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CHAPTER 2



The Double Revolution

THE FEBRUARY REVOLUTION AND THE END OF ROMANOV RULE

On January 22, 1917, just a month before the outbreak of the revolution in Russia, Vladimir Lenin, in exile in Zurich, addressed a meeting of young Swiss workers in German. His topic was the Russian revolution of 1905, and his aim was to counteract the despair that many revolutionaries felt in the third year of World War I. “We should not be deceived by the present graveyard silence in Europe,” he stated soberly.

Europe is pregnant with revolution. The monstrous horror of the imperialist war and the suffering caused by the rise in the cost of living engender a revolutionary spirit, and the ruling classes, the bourgeoisie and their lackeys, the governments, are moving deeper and deeper into a blind alley from which they will never be able to extricate themselves without tremendous upheavals. . . .

He confidently told his audience that the coming revolution would be a “proletarian, socialist revolution,” but he was more pessimistic about its timing. “We of the older generation may not live to see the decisive battles of this coming revolution.”

Lenin proved to be a better revolutionary than a prophet of revolution. The brief wave of patriotism at the beginning of the war had only temporarily ameliorated the political crisis of tsarism. By the spring of 1915, the chasm between the government and educated society had opened up again, as the majority of Duma members, the Progressive Bloc, called for a cabinet that had the support of the Duma. But the tsar had steadily refused to grant such a government and instead threatened to dissolve the Duma. Disenchantment with the emperor and empress reached into the royal family itself. High officials, even the tsar’s uncle, Grand Duke Nicholas, knew of plots to overthrow the tsar and did not report them. Defeats and economic disarray turned more and more people against the regime. The Romanov dynasty existed almost without support, held in place by the inertia of three centuries and fear of the alternatives.

Revolutions, at least in their initial phases, are often affairs of a single city, and 1917 was no exception to this general rule. The largest city in Russia at the time, Petrograd, was the creation of Peter the Great, who founded the town in 1703 on the swampy ground where the Neva River meets the Gulf of Finland and made it his capital. Peter's "window on the West" was a showpiece of classical and Baroque architecture, with the grand Winter Palace facing the Neva and a string of lesser palaces lining the main boulevard, the Nevskii Prospekt. The city center, with its official buildings and elegant residences along the canals, gave the city the aspect of a "Venice of the North." The very geography of the city reproduced the class distinctions and separations of the population. Outside the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century core lay grim factory and worker districts, some of them across the river on islands such as Vyborg and Petrograd. Bridges that could be raised at night separated the poorer sections of the city from the fashionable center. In some ways the imperial center was the symbolic heart of the empire, brilliantly painted in pastels, evoking in stone and gilt the distance of the monarchy and the aristocracy from the simple people. The peasants who had become workers were strangers in certain parts of the city, and those who had more recently become soldiers and now were housed in barracks awaiting transfer to the front were even more alien. In the winter of 1917, in the bone-chilling cold and dark of the Baltic north, where the sun shone without heat for only a few hours of the day, the mood of workers and soldiers matched the weather.

No one suspected in February 1917 that they were about to experience events that would alter world history. After some preparation by Social Democrats, women workers, hungry and embittered, met illegally in several textile mills in the Vyborg district on February 23 (March 8 n.s.), which in the socialist calendar was celebrated as International Women's Day. In many ways more radical than the socialist intellectuals who sought to guide them, the women decided to go on strike and marched to other factories, shouting for bread. Even Bolshevik activists were at first wary about this unplanned strike, though they soon decided to support it. By noon twenty-one factories and fifty thousand workers had joined the strike. They marched on the Arsenal, the large state armaments plant, but were met there with a largely negative response from the well-paid munitions workers. The strikers forced the plant to close and moved on until the strike spread throughout the Vyborg and Petrograd districts of the city. The workers were determined to stage a demonstration on Nevskii Prospekt across the river. The police guarded the bridges, but the strikers simply crossed the ice covering the Neva. Bread shortages inflamed those in bread lines, and they joined the strikers. The angry crowds beat up several police officers, and the Cossacks, usually the troops most loyal to the tsar, made little effort to restore order. An eyewitness, Nikolai Sukhanov, wrote, "The mass street movement in the February Days revealed no sort of purposefulness, nor was it possible to discern in it any kind of proper leadership."

By the second day, February 24, two hundred thousand people, one half of the industrial workers of Petrograd, were on strike. As factories closed down around the city, the metal workers joined the strike. The police tried to stop

demonstrations, but the Cossacks refused to shoot down the workers. In the Duma the liberals now called for a government responsible to the Duma. A Duma leader, F. I. Rodichev, appealed to the tsar: "Give us those people whom all Russia can believe. We demand above all the expulsion from [the government] of persons whom all Russia despises." But more radical voices were also heard. The Menshevik Nikolai Chkheidze argued that compromise with the government was impossible and that contact with the streets was essential.

In Chinese the characters for the word *crisis* can be translated "dangerous opportunity." In this sense the various political parties that had opposed tsarism for decades were now faced by their greatest political crisis. Liberals in the Duma were fearful that the spontaneous rebelliousness of the masses was already breaking loose of state control. Miliukov, the leader of the liberal Constitutional Democratic Party, or Kadets, later admitted, "We did not want this revolution. We did not wish particularly that it would come at the time of the war. And we had desperately struggled so that this would not happen." Miliukov tried in vain to save the monarchy, but as the revolution sped forward, the masses in the street would not sanction preservation of the Romanov dynasty.

The socialist parties were divided between the propeasant Socialist Revolutionaries, or SRs, and the worker-oriented Social Democrats, or SDs. The Social Democrats entered the revolution divided between the moderate Mensheviks and the more militant Bolsheviks, and even these broad factions had further fractures within them. Both SDs and SRs had been traumatized by the outbreak of World War I. The more conservative elements in each party had come out in support of the war, taking a position called "defensism," while the Left took what was known as the "internationalist" position and either opposed the war or called for Russia's defeat ("defeatism"). Among the SDs, Lenin led the Defeatists; Martov headed the Menshevik Internationalists; and Chkheidze and Iraklii Tsereteli, both from Georgia, were among the leading Menshevik Defensists. Tsereteli, who has been largely forgotten except by historians, was a dynamic, charismatic young man who had been elected to the Second Duma, only to be arrested and exiled to Siberia by the tsarist government. On his return to European Russia in March 1917, he soon emerged as the principal theoretician of the Menshevik-Defensist position and a major force in the Petrograd soviet. The leaders of the SRs were unable to unify their ranks, which were divided among a militant, internationalist Left, which would gravitate toward the Bolsheviks; an accommodating Center, led by Viktor Chernov; and a Right that wanted victory in the war and a strong and stable government. As serious as the differences between and within the left parties were, the euphoria of the unfolding revolution momentarily pulled them together, and in February and March Mensheviks, Bolsheviks, SRs, and nonparty workers fought together against the monarchy.

