

the restoration of the Patriarchate in 1917, pronounced an anathema on the Bolsheviks.

The Holy Orthodox Church of Christ in the Russian lands is undergoing hard times now . . . Every day we receive news about awful and bestial beatings of innocents and even people on their sick beds, guilty only of honestly fulfilling their duty to the motherland, doing all they can to serve the good of the people, and all this takes place not only under the cover of darkness but even in broad daylight, with hitherto unheard-of audacity and with merciless cruelty, without any trial and flouting all laws and legality. This is taking place today in nearly all towns and corners of our native land, in the capitals and in distant regions . . . Come to your senses, madmen, stop your massacres. What you are doing is not only cruel: it is truly Satan's work . . .

Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Tikhon

Source: *Khrestomatiya po istorii Rossii, 1917–1940*, pp. 99–101.

### Document 3.5 Sovnarkom Decree 'On Freedom of Conscience, Church and Religious Associations'

On 20 January Sovnarkom issued a decree separating the Church from the state, formally guaranteeing people the right to practise the religion of their choice, or none at all. The decree, however, insisted that religious belief could not be used as an excuse not to fulfil one's 'civic duty', and the teaching of religion in state schools was banned, as it was in private general educational schools.

- 1 The Church is separated from the state . . .
- 12 No church or religious association has the right to own property. They do not have the right to act as a legal entity.
- 13 All property in Russia belonging to churches or religious societies is declared a public resource. Buildings and religious objects used for worship are allowed, by special permission of local or state authorities, to be used by the relevant religious association.

Source: *Pravda*, 21 January 1918.

### Peace and War

Away from internal and inter-party wrangling, the Great War continued. Taking advantage of the chaos in Russia, the Germans had launched an offensive in the West. On coming to power the Bolsheviks agreed an armistice with Germany, but the problem still remained of how to extricate the country from the war. The Decree on Peace (see Document 2.17) tried to achieve a unilateral peace, calling for the cessation of hostilities against Russia and renouncing cooperation with the Allies. The failure of this initiative led to negotiations at the Polish border town of

Brest-Litovsk where the Soviet delegation, headed by Trotsky, adopted the unconventional negotiating tactic of calling for the overthrow of the state with which it was negotiating. Trotsky's tactic of 'neither war nor peace' did not impress the Germans, who threatened a new offensive. Lenin in January 1918 advocated acceptance of the German terms, insisting that Russia needed a 'breathing spell' (*peredyshka*) to protect the gains of the revolution. This was not accepted by the party, and the Germans thereupon seized great swathes of territory. In desperation, the government then accepted even more humiliating peace terms, provoking a controversy that nearly destroyed the Communist Party (as the Bolsheviks were renamed in March 1918). A Left Communist group emerged, joined by Bukharin, that condemned the idea of peace with the imperialists and urged Soviet Russia to launch a 'revolutionary war' against the occupying forces. Instead, Lenin's view on the need for peace triumphed, despite the humiliating terms. At the same time the country began forming a traditional army.

### Document 3.6 Lenin on the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty

On 23 February 1918 the Central Committee finally voted by the narrowest of margins (five to four) to accept the German peace terms, sacrificing land – Poland, the Ukraine and the Baltic – for time. The treaty was signed on 3 March but at the Seventh Party Congress held a few days later the party nearly split. Lenin insisted that the Brest-Litovsk Treaty was preferable to a war which Soviet Russia could not win. The treaty would allow the regime to survive until the world revolution began.

The revolution will not come as quickly as we expected. History has proved this, and we must be able to take this as a fact, to reckon with the fact that the world socialist revolution began in Russia – in the land of Nicholas and Rasputin, the land in which an enormous part of the population was absolutely indifferent as to what peoples were living in the outlying regions, or what was happening there. In such a country it was quite easy to start a revolution, as easy as lifting a feather.

But to start without preparation a revolution in a country in which capitalism is developed, in which it has produced a democratic culture and organisation, provided it to everybody, down to the last man – to do so would be wrong, absurd. There we are only just approaching the painful period of the beginning of socialist revolutions. This is a fact. We do not know, no one knows; perhaps – it is quite possible – it will triumph within a few weeks, even within a few days, but we cannot stake everything on that. We must be prepared for extraordinary difficulties, for severe defeats, which are inevitable, because the revolution in Europe has not yet begun, although it may begin tomorrow, and when it does begin then, of course, we shall not be tortured by doubts, there will be no question about a revolutionary war, but just one continuous triumphal march. That will be, it will inevitably be so, but it is not so yet. This is the simple fact that history has taught us, with



which she has hit us quite painfully – and a man who has been thrashed is worth two that haven't. That is why I think that after history has given us a very painful thrashing, because of our hope that the Germans cannot attack and that we can get everything by shouting 'hurrah!', this lesson, with the help of our Soviet organisations, will be very quickly brought home to the masses all over Soviet Russia . . .

