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Ian Bruggeman HistB200 Professor Roseman The Success of the Bolshevik Revolution In order to understand the success of the Bolsheviks, one must first appreciate that they had no central role in the general revolution of March 1917. The government at the time of this Revolution was extremely weak. This was due to lack of loyalty in the army and consistent internal and foreign policy mistakes abdicated by Tsar Nicholas II, starting with the dissolution of the Duma and ending with the continued engagement in WW1 when Russia was in a state of famine, inflation, and general turmoil. It was only after this revolution that the Bolsheviks started to gain relevance in Russian politics by engaging in the new Provisional Government, and strategically taking advantage of internal and foreign policy errors. An example of their lack of importance during the revolution of March 1917 would be the Bolshevik's leader, Lenin, who was abroad and had given up on the Bolshevik cause in Russia at this point in time. After the March Revolution the Provisional Government consisted of not only Bolsheviks, but many military officers, Socialists, and a small amount of Conservatives who constituted a broad range of the Political Spectrum. Once the Provisional Government was in place the Bolsheviks methodically took bits and pieces of power through policy and the consistent ability to "rally the troops" of the Bolshevik cause. They continued to gain power from 1917- January of 1918 when the Constituent Assembly, ready to dissolve the Bolshevik's dictatorship, was forcibly dismissed. During the summer of 1918 a major reform of the military took place in order to ensure the future of Bolshevism. The Bolsheviks then hung onto control, by a thread until 1920. At this point there was a more solidified grip on the political, and thus military, aspects of the country. The success of The Bolshevik revolution was due to the lack of

power in the central government at the time of the revolution, the Bolshevik's willingness to suppress any opposition even if violence was necessary, and the Bolsheviks aptitude to maneuver and swiftly change policy when necessary. The Central Government had been severely weakened by the Revolution of March 1917 and the Bolshevik's had been able to capitalize quickly and effectively on this weakness. The state of the country during the time of the Revolution was comparable to that of the Stalinist era (Payne, 35). The major difference being there was no Stalin or police force to carry out systematic terror in order to keep people under control. On the other hand the economy and social aspects of Russia suffered comparably. (Payne, 35) Industry was emphasized without adequate pay, peasants were tasked with insurmountable quotas, and discontentment fell in all areas of life. (Payne 35) One of the major differences was the lack of loyalty found in the army. When a rebellious nature rippled through Russia it affected all the people within the country, and without a military force willing to brutally oppress such ideas, Russia became ripe for a Revolution. The necessary spark for a revolution came from within the political heart of Russia, Petrograd, and with Tsar Nicholas's initial indifference to the situation the Revolution quickly spiraled out of his control. The Provisional Government in power after the removal of the Tsar could have possibly retained power had they ended the war, but with Russia's sluggish advancement politically, economically, and socially, Socialism, or some form of it, became the most attractive option for the average citizen. (Payne 36).

© Although Bolsheviks were a part of these Socialist groups, they were by no means the most popular or powerful of the groups within the party at the time of the March Revolution. They did have certain advantages though, one

of them being the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, without Lenin it is unlikely the Bolsheviks would have succeeded. His charismatic nature and innate ability to generate and rally support behind the party were crucial to its success. Not to be downplayed is Trotsky whose leadership of the Red Army was crucial to the Bolsheviks ability to retain power during the years of civil war. It was Trotsky who was a leading advocated in recruiting Ex-Tsarist officers to strengthen the Red Army. (590 The Civil »&r ana the Making of the Soviet System) Without this piece of policy the Red Army would have simply fallen to pieces. On a fiscal scale the Bolshevik's were supported by the Germans, something the other Socialist parties did not have the luxury of. With strong leaders, money, and Socialism becoming a generally attractive idea, the Bolshevik's had one more task before them, to persuade enough people that Bolshevism was indeed the best form of Socialism. The turning point for the Bolshevik's was the Kornilov Affair. Kerenskyism opened the door for the Bolsheviks to seize power, and a coup d'etat was now possible. (Payne 37) When Kerensky turned towards the extreme left in order to block Kornilov, he allowed the Bolsheviks to gain the necessary power for a coup d'etat. (Payne 37) This sudden growth in power continued in October 1917 as the Bolshevik's finally, " gained a majority in the soviet of the capital, Petrogrand...electing Leon Trotsky as chairman" (Payne, 37). The Bolsheviks were now in control of Petrogrand, the political heart of Russia, and if there was a chance to seize power, it was now. Lenin understood this and abdicated taking Russia by force to other members of the party. Some of the Bolsheviks believed that the best way to attain power was by the election coming in late October, but Lenin recognized that the Bolsheviks did not have the support needed to win. In a letter to the Central Committee of the

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Bolshevik party Lenin writes, " I am writing these lines on the evening of the 24th. (October 1917) The situation is critical...to delay the uprising would be fatal...we are confronted by problems which are not to be solved by conferences or congresses, but exclusively by peoples, by the masses, by the struggle of the armed people. " (Lenin) These lines denote not only the urgency of the Bolshevik's situation, but also the idea that violence is not only appropriate but necessary. Lenin himself said that the Paris Commune failed because there was no ensuing Civil War. Violence is an ideology that is synonymous with Bolshevism; one cannot exist without the other.