On February 25, three hundred thousand workers left work in a general strike that spread throughout the city of Petrograd. Streetcars and cabs stopped running; newspapers ceased publication; and the banks closed. Crowds of workers, students, and others surged through the streets, and the soldiers did not stop them.

In Znamenskaia Square in front of the main railroad station, thousands of demonstrators heard revolutionary speeches. When a police officer led a charge to break up the demonstration, he was cut down, by either workers or Cossacks. By the next day workers knew that they might be fired upon by the police or even the army, but they came out anyway. Workers were more militant than their socialist, even Bolshevik, leaders. In the throes of the revolution, the Bolsheviks were divided into factions and hardly resembled the monolithic disciplined party of later Communist mythology or Cold War-era Western fears. Some party committees called for an armed uprising, while the more moderate Russian Bureau of the Bolshevik Central Committee, the highest-ranking Bolshevik committee in the city, opposed that demand.

On the fourth day of the revolution the government went on the offensive. The emperor ordered the Duma to dissolve, but though its members dispersed, they remained in the city. Duma leaders tried to mediate between the government and the streets, but the tsar did not reply to their chairman's call for a government with the confidence of the Duma. The police arrested one hundred people they believed to be important leaders of the rebellion. Soldiers fired into the crowds, machine-gun fire rained from rooftops, and the fraternization of the crowds with the soldiers briefly ceased.

Despite the danger, the crowds in the streets continued to march, becoming angrier by the hour. Suddenly, unpredictably, some members of the fourth company of the prestigious Pavlovskii Guards Regiment mutinied and joined the crowds. This soldiers' mutiny was the turning point in the insurrection. The workers' rebellion of the first days of the revolution would have failed had the soldiers not decided to join them. On the next day, February 27, more guards regiments mutinied. By evening, sixty-six thousand soldiers in Petrograd had come over to the insurrection. That day a group of influential members of the Duma formed the Provisional Committee of the Duma. In the other wing of the same building, the Tauride Palace, deputies elected by workers around the city met to form their own representative institution, the Soviet (Council) of Workers' Deputies. The capital of the Russian Empire was now in the hands of the revolutionaries, and no major social groups or significant military units were any longer prepared to fight and die for the emperor. A few days later, on March 2 (15 n.s.), the last tsar of Russia, Nicholas II, isolated on a railroad siding in Pskov, about two hundred miles from Petrograd, abandoned by his generals and closest advisors, abdicated. Russia, which had been a monarchy for a thousand years, became a republic.

The Romanov dynasty fell with stunning speed, after just five days of rebellion in the capital. But the February Days were only the proximate cause of the collapse of the tsarist regime. The revolution was the result as well of a long and deep social crisis that tsarism was unable to overcome. The monarchy had proven incapable of resolving the growing contradiction between capitalist industrialization, with its newly empowered middle and working classes, and the maintenance of an autocratic government and an antiquated social hierarchy of noble privilege that closed itself off from a mobilizing society. The tsar's attempt at limited constitutionalism

after 1905 brought the subterranean tensions in society into a public arena, as the government vacillated between repression and concession. Nicholas II was intransigent on the question of forming a government of ministers who enjoyed the confidence of the Duma. Once the war broke out, the government appeared to more and more people to be incompetent to govern or win the war, and the authority of the ruling elites eroded rapidly. The failures at the front and the resultant economic shortages, which led to a sharp rise in the cost of living, intensified the social discontents of the prewar era and added a new and potent element, the armed peasantry in uniform. In the context of material hardship and foreign danger the messages of liberals and socialists that linked the people's misery with the autocracy resonated loudly. When the revolution broke out, the attempts by liberals to contain the fury of ordinary people and mediate between the tottering state and the crowds in the streets failed, and new political actors—the workers and the soldiers—pushed the dynasty off the stage altogether. Though the imperial government limply fought one last battle in the streets of Petrograd, its authority and support had seeped away years before.

OVERLAPPING REVOLUTIONS, DUAL POWER

The revolution of 1917 was actually a series of overlapping revolutions. The first was the workers' rebellion, followed by the soldiers' mutiny, that ended with the establishment of two centers of authority. The revolutionary lower classes, or *demokratiia*, as they were styled by the socialists, elected their own organs of power, the soviets, while the middle and upper classes, the military officers, much of the state bureaucracy, and educated society identified with the Provisional Government self-selected by leading members of the Duma. Much of the period from early March until October 1917 can be seen as a second, liberal revolution, led by middle-class politicians and part of the intelligentsia, that attempted to create a new constitutional order amid conditions of ever-deepening social and political disorder. In October the workers' revolution was renewed with the establishment of "soviet power," but this time it was led by the Bolshevik party. Simultaneous, and gaining momentum, was the peasant revolution that culminated in the seizure of land, the expropriation of the nobility, and the leveling of landholding in 1918. Finally, the multiple revolt of the non-Russian peoples of the empire splintered the unitary empire and gave rise to the establishment of national states along the peripheries of Russia.

As calm returned to Petrograd after the battles of the revolutionary days in February, workers turned to the Duma, shouting "Give us leaders; we need leaders." Suspicious of the Duma and the upper classes in general, the mobilized workers and soldiers were not yet prepared to take power into their own hands. Nor were their socialist leaders. With the war raging and the economy in rapid decline, those who had made the revolution in the streets were prepared to recognize their social "betters" as the legitimate new leaders of the country. But when Duma leaders formed a government, headed by Prince Georgii Lvov, workers and

soldiers elected their own soviets to represent their interests and keep a watchful eye on the Duma and the new government. The leaders of the Petrograd soviet turned out to be primarily moderate Mensheviks and SRs, who had been prominent among workers in the city during the war years. The major Bolshevik leaders were in exile, in either Europe or Siberia, and would return to the capital only weeks later.

