What was life like in Russia during the Civil War?

In the late twentieth century, civil wars in the Balkans and the Russian Federation showed how savage, brutal and chaotic such conflicts are. In the Russian Civil War, central authority disappeared and local areas were left to feed for themselves. The fighting fronts were rarely stable. Kiev in the Ukraine changed hands some sixteen times, so the inhabitants were not sure which army was approaching. It was also common for units of soldiers (the Cossacks in particular) to change sides, fighting at one time for the Whites and later for the Reds, depending on how they saw their interests and advantage. As Kolchak's army retreated, one whole regiment murdered its officers and went over to the Reds.

The Civil War in Russia was full of unspeakable atrocities committed by both sides out of fear and resentment. The Cossacks in the south raped and murdered whole villages of Jews in pogroms that may have taken 115,000 lives in the Ukraine alone. They claimed the Jews supported the Bolsheviks. In the Donbass region, the Whites routinely shot miners who did not produce enough coal. In one case in Rustov, they buried hundreds of Red miners alive. In Kharkov, the Reds nailed the epaulettes of officers to their shoulders while they were still alive.

The biggest killer of all was disease, especially typhus, which spread rapidly amongst the ill-clad soldiers and the civilian population. Over one million people are thought to have died from typhus and typhoid in 1920. Estimates suggest that around 450,000 were killed by disease over the whole period while 350,000 were killed in the fighting.

One way to get an idea of what the Civil War was like is to look at novels written about this period by people who were personally involved. You can read extracts from Boris Pasternak's novel Dr Zhivago in Source 7.14. Pasternak had first-hand knowledge of the Civil War.

SOURCE 7.14 B. Pasternak, Doctor Zhivago, paperback edn 1975, pp. 407, 416. Zhivago has been captured by partisans. At one point they are surrounded by White forces and come across a man who has crawled into their camp.

His right arm and left leg had been chopped off. It was inconceivable news, with his remaining arm and leg, he had crawled into the camp. The chopped-off arm and leg were tied in terrible bleeding chunks on to his back, together with a small wooden board; on it, a long inscription stated, with many words of abuse, that the atrocity was in reprisal for similar atrocities committed by such and such a Red unit... It was added that the same treatment would be meted out to all the partisans unless, by a given date, they submitted and gave up their arms to the representatives of General Fryev's army corps.

[Zhivago escapes from the partisans and makes his way home.]

For a long time, for almost half his journey on foot, he had followed the railway, all of it out of action, neglected and covered with snow. Train after train, abandoned by the Whites, stood idle, stopped by the defeat of Kolchak, by running out of fuel... they stretched... for miles on end. Some of them served as fortresses for armed bands of robbers or as hide-outs for escaping criminals or political refugees -- the involuntary vagrants of those days -- but most of them were common mortuaries, mass graves of the victims of the cold and the typhus raging all along the railway line and mowing down whole villages...

Half the villages were empty; the fields abandoned and unharvested as after an enemy invasion -- such were the effects of the war: the Civil War... In the abandoned field the ripe grain spoiled and trickled on the ground.

SOURCE 7.15 I. Babyl, Collected Stories, trans. D. McDuff, 1994, p. 136. Isaac Babyl was born in Odessa in 1894, the son of a Jewish traditionalist. He joined the Bolsheviks in 1917. In 1920 he joined the Red Army and served with the famous cavalry commander Budenny as a war correspondent for ROSTA, the Soviet news agency. In 1925 he wrote the book Red Cavalcade, a collection of stories based on his Civil War experiences, from which this extract was originally taken.

Budenny was standing by a tree, in red trousers with a silver stripe. The brigade commander had just been killed. In his place the army commander had appointed Kolesnikov. An hour ago Kolesnikov had been a colonel of a regiment. A week ago Kolesnikov had been the leader of a squadron.

The new brigade commander was summoned to Budenny: ‘The cars are giving us the squeeze,’ the commander said with a dizziness. ‘Either we win or we die. There is no other way. Got it?’

‘Got it,’ Kolesnikov replied, his eyes bulging.

‘And if you run, I still shoot you,’ the commander said, smiling, and turned to look at the section leader. ‘Very well,’ said the section leader... He touched his peaked cap with five youthful red fingers, began to sweat and saluted off... He walked with lowered head, his long and crooked legs moving with amazing slowness. The breeze of the sunset washed over him, crimson and improbable as an approaching death... His orderly led up a horse for him. He leapt into the saddle and galloped off... I happened to catch sight of him again that evening (after the battle in which the enemy was annihilated)... riding out in front of his brigade... his right arm in a sling... The front squadron was closely leading the others in the singing of obscene couplets. In Kolesnikov’s manner of sitting in the saddle that evening I saw the lordly indifference of a Tartar khan.

