

The Russian Cycle of Revolutions at the Beginning of the 20th Century

Reasons for the Bolsheviks Coming to Power

Alexey Komarov

Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation
Moscow, Russia
E-mail: AVKomarov@fa.ru

Lyudmila Muraveva

Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation
Moscow, Russia
E-mail: lam1812@mail.ru

Abstract—The paper considers the revolutionary events taking place in the Russian Empire at the beginning of the 20th century: from the first Russian revolution of 1905-1907 until the February Revolution of 1917. That period of dual power continued until July 1917. The paper provides the analysis of the Program of the Provisional Government that came to power and examines its economic policy, namely the obtaining of loans and fighting the capital flight. Three crises of the new government led to the October Revolution and the Bolsheviks' taking power. The authors consider political, economic, legal and organizational reasons for the victory of the Bolsheviks.

Keywords—*revolution; workers; peasants; bourgeoisie; power; Bolsheviks; agrarian question*

I. INTRODUCTION

The centenary of the Great Russian Revolution requires a close examination of these events. It is possible to say that the beginning of the twentieth century in our country is marked by a cycle of revolutions that took place in a short time period by the people of one generation.

II. RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY

The first Russian revolution lasted more than two years from January 1905 to June 1907. Along with the desire to solve the agrarian and working issues, the revolution was combined with the national liberation movement on the outskirts of the Russian Empire. Despite the defeat, the revolution forced the ruling circles to make certain concessions. They had to proclaim political freedoms and appoint elections to the people's representative body. That marked the appearance of the State Duma in Russia, which was elected by the population, and during the revolution began the agrarian reform. These are the results of the first revolutionary stage.

The tsar's entourage contained politicians who tried to save the country from the war with Germany, predicting the inevitability of revolutionary events. However, their words and notes were neglected [1]. In 1914, Russia entered the First World War and declared the nation-wide mobilization.

Various problems appeared quickly and especially they began to aggravate since 1915, when military actions spread to Russian territory, and the war took a liberation character. A significant decline in production began in 1916. In agriculture, the collection of cereals, compared with the pre-war level, decrease by 20%. Public finances fell into disorder. With the beginning of the war, exchange of credit notes for gold was suspended. Each military day cost 50 million rubles, which increased budget expenditures four times. The amount of interest on debt was equal to the pre-war budget of the country [2]. The sources for covering military expenditures were taxes and loans. During the war years, Russia conducted six domestic bond issues, the net proceeds of which amounted to 7.4 billion rubles or 30% of all military expenditures [3]. The treasury was also filled through obtaining external loans. The main creditors were allies in the Entente - the governments of England and France. Russia repaid these loans with gold. Small loans were provided by Italy and Japan. Loans from the US were also given in small installments due to high interest rates [4].

The budget replenishment was implemented through currency issue, which constantly led to inflation and the decrease in the monetary income of the population, despite the regular growth of wages. The government began to interfere in the pricing process. At the same time, solid prices were set for food and the cost of consumer goods was not subject to restriction at all. Such "price scissors" (price discrepancy) reduced the peasants' motivation to surrender bread at flat and low prices. The bread crisis not only contributed to enormous speculation and abuse, but also undermined the supply of the army. The food and fuel crises combined with inflation and deficit became fatal for the belligerent country. The combination of several crises with the long-term issues led to the February bourgeois-democratic revolution and the overthrow of the autocracy. The second stage of the revolution began.

III. PROGRAM AND POLICY OF THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT

The Provisional Government came to power. In March 1917 the Declaration and the appeal "To the Citizens of

Russia" appeared, in which the program of the new government was outlined. The peculiar feature of the Russian situation after the February Revolution was the creation of a dual power. All the actions of the bourgeois Provisional Government were under the control of the Executive Committee of the Soviets of Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Deputies. Key ministers of the new government in the name of P.N. Milyukov (Foreign Minister), A.I. Guchkov (Minister for War) and A.I. Konovalov (Minister of Trade and Industry) confirmed the course of loyalty to the allied debt and the continuation of the war. The further implementation of military operations was impossible without the financial assistance of the allies. Minister of Finance M.I. Tereschenko had the power to conduct credit operations abroad within the limits of 10 billion rubles under the guarantee of obligations of the State Treasury. The main Russian creditors England and France doubted the creditworthiness of Russia and confined themselves to small loans on difficult terms. Foreseeing a financial catastrophe, the Provisional Government applied for loans to the United States in May. America did not give loans, but only short-term credits for special purposes. Two loans for 100 and 75 million dollars were spent on the debts repayment and placement of a railway order in the United States. America also did not increase arms tap.

Another issue for the revolutionary Russia was the problem of "capital flight". Banks and individuals participated in this process of sending money abroad. Another form of monetary leak was the secret export of gold. The adoption of the law on the prohibition of money transfer abroad along with severe customs measures did not have effect. According to implicit data, several tens of millions of rubles were exported from Russia.