Almost immediately the differences and distance between the two new governing institutions became apparent. The Duma wanted to restore immediately the command over the army of the military officers, but rank-and-file soldiers were opposed to giving up their new power. On March 1 the soviet met with representatives of the soldiers and adopted the famous "Order No. 1," which stated that soldiers should obey no order unless it was sanctioned by the soviet. Soldiers mistrusted their officers and quickly rallied to the soviet. With this order the soviet gained authority over the soldiers, and though the Provisional Government would have formal power and be recognized as the government of Russia by its allies, the Petrograd soviet had the real power. It alone could issue orders, bring out the troops, and order the factories to operate. The soviet, however, decided not to seize official power in its own name but to recognize the new government and maintain a watchful eye over its activities. Its resolution of March 2 (15 n.s.) reflected the soviet's suspicion of the government:

The Provisional Government that emerged from the revolution speaks for the interests of the bourgeoisie and, therefore, the working class can support this government only in so far as its policy will not turn against the interests of the broad laboring masses; at the same time the working class must organize itself for the defense of its class interests and the consolidation of all the achievements of the revolution.

This dual power (*dvoevlastie*) reproduced and reinforced the real balance of power in the city. On one side stood a suspicious working class and its allies, the soldiers; on the other were the people of property—the liberal and conservative politicians, officers, and nobles—who feared the potential wrath of an aroused people. Later a liberal politician remembered:

Officially we celebrated, we praised the revolution, shouted "hurrah" to the fighters for freedom, wrapped ourselves with red bunting and marched under red flags. . . . We all said "we," "our" revolution, "our" victory, and "our" freedom. But inside, in our solitary discussions, we were horrified, we shuddered, and felt ourselves to be prisoners of inimical elements moving along some sort of uncharted path.

In the early months of the revolution workers were not interested in ruling the country but merely in gaining greater control over their own lives. Though they were wary of the government, they hoped that the new political leaders of the country would work in the interests of the poor as well as the well-off. In their factories they loaded hated foremen or known police spies into wheelbarrows and carted them out of the plants. They elected their own factory committees to look after their interests and to maintain discipline within the factory.

Extremely popular was the Social Democratic program of an eight-hour workday, the confiscation of landlords' land, and the formation of a democratic republic.

The polarization of urban society that had been evident before the war was far less extreme in the first month of the revolution. Industrialists made significant concessions to workers in many cities in order to enhance social peace and aid the war effort. They accepted with little resistance the reduction of the workday from ten or twelve hours to eight. Factory owners also agreed to pay raises, which pleased the workers but also raised expectations. When inflation wiped out the wage gains in the next few months and industrialists proved less willing to offer another round of pay increases, bitterness set in among the workers.

Peasants joined the revolution later than people in the cities. Their interests centered on gaining control of the land, and they were generally in favor of distributing the land to those who worked it. Their gradual radicalization came from impatience with the government, which vacillated between the radical rhetoric of the Socialist Revolutionaries and the hesitancy of the representatives of the landlords. A peasant from Riazan wrote of his discontent, "Well, nothing has changed yet, and the revolution is already six weeks old."

The most politically active peasants were the more than 4 million in uniform. Like their brethren back in the villages, soldiers looked at the revolution as a means to achieve land and peace. With red ribbons pinned to their uniforms, they became insubordinate to their officers, organized constant rounds of meetings, and took out their hostility on officers they felt were opposed to the revolution. At first the soldiers were willing to continue fighting, but as winter turned to spring they balked at launching another offensive against the Germans. Revolutionaries met with the soldiers and urged that they support the workers and the soviets. By April soldiers had grown suspicious of the Provisional Government and had become reliable allies of the workers and their elected councils. Daily reports of units refusing to obey orders alarmed the government, as did news of Russian soldiers fraternizing with their purported enemies, the Germans and Austrians, across the lines. At Easter time Germans served rum to the Russians, brought out their orchestras, took pictures of the enemy, and talked to the Russian soldiers about the futility of war. Desertions rose as Bolsheviks agitated against any offensive military operations.

At first most ordinary people did not distinguish between political parties. With the Bolsheviks, the Mensheviks, and the Socialist Revolutionaries cooperating in the early days of the revolution, few people understood the differences among them. Bolsheviks presented themselves as the most radical of the socialist parties, the most fervently opposed to the war, and the most suspicious of the Provisional Government. Yet until Lenin returned from exile, most Bolsheviks were willing to support the new government and the policies of the soviet. In Petrograd two of Lenin's followers, Joseph Stalin and Lev Kamenev, led the party toward cooperation with the Provisional Government. Traveling by closed train across Germany, Lenin arrived at the Finland Station in Petrograd on April 3 (16 n.s.). As Trotsky, who was soon to join the Bolsheviks, later remarked,

“The party was as unprepared for Lenin as it had been for the February Revolution.” Lenin exploded in anger at the party’s soft line toward the government and insisted that it support the “conquest of power by the soviets of workers’ deputies.” Lenin believed that Russia was in transition from the bourgeois to the proletarian stage of revolution and that only a republic of soviets could bring the war to an end and spark the international socialist revolution for which he had worked his entire adult life. Party leaders were stunned by Lenin’s militancy, but they eventually adopted his “April Theses,” which rejected support for the Provisional Government. By this resolution the Bolsheviks emerged as the clear alternative to the Menshevik and SR policy of cooperation with a government that over time became identified in the minds of many with the upper and middle classes.

Russia’s middle class, insofar as it acted as a coherent social group, was led by powerful industrialists, who had begun to see themselves as the harbingers of a new economic and social order. They wanted full economic freedom, the end of governmental regulation of corporations and banks, and an enhanced role for themselves in political decision-making. With the autocracy out of the way and bourgeois parties leading the new government, Russia’s merchants and industrialists entertained high hopes that the new order would usher in an age of enterprise free of the heavy hand of the state.

The leading parties in the Provisional Government were the liberal Kadets, headed by Foreign Minister Miliukov, a more conservative party, the Octobrists, led by Minister of War Guchkov, and the self-styled representatives of the bourgeoisie, the Progressists, headed by Minister of Trade and Industry Aleksandr Konovalov. No socialists joined the government, except the impulsive Aleksandr Kerensky, a well-known lawyer who had been a secret member of the SR party and now became minister of justice. A flamboyant personality and a dynamic public speaker, he enhanced his considerable reputation and gained immediate popularity by issuing an amnesty to all political prisoners. But despite the fact that the government was recognized by other states and held legal authority, despite all the formality and even pomp that surrounded it, the Provisional Government soon realized that it was dependent on the good will of the soviet. Guchkov wrote to General Mikhail Alekseev in mid-March:

The Provisional Government does not possess any real power, and its directives are carried out only to the extent that is permitted by the Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies, which enjoys all the essential elements of real power, since the troops, the railroads, the post and telegraph are all in its hands. One can say flatly that the Provisional Government exists only so long as it is permitted by the Soviet.