Talking Point:

How useful do you think novels like these are to historians?

Focus Route:

Make notes on:

a) the problems facing the Bolshevik
government on the domestic front
b) the main features of War
Communism as a solution to the
Bolsheviks’ problems and a means to
develop socialism
c) the use of terror and class warfare
to defeat elements in society hostile
to the government
d) the arbitrary nature of the terror.

Why did Lenin adopt War Communism?

While Trotsky managed the Civil War, Lenin concentrated on building and consolidating the Bolshevik state. This is not to say that Lenin had no part in the Civil War. He and Trotsky took strategic decisions together and Trotsky needed Lenin’s support on a number of occasions, for example, over the use of former Tsarist officers in the army. But Lenin took charge of the day-to-day business of the Sovnarkom and the problems he faced were formidable. Chief amongst these was the rapid deterioration of the economy in the spring of 1918.

To ensure their survival in the first months after the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks had handed over control of the land to the peasants and control of the factories to the workers’ committees. The pressure from peasants and workers had been irresistible. But it was not long before the shortcomings of both policies became apparent.

Industry fell apart as workers’ committees proved incapable of running the factories (although the economic collapse was underway well before the workers took over, so they cannot be blamed entirely). This was compounded by acute shortages of raw materials created by the Civil War. Industrial output, particularly consumer goods, shrank in the Bolshevik-held central area. The shortage of goods led to soaring price inflation and the value of the rouble collapsed. Peasants would not supply food to the cities if there were no goods for which food could be exchanged and paper money was worthless. Moreover, the rich wheat areas of the Ukraine were outside Bolshevik control. So the food shortages got worse and as early as February 1918 the bread ration in Petrograd had reached an all-time low of only 50 grams per person per day. There were
**The Problem of Food Supply**

Getting food into the cities had been a problem since 1915 and had contributed significantly to the February and October Revolutions. For some time the peasants had been unco-operative. During 1917 they had been interested only in getting the land and once they had it, they wanted to be left alone to farm it. Their main wish was to run their lives without outside interference. They were not really concerned about the problems of the cities, which had little to offer them in return for their grain. Added to this, large peasant households had split themselves into several smaller households to increase their claim for land and consequently the land had been divided up into small parcels. This encouraged a return to subsistence farming rather than production for the market. Yet Lenin had promised to give the workers 'bread and this was a promise he could not afford to renge on.'

**Summary of Key Features of War Communism**

- Grain requisitioning
- Private trade banned
- State control of industry
- Single managers to replace workers' committees
- Passports to prevent workers leaving the towns
- Rationing

**The Main Features of War Communism**

- **Grain Requisitioning**
  The Bolsheviks had been sending units of Red guards and soldiers out into the countryside to find grain for the hard-pressed cities. In May 1919 the Food-Supplies Dictatorship was set up to establish the forcible requisitioning of grain as the standard policy. Unsurprisingly, the peasants resisted bitterly.

- **Banning of Private Trade**
  All private trade and manufacture were banned. However, the state trading organisation was extremely chaotic and industry was simply not producing enough consumer goods. So an enormous black market developed, without which most people could not have survived.

- **Nationalisation of Industry**
  All industry was brought under state control and administered by the Supreme Council of National Economy (Vesenkho). Workers' committees were replaced by single managers reporting to central authorities. These were often the old bourgeois managers now called 'specialists.' This was the only way to stop the chaos caused by the factory workers' committees who had voted themselves huge pay rises, intimidated management and stole materials for illegal goods. Not all workers were against nationalisation: many, faced with the closure of their factory, urged that it be nationalised and kept open. They were desperate to keep their jobs.

- **Labour Discipline**
  Discipline was brought back to the work place. There were fines for lateness and absenteeism. Internal passports were introduced to stop people fleeing to the countryside. Piece work rates were brought back, along with bonuses and a work book that was needed to get rations.

- **Rationing**
  A class-based system of rationing was introduced. The labour force was given priority along with Red Army soldiers. Smaller rations were given to civil servants and professional people as doctors. The smallest rations, barely enough to live on, were given to the burzhui or middle classes – or as they were now called, 'the former people.'

