6. The March Revolution

The approach of the Revolution was heralded by a series of struggles in January and February 1917, which outwardly were but a further development of those of 1916, a quantitative change, so to speak.

In January (according to official data) there were 454 strikes with 355,000 participants: of these, 258 strikes with 218,000 participants were political: in Petrograd nearly 90 per cent of the strikes were political—chiefly on the anniversary of Bloody Sunday. Denunciation of Tsardom and the war was general.

In February, up to the 20th, there are records so far of 158 strikes with 203,000 participants—70 per cent of them political. In particular, there were 89,000 strikes in Petrograd on February 14th, when a session of the Duma was to begin. The Menshevik delegates in the War Industry Committee had organised legal meetings in the factories calling on the workers to march to the Duma on that day as a sign of their support. The Bolsheviks called for a strike, first on February 10th—which turned out to be unsuitable, because large numbers of factories were on Shrovetide holiday—then on February 14th. The strike that day took place in spite of dire threats placarded by General Habalov, commandant of Petrograd, and an appeal from Milyukov.

Thus the atmosphere in the capital was once more tense, and very little was needed to bring down a storm.[22]

The Beginning

It began with a strike in one department of the Putilov works on March 2nd, continued next day. The same evening the Party Committee in the Narva quarter decided to call for solidarity action in other factories of the district. On the 4th a number of other plants struck, while the Putilov strikers elected a delegation to interview the management. The latter however threatened to dismiss the delegates. Protest meetings began in all departments of the vast plant (in which there were approximately 150 members of the Bolshevik Party), and on March 6th the whole place was stopped. The following day the management closed down the works indefinitely. A strike committee of one per department was elected by the workers who had gathered at the gates that morning: and it held a joint meeting with the Narva Party Committee, at which it was decided to send delegates to all the factories in that and the neighbouring Vyborg quarter, asking for solidarity strikes. The news spread like lightening throughout the capital.

March 8th was International Women's Day. The

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[22] The following account is based on the highly documented section on the Revolution (chapter 6) in the work of Academician Mintz.

Bolshevik leaders had decided to call for stop-work and factory meetings, the subject to be "The War, the High Cost of Living and the Position of Working Women". They did not manage to get out a leaflet, and a small mixed group of former Bolsheviks and anti-war Mensheviks issued one which denounced the war and Tsardom, but did not call for strikes or a demonstration. But meetings were held in many of the factories in the Vyborg quarter, where Bolsheviks were particularly strong. While a giant procession of the Putilov workers were marching through the Narva ward towards the centre of the city, drawing thousands of people from the food queues into their ranks and being joined by workers from factories on the route, the Vyborg workers, enterprise after enterprise, starting with the textile factories where masses of women were employed, were going on strike, and sending representatives to factories still working—and then marching towards the city centre, the Nevsky Prospekt. There they met a large section of the Narva workers, who had evaded police barriers by also crossing the icebound river. The resultant demonstration freely displayed red flags, sang revolutionary songs, and had fierce fights with the police. In all, including the Putilov workers already on strike, at least 120,000 were out.

Large numbers of troops were called out, according to a plan carefully worked out in January 1916, which provided for over 20 battalions of infantry and cavalry, distributed over 16 sections into which the city was divided, to reinforce the police. In most places the workers surrounded the soldiers, arguing with them and explaining their aims. The battle for the armed forces had begun.

That evening there was a meeting of the Vyborg Bolshevik Committee with representatives of the Petersburg Committee and the Russian Bureau. They decided to call for an extension of the strike, to hold an anti-war meeting on the Nevsky Prospekt, and to intensify agitation among the soldiers.