*Source: Lenin, 'Political Report of the CC', Seventh Emergency Congress of the RCP(b), 7 March 1918, PSS, vol. 36, pp. 15–16.*

### Document 3.7 The Left Communists Condemn the Brest-Litovsk Peace

The Left Communists led by Bukharin advocated a revolutionary war, Trotsky took a middle line, while the majority led by Lenin argued that the treaty was essential for the survival of the regime. In a declaration the Left Communists insisted that there was an alternative.

In response to the offensive by the German imperialists, openly declaring their aim of crushing the proletarian revolution in Russia, the party's CC responded by agreeing to making peace on those conditions that a few days earlier had been rejected by the Soviet delegation at Brest. This agreement, accepted on the first onslaught of the enemies of the proletariat, represents the capitulation by the leading section of the international proletariat before the international bourgeoisie . . .

We consider that after seizing power, after the complete crushing of the last bastions of the bourgeoisie, there inevitably arises before the proletariat the task of fomenting civil war on an international scale, a task for whose fulfilment it cannot stop in the face of any danger. Refusal to fulfil this will lead to its destruction by internal degeneration, the equivalent of suicide . . .

*Source: Protokoly TsK RSDRP(b): avgust 1917–fevral' 1918 (Moscow, Politizdat, 1958), p. 178.*

For the Bolshevik regime to have been able to put up any military resistance to the Germans, the war would have had to have been fought not so much as a revolutionary war but as a *national* war, as Stalin did indeed fight the Great Patriotic War of 1941–5. But to have done so would have forced the Bolsheviks to ally precisely with those forces that they were intent upon destroying, threatening the Bolshevik hold on power in the process. The Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty was ratified by the Fourth (Emergency) Congress of Soviets on 15 March 1918. The Left SRs refused to recognise the peace and withdrew their representatives from Sovnarkom. The Bolsheviks also committed themselves to the cessation of revolutionary propaganda. A further agreement signed in Berlin on 27 August 1918 committed Russia to paying Germany a total of 6 million marks. The Brest peace was annulled by the Soviet government on 13 November 1918.

### Document 3.8 Trotsky and the Red Army

Soon after establishing the Cheka, the Soviet authorities moved to create their own army – the tsarist army having in effect dissolved. On 23 February 1918 the Red Army was formally established, and Trotsky, who had resigned as Foreign Affairs Commissar at the time of the Brest-Litovsk negotiations, was appointed Commissar of Military Affairs. While the Left Communists harked back to Marx's strictures against a standing army, favouring a revolutionary volunteer militia army using guerrilla tactics, the election of officers and democratic decision-making, Trotsky insisted on the reimposition of traditional discipline and the employment of so-called 'military specialists', former tsarist officers, under the *kontrol'* (supervision) of communist commissars.

The misfortune of the working class is that it has always been in the position of an oppressed class. This is reflected in everything: both in its level of education, and in the fact that it does not have those habits of rule which the dominant class has and which it bequeaths to its heirs through its schools, universities, etc. The working class has none of this, but must acquire it. Having come to power, it has had to view the old state apparatus as an apparatus of class oppression. But at the same time it must draw from this apparatus all the worthwhile skilled elements which are technically necessary, put them where they belong, and heighten its proletarian class power by using these elements. This, Comrades, is the task which now stands before us for our overall growth . . .

Here I turn to a ticklish point which to a familiar degree has now assumed major importance in our party life. This is one of the questions of the organisation of the army, specifically the question of recruiting military specialists – i.e., to speak plainly, former officers and generals – to create the army and to run it. All basic, guiding institutions of the army are now set up so that they consist of one military specialist and two political commissars. Such is the present basic tone of the leading organs of the army . . .

There is still another question in the area of the organisation of the army: the so-called elective principle. In general, all it means is to struggle against the old officers' corps, to control the commanding staff. As long as power was in the hands of a class that was hostile to us, when the commanding staff was an instrument in the hands of this power, we were obliged to strive to smash the class resistance of the commanding personnel by way of the elective principle. But now political power is in the hands of that same working class from whose ranks the army is recruited. Under the present regime in the army – I tell you this in all frankness – the elective principle is politically pointless and technically inexpedient, and has in fact already been set aside by decree . . .

*Source: Trotsky, 'Labour, Discipline, Order', speech to the 27 March 1918 Moscow City Conference of the Russian Communist Party, in Daniels, Communism in Russia, p. 93.*