

## The Russian Revolution

Now, at last, it seemed as if some sort of rational order might replace the governmental chaos. It was as if some dreadful nightmare had ended. But these feelings were confined to the ruling classes. Rasputin's death, which appeared to clear the way for some sort of liberal reform, left the misery of the vast mass of the Russian people unchanged. The millions of dead, the demoralized army, the hundreds of thousands of deserters, the toiling factory workers who could no longer afford even the barest necessities of life, the mutely suffering peasants—for them the death of Rasputin had only one effect. It proved beyond any shadow of doubt that the government was so corrupt that even its supporters, even a grand duke or a prince, had no other means of affecting it than through murder. The medieval orgy of absolutism had reached its highest expression in the disgusting rise and fall of Gregory Rasputin. Now the masses would have their say.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# The February Revolution

*NONE OF THE LEADERS* expected it. Neither the Bolsheviks nor the Mensheviks nor the Social Revolutionaries nor the liberals nor the czarist nobility. Even though they had prayed for it or feared it or predicted it in a general way, when it occurred, none of them was prepared. The only organization in Russia that accurately forecast what was about to happen was the secret police. But their perceptions were keener—just as the perceptions of a man facing the charge of a ferocious tiger are keener than those of his gun-bearers

ries, their fellow soldiers in the ranks. They were used to organizing, to leading. If they lacked the grip on theory and philosophy displayed by such as Lenin, Plekhanov, Trotsky, they nevertheless understood immediate political problems and how to exploit them. Besides that, they had all been schooled in the ruthlessness of the czarist state; many had had experience of street fighting in 1905.

Before unfolding the drama of the revolution, it might be well to see what sort of people these lower-rank revolutionaries were. Remember that they were of every political persuasion, not just Bolshevik, so long as it was revolutionary. Max Eastman, who visited Russia in the 1920's, has sketched the following portrait of them: "A wonderful generation of men and women was born to fulfill this revolution in Russia. You may be traveling in any remote part of the country, and you will see some quiet, strong, exquisite face in your omnibus or your railroad car—a middle-aged man with white, philosophic forehead and soft brown beard, or an elderly woman with sharply arching eyebrows and a stern motherliness about her mouth, or perhaps a middle-aged man, or a younger woman who is still sensuously beautiful, but carries herself as though she had walked up to a cannon—you will inquire, and you will find that they are the 'old party workers.' Reared in the tradition of the terrorist movement, a stern and sublime heritage of martyr-faith, taught in infancy to love mankind, and to think without sentimentality, and to be masters of themselves, and to admit death into their company, they learned in youth a new thing—to think practically; and they were tempered in the fires of jail and exile. They became almost a noble order, a selected stock of men and women who could be relied upon to be heroic, like a Knight of

far behind him. The February Revolution (which in our calendar took place in March 1917) that exploded in the streets of Petrograd caught not only its leaders and opponents unaware—in a certain sense it caught the people themselves unaware. It was something that grew on unexpected success—an event fed by its own flames, a movement which surprised itself by its own victory.

A revolution, when it occurs, offers the greatest challenge to any historian. The masses of people fighting and dying in the streets do not take time out to keep a journal of what they are doing. In any case their victories and defeats are often isolated one from another. A man immersed in a struggle has no time to raise his head to take an overall look at events. After the fact there will be memoirs—but those who write them will often have some special axe to grind. And, too, one of the first objectives of the mob will be to burn and destroy the records. When to this is added the fact that the vast majority of the people who took to the streets in Petrograd were barely literate, it will be seen how difficult is the intensely dramatic events is possible to reconstruct the downfall of the Czar during which brought about the downfall of the Czar during five days of struggle—by imagination, careful selection of the records which do exist, and above all by sticking firmly to the inner social meaning of these events.

It has been said that the February Revolution was leaderless. It is true that the various party organizations were caught unprepared and that the higher leaders of the parties were in exile or prison at the time. But over the years, in Russia, a very highly politically educated leadership had been developed among the workers themselves. Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, Social Revolutionaries of the lower ranks were accustomed to explaining things to their fellow workers in the facto-

the Round Table or the Samurai, but with the patents of their nobility in the future, not the past."

Rasputin's body had been recovered from the Neva on New Year's Day. Aside from general rejoicing at his death, there was no immediate reaction. The murderers, too close to the royal family to be hanged, were banished to their country estates. The Czarina spent her days praying beside Rasputin's tomb, while the Czar tried to comfort her. The Duma continued its endless bickerings, the generals continued their endless mistakes, and the severe winter mantled Petrograd in snow and ice.