On March 9th the day began with over 200,000 workers on strike. This time tens of thousands of workers broke through several police barriers at the bridges and burst into the centre, singing, shouting "Down with the Tsar!" and carrying red flags. A feature of the demonstrations was the stubbornness with which, dispersed by police, Cossacks and infantry in one place, they would gather immediately not far off. Dozens of factories, large and small, joined in the strike during the day. On the other hand, many more units of the Petrograd garrison were called out to support the police. Among these there were many mobilised workers, and they together with Bolshevik workers who talked with soldiers in the streets began energetic agitation among the troops. The first results were seen at three demonstrations on the vast Nevsky Prospekt, where Cossacks refused to join the police fighting the workers and rode away, amid cheers from the crowd. By the evening some 240,000 were on strike—about 60 per cent of the city's working class. There was a second joint Party meeting that evening, this time with representatives of Party organisations from other quarters of Petrograd. It was decided to call for a general political strike against Tsardom next day, to get Party spokesmen into the barracks, and to send a messenger to Moscow urging the Party committee there to organise solidarity action.

General Political Strike

Petrograd resembled an occupied city next morning, March 10th. There were infantry, police and Cossack posts everwhere, and mounted patrols in the streets from early morning. The aim was to keep the workers back in the factory quarters. On their side, just over 300,000 came on strike. The workers gathered at their factory gates and marched off in columns, growing rapidly into huge demonstrations towards the river. The police report for the day noted that almost the only slogan on the banners was "Down with Tsardom". There were no police to be seen in the industrial districts, and the Putilov works passed into the hands of a Provisional Revolutionary Committee, which began organising an armed workers' guard, and later in the day a revolutionary staff was set up. There was a series of fights with the police at the bridges and on the Nevsky, but thousands broke through across the ice; several demonstrators were killed by revolver shots.

On several occasions however, Cossacks refused to attack the workers, and at about 2 p.m., in the presence of a 5,000-strong demonstration at the Kazan bridge, they helped in the freeing of 25 who had been arrested earlier, striking the police with the flats of their sabres. At Znamensky Square a girl student was shot dead by an officer, but a Cossack NCO cut down a police chief. Individual policemen were disarmed, and in the Vyborg and Narva wards the workers occupied police stations and took away the rifles, revolvers and ammunition. While a printed leaflet in the name of the Central Committee of the Bolsheviks circulated, calling for an all-Russian strike and for all to come out into the streets and fight for freedom, a meeting of the Petersburg Committee in the afternoon decided (i) to issue an appeal to the soldiers, (ii) to organise an information bureau of elected delegates from factory committees, (iii) to proceed to an insurrection, erecting barricades. Reports from the Ministers and General Habalov to the Tsar (who was at GHQ), a letter to him from his wife, discussions of the politicians in the Duma building and at the City Council, all treated the events as "food disturbances"; while the Tsar at

9 p.m. sent a telegram to Habalov ordering him to "stop the disorders tomorrow", the Bloc leaders (including the Socialist-Revolutionary Kerensky) called for the formation of a "responsible Ministry" (under the Tsar) and urged the workers not to "repeat the sad events of 1905" by street fighting. The police arrested about 100 more active Bolsheviks during the night including three members of the Petrograd Committee: they had an agent in the Committee.

March 11th was a Sunday; the strike was reinforced by the printers, and no newspapers appeared. Habalov ordered all regimental commanders and police chiefs to fire after three warnings. About 400 machine guns were installed by the police on roofs and belfries. Workers began to gather at midday in the factory quarters and move off towards the centre, this time in columns of 5,000 or more. Once again they were breaking through into the centre with almost continuous "meetings" at the lines of soldiers: but this time there was continual shooting on the Nevsky itself. Police reports as well as memoirs speaking of the astonishing insistence with which meetings went on there even after shootings, gathering immediately from the doorways and alleys in which the workers had taken refuge.

Armed groups of workers and students exchanged fire with the police: dozens were killed on both sides. Girl students, organised by the Bolshevik Student Committee, put on white aprons and Red Cross armbands and forced their way into police stations to tend the wounded under arrest, "behaving in the highest degree insolently", the last report of the secret police noted that evening. The Party leaflet to the soldiers reached them: it was distributed in the streets, thrown over the railings of barrack yards, given in packets at barrack gates to soldiers returning from duty, by pickets and at short meetings.

