

# RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR 1918–1920

Peace Treaty March 1918 – Brest-Litovsk.  
Describe the peace treaty... the effect for Russia?

1. The **Ukrainian government** (Ukraine became independent in January 1918) signed a separate treaty with Germany and Austria-Hungary in February 1918. – This put pressure on Russia!
2. The Germans declared war again and started a new offensive in February 1918. They advanced far and were only 100 miles from Petrograd when Lenin ordered a resumption of negotiations.
3. On **3 March Trotsky signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk**. Trotsky:
  - *Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland were given up to Germany and Austria.*
  - *Areas in Southern Caucasus were given up to Turkey.*
  - *Finland, Georgia and the Ukraine were to have their independence recognized.*
  - *6000 million marks were to be paid as reparations.*
  - *Russia lost 26% of the population,*
  - *Russia lost 32% of the arable land*
  - *Russia lost 33% of all manufacturing industries and*
  - *Russia lost 75% of the coal and iron resources*

Why did Russia accept it?

The peace treaty created splits in the government. The Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party accepted it by 7 to 4. **Lenin's explanation** was that Russia could take no more war, but the treaty was only a temporary measure, since the inevitable and promised revolution in Germany (and in the world) would soon come and in its aftermath all comrades would renounce their gains ill-gotten by war. Russia just needed to gain time...

**Basil Dmytryshyn claims** “*Most of the lost territory was not under Bolshevik control*”

**Daniel Schub claims** that “*the Bolsheviks still received German funds and they could not risk the exposure of that fact*”...

Describe the Bolsheviks preparation for Civil War:

**CHEKA:** The All-Russian Extra-ordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution, Speculation, and Sabotage. The Cheka was established on **December 7<sup>th</sup> 1917** by a decision of the Sovnarkom. It was subordinated to the Sovnarkom and its functions were, “*to liquidate counter-revolution and sabotage, to hand over counter-revolutionaries and saboteurs to the revolutionary tribunals, and to apply such measures of repression as 'confiscation, deprivation of ration cards, publication of lists of enemies of the people etc.'*” The man in charge was Felix Dzerzhinsky. But several contemporary sources indicate the active role of Lenin in enforcing the “*policy of terror*”...

During 1918 6300 people were executed by the CHEKA according to their own official numbers. The actual figures were probably much higher. The most famous victims were the Tsar family (executed in Yekaterinburg in July 1918).

**RED ARMY:** The new Bolshevik regime did not trust the old army, so they formed a new one in **January 1918:**

- It was open to all “*class-conscious*” workers of 18 years of age or more
- The bourgeoisie was banned
- 50 000 former Tsarist officers were retained to train the new force
- Each unit received a political commissar who was responsible for indoctrination and he should ensure that the army remained under Bolshevik control

- The supreme commander of the military forces was Leon Trotsky
- In August 1919 the Red Army had 300 000 soldiers – in January 1920 the Red Army had over 5 million men...

**To reinstate discipline a few regulations were made in February/March 1918:**

- *The powers of the regimental councils were curtailed*
- *The practice of electing officers was abolished*
- *The death penalty for deserters was reintroduced*

Change of the Economy – War Communism:

1. The big socialist reform was the **establishment of the "Supreme Economic Council" (Vesenkha)**. The Council was established to supervise the economy and to operate nationalized enterprises. This was a first step towards a state-controlled economy.

**2. Reforms in April-June 1918:**

- *Banks were nationalized*
- *Mineral resources were nationalized*
- *Industrial concerns were nationalized*
- *Foreign trade was nationalized*
- *Inheritance of property was made illegal*

**3. WAR COMMUNISM (June/July 1918 - March 1921)**

- *VESENKHA: "Supreme Economic Council" - formed in December 1917*
- *Civil War - the economy had to be adjusted to the war...*
- *Extensive nationalization (all the industries - "Decree of Nationalization")*
- *Equalization of earnings and direction of labor*
- *JUNE 1918: Different local rural administrations were formed, the "Committees of Poor Peasants" - who were going to control the rich peasants = "kulaks"*
- *Food was distributed by two centralized bodies: "Commissariat of Agriculture" and "Commissariat of Food"*
- *Large scale grain requisition (sometimes by military force and/or help from the Cheka)*