The imbalance of power between soviet and government was dramatically illustrated in a dispute over Russia’s foreign policy. At the end of March the Petrograd soviet, under the guidance of the influential Menshevik Iraklii Tsereteli, adopted its own position on the war, called “revolutionary defensism.” Russia should fight the war in order to defend the revolution, Tsereteli argued, but it

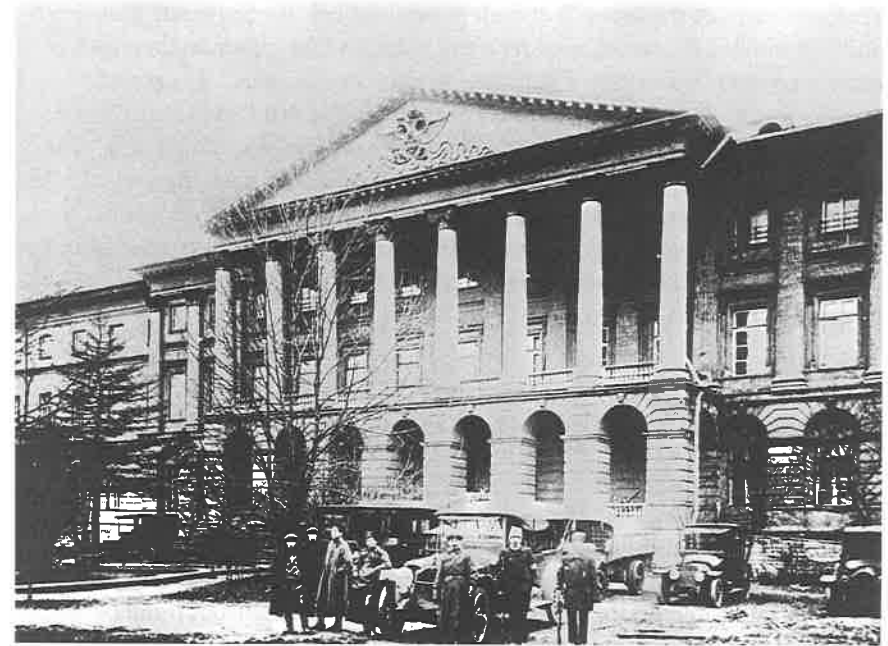


Figure 2.1 Smolny Institute, the site of the Bolshevik headquarters, in October 1917 (RIA Novosti).

should also carry on a campaign for peace. The soviet favored a “democratic peace” with no imperialist seizures of territory or reparations paid by one side to the other. The leaders of the government, on the other hand, wanted to fight the war “to a victorious conclusion” and to “sacredly observe the alliances that bind us to other powers.” Foreign Minister Miliukov disregarded the Soviet’s policy of “no annexations or contributions” and continued to articulate the war aims of the deposed tsarist government, which included Russian control of Constantinople and the Dardanelles. When the public heard about Miliukov’s note to the Allies retaining the old imperial policy, thousands of workers and soldiers poured into the streets, marched to the residence of the government, and called for the removal of the “capitalist ministers” and “Miliukov-Dardanelskii” (Miliukov of the Dardanelles). One woman who joined the demonstration was confused by the issues involved and questioned who these terrible women were, Anneksiia (annexation) and Kontributsiia (contribution), who wanted to continue the war!

The weakness of the Provisional Government and its dependence on the soviet were now readily apparent. From the Left the Bolsheviks called for the abolition of the government and “all power to the soviets,” but there was still relatively little support for this idea. From the Right Miliukov and some of the conservative forces wanted to strengthen the government and remove soviet influence over it, but that would have required strong military backing, which they did not have. In the middle some liberals called for a coalition government, which would include

representatives of the soviet. But their potential allies, the moderate Mensheviks and SRs who led the soviet, were reluctant either to take power on their own or to enter a coalition government with the “bourgeois ministers.” The soviet leaders wanted above all to preserve the unity of the alliances that had brought about the February Revolution and to keep the country from disintegrating along class or ethnic lines. When Minister of War Guchkov resigned his post, the soviet leaders suspected that conservatives might be planning a military move against them. Only then did the soviet vote for coalition on May 1. Two days later Miliukov resigned, and on May 5 a coalition government with a minority of socialists was formed.

THE REVOLUTION DEEPENS

By 1917 Russia was too weak and weary to carry on the war against the Central Powers with any real effect. The army was sullen and demoralized and no longer interested in fighting. Yet the war went on, and the Provisional Government remained enthusiastically committed to victory. After he became minister of war in May, Kerensky pushed for a major new campaign against the Germans. On June 18 the so-called Kerensky Offensive was launched, with disastrous results. Fighting a war that was beyond the means of the country was like running an engine that was overheating. The demands of supplying a massive army and large cities with food and fuel proved too great for the inadequate transportation network and the organizational skills of the government. Though supplies to the cities had improved briefly just after the February Revolution, the movement of foodstuffs fell off by 40 percent in April and May. Shortages led to rising prices, and the inflation wiped out wage gains. Factories closed because of the high fuel costs and inadequate supplies of raw materials. Unemployment increased. The number of strikes rose, almost doubling in May. Industrialists responded to worker pressure by closing factories, only compounding the problem and sharpening worker hostility. Outside government the voices of the militant Left became louder and more convincing to workers and soldiers.

The revolution of 1917 largely took place in the capital, and here the workers and soldiers were far more hostile to carrying on the war or working with the bourgeoisie than were people outside the capital. Besides Petrograd volatile workers were concentrated in a dozen large cities: in Moscow and Ivanovo-Voznesensk in central Russia, in Saratov and Nizhnyi Novgorod on the Volga, in Ekaterinburg in the Urals, in the Don Region, in Kharkov, Odessa, and Kiev in Ukraine, and in Baku. Though there was adequate grain available in the countryside for both civilians and soldiers, it was not delivered on time and in the necessary quantities to the cities. Shortages in the industrial areas had immediate and catastrophic effects both on the productivity of the whole country and on the political attitudes of the workers.