Food supplies, which had been a gold mine of graft to the ruling classes, were in shorter supply than ever. On March 1, 1917, bread rationing was introduced in Petrograd. Now long lines of women could be seen, sometimes waiting through the icy night for a chance to purchase a few ounces of bread. The misery of the people, now reaching its height, had no effect on the Czar. When the English and French ambassadors, alarmed by the situation, begged him to take some action to regain his people's confidence, Nicholas replied: "Do you mean that I am to regain the confidence of my people, Ambassador, or that they are to regain *my* confidence?"

Strikes took place in some of the factories in response to rationing, but nothing spectacular. The Duma which met on February twenty-seventh called angrily for an end to the war and for the usual reforms—sounds that had been heard before. The president of the Duma, Mikhail Rodzianko, wrote a note to Nicholas warning that revolution was imminent—but the frightened cries of the liberals had also been heard before. On March eighth Nicholas once again left the capital to resume his duties at the front, hundreds of

miles to the south. And it was on that day that the revolution began.

March eighth was International Woman's Day. The Social Democrats in Petrograd had intended to mark the day by issuing a few leaflets and declarations. No strikes had been called for that day. When the women workers in the textile factories threatened to strike, the Bolshevik Kayurov warned them against premature action. But the women were not to be held back. Getting the men who worked in the huge Putilov metalworks to join them, on March eighth they took to the streets. They formed processions carrying banners with the slogan *Down with the Autocracy* inscribed upon them, and they chanted "Give us bread!" as they marched somberly through the streets. When they attempted to invade the center of the city, the police tried to repel them, but they succeeded in reaching the Nevski Prospect anyhow. There were ninety thousand men and women on strike that day. Some of them reached the palaces of the Duma demanding bread, a hopeless request.

The day passed without any great incident, and the czarist authorities as well as the leftist leaders thought the demonstrations were over. But on the following day the number of people in the streets doubled. At least half of the industrial workers of Petrograd were now on strike. When the workers showed up at the factories on the morning of March ninth, they did not go to work. Instead they held meetings, then went out to support what was quickly developing into a general strike. When the workers marched down the Nevski Prospect, they found crowds of middle-class people cheering them on. The Cossacks had been called out by the government, but instead of charging the mass of people they simply walked their horses through them. Everywhere the crowd was heartened by the rumor

that the Cossacks had promised not to shoot. Throughout the day huge crowds of people poured from one section of the city to another. The police broke them up continuously, and there were vicious battles. Toward the police, the "Pharaohs," the crowd showed only deep hatred. They threw stones, pieces of ice, anything at hand. And in these battles a remarkable thing was observed—not only did the Cossacks not interfere, they seemed to side with the workers! The crowd's enthusiasm was aroused by a report that when a policeman struck a woman with his club, the Cossacks rode the police down and drove them away. When the workers from the Erikson factory—some twenty-five hundred of them—ran into a Cossack squadron on the Sampsonievsky Prospect, the Cossacks rode gently through them. Kayurov, a Bolshevik worker, was there. "Some of them smiled," he recalled, "and one of them gave the workers a good wink."

The Cossacks even began to discuss matters with the workers milling around them. Their officers, now deeply alarmed, called back the patrol and lined it up across the street. But even this could not stop the integration. The Cossacks sat motionless while the workers dived under the bellies of their horses. What did this mean?

The Cossacks, those ancient subduers and punishers of the people, had always received special treatment at the hands of the czars. They were not peasants. They owned their own land, their own horses. And they enjoyed an almost autonomous self-government in their territories in the Ukraine and along the banks of the river Don. But they were as sick of war as anyone else. Above all they were sick of being pushed and pulled and always used to break the people. They wanted to go home. Therefore they winked. If the workers could pull it off, they would not stop them.

The military governor of Petrograd, Khabalov, had long since laid plans to deal with an uprising. On the first day, March eighth, he used police forces. On the second day, March ninth, he sent out the Cossacks. He held back infantry until events should develop further. It has been suggested that the police purposely displayed weakness during these days, hoping to lure the workers into a bloody showdown which would break their strength. If true, they badly miscalculated.