Individual soldiers began joining the demonstrators with their arms, and a company of the Pavlovsky Guards mutinied: they were however disarmed by soldiers called in from the Preobrazhensky Guards close by. On orders from the Tsar, Chief of General Staff Alexeyev that night instructed the Northern and Western Fronts (those nearest to the capital) each to despatch a brigade of infantry, with artillery, and a cavalry brigade to reinforce the Petrograd garrison, under an "energetic general". The same evening Rodzyanko, President of the Duma, bombarded the Tsar with telegrams imploring him to appoint a new Premier, "enjoying the confidence of the country", and adding that "delay meant death"; he sent copies to the Front commanders, and two of them in the morning supported him in cables to Alexeyev. Menshevik speakers this day called on the workers to break off the general strike, saying that a revolution was "madness". Anarchists called for terror against the Government. Late at night delegates of the Russian Bureau, the Petrograd Committee, the Vyborg Committee and of a number of large factory groups resolved that next day must be one of armed insurrection: steps were discussed to seize arms depots and prisons and for more fraternisation with the soldiers, and to issue leaflets calling for insurrection. A girl student working for the Bureau was sent to Moscow. During the night the local Bolshevik committees received these directions, studied maps and prepared action.

Armed Insurrection

Early on March 12th more threats by Habalov were placarded everywhere; but brief workers' meetings at factory gates rapidly adopted resolutions endorsing the Party's appeal and moved off to the centre. At one bridge a training company of the Moscow Guards was disarmed, after a brief struggle in which the commander was killed. In ward after ward ammunition factories and gun shops were occupied. Police stations everywhere were attacked and sacked, and after a fight with the gendarmes the Petrograd Secret Police office was seized and set on fire. Most of the soldiers this time were kept in barracks, but all accounts show that discussions among them raged all night. After preliminary discussions among NCOs, the Volhynian Guards were roused one hour earlier and urged not to obey orders to fire; when the first officers appeared, a general revolt took place. The regiment formed up and sent delegates to the neighbouring Litovsky and Preobrazhensky Guards. These too rose, and all three regiments, without officers, marched off to the Vyborg quarter, where they joined the huge workers' demonstration, handing over part of their arms. Occupation of the points decided on during the night began, including all bridges, railway termini, the Arsenal with 40,000 rifles and 30,000 revolvers. Large quantities of arms in regimental stores were seized; the main prisons were occupied during the morning and political prisoners released, and regiment after regiment revolted, sometimes killing their most recalcitrant officers.

By the evening nearly 67,000 soldiers had gone over to the Revolution. About 160 private cafés and municipal canteens were taken over, as temporary canteens for the troops. In the evening the Peter and Paul Fortress, with more arms in its arsenal, fell. In the morning the Vyborg Committee issued a leaflet calling on the workers to elect delegates to a Council of Deputies as a "Provisional Revolutionary Government" (elections of delegates had already begun, mainly in the engineering factories in different quarters, on March 9th and 10th). During the day the Russian Bureau adopted and issued as a printed leaflet in the name of the Central Committee

a manifesto "To all Citizens of Russia", announcing the fall of Tsardom, proclaiming the programme of basic measures which the Bolsheviks had long adopted (a democratic Republic, the 8-hour day and confiscation of landowners' estates) and calling on the workers and soldiers to elect their delegates to a Provisional Revolutionary Government. By the evening the last 2,000 troops at Habalov's disposal, a mere handful, had been driven back to the Winter Palace: but there was still intensive firing from the police machine gun nests on roofs and belfries.[23] About 2 p.m. the Menshevik leaders of the "Workers' Group" on the Central War Industry Committee met with their deputies at the Duma building, proclaimed themselves the Provisional Executive Committee of the Council of Workers' Deputies (Soviet) and issued a call to the workers to send one deputy per 1,000, and to the soldiers to send one per *company*, to a first meeting at 7 p.m. Actually it met at about 9 p.m., with some 50 present; the main life of the capital was still in the streets.

It elected an Executive Committee, appointed food, defence and literature committees, decided to publish a daily paper (*Izvestia*), and called on the workers to form a militia in each factory, 100 per 1,000 workers. At about 4 p.m., in another wing of the Duma building, after many hours of discussion, whether they should take any action or not—since it was not clear what the Tsar would do—the leaders of the Progressive Bloc decided to form a "Provisional Committee of the State Duma to restore order in the capital and enter into relations with institutions and persons".

