

## From the Introduction

Every book on the Russian Civil War is essentially a study of the victor's victory and the loser's defeat. Even the historian who aims at nothing more than telling the story of the struggle at least implicitly provides us with an explanation of the outcome.

In Western historiography there is general agreement on the main causes of Bolshevik victory, and most historians would agree with the following summary. The Bolsheviks possessed superior leadership. Lenin was a master of political strategy and Trotskii had great organizational ability, which he showed in creating the Red Army and leading it to victory. The Bolsheviks also took advantage of the revolutionary enthusiasm of the Russian people, an enthusiasm fired by the injustices they had suffered under an outdated political and social system; the crucible of a modern war revealed just how outdated it was. Lenin's appropriation of the agrarian program of the Social Revolutionaries induced the peasants to prefer the Bolsheviks to their enemies. And whereas the Bolsheviks were relatively united, their enemies were divided by personal animosities, ideologies, and memories of previous conflicts. The Bolsheviks, who occupied the center of the country, had a great strategic advantage: their enemies had to base their movements on the peripheries, inhabited largely by non-Russians; the Red Army could send reinforcements to any segment of the front that was most directly threatened, but the Whites could not coordinate their military moves.

But such a simple enumeration of causes is hardly satisfactory. After all, what evidence do we have, for instance, that the peasants preferred the Bolsheviks, except the fact that the Bolsheviks ultimately won? Besides, is it not possible that the Bolsheviks won in spite of the attitude of the peasants? How is one to balance the importance of the favorable strategic position of the Bolsheviks against the significance of Allied aid, which obviously greatly benefited the Whites? It is true that the anti-Bolshevik camp was deeply divided, but perhaps the White advantage of having a large pool of experienced administrators and trained officers was an adequate compensation. Most important, how is one to rank the various explanations? Which cause should we consider primary?

This book, too, is an attempt to explain the outcome of the Civil War. However, I will try to develop a primary or general explanation for the defeat of the Whites, one broad enough to include a number of the others previously mentioned. In the process of describing the defeat of the Whites I hope to work out a new framework for looking at the Civil War. Instead of regarding it as a purely military contest between two opposing armies, I will approach it as a political competition between the two major antagonists in which each tried to impose its will on a reluctant people. The winner in this competition was the winner of the Civil War.

The Revolution represented the disintegration of traditional authority. The institutions, the ideology, and the leaders by which the tsarist regime governed the country at the time of an extremely demanding war proved inadequate. The March revolution gave an opportunity to the liberal intelligentsia to experiment with a new system, but the events of 1917 proved conclusively that the Provisional Government was no more able to hold the country together than its defunct predecessor. The victorious liberals not only failed to reverse the process of disintegration, but themselves contributed to anarchy. Under the circumstances, the accomplishment of the Bolsheviks in November was a slight one. Almost any small group of determined men with some support from the people could have removed the defenseless Provisional Government, which had already defeated itself. The difficult task lay ahead: the Bolsheviks had to devise a system of government which could cope with the extraordinary situation.

The Civil War was a period of boundless anarchy; but it was also a time when groups of men experimented with institutions and ideologies which would help them to overcome anarchy. One might have thought that the democratic socialists, whose program was clearly favored by a majority of Russians, would have had the best chance of rallying the people. Yet within a year the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks had lost all positions of power and influence, proving that an attractive ideology is only one component for establishing a successful

government. Most socialists drew the unavoidable conclusions and, depending on their ideologies and personalities, joined either the Whites or the Reds, the two surviving antagonists.

Russia could hardly have produced two more different groups of people than the leaders of the Reds and the Whites. On one side were the revolutionary intellectuals who had spent years in jail or in exile and who were profoundly committed to change. They were articulate, they lived their politics, and they believed it was in their power to mold society into something better than they had found. The other side consisted of army officers, men who had felt basically at home in tsarist Russia, who disliked politics, and who envisaged only military solutions to problems. They had no vision of a future Russia, yet they deeply felt that Bolshevik rule would bring only evil to their country. Obviously the two groups hated and despised one another.

However little these men shared in background and ideology, they did share common problems. For whatever their long-term goals, the immediate task for Whites and Reds alike was to create a functioning administrative machinery which would enable them to carry out their decisions, to organize an army, to collect food, and to make railroads run and factories produce; briefly, to bring order out of chaos.