**REACTION:** *the peasants stopped producing a surplus which led to hunger and starvation*

- *Peasant unrest all over the country (uprise...)*
- *Industrial sector was pushed far back during this period - devastating results*
- *Chaotic decline of industry, rationing, hunger, disease, decline of the urban population, gradual subordination of the unions to the government*
- *Temporary abolition of money (extreme inflation - economic chaos)*
- *Kronstadt uprising. The sailors together with some soldiers from the Red Army called for a new revolution with freedom of speech, of assembly and private trade*

So was the Bolshevik economical policy "War Communism" successful? Well, they won the Civil War...

The outbreak of the Civil War. It's characterized by **extensive nationalization**, the **temporary abolition of money as a measure of value**, **equalization of earnings** and the **direction of labor**. This was a period of war, economic chaos, hunger + starvation and enormous hardship. War Communism is reckoned to have begun at mid-1918 with the **"Decree of Nationalization"**, making all large-scale enterprises liable to nationalization without compensation. In the following three years there was wholesale nationalization, grain requisitioning, extreme inflation and the virtual disappearance of a money economy, a chaotic decline of industry, rationing, hunger, and disease, a decline of urban population, a gradual subordination of the unions to the government, and a Civil War which demanded the dispatch of all available human and material assets to the fronts.

Morris writes about War Communism: *"Strict centralized control of all forms of economic production and distribution, the virtual outlawing of all private trade, and the near destruction of the money economy by the printing of vast quantities of banknotes."*

To be able to feed the towns during the civil war a **large-scale requisitioning of grain** on the countryside was necessary. In **June** different local administrations - the "**Committees of Poor Peasants**" were formed. They were going to fulfill the needs of the urban population and the army. To make sure that the food supply was enough a **decree of 1919 ordered the peasants to hand over to the State any grain surplus to what was needed for subsistence**. In response the peasants simply reduced their production so there was no surplus. By 1921 only about half as much stock was kept and half as much land cultivated as there had been in 1913. Little food arrived in the cities, and the only prospect of a livelihood lay in the countryside. City workers in their thousands simply left and went into the country, to join the thousands of soldiers returning from the wars. The Government continued the confiscation of supplies, sometimes by military (CHEKA) force.

In March 1921, shortly before the Tenth Bolshevik Party Congress opened in Petrograd, the sailors of the Kronstadt naval base outside Petrograd, joined by some of the Red Army, refused to obey their officers and called for a new revolution that gave genuine freedoms - of speech, of assembly, of private trade. Trotsky decided firm action was needed - it took ten days before the rebels gave up. This outburst, together with the peasant's active refusal to take part in the grain requisitioning, convinced Lenin of the need for change.

**NOTE: WAR COMMUNISM – very important to be able to identify this economy!!!**

Describe the White forces preparation for the Civil War; who were they, their aims, their geographical location, their leadership – with other words – Why did the Civil War break out and what were the conditions for the White Armies?

### **WHO WERE THEY:**

#### **Morris:**

- Those attached to other revolutionary groups, hostile to or rejected by the Bolsheviks...
- Former officers of the Imperial army, usually resentful of the "betrayal" at Brest-Litovsk
- Nationalist groups seeking independence for their particular minority

#### **Another suggestion is:**

- Tsarists, nobilities
- Middle-class constitutional democrats
- Mensheviks
- Socialist Revolutionaries
- Foreign Powers
- Groups of nationalists, peasants etc... (Greens: Independent groups of nationalists, peasants or bandits who roamed Russia at this time. They fought anyone and raided villages and towns. The most famous was the Ukrainian nationalist, Nestor Makno, who shared his booty with local peasants)

### **AIMS:**

- The groups that made up the Whites had different aims: some wanted the Tsar back, some a military Dictator; others wanted constitutional government or revolutionary change. The only aim they had in common was to defeat the Bolsheviks; they agreed on little else...
- Senior Russian Army Officers hated the humiliating terms of Brest-Litovsk. They also wanted to regain control over the Army...
- Landowners wanted their land back
- Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks had been denied power...
- The Foreign Powers were critical against Russia leaving the war (for several different reasons)
- The Foreign powers were also afraid of the new doctrine - Communism
- National minorities wanted their independence...