Under cover of this cautious formula, they began pressing for the Tsar's brother, the Grand Duke Michael, to become dictator, and for the Tsar to "grant a responsible ministry". The one thing that united all concerned was fear of the revolted workers and soldiers. Rodzyanko, Milyukov and Kerensky, in speech after speech to military units which marched to the Duma building that afternoon, urged them to obey their officers and go back to their barracks. Meanwhile the reserves summoned from the various fronts began moving towards the capital, and the Tsar appointed an "energetic general" Ivanov, to take charge of them and of the Petrograd Military District with dictatorial powers: he also decided to go to Petrograd himself next day, and summoned yet more artillery batteries from the fronts. In fact, however, most of the Ministers had already been arrested and the whole city was in the hands of the revolutionaries. Habalov informed Ivanov himself by telegraph in the early hours of March 13th. And (anticipating a little) early on March 14th the whole punitive expedition was stopped in its tracks by the 25,000-strong garrison of one railway junction on its way (Luga) going over to the Revolution, railwaymen and other workers blocking the way on another line, and finally troops of the Ivanov expedition themselves beginning to melt away, persuaded by revolutionary soldiers at Tsarskoye Selo.

In Moscow

Meanwhile in Moscow, despite the fact that the press was forbidden to publish any details of what was going on, the City Committee of the Bolsheviks on March 12th decided to issue a printed leaflet. It reported the revolution in Petrograd—particularly the soldiers joining the people—and called on the workers to strike and the soldiers to come out on the streets, and thus transform the revolution into an all-Russian one. It also called for elections to a Council of Workers' Deputies. The same evening, trying to outwit the Bolsheviks, the Menshevik leaders met at the City Hall and proclaimed themselves a provisional revolutionary committee. Next morning, however, many Bolshevik delegates came in from the factories. The enlarged committee likewise called for a general strike, and for the soldiers to come over to the workers' side.

Strikes in fact broke out all over Moscow that morning and workers marched from all quarters to the centre, breaking down all police resistance on the way. Nowhere did soldiers, lined up to bar the way, attempt to stop the workers, much less shoot: and in the course of the day many units joined the revolution. Numbers of gendarmes and police were disarmed. Political meetings went on all day outside the City Hall (now the Lenin Museum). Next day (March 14th) as a particularly stirring appeal to soldiers from the Bolshevik Committee was being distributed in the barracks, an entire artillery brigade, upwards of 15,000 soldiers, went over to the Revolution: in the course of the day so many troops did the same that in the evening the staff of the Moscow Military District ordered all shooting to cease. By then all public buildings were in the hands of the workers, as well as all the prisoners: political prisoners, some of them after ten years at hard labour, were released. Similar events took place in many other towns.

By midday on March 13th, all resistance had been overcome in Petrograd, and officers—among them

[23] A ridiculous attempt has been made by Mr. G. Katkov, author of the most recent historical whitewashing of the Tsar, to pretend that the police firing from the roof tops is a "legend". Unfortunately for him, cables from *The Times* correspondent in Petrograd, sent on March 12th, 13th, 14th and 17th, 1917, all provide explicit evidence that it was not.

the Grand Duke Cyril—themselves began to come to the Duma to proclaim their adhesion to the Revolution. Simultaneously elections to the Soviet took place in most factories and military units; when the Soviet held its second meeting in the afternoon, hundreds of delegates attended. All day Ministers, high Tsarist officials, police chiefs and generals (including Habalov) were being arrested.