The growth of economic difficulties forced the Provisional Government to begin the reorganization of the government agencies. The Main Economic Committee and the Economic Council were established. New bodies introduced elements of centralization, forced distribution and labor service. The grain monopoly was added to the existing coal and sugar ones. These efforts of the Provisional Government were supported by bankers and entrepreneurs. The Siberian Bank and the Council of Congresses of joint-stock commercial banks each allocated a million rubles for the advocacy of government economic policy [5]. Four million rubles for the organization of advocacy in the troops were collected by the Society for the Economic Renovation of Russia, created by A.I. Guchkov, who resigned from his post of minister. However, the strengthening of regulatory and controlling principles started gradually to push entrepreneurs away to the detriment of the market economy. All over the country, the owners closed industrial enterprises. In summer 366 enterprises were closed and 90,000 workers became unemployed. Tax revenues decreased tens of times. Banks refused to sell loans to cities, depending on the political composition of self-government bodies [6]. At the end of August, General L.G. Kornilov's mutiny was put down. In September the Provisional Government proclaimed Russia a republic. The revolution entered the third stage.

After the collapse of the Kornilov's revolt, the center of the political struggle gravity shifted to the left flank. The struggle was mainly conducted between the leftist parties of the socialist direction, each of which had its own program. The Bolsheviks proposed a way out of the financial crisis at the VI Congress of the RSDLP (b). With their program D.P. Bogolepov, the future creator of the Soviet educational financial made a speech. The program included the following provisions: the termination of the issue, the confiscatory tax policy, the refusal to take new loans and the repayment of old debts, the transformation of the financial sector [7].

Government spending were growing, cash receipts were contracting, large-scale monetary emission caused galloping inflation. The financial crisis highlighted two new phenomena: the destruction of a single monetary policy and the emergence of parallel currencies. The former royal money was in circulation. For 8 months in power the Provisional Government issued paper money for 9.5 billion rubles. In October, credit cards were drawn for 18 billion 917 million rubles, secured by gold by 5.5%. The purchasing power of the ruble dropped to 8 cents [8]. "Duma money" and "kerenki" were added to the previous issues. "Dumas" were of two merits. On bills of 250 rubles depicted an eagle without the attributes of royal power. Thousand denominations contained an image of the Tauride Palace - the seat of the State Duma. "Kerenki" were issued at a nominal value of 20 and 40 rubles. The population was wary of new money and preferred to save the tsar's money. Moreover, the hoarding extended not only to metal money, but also paper bills of the old regime. The economic crisis, along with the helplessness of the Provisional Government, led to the October coup. The revolution entered to the fourth stage.

IV. CAUSES OF THE BOLSHEVIKS' VICTORY

There were several prerequisites and reasons that helped the Bolsheviks come to power in October 1917. First of all, it was the illegitimacy of the Provisional Government. It was not elected; it was formed by the members of the Provisional Committee of the State Duma. The new government was not even authorized by the State Duma since its activities were suspended. After the abdication of the tsar on March 3 from his brother Grand Duke Mikhail Alexandrovich refused the proposed throne and power. In his Manifesto on the acceptance of the supreme authority the following was said: "I ask all citizens of the Russian state to obey the Provisional Government, on the initiative of the State Duma, which was established and vested with all the powers, till the day when the Constituent Assembly convened by the universal, direct, equal and secret vote expresses the will of the people by its decision" [9]. According to P.N. Milyukov, who was included in the first membership of the Provisional Government, the new government was chosen by "the Russian revolution" [10]. An even more pessimistic assessment was made by A.I. Guchkov, who wrote that the Provisional Government "was left without any kind of sanction from above in the sense of the lack of monarchical prestige and continuity of power, with the absence of support from below, when there were no legislative institutions or

any ground in the organized public opinion and the mood of the masses. We remained unsettled: there was no historical ground at all" [11]. Such a shaky legitimacy, even more not confirmed by legislation or any legal papers, could not serve as a serious basis for the transfer of legitimate authority. The liberals and elections to the Constituent Assembly were postponed till the end of the war. At the same time, the Council of Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Deputies was elected democratically. Even the coalition Provisional Governments never allowed the left radicals in their members but limited them to the right and moderately left representatives. However, it was the Bolsheviks and the Left SR's (social-revolutionaries) who had twenty years of experience in the political struggle and the practice of the creation of new authoritative bodies - the Soviets, already tested during the first revolution.