From May until October the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries sat in the government. As the government proved unable to solve the problems of the



Figure 2.2 July Days protesters fired on by soldiers in Petrograd, 1917 (RIA Novosti).

economy or end the war, its popularity withered and the lower classes began to perceive the moderate socialists in the government as collaborating with the enemy. Beginning in late spring and continuing through the fall, the social distance between the top and the bottom of society widened, and the attempts by moderates to hold together an alliance of all social classes proved impossible. Workers moved leftward, the middle and upper classes moved to the right, and both became more resistant to the interests of the other. There was no broad consensus, either in government or society, on the future economic order in Russia. Was the economy to be free-market capitalism, with a minimum of state intervention, or some form of socialism, with considerable regulation by the state? The Mensheviks in government, working through the newly formed Ministry of Labor, favored state control of the economy, which meant that the government would regulate and supervise economic relations in a basically capitalist economy. But the business community and its spokesmen in the Ministry of Trade and Industry opposed state regulation and called for a rejection of socialism. The government was unable to resolve this key question, and few measures could be taken to stimulate the industrial sector.

Outside the government, workers saw the “capitalist ministers” as saboteurs of the revolution, and industrialists saw workers as the cause of industry’s decline. On the last day of May the workers’ section of the Petrograd soviet voted for a Bolshevik resolution in favor of “All power to the soviets!” From the first days of the revolution, workers had elected their own committees within factories, and these factory committees soon became more responsive to the changing mood of workers and more radical than the soviets. The government’s failure to implement state control convinced many workers to push for a more radical solution,

“workers’ control,” which involved factory committees keeping an eye on the running of the factories. As promoted by the Bolsheviks, workers’ control meant supervision of the managers by worker representatives and not, as it was often interpreted, the actual seizure of the factories by workers. In early June the First Conference of Petrograd Factory Committees, which was dominated by the Bolsheviks, voted in favor of workers’ control. The Mensheviks called on the workers to restrain their demands, but, faced by falling real wages, workers stepped up the number of strikes. As early as mid-May, the Menshevik Vladimir Voitinskii noted, “In the workers’ quarters the ground was slipping out from under our feet, and the same observation held true for the barracks.”

Insofar as they expressed themselves politically, peasants voted for the large, loosely organized Socialist Revolutionary Party, the one major political party that saw itself as expressing the peasants’ interests. The SR Party was potentially the strongest party in Russia, with activists scattered throughout the country and a commitment to further the interests of the peasant majority. SRs consolidated their support in the countryside in the early months of the revolution by organizing peasant soviets in the villages and promoting the nationalization of the land. Especially strong in the Volga region and Siberia, the SRs also had support in the cities, especially among soldiers. But the party was deeply divided into a right wing that supported the coalition government and the war effort, a vacillating center, and a left wing that drew ever closer to the Bolsheviks. At the First All-Russian Congress of Peasants’ Soviets, which met early in May, the right-wing SRs, who dominated the meeting, pushed through a resolution that all agricultural land be handed over to land committees, which could then decide on its equitable distribution. The congress opposed all buying and selling of land, fearing that landlords would sell out to rich peasants or others. Land was, thus, to be nationalized without reimbursement to the landlords and redistributed on the basis of equality. The minister of agriculture in the coalition government, SR party leader Viktor Chernov, began elaborating a series of agrarian laws to implement these policies. But he met resistance from the chairman of the government, the liberal landlord Prince Georgii Lvov, who opposed any restrictions on the rights of private property. Chernov followed his party’s strictures on the sale of land, but the nonsocialist ministers refused to sanction the land committees or prevent the sale of land. Thus, on the land question, as on the question of state regulation of the economy, the government arrived at an impasse. After enduring personal and political attacks, Chernov resigned from the government on July 20. The strategy of working through the government had clearly failed.

Like the workers and the soldiers, the peasants became more active in running their own lives as a result of the revolution. At first peasant assemblies expressed support for the Provisional Government and drafted proclamations on the land question that were influenced by SR intellectuals. But when peasants gained little satisfaction from the government, they took matters in their own hands, forming “committees of people’s power” that endorsed peasant seizures of uncultivated land. Local land committees simply disregarded the decisions taken

in Petrograd with which they disagreed, and month after month the number of peasant seizures of landlord estates rose. How they treated a noble often depended on the past behavior of the lord. Sometimes they burnt his house and stole his livestock; other times they left the lord a parcel of land for his family. Occasionally peasants killed landlords and burnt down their houses, but more often crowds ransacked the manors and simply took over the land. In Riazan province peasants soberly considered whether they should turn the lord’s home into a school. “What sort of a school would this make?” one peasant asked. “Our children would get lost in it.” The next day they chopped out the doors and windows, smashed the mirrors, poured kerosene over the wooden structure, and set it ablaze.

By the end of the summer, peasants had entered the revolution in large numbers, and the countryside was no longer under the control of the weakened Russian state. The single country of Russia fragmented into village and regional governments; these republics of peasants with their own laws took little account of what Petrograd ordered. What looked like anarchy to liberals and the government was celebrated by the Bolsheviks as manifestations of the people’s will. As spring turned into summer, the unity of the soviet forces began to fray. Bolshevik strength grew steadily among workers and, after the June military offensive, among soldiers as well. The moderate socialist leaders of the soviet remained confident that they represented the most responsible elements in the “democracy.” At the opening of the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets in early June, Tsereteli announced, “At the present moment, there is not a political party in Russia that would say: Hand the power over to us, resign, and we will take your place. Such a party does not exist in Russia.” He was interrupted by a voice from the audience: “It does exist!” Lenin later rose to defend his position, sarcastically referring to Tsereteli as “Citizen-Minister of Post and Telegraphs”: “I say: Such a party exists! No party has a right to refuse power, and our party does not refuse it. Our party is ready at any moment to take all power in its hands.” He was greeted by applause from his supporters and laughter from his opponents, to whom the Bolshevik’s audacious claim appeared ridiculous.

The Congress reflected more the mood of Russia outside the capital than the more militant voices in Petrograd. Led by the Mensheviks and SRs, the delegates voted to support the coalition government and the military offensive against the Germans. Always ready to address a large audience, Kerensky defended the democratic program of the government that would prevent the Russian Revolution from following the pattern of other revolutions:

The problem of the Russian socialist parties and of the Russian democracy is to prevent such an outcome as occurred in France [the fall of the republic and the rise of a dictator]—to hold on to the revolutionary conquests already made; to see to it that comrades who have been released from prison do not return there; that Comrade Lenin, who has been abroad, may have the opportunity to speak here again, and not be obliged to flee back to Switzerland.