7. Dual Power

It was not by chance that officers began to come to the Duma proclaiming their support of the Revolution. Word of the Duma leaders' appeals to the soldiers to disarm the day before, had got round. Now Rodzyanko signed an order, on behalf of the Duma's Provisional Committee, *instructing* the soldiers to return to their barracks and hand in their arms. The same afternoon, two members of the Duma were sent with a military unit to the Peter and Paul Fortress and stopped any further distribution of arms to the workers. These circumstances should be seen in connection with the fact that the Duma Committee knew that General Ivanov with his punitive expedition at that moment was moving on the capital (but concealed it from the Soviet). It is obvious that the Provisional Committee was still hoping to get the revolution under control: this became clear on March 14th, when it sent out a telegram to all towns in Russia, signed by Rodzyanko, announcing that Government power in Petrograd had passed to the Provisional Committee. What this meant was well understood. General Orlov, deputy to the Viceroy of the Caucasus (the Grand Duke Nicholas), sent a secret circular to all the local (Tsarist) authorities, instructing them to maintain order by force of arms if necessary, and explaining that the Provisional Committee formed by the Duma "has set itself the patriotic public task of quelling the revolutionary movement". Obviously only the arrival of Ivanov's forces and the voluntary surrender of their arms by the soldiers, could make such a "task" practicable, and give the bourgeois parties the real power they still lacked.

The Soldiers' Demands

While all these details were not yet public, Rodzyanko's order on March 13th was sufficient to alarm the now alert soldiers. All over the Petrograd garrison they were roused to fury when the officers who had fled the previous day began reappearing: great numbers of them were disarmed and arrested, and delegates from the soldiers began arriving at the Soviet session in the evening to demand withdrawal of Rodzyanko's order. Late that night the EC of the Soviet decided that the matter must be discussed at the Soviet meeting next day.[24]

The Soviet session opened at midday on March 14th and a little later a number of soldiers' delegates arrived. In the course of a deeply heated discussion, at least 20 soldiers took part. They bluntly stated that Rodzyanko represented the "party of order", who wanted "the workers and peasants to be like a herd of cattle, while they do the ruling"; that until the revolution was successful, the Duma leaders had supported the Tsar, but now they were trying to get back under the plea for "order"; once they had disarmed the soldiers, they would throttle the revolution; the soldiers should be organised in the Soviet of Soldiers' and Workers' Deputies, who should be the only authority for them; the only weapons left to the "gentlemen officers" should be their swords, while all other arms should be under the control of elected soldiers' committees: the returning officers had only put on red armbands to deceive the soldiers, but in reality they were monarchists, and among themselves called the soldiers "a flock of sheep"; they should be allowed back only as instructors, forbidden to use bad language, and addressed as "Mr. Captain", etc. The Soviet, deciding to accept these points in general, instructed its EC to draw up an appropriate order to the troops. It included in the EC for this purpose 10 representatives of the soldiers. Those chosen included two Bolsheviks, two left Mensheviks, a right-wing Menshevik, a Socialist-Revolutionary, and four without particular affiliations. These, together with representatives of the EC, drew up "Order No. 1" in about half an hour, embodying the essential demands of the soldiers. It was endorsed first by the EC and then by the full Soviet: and sent to the printers immediately, to appear in the form of leaflets which were issued to all units in the morning, and later in *Izvestia*.

This act, which aroused the unspeakable fury of the old generals, the Provisional Committee of the Duma, the foreign ambassadors, etc., broke the back of the old army, and paralysed beforehand any attempt of the Duma parties to "quell the revolutionary movement". It showed, moreover, where real power lay on March 14th.

On the same day, the EC of the Soviet decided all the same that it should not enter the Government but should confine itself to critical support. The Government should be formed by the Provisional Committee of the Duma, i.e. by the bourgeois parties, on

[24] For the proceedings which ended in the issuing of "Order No. 1" to the troops, I follow the detailed accounts, based on the minutes lately found in the archives of the Petrograd Soviet, in Miller, *The Beginning of Democratisation of the Old Army*, in the Soviet journal *History of the U.S.S.R.* (in Russian), No. 6, 1966.

condition that they accepted a programme of democratic reforms (but not including any reference to peace or the land). The EC late that night met the Provisional Committee, which accepted the conditions. At midday on March 15th the EC reported to the full Soviet, where a discussion lasting seven hours ensued. The Bolsheviks fought for the creation of a Provisional Revolutionary Government based on the political parties represented in the Soviet alone, but were defeated. The Mensheviks argued that the working class was not organised enough and could not consolidate the revolution without the help of the bourgeoisie—whom they promised to keep under "supervision". As though to round off the yielding of political power to the bourgeois parties, Kerensky (who was a vice-chairman of the Soviet) came into the meeting and announced that, contrary to the decision not to enter the government when it was formed, he had agreed to join it as Minister of Justice in order to secure the liberation of all political prisoners. His action was approved by an immense majority.