### **LEADERSHIP:**

- They lacked good leaders. Some of the commanders were cruel, treated their men with disrespect and set a bad example, drinking and taking drugs...

- *The White Generals did not trust each other and would not co-ordinate their attacks. This allowed the Bolsheviks to pick off the White Armies one by one*
- *The Whites had problems inside their Armies, too. There was often fighting and squabbling, because the groups had different aims and beliefs. It was particularly hard for the revolutionaries to co-operate with supporters of the Tsar.*

### **GEOGRAPHICAL DIFFERENCES:**

- *They were scattered around this central area, often with hundreds of miles separating the different armies.*
- *Communications were difficult - that is, if the generals wanted to communicate.*

Describe the Course of the War:
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- (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.

The **Polish claim was extra difficult since there was a disagreement of the eastern borders**; should the historic borders from before the partition of the old Polish kingdom in 1772 be the new border or should it be fixed by the main areas of the Polish-speaking population (called the Curzon Line). **The dispute about this border would lead to war** between Poland and the new Bolshevik State of Russia **in 1920...**

Why did other countries intervene in the Russian Civil War? Describe this international intervention and evaluate its results...
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### **Several foreign powers intervened on the behalf of the White side - Why?**

- *LENIN: "The allies wanted to suppress communism"*
- *The allies wanted Russia to restart the war in the east, or at least prevent Germany (Central Powers) from making free use of Russian, Polish, Ukrainian raw materials (and the allied stored supplies in Russia)*

### **AFTER WWI:**

- *France wanted to have some of the invested money back. Between 1887 and 1917 France invested 16 billion francs in companies/enterprises now nationalized (without any compensation) by the new government*
- *Great Britain and the US had lesser investments to defend*
- *Japan saw an opportunity of territorial gains in Asia (and they were therefore checked by US troops that was more concerned with hindering Japanese annexations than combating Bolshevism further west...)*

## AFTER MID-1919

- When the Third Communist International (**COMINTERN**) declared that the main aim was to "overthrow capitalism, establish the dictatorship of the proletariat in an International Soviet republic" the Russian Civil War became predominantly ideological.

### The international intervention was strictly limited:

- The US sent only about 6000 men to Siberia (mostly to check the Japanese troops)
- Many of the men that were sent over were affected by war-weariness - they were not motivated
- The undemocratic regime of some of the White generals made it hard (or impossible) for some of the foreign troops to cooperate (esp. with Admiral Kolchak on the Eastern front... the US troops refused to cooperate and the French troops did it with very big difficulties)
- More important for the White armies were the substantial sums of money and the large quantities of military supplies. Unfortunately some of that was checked by corruption and inefficiency which meant that little of the aid actually reached the front
- The intervention seemed to have the opposite effect of what it meant to have. The Bolsheviks were skilled in their propaganda when they portrayed their war effort as a defense of Russia against foreign imperialism...
- The only big exception to the limited success of the international efforts was the **Czechoslovak Legion**. It had been formed in 1917 by Czechs and Slovaks resident in Russia together with POW. Their aim was not anti-Bolshevik, it was to fight for independence in their own country against the weak Austrian-Hungarian Empire. On their way to the Western front they clashed into local Soviet officials who tried to disarm them (in Cheliabinsk). This incident led to this well-organized and well-equipped unit to cooperate with the White forces. It was successful, especially in the beginning of the Civil War, and their success encouraged the White forces. Representatives of the Socialist Revolutionaries combined with the Czech Legion formed one centre of White Administration at the Eastern front (Omsk).

So – in the end: Why did the Bolsheviks win the Civil War?

**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 50 000 former officers of the Tsarist army, 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.