But when the Bolsheviks tried to hold a demonstration in the streets of Petrograd calling for the removal of the nonsocialist ministers, the Congress voted

unanimously (even the Bolshevik faction, unaware of the leadership's decision) to prohibit street demonstrations. Tsereteli, who had emerged as the most decisive leader of the soviet, charged that the Bolsheviks were plotting to seize power and called for drastic measures to "kill the counterrevolution." But the Congress stopped short of repressing the Bolsheviks and decided to hold its own demonstration. On June 18, four hundred thousand people marched down the Nevskii Prospekt. To the dismay and embarrassment of the soviet leaders reviewing the parade, the great majority of the marchers carried Bolshevik slogans: "All power to the soviets!" and "Down with the ten capitalist ministers."

On the same day as the Petrograd demonstration, hundreds of miles south and west of the capital, the Russian army advanced against the enemy. The Kerensky Offensive had begun. The middle and upper classes greeted the news from the front with patriotic sighs of relief. At last the army, which seemed to be falling apart through inactivity, would be revitalized by engaging the enemy. Perhaps the volatile soldiers in Petrograd could also be sent to the front. Workers greeted the news of the offensive either with apathy or powerful opposition. Many soldiers mutinied against mobilization for the front. Others yielded to patriotic appeals, only to waver under fire. "What good is the land and freedom to me," a peasant soldier complained, "if I am dead?" Bolsheviks urged the soldiers not to participate in the offensive, while Kerensky and soviet representatives tried to convince them to fight. The mood of the soldiers darkened against both the government and the soviet, and "trench Bolshevism" grew rampantly at the front. Soldiers beat up emissaries from the soviet. With demoralization undermining the will to fight, the offensive faltered soon after it began.

As news trickled into Petrograd of the losses at the front, a major political crisis erupted. Late in June delegates from the government conferred in Kiev with representatives of the Ukrainian Rada, a locally elected parliament. The Rada had issued its First Universal, declaring autonomy for Ukraine and itself the supreme political authority. After heated discussions, the Petrograd delegation reluctantly decided to recognize the Rada's competence to work out reforms in Ukraine and to run the region until the convocation of the Constituent Assembly. Liberals and conservatives opposed any division of united Russia, and on July 2 several members of the Kadet party resigned from the government in protest over the concessions made in favor of autonomy for Ukraine. The next day, with the government disintegrating, a machine-gun regiment in Petrograd took to the streets on its own initiative to stir up a movement for the overthrow of the government. In the workers' section of the Petrograd soviet, Bolsheviks convinced the deputies to back the street demonstrations and to call once again for Soviet power. Twenty thousand sailors from the Kronstadt naval base joined the workers in a march to Bolshevik headquarters, where a hesitant and reluctant Lenin, who was not in favor of violent action at this time, called for caution and a peaceful demonstration. The crowd moved to the Tauride Palace, seat of the soviet. Chernov tried to calm the crowd, but he was surrounded and someone yelled at him, "Take power, you son-of-a-bitch, when it is given to you." After several hours in which power

had fallen into the streets, the government brought loyal troops from the front to quell the demonstrators. Newspapers reported, falsely, that Lenin was a German agent, and the mood of the city changed immediately. Neutral troops rallied to the government, and the pro-Bolshevik soldiers slipped back to Kronstadt. That very evening Lenin and his close comrade, Grigorii Zinoviev, went into hiding. Other Bolshevik leaders, Lev Trotsky among them, were thrown into jail, and the Bolsheviks suffered an immediate, but temporary, political eclipse. An obscure party functionary, Joseph Stalin, became briefly the most important Central Committee member at large. Discouraged by the actions of the soviet, Lenin abandoned the idea of soviet power and called for a new slogan—"All power to the working class led by its revolutionary party, the Bolshevik-Communists!" Four hundred people lay dead after the armed clashes of the "July Days." The revolution's leftward drift came to a sudden, bloody halt, at least for another month.

ON THE ROAD TO OCTOBER

The government reeled in confusion after the July Days. Lvov resigned as prime minister and was replaced by Kerensky. Popular with the crowds, the new head of government was seen by his rivals as overly ambitious and lacking the character to lead the revolution. "It is a curious fact," wrote Tsereteli later, "that this man, whose name became the synonym of a weak, spineless government, had a pronounced personal predilection for the exercise of strong, commanding power. Had this tendency been combined with strength of character and organizing ability, he might have played a much more substantial and constructive part in the revolution than the one he actually performed." Almost three weeks passed before a new government could be put together, now with moderate Kadets and socialists attempting to work together. The soviet leaders agreed to empower the government to "save the revolution" by restoring discipline in the army. Kerensky appointed General Lavr Kornilov, an officer known to be hostile to the revolution, as supreme commander of the army. About Kornilov General Alekseev reportedly commented that he had "the heart of a lion and the brain of a sheep." Under pressure from the socialists, the government declared a program of reforms to democratize Russian society, abolish *sosloviia* (social estates), support the land committees, and regulate industry. The program drove the more conservative Kadets into opposition. Miliukov pledged to fight the Left to save the motherland, and an alliance of gentry landowners, military officers, the church, the Cossacks of the Don, and Russian nationalists formed to struggle against socialism. Adopting the language of the Marxists, the wealthy Moscow entrepreneur Pavl Riabushinskii expressed the view of the liberal-conservative opposition most militantly when he told the conference of industrialists in August:

We ought to say . . . that the present revolution is a bourgeois revolution, that the bourgeois order that exists at the present time is inevitable, and since it is inevitable, one must draw the completely logical conclusion and insist that those who rule the state think in a bourgeois manner and act in a bourgeois manner.

In the belief that the government was increasingly helpless before the soviet, the business and industrial elite rallied around General Kornilov as their best hope to bring the radicalization of the revolution to an end. On August 3 Kornilov presented the government with demands that he wanted the government to fulfill: restoration of the death penalty throughout Russia for civilians and military personnel, restoration of the authority of the officers over the soldiers, the abolition of soldiers' assemblies and the introduction of censorship at the front, and the disbanding of revolutionary-minded regiments. Kerensky understood that accepting such demands would have meant a declaration of war on the soviet, but in the end he accepted some of these demands.

By midsummer the country was irreconcilably divided. Bolsheviks quickly rebounded from their slump, reaping the harvest of the continuing economic decline, rising unemployment, and falling real wages. They shaped the anger and frustration in the factories and the garrison, explaining in their own way the causes of the crisis. Among workers and soldiers anger mixed with physical misery and fear. A leading Kadet tried to address a mass meeting and spoke of defense of the fatherland but was shouted down: "A worker has no fatherland; he has a fist!" Such words, replied the speaker, would lead people to chop off each other's heads, just as in the French Revolution. A sailor yelled out, "And your head should be chopped off too."