The central argument of this book is that the Whites lost the Civil War above all because they failed to build those institutions which would have enabled them to administer the territories under their nominal rule. This failure can be understood only in a comparative context. After all, Bolshevik rule was also shaky in these years. Bolshevik weakness made the civil war inevitable and the survival of the Whites for three years possible. But a civil conflict is always a struggle between the weak and the weaker. In this conflict the Whites in the end proved inferior: their administrative confusion was greater, and their territories even more engulfed by anarchy.

To be able to govern means to have authority. The problem of a country in the throes of a civil war is that the two components of authority, legitimacy and force, are in short supply. The task is to build authority. But how can one acquire legitimacy, and where is the force to come from? The more a government's right to rule is questioned and the less it is able to coerce, the more it has to appeal to the people. In order to stay in power it must present itself as the defender of the aspirations of the masses. At the same time it has to organize a coercive apparatus. For that purpose it must mobilize a highly motivated group of activists willing to perform unattractive tasks, such as staffing the secret police.

Propaganda and organization are essential elements for winning a civil war. But the leaders of the Whites were military men who never properly understood the political nature of the war in which they were engaged, and thus did not understand the tasks confronting them. Their inbred contempt for politics was a fatal disability, for they were forced to compete with masters of political manipulation. It may be that the White cause was hopeless from the beginning. After all, the enemies of the November revolution could not easily outbid the Bolsheviks. No White general could have countenanced the agrarian revolution which was taking place in the villages. The Whites and the Reds had to rely on different social classes, and this reliance imposed severe limitations on their programs. Nevertheless, it is clear that the White leaders played their hand poorly.

In *Red Attack White Resistance*, I summarized the difficulties the Bolsheviks had to surmount during the first year of the struggle and described in detail the birth of the White movement. In November 1917 there were few people in Russia or abroad who believed that the Bolsheviks, with their outlandish ideas and Utopian plans, could hold on to power and succeed where more traditional statesmen had failed. But the Bolsheviks did succeed. Their leaders possessed political talent and determination, and their enemies were weak, divided, and demoralized. Lenin's government survived one crisis after another. In January 1918 this government showed its lack of democratic scruples as it dismissed the Constituent Assembly, the fruit of Russia's only free election. In the following month the new regime had to face a far more dangerous threat: the German army. Only large territorial concessions could stop the effortlessly advancing enemy; but these concessions, made to the Germans at Brest-Litovsk, led to a break with the Bolsheviks' only coalition partners, the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, and even threatened the unity of the Party.

The worst crisis came in the last spring and early summer of 1918. The Bolsheviks' inability to feed the people resulted in such misery and dissatisfaction that their base of power was close to crumbling away completely; Russia was on the brink of total anarchy. This was the time when large-scale anti-Bolshevik forces started to organize and the Civil War began in earnest. The first serious military opponents of Bolshevik rule formed a strange group. The Provisional Government had organized a small army out of the willing prisoners of war of Czech and Slovak extraction who wanted to fight for the birth of their own country. After the Brest-Litovsk peace, this army of approximately forty thousand men wanted to be transported to Western Europe in order to continue the fight against Germany. Their remarkable odyssey had an unexpected result: the Czechs rebelled against their hosts and within a short time they gained control of the entire Trans-Siberian railroad; forty thousand men became the masters of Siberia. Under Czech protection, the Socialist Revolutionaries organized a government and an army. For a while this new army advanced victoriously and the Bolsheviks lived through very anxious days. Trotsky's defeat of the enemy at Sviazhsk, not far from Kazan, at the end of August 1918 is considered one of the decisive battles of the Civil War.

At the same time a bewildering variety of anti-Bolshevik forces organized in South Russia. The Ukraine was in the hands of the Germans, who administered it through their reactionary puppet, Hetman Skoropadskii. The newly formed Caucasian states all assumed an anti-Bolshevik stance. The Don Cossacks of Ataman Krasnov, with German aid and protection, soon liberated the entire Don *Voisko* (army). Perhaps most important, the Volunteer Army, which had been established by Russia's most prominent generals soon after the November Revolution, in the summer grew into a serious force. The army was protected from the main Bolshevik armies by the Don Cossacks, and—ironically in view of the army's loyalty to the Allies—by the Germans. Under these favorable circumstances the Whites could organize their forces in the relative security of the Kuban. In August they captured the capital of the district, Ekaterinodar, which was to remain their headquarters for many months.