On March tenth the strike spread to include all of Petrograd. Now there were 240,000 workers in the streets. Students, lawyers, small businessmen joined them. Meetings were held in the open. Orators addressed the crowds from the Alexander III monument. The police opened fire. A speaker fell. Shots from the crowd killed a police inspector. Suddenly the Cossacks present fired a volley at the police, who immediately ran away. Kayurov reported how a group of workers were being whipped by mounted police within sight of a squadron of Cossacks. Kayurov and a few other workers walked over to the Cossacks, caps in hand, and said: "Brothers—Cossacks, help the workers in a struggle for their peaceable demands; you see how the Pharaohs treat us hungry workers. Help us!" The perfect psychology of this approach in humble supplication had its effect. "The Cossacks glanced at each other in some special way," Kayurov continued, "and we were hardly out of the way before they rushed into the fight." Almost immediately the police were dispersed. A Cossack who had cut down a police inspector with his sabre was tossed in the arms of the enraptured crowd.

Now the police began to go into hiding. There would be no mercy for them, and they knew it. The crowd could not compromise with them—if the revolution failed, these were the men who would be their ex-

ecutioners. Only death could settle the scores between people and police. In their place now appeared the infantry. They had established barricades across the most important streets. Toward them the crowd behaved cautiously, seeking by every means to win them over, not to antagonize them. In this the women workers had the greatest effect. After all, who were these soldiers but the brothers, husbands, and fathers of the Russian people themselves? The war had brought this about. The regiments stationed in Petrograd were not the professional soldiers of former days. Even the crack Guards regiments were full now of conscripts—peasant boys who had only recently been taken from their villages. Many of them had seen action at the front and would do anything to avoid returning there; others had seen how the autocracy had crushed their own families back home. And among them were drafted workers who had experience at political agitation. But when the people—led by women workers—approached them, cap in hand, to ask them why they obstructed the streets, these soldiers turned away suddenly. They were torn now between the terrible discipline of the army and the demands of the people. What if the revolution failed? Then the soldiers would be court-martialed and shot. They could expect no mercy from their officers. They had to be very careful. They would act only when they were convinced that the workers were in earnest—that they meant to go all the way and win the victory. As the crowds surged around them, arguing, begging, discussing, breaking into their ranks, the soldiers wavered. Perhaps they would remain neutral for a while—but no more. They were not yet ready to decide.

By this time the authorities in Petrograd realized that they were facing a full-scale revolution. They telegraphed the Czar, begging for instructions and for

reinforcements from the front. But Nicholas telegraphed Khabalov on March tenth: I ORDER THAT THE DISORDERS IN THE CAPITAL BE STOPPED TOMORROW. That is all. "I wish it, therefore it must be"—that was Nicholas' response. By this time, too, the revolutionary leaders in Petrograd had realized that the people were in earnest. They rushed to assume the leadership of the demonstration they had warned against. A three-day general strike was called by a committee consisting of Bolshevik, Menshevik, and Social Revolutionary leaders, united for once. Khabalov's reaction to this was to arrest about one hundred of these leaders and order the workers to return to their factories—not immediately, but in three days, when the general strike would have ended anyhow. This was understood by the crowds as a sign of weakness.

By morning of March eleventh, police stations throughout the city had been wrecked. Police arms—revolvers and rifles and ammunition—were in the hands of the crowd. The hated Pharaohs had gone into hiding—those of them who had not been killed. March eleventh was a Sunday, and the factories, which had been the rallying centers of the workers, were closed. But they flocked once again to the streets.

When the bridges over the Neva were raised against them, they scrambled over the icy surface of the river. When they reached the center of the city, they found the troops had been ordered out in force against them. Today they had orders to shoot. And some of them did shoot—mainly the selected training squads of the regiments. It was now no longer possible for the soldiers to maintain a benevolent neutrality. Their officers ordered them to shoot; the people begged them not to shoot their brothers and sisters. The pressure upon them had brought them to the breaking point. In one incident sixty workers were shot down by the soldiers.

lution. Some of the officers were shot. Then the Volynsk men poured into the streets and began calling out the other regiments to join them. They marched in perfect order, their band playing as they went. Soon the Preobrazhensky Regiment, the Litovski Regiment, the Moscow Regiment all joined the revolution. In most cases the Czarist officers were shot or, ripping their epaulets from their shoulders, fled into hiding.

Armored cars bearing red revolutionary banners began to appear in the streets. Workers, armed with pistols taken from the police, would organize companies of soldiers and together storm police stations throughout Petrograd, which continued to hold out. Soon the workers faced the great Fortress of Peter and Paul. New field guns had been placed in its embrasures. Did the men inside intend to make a fight of it? No—after assurances that officers would not be killed the fortress surrendered to the revolutionaries. All Petrograd was now in their hands.