Provisional Government Formed

Later that day (March 15th) the Duma Committee announced the formation of a Provisional Government of 12 members—six of them Cadets, five Octobrists or members of minor bourgeois parties, one Socialist-Revolutionary. Thus the Progressive Bloc had achieved its aim, and the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries had carried out their programme: the bourgeoisie had replaced the great landowners as the ruling class. The parties which had kept well out of the picture, intriguing with Tsardom to the end, until the workers and soldiers had by their sacrifices made the revolution (869 soldiers, 237 workmen and 276 others had been killed and wounded in the struggle) were enabled to step into the seats of power.[25] But the special feature of the situation was that the Provisional Government acquired its position, and could retain it, only by grace and favour of the majority in the Soviet—representing hundreds of thousands of those same workmen and soldiers.

It was this situation which Lenin described as "dual power".

How fragile was the situation of the Provisional Government was displayed that very day, March 15th, on which it was formed. So fixed in the minds of its members was the idea that Russia could not get on without a monarchy, and the Romanov dynasty particularly, that it despatched two of the leading members of the bourgeois parties, Guchkov and Shulgin, to the Tsar at Pskov to persuade him to abdicate in favour of his son, with the Grand Duke Michael as Regent. In fact, when they got there, they found that Nicholas was abdicating on behalf of his son as well, and was calling on Michael to succeed him as Tsar—a questionable honour, which Michael next day wisely refused with the utmost energy. But so sure of himself was Milyukov, the new Foreign Minister, that after the negotiations with the Soviet leaders about the Government were over, he announced to a large gathering of workers and soldiers in the Duma building the Provisional Government's decision about Michael Romanov's regency.

This caused an immediate uproar, and when the news spread through the city, stormy meetings of workers and soldiers, began. Officers began to arrive in groups at the Duma building, saying that they dared not return to their units unless Milyukov's announcement were repudiated. He had to do this himself in the next morning's press, explaining that he had "only expressed his own personal opinion". Guchkov did not know of this, and immediately on his return to Petrograd (March 16th) announced the "glad news" about the Grand Duke Michael taking over to a meeting of 2,000 railway shopmen—who immediately arrested him and sent him under armed guard to the North Western Railway Commissari office, whence he only got away after the workmen had "calmed down".[26]

Thus for all their investment with power by the Soviet, the Provisional Government in the person of its leading spokesmen—Guchkov was Minister of War and Marine—found itself powerless directly a question was raised which the workers and soldiers regarded as vital for themselves.

8. Causes and Consequences

But how was such a situation possible?

Primarily because Russia was a petty-bourgeois country still, i.e. one in which the vast majority of the people were peasants, while capitalism was still inadequately developed—so that large sections of the workers too were recent recruits from the peasantry (and, owing to wartime conditions, from the town small shopkeepers and other petty bourgeois strata as well). Brought suddenly into mass

[25] *Pravda*, March 23rd (April N.S.), 1917.

[26] One consequence of this incident, described by Shulgin in his 1925 memoirs, *Days*, and by Professor Lomonosov in his *Recollections of the March 1917 Revolution* (Berlin 1921) was that the act of abdication was handed over by Shulgin to Bublikov, a Duma member, who hid it in a pile of old journals at the Railway Ministry—where it was lost, and only rediscovered at the Academy of Sciences in 1929!

activity, the peasants in uniform and the greatly diluted working class in its majority, even while carrying out a giant revolution, were politically inexperienced and simple minded. They easily fell a prey to the skilled eloquence, concealing pro-capitalist aims in Socialist-sounding phrases, of the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries. "A giant petty-bourgeois wave swamped everything, crushed the class-conscious proletariat not only numerically but ideologically as well, i.e. infected, captured very wide sections of the workers with petty-bourgeois views on politics", wrote Lenin.