Secondly, the Bolsheviks had a powerful combat party consisting of professional revolutionaries and had considerable experience of practical work both in legal and illegal conditions. The basis of the party was the principle of iron discipline. During the period from February to October, the popularity and strength of the Bolshevik party increased significantly. Thirdly, the leader of the party was the unconditional and the only leader with an unquestioned authority, a purposeful, and moreover an excellent strategist. Fourthly, the Bolsheviks defeated in alliance with the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, who would leave the local councils, and then the government in the summer of 1918 after the SR's mutiny. Historically, the Bolsheviks did not seek a one-party system of power. Fifthly, the Bolsheviks accurately chose the moment for a coup when the government was not difficult to take because of the total disillusionment with the Provisional Government and its actions. Confused Russian society was too gullible and receptive to the slogans proposed by the Bolsheviks.

Finally, the Bolsheviks correctly assessed the situation, realizing that the revolution had won in the peasant country thanks to the support of the peasants, who accounted for 83% of the country's population. The Bolsheviks factored in the errors and drawbacks of the previous authorities and at the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets adopted the "Decree on Power" on October 25 and elected new supreme bodies of power - the legislative All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the executive Council of People's Commissars. Immediately they began to address urgent and long overdue issues. The Bolsheviks promulgated the "Decree on Peace", in which they suggested that all belligerents stop the war and conclude a democratic peace without annexations and indemnities. "The Workers' and Peasants' Government, created by the revolution on October 24-25 and backed by the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies, offers all belligerent parties and their governments to begin immediately negotiations on a just and democratic peace. A just or democratic peace, which the overwhelming majority of the exhausted, tortured and war-torn workers and working classes of all belligerent countries craves - the world most definitely and persistently demanded by the Russian workers and peasants after the overthrow of the tsarist monarchy - such peace according to the

Government is an immediate peace without the world annexation (i.e., without the seizure of foreign lands, without the forcible annexation of foreign nationalities) and without indemnities. Such a peace is proposed by the Government of Russia to conclude immediately by all the belligerent peoples, expressing their readiness to immediately take all decisive steps without the slightest delay, until the final approval of all conditions of such peace by authorized assemblies of people's representatives of all countries and all nations." [12]. As the response from the allies did not follow, Soviet Russia withdrew from the First World War on March 3, 1918, having concluded a separate peace with Germany.

The next burning question remained the agrarian one. The leader of the Bolsheviks V.I. Lenin knew how to respond to the present moment and make compromises in the interests of the cause and the goals set. In April, in his famous "April Theses" in the sixth paragraph he raised the problem: "The agrarian program includes the transfer of the center of gravity to the Soviet deputies. Confiscation of all landlords' estates. Nationalization of all lands in the country, disposal of land by local Soviets and Peasants' Deputies. Allocation of Soviets of Deputies from the poorest peasants. Creation from every large estate (in the amount of about 100 dessiatins to 300 according to local and other conditions and by definition of local institutions) of exemplary farming under the control of deputies and to the public account" [13]. In October, in the Decree on Land, the Bolsheviks proclaimed a gratuitous transfer of land confiscated from landlords to peasants for private use, borrowing this provision from the Socialist Revolutionary "Punishment to the Peasants." "The land issue at large can be resolved only by a nationwide Constituent Assembly. The most just solution of the land issue should be as follows: 1) The right for private ownership of land is abolished forever; the land cannot be either sold, bought, leased, bailed, or otherwise alienated.

The whole land: state, crown, cabinet, monastery, church, possessional, entailed, private, public and peasant, etc., is alienated without compensation, turns into a national property and goes into the use of all working on it people" [14]. The everlasting dream of the peasants "about Black Repartition" came true. It was a reasonable step. The peasants supported the revolutionary events and the Red Army, consisting of peasants in soldiers' overcoats, secured the Bolsheviks a victory in the civil war. According to V. Akoyev, "This step allowed Lenin to preserve Russia, which in the summer of 1917 began to disintegrate ... Having preserved the unity of the peasantry, Lenin preserved the unity of Russia. Lenin made changes to the party program on the agrarian question right before the 2nd October Congress of Soviets, when he became convinced that in the Soviets his party holds a majority and the merit of the "Decree on Land" adoption would go to it. Socialist slogans remained in use, and the real socialization of society began only after 10 years with collectivization and industrialization" [15]. In his work "On Our Revolution. (Summarizing the notes of N. Sukhanov), summing up the results of the revolution V.I. Lenin wrote: "What if the total hopelessness of the situation, thus multiplying the workers and peasants, thus opened up

the possibility for us to make another transition to the creation of the basic prerequisites of civilization, than in all the rest Western European states?" [16]. The construction of the Soviet state began.

V. CONCLUSION

As can be seen from the above, a correctly chosen strategy and developed tactics, ability to respond to the challenges of time and assess accurately the prevailing situation, the choice of correct and intelligible slogans contributed to attraction of broad masses of the people to the new government. In addition, calls for peace, the solution of the agrarian question in the interests of the peasants and the introduction of workers' control in enterprises helped to expand the social base of the Bolsheviks.

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