What had the czarist government been doing all this time? On this same March twelfth which saw the triumph of the revolution General Khabalov ordered posters proclaiming martial law plastered all over the city. Unfortunately, no glue could be found, or brushes with which to complete this task. And on this day, too, General Ivanov moved on Petrograd from the front with the famous Battalion of Saint George—crack and disciplined troops. He had been given dictatorial powers by Nicholas to crush the uprisings. When he reached Tsarskoe Selo on the outskirts of Petrograd, Ivanov sent a telegram to General Khabalov, who was now under siege in the Admiralty building. To Ivanov's inquiries as to how many troops remained loyal, what parts of the city were in rebel hands, and so forth, Khabalov was forced to reply, "I have at my disposal in the Admiralty building four companies of the

Immediately workers rushed off to the barracks of the Pavlovsky Regiment. "Tell your comrades that your regiment too is shooting at us—we saw soldiers in your uniform. . . ." To the soldiers this came as a shameful reproach. By evening the fourth company of this regiment left under the orders of a noncommissioned officer, without permission, to round up its training squad which had fired on the people. On their way they had gun battles with remnants of the police.

When this company returned, they aroused that their tire regiment. But suddenly it was discovered that their rifles had been removed by the officers. Then they found themselves surrounded by the Preobrazhensky Regiment. Nineteen of the mutinous soldiers were arrested. Later that night it was found that twenty-one others had previously given weapons to the people. These twenty-one men, who would certainly on the morrow face arrest if the revolution failed, now scurried off through the night to find allies among the other regiments in the city. In any event, debates were raging all night long in the soldiers' barracks throughout Petrograd.

Nor did the workers get much rest. The real crisis of the revolution was upon them now. They would either swing the regiments to their side or face disaster. But they retained confidence. At dawn on March twelfth a great mass of workers held a meeting just outside the gates of the compound in which were the barracks of the Moscow Regiment. They were scattered by machine-gun fire from guns operated by the officers. But the age-old appeal of workers to soldiers had at last been heard. While the workers were scattering before the guns of the Moscow Regiment the Volynsk Regiment mutinied. A sergeant, Timofeyev Kirpichnikov, seems to have been the moving spirit who first rallied his company and then the entire regiment to the revo-

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Guard, five squadrons of cavalry and Cossacks, and two batteries; the rest of the troops have gone over to the revolutionists. The whole city is in the hands of the revolutionists." Upon receiving this reply, General Ivanov turned back and gave up his attempt to enter Petrograd.

The inner meaning of this crumbling of czarist power is obvious. A state revolution affects the army just as deeply as it does the revolutionary masses for the simple reason that the army is composed of men from these same masses. The essence of a revolution is that no one will any longer obey the orders of the old government. So no glue was to be found, no brushes were available—who would, after all, go out and round up these simple supplies? When he issued his orders to the regiments in Petrograd to crush the revolution, Khabalov found, as he later put it: "The regiment starts, starts under a brave officer, but . . . there are no results." How can there be results when the soldiers of the regiments are only awaiting an opportunity to kill their officers and go over to the revolution? As for the police, the training squads, the officers, the "crack" battalions—these are so small a force that they simply vanish beneath the weight of the revolution were to be months and years following the revolution who would filled with gallant colonels and generals who would say, "Give me one strong regiment and I'll soon put an end to all this mess." But where, in the midst of a revolution, will they ever find that one good regiment?

And what of the Czar and Czarina? They moved through this terrible week like sleepwalkers. The Czar refused to believe that anything serious was happening. When Mikhail Rodzianko, President of the Duma, himself terrified by the mass rising, telegraphed Nicholas that some sort of compromises would have to be made, Nicholas commented that he had received

"some more rubbish from that fat Rodzianko." The Czarina Alix sent telegrams by the score to her husband—at first demanding firm action, reassuring him that a few hangings, a few regiments would soon restore order. But finally, when the city was in the hands of the revolutionists, even she admitted that some concessions would have to be made. Unfortunately, it was now too late for concessions. Nobody—not even the grand dukes, the Chiefs of Staff, the Duma—could tolerate another moment of Romanov rule. Certainly the people would not hear of it—and the others were too frightened to do anything but agree.

On March thirteenth Nicholas, now finally alarmed, set out in his private train to rejoin his family at Tsarskoe Selo. At first the journey went smoothly. But when the train reached the village of Visher, the railroad workers would not permit it to travel on. The train was rerouted by way of another line, but when it reached the Bologoe station, it was again stopped by the railroad men. The Czar was not to be permitted into Petrograd. As Trotsky observed, "With its simple railroad pawns, the revolution had cried 'check' to the king!" The wandering train finally had to double back to military headquarters at Pskov, where Nicholas awaited further word.