## **GOOD STUDENT ANSWER TO THE QUESTION – WHY WERE THE WHITES DEFEATED IN THE RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR?:**

*After the October Revolution in 1917 when the Petrograd Soviets had eliminated the power of the Provisional Government and Bolsheviks had obtained the leading position over Russia, the Bolsheviks were faced with problems. There were groups disagreeing with Bolshevik ideologies and the disastrous aftermath of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty awoke even more resentment towards the Bolsheviks. The tension between the conflicting groups culminated and resulted in a Civil War in Russia. The Bolsheviks, the Reds, on one side and the Anti-Bolsheviks, the Whites, on the other side fought each other between 1918-21, till finally the Reds defeated the Whites. However, why were the Whites defeated in the Russian Civil War? This is the main aspect that will be investigated in this essay.*

*The White forces consisted of three main parts: those that belonged to other political groups that were Anti-Bolshevistic or rejected by the Bolsheviks; former officers of the Imperial army; and national groups claiming independency. Even if the Reds were surrounded by all these hostile groups there were reasons for why they were the stronger of the two sides. As mentioned, the Whites belonged to different groups and had therefore not the same aims and beliefs, apart from fighting the Reds. Still, the Bolsheviks had common Marxist-Leninist principles and aims and had therefore a higher morale and motivation. Also, the foreign intervention of countries such as France, Britain, USA and Japan and the Czechoslovak Legion created a greater Soviet unity through effective Bolshevik propaganda. The propaganda enabled the Bolsheviks to draw attention away from domestic problems and instead put people's focus on hostile foreign intervention. Also, the majority in Russia were peasants and most of them directed their support towards the Reds, which was a very important factor for the Bolshevik victory.*

*The Whites were often disorganized and quarrelsome. In the south and in the east their armies fought on very wide fronts, and on areas far from major industries and with poor communication. The leadership too was poor and sometimes military leaders and intervening allies had different opinions. For instance, France and Britain wanted compensation for all the money they had invested in the country, Japan wanted to expand territorially, USA wanted to ensure that Japan did not expand too much and the Czechoslovak Legion wanted national independency. Thus, they were more interested in their own affairs rather than putting focus on the Bolsheviks. This can be seen in, for instance, the little number of soldiers that these countries assisted the Whites with. In addition, most of the military leaders wanted to restore the old regime and showed little interest and care for peasants and that is why the Whites never got much popular support, apart from few leaders such as Wrangler.*

*Great leadership and the size of the Red Army are very essential factors for why the Bolsheviks won the war. Lenin and Trotsky contributed with brilliant tactics on how to organize the party and military, but the Whites lacked such skilled leaders. Moreover, in April 1919 the Red Army consisted of 500,000 soldiers and this increased immensely towards June 1920 to about 5 million men. Clearly, the Reds outnumbered the Whites when comparing the size of their militaries.*

*The Reds installed a policy called War Communism that put all productions within the economy under centralised control. This meant that the state had now control over areas such as banks, trade and industrial areas. The Reds had also control over the railways and could therefore transport their soldiers to the different fronts much more efficient than the Whites. Thus, the Whites did not have access to these areas and had therefore economical and transportation disadvantages. However, the Whites did get economical support from allied countries but since corruption and inefficiency were quite common little of the aids reached the front.*

*In conclusion, the Whites were shattered already from the beginning having different aims and objectives and lacking skilled leaders that did not understand the war situation. The Reds, on the other hand, had the advantage of efficient leaders such as Lenin and Trotsky who could create a unity amongst them with common beliefs and principles. Furthermore, the foreign intervention benefited the Reds since it drew attention away from domestic problems and brought the Reds and the peasants closer. Indeed, the Reds would never have won the war if it was not for the 5 million soldiers in the army that were under the command of Trotsky and faithfully obeyed his orders. Also, the industries and railways and most of Russia's economy was under Bolshevik state control, after the principle of War Communism, which supplied them with material and resources that the Whites could not have access to. Although the Whites did get economical aid from allied countries much of it went directly into the pockets of leaders without being used for White causes. Thus, when seeing all the pro-Bolshevik and anti-White aspects that existed it is more understandable how the Reds won and the Whites were defeated in the Russian Civil War.*