Furthermore, this was made particularly easy for the "Socialist" opportunist parties because, supporting the war as they had from the outset, they had been treated with great leniency by the authorities from 1914 onwards, and allowed to retain all kinds of "legal" posts—particularly in the co-operative societies, sick benefit clubs and, as has been shown, the War Industry Committee—as well as holding their prominent positions in the Duma and publish their paper. The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, had been continually harried, on a far bigger scale than before 1914, losing their five deputies as well as their paper. Concentrating on the largest factories and the biggest industrial towns in their deeply "underground" organisation, they were unable to maintain permanent contact with the great mass; and when revolution began, literally hundreds of their best speakers, organisers and writers had to be brought back from exile, or out of prison, before they could begin to function.

This situation found its dramatic reflection in the fact that, during the dramatic events before and after March 12th, the Mensheviks were able to avoid publicly associating themselves with revolution until the cat had jumped, whereas all the Bolsheviks available were involved day and night in getting it to jump: one group of released prisoners went to the Duma building while the other went to the factories, streets and barracks.

In this situation, in turn, the system of election to the Soviet, though natural enough from the standpoint of drawing the widest mass of the working people into activity, ensured a big preponderance of "the petty-bourgeois views on politics". With the workers electing on the basis of one deputy per 1,000—and smaller factories under that figure nevertheless having one deputy as well—the Petrograd Soviet had 800 worker deputies, but the larger works were definitely outnumbered among them. When it came to the soldiers, however, one per company or its equivalent was the rule, i.e. one per 200 or 300; many smaller units had deputies as well. As a result, there were 2,000 soldier deputies—although the total garrison (170,000) was no more than half the size of the Petrograd working class.

Thus the character of the broad democratic upheaval of the people in Russia, the particular circumstances of the political parties seeking the ear of the working people, the form of mass organisation which this situation brought into existence, were all closely interconnected—and they made it certain that the very thoroughness of that great event would put the Menshevik leaders in a majority position, when they were able to try out to the full their theory that this was a bourgeois revolution, therefore the bourgeoisie must rule.

Role of the Bolsheviks

Does this mean that it was they who made the revolution, or that it happened spontaneously, as the British newspapers immediately tried to make out; or that the Bolsheviks, not having been able to "plan" the revolution in its technical details, dates, etc., therefore had no part in making it, as subsequent popular historians have asserted; or that they (and Lenin) were taken by surprise?[27]

All these suggestions, put forward at various times in the last fifty years, in order somehow or other to present a picture of the March Revolution without the Bolsheviks, are belied by the facts of history—when these are studied objectively, on the basis of contemporary documents and properly

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[27] Pares, *History of Russia* (1947): "As yet (March 12th) there was no direction of the movement which, in the words of one of the leading revolutionaries, went of itself." Seton Watson, *The Decline of Imperial Russia* (1952): "The Progressive Bloc appointed a permanent committee. . . . On the morning of March 12th the troops in the capital began to come over to its side. The revolution had come." Charques, *Short History of Russia* (1956): "Planless, aimless, chaotic, the March revolution of 1917 had been achieved. . . . The Bolsheviks had next to nothing to do with the fall of Tsarism." Lawrence, *Russia in the Making* (1957): "Riots broke out in the capital; the Tsar dissolved the Duma, the Duma refused to be dissolved, mutinous troops refused to fire on the people; and suddenly no one obeyed the Government." Charques, *The Twilight of Imperial Russia* (1958): "The Bolsheviks contributed little or nothing to the revolution.... The first disturbances were wholly unorganised.... The mass moved of itself. . . . The Petrograd Soviet came into existence out of the chaos of revolution." Kochan, *The Making of Modern Russia* (1962): "It began in a small way, spontaneously almost, one might say, unpolitically. . . . The movement took the revolutionaries by surprise as much as anyone else." Katkov, *Russia 1917. The February Revolution* (1967): "All the evidence goes to show that the Bolsheviks had not set up an organisation capable of provoking mass action. . . . In the spring of 1917 in particular they did not believe mass action at all desirable . . . (The Petrograd Bolsheviks) played an insignificant part."

checked memoirs.[28] It is these facts which have been summarised in the preceding pages, and which are constantly ignored by those who seek to present the kind of distorted picture which will at least partially whitewash the bourgeois parties and the Mensheviks (most commonly), or even the Tsardom (more rarely).

