

# THE RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR 1918-1920

The civil war can be divided into three phases:

- (1) February to November 1918
- (2) November 1918 to December 1919
- (3) January to November 1920.

During the **first phase**, the eastern front was the most significant. The fronts in the north and southeast did not register much activity. Admiral Kolchak overthrew the Directorate which had been established in Ufa and proclaimed himself supreme ruler of Russia in November 1918.

The **second phase** saw action on the northwestern, eastern, south-eastern, southwestern, and southern fronts. Bitter fighting was the keynote everywhere. The high point of White progress was achieved in October 1919 when Denikin's cavalry reached Orel, 200 miles southwest of Moscow. Yedenich reached the suburbs of Petrograd in late October 1919. The Reds scored notable victories to force Denikin back to the Don in October 1919 and Kolchak was forced to retreat to Irkutsk in December.

**Phase three** is dominated by the Polish invasion in May 1920 and Wrangel's drive north from the Crimea in June. The Reds met defeat near Warsaw and conceded territory to the Poles at the Treaty of Riga in March 1921. By the end of the year Soviet Russia had been cleared of all large anti-Bolshevik forces.

**Why did the Red Army win the civil war?** The Bolsheviks had some **advantages** - the **railroad** within their area made it possible for the troops to move quickly from one front to another, the area included **industrial centers** who could easily change the production to arms and equipment, they **had a skillful Commissar of War - Trotsky - who brought in 30 000 former officers of the Tsarist army (by compulsion)**, and the Red Army was quite homogeneous - **the army was united in the aims, the ideology and by compulsion...**

In contrast, **the various enemies were divided** in their intentions. Some of them were based on minority nationalities, many of whom, such as the Lithuanians, Moldavians and Ukrainians, declared their independence. In other areas, leaders of the anti-Bolsheviks, or "*Whites*", formed armies with the aim of establishing a power base and advancing from it to the Bolshevik stronghold. The "*White*" forces contained different fractions such as - other revolutionary groups that were hostile to or rejected by the Bolsheviks, former officers of the Imperial Army (especially resentful to the "*betrayal*" at Brest-Litovsk) and nationalist groups. In addition, Russia's former allies sent troops to Russia with several aims in view - first of all to continue the Eastern front against Germany. The allies also needed the supplies that were stored in Russia, they wanted to prevent Germany and Austria from making free use of the Russian, Polish and Ukrainian raw materials and finally they wanted to help defeat Bolshevism (especially after the Third Communist International - "**COMINTERN**" in March 1919 had been founded with the expressed intention of spreading communism around the world and organizing the overthrow of the Western governments). The fourth and final anti-Bolshevik force was the Czech Legion, 30 000 men originally captured by the Russians in the war against Austria-Hungary, and now in central Russia. The deep divisions between the groups and the incapability to coordinate their military campaigns defeated the anti-Bolshevik troops after three years in 1921.