When two thousand delegates gathered in Moscow on August 14 for a state conference to rally support for the government, the Left and Right cheered their own and jeered their opponents. Tsereteli called once again for unity behind the government, symbolically embracing a prominent industrialist. But the most tumultuous welcome was reserved for Kornilov, who spoke of "a ruthless struggle against anarchy." The wild reception convinced the commander in chief to take matters into his own hands. Kornilov believed that he had an agreement with Kerensky to back his decision to send troops to Petrograd to establish a military dictatorship, but in the eleventh hour the prime minister refused to back Kornilov and announced that a mutiny was taking place. The soviet rallied to the government's defense, Kerensky opened up the arsenals to arm the workers of Petrograd; and soldiers and workers along the route to the capital prevented Kornilov's troops from reaching the city. The supreme commander was dismissed and placed under arrest.

The failure of the Kornilov revolt had profound effects on the Russian political scene. Workers and soldiers all over the country were now convinced that Bolshevik warnings of counterrevolution were correct, that the government of Kerensky was somehow involved in the attempted coup d'état, and that the leading liberal party, the Kadets, was part of an antiworker conspiracy. All the latent and overt suspicions and hostilities of the lower classes toward the middle and upper classes now intensified. At the very end of August Lenin wrote to the Bolshevik Central Committee:

Events are developing with a speed that is sometimes dizzying. . . . Kornilov's revolt is an altogether unexpected . . . and almost unbelievably sharp turn in the

course of events. . . . An active and most energetic, really revolutionary war against Kornilov . . . by itself may lead us to power, though we must speak of this as little as possible in our propaganda (remembering very well that even tomorrow events may put power in our hands, and then we shall not relinquish it).

The very next day, August 31, the Bolsheviks won an absolute majority in the Petrograd soviet (workers and soldiers' sections voting together) for the first time. Their resolution called for a government "of representatives of the revolutionary proletariat and peasantry." In early September Bolsheviks became the most popular party in the Moscow soviet as well.

As the Russian political crisis reached its climax, parties and politicians groped for a way out. They divided around four possible solutions to the question of power. First, Kornilov had tried and failed to establish a dictatorship of the Right. That path was now blocked, though the so-called White forces would make other attempts during the coming civil war. Second, some moderate Kadets, the Menshevik-Defensists, and the moderate SRs continued to support coalition and call for an immediate peace "in the spirit of democratic principles." But they were opposed by other influential liberals, including Miliukov, who wanted no further collaboration with the socialists. Eventually, in late September, a third coalition government was formed by Kerensky, but its power did not extend far outside the Winter Palace, where it met.

Some leaders on the Left, like Martov and the Menshevik-Internationalists, proposed a third possible solution, a government made up of all the socialist parties. This seemed the only possible alternative to the fourth solution, a Bolshevik takeover. The idea of a broad-based government of the Left was popular among workers and soldiers, particularly in the larger cities and on the northern front, and was often conflated with the idea of soviet power. The real choice in the fall of 1917 was between such a multiparty democratic socialist government and a one-party government by the Bolsheviks.

THE OCTOBER INSURRECTION

The rapid radicalization of the largest cities became clear in late September, when Muscovites elected a Bolshevik majority to their city Duma, with the Kadets coming in second. Bolsheviks also won big in Samara and Tomsk at the expense of the moderate socialist parties. The center was eroding, and the electorate polarizing. By the second week of September Bolsheviks were a majority in the Petrograd soviet, and Trotsky, who had joined the Bolsheviks after his arrival back in Russia in May, was elected its chairman. Lenin was anxious to take power in the name of the soviets and revived his old slogan, "All power to the soviets!" Still in hiding, he suggested in an article, "On Compromises," written in the first days of September, that though "our party, like all political parties, strives for political power *for itself*," it would support a government of the Mensheviks and SRs based on the soviets. Quickly disillusioned by the refusal of the moderate socialists to push for a soviet government, Lenin abruptly withdrew his compromise and simply advocated

soviet power, which in his mind now required a leading or exclusive role for the Bolsheviks. He wrote to his comrades in Petrograd:

The Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries, even after the Kornilov revolt, refused to accept our compromise of peacefully transferring power to the soviets.... They have again sunk into the morass of mean and filthy bargaining with the Kadets. Down with the Mensheviks and SRs! ... Ruthlessly expel them from all revolutionary organizations. No negotiations, no communications with these friends of the ... Kornilovite landlords and capitalists.

Convinced that an armed insurrection was necessary to overthrow the Provisional Government, Lenin urged his comrades in the capital to prepare the uprising while they still had a majority in the soviets and before Kerensky surrendered the city to the Germans. But other Bolsheviks were hesitant to seize power. Some, like Trotsky, suggested waiting for the opening of the Second Congress of Soviets, which would “legitimize” the seizure of power. Workers too were more cautious about militant action in October than they had been in July, though they were willing to respond to a first move by the government against the Bolsheviks or soviets. Lenin, fearing that Kerensky would act first and attack the Bolsheviks, called such delays idiotic and even tried to resign from the Central Committee when the majority refused to take immediate action.

On October 7 Lenin returned secretly to Petrograd, and three days later, in a historic session, he convinced the Bolshevik Central Committee to “place the armed uprising on the agenda.” Moderate Bolsheviks were upset by the decision to move toward an armed uprising, and two of Lenin’s closest comrades, Kamenev and Zinoviev, broke ranks and issued a handwritten declaration against the seizure of power that soon appeared in the press. The Bolsheviks’ plans were hardly a secret. On October 16 the government decided to deploy troops to meet the expected Bolshevik move. Lenin spoke the same day to the Central Committee:

The masses have given the Bolsheviks their trust and demand from them not words but deeds, decisive policies both in the fight against the war and in the struggle with economic dislocation.... Acting now we will have the entire European proletariat on our side.... The bourgeoisie is intent on surrendering Petrograd as a means of crushing the revolution, and the only way of avoiding this is by taking the defense of the capital into our own hands.... It follows that the most decisive political action possible is now required—which can only mean an armed uprising.... Power must be seized immediately, at once. Every day lost could be fatal. History will not forgive us if we do not take power now!

The soldiers of the capital agreed to follow the orders of the Soviet’s Military-Revolutionary Committee, which was controlled by the Bolsheviks and their allies, the Left SRs, and headed by Trotsky. With the garrison on their side, the Bolsheviks had won the struggle for soviet power even before the armed seizure was launched.