Of course a revolution in which millions of workers and soldiers took part could not be *planned* in the sense that an advertising campaign, or even a single demonstration can be planned, with all the technical details of an organisation, supervising and directing the whole operation. The suggestion that it can, only reflects the degree to which the historian who makes it has absorbed the *police* conception of a revolution, "the police-tinged bourgeois mind" which Marx long ago ridiculed in his *Civil War in France*—"explosions" ordered from time to time by some central conspiratorial body.

That kind of "revolution" is indeed known to history—but it is the kind in which armed coups have been carried out *against* the people, and often with foreign encouragement and aid compensating the conspirators for their lack of thinking support among the masses. Such was the Franco rebellion against the Spanish Republic in 1936, and the military coup of the Fascist General Metaxas in Greece, the same year.

But a revolution in which the masses play a decisive part, again and again taking the initiative because they understand in essence what it is all about, cannot be an "operation" of that kind. Millions and tens of millions of workers, peasants and soldiers cannot be encompassed by an all-seeing and all-directing organisation for *revolutionary* action.[29] What a revolutionary organisation can do is to show that it understands the basic requirements of the people, and lead them towards the fulfilment of those requirements wherever and whenever it can. This the Bolsheviks did over many years, and particularly in the years of revival of the working class movement before and during the war (1912-14, 1915-17). They could not know precisely the week and day when a strike of one section of the workers might lead to a general strike, still less when a general strike might develop into a revolution (just as a party elsewhere cannot tell when a campaign of political demonstrations may turn into a political storm which may sweep away a Minister, as happened with Sir Samuel Hoare over the betrayal of Ethiopia in 1935, or completely frustrate the policy of a recently-elected Government, as happened with Anthony Eden's Government over Suez). What the Bolsheviks could do, and alone did, was to be present and active as part of the working class, wherever the most influential sections of that class were prompted by general conditions into action—and, once that action was launched, to act in the spirit of Marx and Engels' advice in the *Communist Manifesto:*

> "The Communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class; but in the movement of the present, they also represent and take care of the future of that movement."

Tsardom Overthrown

At a moment when the incapacity of the ruling class of Russia (all their conflicting groups) was at its height, when the masses of the workers, soldiers and peasants were feeling that the miseries of the war were an intolerable burden, and displaying their feeling in many spontaneous ways: the determined action of the Bolsheviks led by Lenin, and only the Bolsheviks, and particularly of their Petrograd organisation, raised the struggle which had been going on, in wartime conditions, since 1915 to a higher level—and at that higher level it broke through all obstacles, and launched the revolutionary fight which, in five swift days, overthrew Tsardom. Thereby the Bolsheviks were put publicly in the position of a minority—but a minority in a working class which was, for the first time in its history, playing an independent part, potentially holding political power though not wielding it, a working class, therefore, which was in a position to learn from its experiences, as it had never learned in the half century since the emancipation of the serfs in 1861.

It did learn from its experience between March and November, and the lesson it drew was that the Bolsheviks were right.

That was the greatness of the March Revolution, and that was what made it the first historic stride towards the Socialist Revolution in November.

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[28] It should be mentioned that one myth put about in recent years is that Lenin himself was not only taken by surprise, but did not believe the revolution would happen in his lifetime: as proof of this, his address on the anniversary of 1905 to Swiss Youth at Zurich (January 22nd, 1917) is regularly quoted. But the text is available now in many cheap editions. Anyone can see for himself that, when Lenin spoke of the Russian revolution, he was referring to what had happened in 1905; when he said that "we of the older generation may not live to see the decisive battles of this coming revolution", he was referring throughout (6 times!) to a *European* revolution.

[29] The logical absurdity to which the contrary idea of what makes a revolution is pushed is well illustrated by Mr. Katkov when he writes (pp. 260-1) that the proletarian masses in 1917 were not interested in the slogans for which they were demonstrating, so long as they got their strike pay—forgetting only to produce one solitary piece of evidence amid that vast series of struggles that anyone, anywhere, got any "strike pay".