Bolshevik's believed that in order for the world to become a Utopia all those opposed to Bolshevism must be eliminated. This ideology allowed for the Bolshevik's onslaught of people to be recognized not as morally just, but as necessary for the world to advance. The Bolshevik Party saw itself as a vanguard of a future that would contain industry, justice, and fairness for all. This goal had to be achieved by whatever steps were necessary. The Bolshevik's took power in November, and although they promised to allow for legitimate Democratic elections, this was all a ruse to content the people until firmer control of the government could be taken (Payne 38). The Bolsheviks hung on to power by a thread in the months after the coup d'etat took place. Initially there was general support for the Bolsheviks who rode under the slogans of, " Land, Peace, and Bread" and " Loot the Looters". This initial backing dissipated over the upcoming months and by the time the Constituent Assembly met in January 1918, the Bolsheviks had lost a fair amount of their support, and were no longer the most popular party. (Payne 39) This assembly was ready to vote the Bolshevik dictatorship out of power, but was dissolved by force before it got the chance. (Payne 39) An example

of the Bolshevik's ability to navigate foreign policy in a way that advocated necessity instead of Bolshevik principles was the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The treaty not only amounted to huge reparations, but also, " 26 percent of the empire's former population and about a third of its economic resources. "

(Payne 41) This treaty does not agree with the Bolshevik doctrine of manliness, but instead gives the Bolsheviks the appearance of cowardice. Lenin understands this but is willing to end the war on such definitively bad terms in order to consolidate the power within his reach. This treaty would eventually metabolize into propaganda with campaign against Germany painting it, not The Bolshevik's as the Soviet enemy (Payne 62). This would give the Bolshevik's the space it needed to mobilize for civil war. (Payne 62) With the Bolshevik's now firm grip on the political structure of the Soviet Union; the next step was to solidify this control by building a military force to suppress any backlash the Bolsheviks may face. This force came in the form of the Red Guard that was formed January 15th 1918. During the summer of 1918 the walls were caving in on the Bolshevik party, martial law was imposed, war fronts were drawn, battalions organized, and the economy geared towards the war effort. (594 The Civil War - and the Making of the Soviet System) The Red Guard was a key aspect in the Bolshevik's success, and continually evolved to meet the needs of the party, sometimes even overstepping the ideologies of Bolshevism itself. This quote expresses the fabric of the Red Guard that would follow its initial failure, " In early 1918, when Trotsky began to build the officer corps of the new Red Army, he turned first to the NCO... who had learned their trade in the tsarist army. " ((The Civil War and the Making of the Soviet System 590)) This bars against Bolshevik ideologies because standing armies were seen as a tool used for

oppression the people, Ex-Tsarist officials were symbolic of this oppression. None the less the after its conception, the Red Guard consistently was unreliable, ill-prepared, and in no way a viable option to defend the Bolsheviks from a formidable enemy. An example of this is in June 1918 275, 000 Red Guard militia men were called upon to take up arms, only 40, 000 showed up. (The Revolution Goes to Hir 595) During the first months of control in 1918, 35, 000 Latvians were the Bolshevik's only force keeping the regime from collapsing. (The Revolution Goes to Hir 590) This was deemed unacceptable by leaders in the party and more ex-Tsarist Captains were recruited to control and contain this force. The Bolshevik's foes of the Whites, Greens, and Blacks were generally more organized, better trained, and more reliable than the Bolsheviks Red Guard. The Whites were the Soviets most immediate threat as the peasant class lacked unity. The Bolshevik's had stronger industry, a better propaganda campaign, and less corruption within its ranks. All of these aspects let to the eventual downfall of the Whites. (Payne 62) In terms of fighting capabilities statistics will represent that the Whites were a much more disciplined and militarily advanced force. During the civil War the Bolshevik's lost 1. 2 million men, the Whites a third to a fourth of that number. (Payne 65) Given the Bolshevik's were fighting other forces at the time it is still a rather larger discrepancy between its casualty count and that of its greatest enemy. In order to compete with the necessary needs of the Soviet Union War Communism was imposed upon the economy. War Communism, " Aimed to abolish all private trade, maximize the state's control of distribution and the labour market, nationalize all large-scale industry, collectivize agriculture, and at its height in 1920 replace the money system with a universal system

of state rationing. " (612 The. Civil Jtar and the Making of the Soviet System)

In essence it was a failure and the Bolsheviks continually had to appeal restrictions barred upon the economy. What kept the Bolshevik's from falling was the sheer size of the army, which eventually became the largest in the world. The Bolshevik's also had the luxury of controlling the ex-Tsarist military forces arms, something that the Whites, Greens, and Blacks did not.

(Payne 62) The size of the army did not come without consequence though, for these soldiers were pulled from agriculture, industry, and other areas of life that would eventually have a traumatic effect on the Soviet economy. An

interesting paradox that ensued came in the form that as conditions

worsened the army became a place of salvation causing more men to flee poverty and join the army, putting an even greater strain on the economy.

The Bolshevik economy was at the time the greatest of all of its immediate enemies due to its control of almost all the major cities within Soviet Russia.

Not only did the control of these cities stabilize the continually rocky economy, but it also gave the Bolshevik's and immediate pool of 80 million people who could be used as factory workers or soldiers. (Payne 62) The

Whites, or Kulaks, had to draw from outside of this realm of control which in turn limited their resources and man power. [http://ehis.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?sid=4cfe84a4-c6ac-45e1-ba94-](http://ehis.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?sid=4cfe84a4-c6ac-45e1-ba94-8444138377c2%40sessionmgr12&vid=1&hid=2&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWwhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRl#db=aph&AN=79779024)

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