November 1918 was a turning point in the history of the Civil War. In Siberia, Admiral Kolchak overthrew a government in which the Socialist Revolutionaries had participated. After this coup, Russia's most popular party never again played a major role. Even more important for the course of the Civil War was the end of the war in Europe. This enabled the Allies to pay more attention to Russia. As a result, paradoxically, the intervention, which began within the context of the European war, greatly expanded after November 1918. The spirit of the anti-Bolsheviks was lifted by the prospect of large-scale support from foreign friends. They optimistically assumed that the powers which had defeated the greatest army in the world, the German, now would quickly remove Lenin and his comrades.

Yet the immediate beneficiaries of German defeat were the Bolsheviks. As the German troops withdrew from the Ukraine, the Red Army quickly occupied the country. The Bolsheviks, unlike their enemies, possessed the forces to take advantage of the power vacuum. German defeat was followed by revolutionary risings, and the Bolsheviks confidently expected that the socialist victory in Berlin was only a prologue to a communist revolution. It seemed that their days of terrible isolation were nearing an end.

This book takes up the story where the previous volumes left off. In 1919 the Volunteer Army grew from a regional force into a major army which in October came close to occupying Moscow. But the success proved ephemeral, and in March 1920 the White movement was on the verge of collapse. During the period of victories and defeats the White leadership experimented with policies and institutional changes. Studying these shifts we become aware of the varieties possible even within military counterrevolution. In the spring of 1920 General Wrangel took General Denikin's place as Commander-in-Chief, but he succeeded in staving off defeat only for a few months. In November 1920 the remnants of the Volunteer Army evacuated the Crimea, and this event finally ended the three-year-old Civil War.

In deciding the outcome of the struggle, political failures were more decisive than military ones, and so I consider my main tasks to be these: to describe the administrative apparatus of the Whites, to reconstruct the world view of the men who organized and ran the

institutions, and to analyze the White social and economic policies. Of course, in the chaos of the Civil War there was a wide gap between the policies agreed on by the central organs and what the people actually experienced. While it is relatively easy to relate the functioning of central institutions, such as Denikin's Special Council, it is far more difficult to reconstruct the work of the administrative organs closest to the people. For example, we can follow the development of the thinking of the leaders on the issue of land reform and the work of various commissions, but we have only a hazy picture of the effect of Wrangel's land law on the peasants, and it is hard to establish how much of the reform was in fact carried out. We are forced to conjecture on the basis of thin evidence.

Since this book must describe the defeat of an army, obviously much will have to be said about the changing military situation. However, this book is not intended as military history. I am more interested in the army as an institution, in the background and behavior of the soldiers, and in questions of morale and indoctrination than in the history of campaigns.

Similarly, I devote relatively little space to the issue of Allied intervention. I do so because I believe that the Civil War was indeed a civil war in the sense that its outcome was determined by local forces and circumstances. Also, foreign intervention is the aspect of the Civil War which has been described best and in most detail by other historians. Indeed, the many books on this subject may actually have distorted our picture of the conflict by exaggerating the role of foreigners.

In the historical literature there are far better works about the Bolsheviks than about their enemies. However, from many otherwise valuable books the comparative perspective is missing. It is a serious weakness. The Reds and the Whites were, of course, quite conscious of competing against one another, and therefore when the historian concentrates only on one group he cannot present a fully accurate picture. For example, in order to understand Lenin's agrarian policies it is important to know what the Whites were doing. Recently some historians have stressed the heterogeneous nature of the Bolshevik Party in the years of the Civil War. Those who study the White movement will quickly see that, by comparison, the Bolsheviks were firmly united.

Although I recount the history only of the South Russian anti-Bolshevik movement, I have tried to write something broader than a regional history. I have concentrated on the microcosm of the South because it seemed the best way to pay attention to the enormous variety of forces which were at work, and thus to gain a better understanding of the White movement in general.