In a futile attempt to prevent a Bolshevik victory, Kerensky made the first move and tried to arrest the Military-Revolutionary Committee and close the Bolshevik newspapers. The battle was joined on October 24, as Lenin made his way secretly to Bolshevik and soviet headquarters at the Smolny Institute. Within a few hours the city was in the hands of soviet forces, under the direction of the Bolsheviks. There was little fighting and little active participation by workers. The Military-Revolutionary Committee demanded the surrender of the ministers of the Provisional Government, who were isolated within the Winter Palace, defended only by the Women’s Battalion of Death and a few teenage cadets. At 9 P.M. the cruiser *Aurora* fired a blank salvo as a warning, and a few hours later sailors and Red Guards entered the palace and arrested the ministers. Kerensky had escaped earlier to rally troops.

Early in the morning of October 25, 1917 (November 7 n.s.), the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets declared all power to belong to the soviets. Lenin had won his gamble, but history would be unforgiving in ways he had not suspected. By launching the insurrection before the Congress of Soviets officially took power, the Bolsheviks threw down the gauntlet to the rest of Russia, including the other socialist parties. Instead of a multiparty socialist government, the likely outcome of the struggle for power now seemed to be dictatorship and civil war.

Historians are divided between those who explain the October Revolution as a Bolshevik conspiracy or coup d’état and those who emphasize the deeper social conflicts that propelled the Bolsheviks into a dominant position. Certainly Lenin’s will to power and the effective organization of the Bolsheviks contributed to their victory, and their policies and proclamations appealed to workers and soldiers driven to desperation. But of all the major political parties in revolutionary Russia, Lenin’s followers were unique in opposing the coalition government that attempted to link the top and bottom of society in a common political effort. The Bolsheviks committed themselves to the idea of class government, of rule by the lower orders of society and the elimination from political power of people of property. As workers grew increasingly discontent with industrialists through the summer and fall of 1917, because of the rising cost of living and the refusal of industrialists to make further concessions to labor, the industrialists in turn became ever more alienated from the revolution. Liberals turned more conservative and sought assistance from the army in putting down the lower classes. At the same time ordinary rank-and-file soldiers grew suspicious of the Provisional Government, which seemed incapable of or uninterested in ending the war; officers, on the other hand, drew away from the government because of its indecision and inability to discipline the soviets. Society was polarizing as it had in 1914, but now that polarization was leading toward civil war, with the lower classes on one side and the upper and middle classes on the other. The moderate parties, like the Mensheviks and SRs, which tried to reconcile the interests of the antagonistic extremes in Russian society, lost the backing of key groups like the workers and soldiers, while the Bolsheviks confidently rode the wave of popular radicalization to power.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

The historiography of the Russian Revolution solidified in the years before and during the Cold War into an “orthodox” interpretation, which saw Lenin and the Bolsheviks as unscrupulous and power-hungry conspirators who seized power in a coup d’état with relatively little popular support behind them. One of the classic works that expresses this point of view is Leonard Schapiro, *The Origins of the Communist Autocracy: Political Opposition in the Soviet State, 1917–1922* (Cambridge, MA, 1955). Robert V. Daniels, *Red October* (New York, 1967), emphasizes the role of accident and chance in 1917, and George Katkov, *Russia 1917: The February Revolution* (New York, 1967), extends the theory of conspiracy to the events of February. Beginning in the 1970s a new generation of “social historians” broadened the more political and biographical studies of earlier years to include the history of workers, soldiers, and peasants. With a few exceptions, such as John H. L. Keep, *The Russian Revolution: A Study in Mass Mobilization* (New York and Toronto, 1976), social historians in the last years of the Cold War developed a “revisionist” interpretation that argued that the Bolsheviks rode a wave of popular discontent and enthusiasm for Soviet power, particularly in the large cities and among soldiers. Among the revisionist works are: Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *The February Revolution: Petrograd 1917* (Seattle, 1981); Steve A. Smith, *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories, 1917–1918* (Cambridge, 1983); Allan K. Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ, 1983–87); Ziva Galili, *The Menshevik Leaders in the Russian Revolution: Social Realities and Political Strategies* (Princeton, NJ, 1989); William G. Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution: The Constitutional Democratic Party, 1917–1921* (Princeton, NJ, 1974); Alexander Rabinowitch, *Prelude to Revolution: The Petrograd Bolsheviks and the July 1917 Uprising* (Bloomington, ID., 1968) and *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* (New York, 1976); Diane Koenker, *Moscow Workers and the 1917 Revolution* (Princeton, NJ, 1981); and Daniel H. Kaiser (ed.), *The Workers’ Revolution in Russia, 1917: The View from Below* (Cambridge, 1987). Two earlier works on the Socialist Revolutionary Party remain the standard texts: Oliver H. Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism* (New York, 1958) and *The Sickle under the Hammer* (New York, 1963).

In the last years of the USSR and after its fall, an “antirevisionist” turn was reflected in a number of works: Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (New York, 1990) and *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime* (New York, 1993); and Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917–1991* (New York, 1994). For discussions of the changing approaches to the Russian Revolution, see the historiographical reviews by Ronald Grigor Suny, “Toward a Social History of the October Revolution,” *American Historical Review* 81, no. 1 (February 1983): 31–52; “Revision and Retreat in the Historiography of 1917: Social History and Its Critics,” *The Russian Review* 53, no. 2 (April 1994): 165–82; and Ronald Grigor Suny and Arthur Adams (eds.), *The Russian Revolution and Bolshevik Victory: Visions and Revisions* (Lexington, MA, 1990). Finally, one should consult Orlando Figes, *A People’s Tragedy: the Russian Revolution, 1891–1924* (New York, 1997), for a broad overview of the revolutionary period, as well as Rex A. Wade, *The Russian Revolution, 1917* (Cambridge, 2000).

For the subjective side of the revolution, both how people at the time interpreted it and how historians have conceptualized it, see Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917* (New Haven, CT, 1999); Mark D. Steinberg, *Voices of Revolution, 1917* (New Haven, CT, 2001); Mark D. Steinberg, *Proletarian Imagination: Self, Modernity and the Sacred in Russia, 1910–1925* (Ithaca, NY, 2002); and

Frederick C. Corney, *Telling October: Memory and the Making of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Ithaca, NY, 2004). For comparisons among various revolutions, several books are of interest: Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge, 1979); Arno J. Mayer, *The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions* (Princeton, NJ, 2002); and S. A. Smith, *Revolution and the People in Russia and China, A Comparative History* (Cambridge, 2008).