Meanwhile, the revolutionary regiments in Petrograd were marching with bands playing the "Marseillaise" to the Tauride Palace. This was the official meeting place of the national Duma and soon became the focus of the revolution. The Duma itself, which had spoken up so boldly for revolution in the past, was terrified of its actuality. Many of its members were in hiding; others surveyed events with despair. The liberals, the Cadet party, saw in the revolution only chaos and a threat to their own positions. Most of them hoped to be able to preserve at least the principle of constitu-

least temporarily—as the Soviet got down to the business of governing. N. N. Sukhanov, a Menshevik who was on the Soviet's Executive Committee, has described one of the early meetings of the Soviet: "Standing on stools, their rifles in their hands, agitated and stuttering, straining all their powers to give a concentrated account of the messages that had been given to them . . . one after another the soldiers' deputies told of what had been happening in their companies. Their stories were artless and repeated each other almost word for word. The audience listened as children listen to a wonderful enthralling fairy tale they know by heart, holding their breaths, with craning necks and unseeing eyes . . . 'we had a meeting . . . we've been told to say . . . that we refuse to serve against the people any more, we're going to join with our brother workers . . . we would lay down our lives for that.' It was then and there proposed, and approved with storms of applause, to fuse together the revolutionary army and the proletariat of the capitol, and create a united organization to be called from then on the 'Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.'"

Before the evident power of the Soviet the Duma leadership's plans to preserve some element of monarchy quickly crumbled. Delegates were sent from the Duma to Nicholas at Pskov with instructions to secure an abdication. And in the meantime, the generals commanding Russian armies at the front had taken a straw vote among themselves. They found they were unanimously terrified of the revolution, that they could not count on their troops to put it down, and that the Czar's only recourse would be to abdicate. So, on the night of March fifteenth, Nicholas II signed the abdication brought to him by the Duma delegates. "In agreement with the Imperial Duma, we have thought it good to abdicate from the throne of the Russian State, and

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Nicholas would abdicate—but the throne would descend to his son, or possibly to one of the grand dukes. Nicholas' son was certainly too ill to be parted from his family, and the grand dukes wisely declined invitations to assume the throne, but in any event the people would never have accepted any such solution. For the regiments and crowds which moved to the Tauride Palace were not going there to support the Duma—they were going there to set up a new soviet, just as they had done in 1905.

The soviet grew out of the strike committees of the workers, the leadership of the regiments, those few socialist leaders who were not in exile (the jails had already been emptied by the crowds, and some political leaders were thus set free, along with criminals of all kinds), and, in fact, anyone bold enough or talkative enough to assume importance. While the Duma was setting up a special committee under the leadership of Paul Milyukov, Mikhail Rodzianko, and Alexander Guchkov to try to sort some order out of events, in another wing of the Tauride Palace a soviet was being established by Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, and Social Revolutionaries. Soon it was plain that only the orders of this soviet would be obeyed by the soldiers and workers—they had almost no confidence in the Duma, which they suspected (correctly) of attempting to pre-serve some elements of the old order.

By evening on March twelfth the Soviet had already appointed a special Executive Committee and military commissions to handle such problems as food and military affairs. There were more than a hundred members of this soviet—deputies elected by the workers' strike committees and the soldiers—and if their meetings were chaotic, there was certainly an air of elation and brotherhood about them. Differences that had split the socialist movement in the past were now forgotten—at



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to lay down the supreme power. . . ." The Czar ended the document "May the Lord God help Russia!" Later that night he was to confide to his diary (with considerable justification): "At 1 o'clock in the morning I left Pskov with heavy feelings; around me treason, cowardice, deceit." Within a few days the royal train reached Tsarskoe Selo at last. There Nicholas re-joined the Czarina Alix and his family. They were all placed under house arrest and confined to the palace.

A brief attempt on the part of the Duma to get one of the grand dukes to assume the Russian throne came to nothing, and, for the first time since Ivan the Terrible assumed the title in 1547, there was no czar in Russia. Arriving exhausted at Tsarskoe Selo, Nicholas had said simply, "There is no justice among men." But the generations of untold millions of suffering serfs, peasants, workers, and soldiers would not have agreed with him.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Power and Paradox

ON MARCH 16, 1917, when Petrograd at last drew breath and looked around, it was seen that the revolution, completely successful, had cost comparatively few casualties and little damage. A little over one thousand workers and soldiers lay dead, buildings were scarred by bullet marks, windows were smashed, certain establishments such as the police stations were utterly wrecked, but in general the city presented a remarkably calm outer appearance considering what it had gone through. The Romanov dynasty was gone; gone,