orientation. . . .

Greetings to all friends,

your
L. Martov

Translated in Vladimir N. Brovkin (ed. and trans.), *Dear Comrades: Menshevik Reports on the Bolshevik Revolution and Civil War* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1991), pp. 96–103.

Lenin's Letter to V. V. Kuraev, E. B. Bosh, and A. E. Minkin

AUGUST 11, 1918

This letter to three local Bolsheviks in Penza was discovered by researchers in a closed fund of Leniniana in the archive of the Communist party and only published after

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2. Ibid., p

the fall of the Soviet Union. Though at times, particularly in the first months of the revolution, many Bolsheviks were wary of using political terror against their opponents, Lenin, Trotsky, and Dzerzhinskii in particular were among those who believed that violence against enemies of and insurgents against Soviet power was essential in the current civil war. A little over a month after coming to power, Lenin told the Central Executive Committee of Soviets:

We are reproached for persecuting the Kadet party. But one cannot distinguish between class struggle and [the struggle against] political opponent[s]. When it is said that the Kadet party is not a strong force, this misrepresents the facts. The Kadet Central Committee is the political staff of the bourgeoisie. The Kadets have absorbed all the possessing classes; elements to the right of the Kadets have merged with them and support them. . . .

When a revolutionary class is waging war against the possessing classes that resist it, then it must suppress this resistance; and we shall suppress the possessors' resistance by all the methods which they used to suppress the proletariat; other methods have not yet been invented. . . .

The bourgeoisie is using its capital to organize counter-revolution and to this there can be but one reply: prison! That is how [the Jacobins] acted in the great French Revolution: they declared the bourgeois parties outside the law.¹

Trotsky went even further:

There is nothing immoral in the proletariat finishing off a class that is collapsing: that is its right. You [the Left SRs] wax indignant at the naked terror which we are applying against our class enemies, but let me tell you that in one month's time at the most it will assume more frightful [groznye] forms, modeled on the terror of the great French revolutionaries. Not the fortress but the guillotine will await our enemies.²

Whereas at the end of 1917, Lenin spoke of prison for political opponents and Trotsky spoke of the guillotine, a year later, after months of fighting civil war and peasant resistance to grain requisitioning, Lenin wrote of mass executions—without trials—of class enemies.

11 August 1918

To Penza

To Comrades Kuraev, Bosh, Minkin, and other Penza Communists

Comrades! The uprising of the five kulak districts should be **mercilessly** suppressed. The interests of the **entire** revolution require this, because now "the last decisive battle" with the kulaks is **under way everywhere**. One must give an example.

1. John L. H. Keep (trans. and ed.), *The Debate on Soviet Power: Minutes of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets, Second Convocation, October 1917-January 1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 174-76.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 177-78.

1. Hang (hang without fail, so **the people see**) no fewer than one hundred known kulaks, rich men, bloodsuckers.
2. Publish their names.
3. Take from them *all* the grain.
4. Designate hostages—as per yesterday's telegram.

Do it in such a way that for **hundreds** of versts³ around, the people will see, tremble, know, shout: **they are strangling** and will strangle to death the bloodsucker-kulaks.

Telegraph receipt and **implementation**.

Yours, Lenin

Translated in Richard Pipes (ed.), *The Unknown Lenin: From the Secret Archive*, with the assistance of David Brandenberger, trans. by Catherine Fitzpatrick (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 50.

Lev Trotskii, "Report on the Red Army" to the First Congress of the Communist International

MARCH 2, 1919

Initially the Bolsheviks created a democratic army, voluntary, loyal to the soviets, largely made up of workers who elected their officers. With the dissolution of the Imperial Army the Red Guard filled this bill and, in January 1918, became the nucleus of the new Red Army. But when in March 1918, Lev Trotsky became People's Commissar of War, he began implementing new principles of military organization. Against the resistance of those dedicated to the idea of a voluntary army, Trotsky pushed for a conscripted, professionally trained army that employed former Imperial officers. To assure loyalty of the old officers, political commissars were to be attached, as agents of the soviets, to army units, and given power over the formerly decisive soldiers' committees.

This radical reorganization of a "socialist" army into a professional force took the better part of a year to achieve. Trotsky presented himself as the defender of officers' rights, and given the widespread distrust of the old officers, particularly at the front, the Commissar of War became politically isolated. Thanks to support from Lenin and to the impressive victories of his new army, however, his prestige and influence remained high. The Red triumph at Kazan in early September 1918 confirmed Trotsky's program as the more effective, and in the coming months the influence of elected party organizations in the army declined as appointed "political departments" (politotdely) became dominant.

Trotsky's military policies were crowned by success, but his single-mindedness in pursuing his positions created enemies both among top party leaders and rank-and-file members. His willingness to use terror against commanders and political commissars created fear and hostility among many. Besides alienating those who embraced the antimilitarist tendencies of the socialist tradition, Trotsky engendered opponents among many of the leading military officials, including Mikhail Frunze and Mikhail

3. A verst (*versta*) is a Russian measurement of distance equal to 3,500 feet.