**The Assassination Attempt on Lenin and the Beginning of the Lenin Cult**

After addressing a meeting of workers on 50 August, Lenin was shot in the neck and badly wounded. The culprit arrested on the spot was Fanya Kaplan, an ex-.anarchist turned Socialist Revolutionary. She claimed that she was protesting about the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The Lenin cult began at this time. Biographies appeared in the Bolshevik press giving her Christ-like qualities, unfaithful to sacrifice his life for the revolution. Zinoviev made a long address of which 200,000 copies were published. Portraits and postcards of him appeared in the streets (some had been produced up to this time) in a deliberate effort to promote his god-like leadership qualities. (See Chapter 9 for more about the Lenin cult.)

**The Red Terror**

Another crucial component of War Communism was the systematic use of terror to create a Nazi-like model government and deal with opposition. The Bolsheviks faced increased opposition inside the cities from:

- Workers who were angry at their economic plight, low food rations and state violence. There were calls for new Soviet elections, a free press, the restoration of the Constituent Assembly and the overthrow of the Sovnarkom (only six months after the revolution). Signs appeared on city walls saying, 'Down with Lenin and his parliamentary system! Give us the Tzar and peace!'
- Anarchists who rejected the authoritarian control of the government
- Left-wing Socialist Revolutionaries who were protesting about the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. They turned to terrorism, shooting the German ambassador in July 1918 to try to wreck the Russian relationship with the Germans. They captured Dzerzhinsky, the head of the Cheka, in May and managed to shoot Lenin in August 1918. Two other Bolshevik Party leaders were murdered.
- They put the regime under real pressure.

The assassination attempt on Lenin prompted the Cheka to launch the Red Terror in the summer of 1918, but this was simply an intensification of what was already happening. From June onwards, Socialist Revolutionaries had been arrested in large numbers, along with anarchists and members of other extreme left groups. Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries were excluded from taking part in soviets. Many Kadets were already in prison, others had fled to the south.

The execution of the Tsar and his family

One of the most significant victims in this period was the Tsar Nicholas, along with his family and servants, was shot on 17 July 1918 in Ekaterinburg in the Urals. Lenin and Sverdlov (Party Secretary 1918-19) claimed that it had been carried out by the local soviets against their wishes, but the weight of evidence now suggests that the order came from the centre. Lenin did not wish to antagonise the Germans at this point so he probably wanted to suggest that it was nothing to do with him. Alexandra, the Tsar's wife, was German and, of course, the Tsar was a blood relation to the other monarchs in Europe – for example, he was cousin to the German Kaiser. The stories about the possible survival of some of the Tsar's children may have been allowed to flourish for similar reasons. The Cheka turned the flames of class warfare, as some Bolsheviks talked of wiping out the middle class completely. But the real purpose of the Terror was to terrify all hostile social groups. Its victims included large numbers of workers and peasants as well as princes and priests, prostitutes, judges, merchants, traders, even children (who made up five per cent of the population of Moscow prisons in 1920) – all guilty of 'bourgeois provocation' or counter-revolution. The problem was that no one was really sure who the counter-revolutionaries were.
THE CHEKA

The Cheka grew rapidly after occupying its new premises in the infamous Lubianka in Moscow at the end of March 1918. By June it had a thousand members and by September most provinces and districts had a Cheka branch. It worked outside of the law or justice system, reporting directly to Lenin and the politburo. As one of its founder members put it: 'The Cheka is not an investigating committee, a court or a tribunal. It is a fighting organ on the internal front of the Civil War... It does not judge, it strikes.'

SOURCE 7.17 The Lubianka in Moscow, the headquarters of the Cheka. There was a prison inside the building

Felix Dzerzhinsky

The head of the Cheka was Felix Dzerzhinsky, a Pole from Lithuania. As a boy he had wanted to be a Jesuit priest and may have brought some of the Jesuit religious fanaticism into his political life. For he was a fanatic, and just the person Lenin needed to head up the Cheka. He was incorruptible and merciless. Having spent a great deal of his adult life in tsarist prisons, he knew a lot about how they worked and possessed the zeal to deal with the class that had put him there. He commented to the Sovnarkom: 'Do not think I seek forms of revolutionary justice; we are not in need of justice. It is war now - face to face, a fight to the finish. Life or death!'

In the cities, Cheka arrests had a terrifyingly random character (see Source 7.18). People were arrested for being near scenes of 'bourgeois provocation' or because they were acquaintances of suspects. Many were denounced as counter-revolutionaries following arguments or as a result of vendettas. In the provinces it was possibly worse, since local Cheka bosses controlled their own patch and acted as petty tyrants with no court of appeal. Some were very dubious characters who used their position to pursue long-term vendettas against sections of the local community. There was little central control.

The Cheka was particularly active in the countryside, helping requisitioning brigades to collect grain from the peasants. Quotas were filled even if this left peasants starving. It was little better than theft and some of the brigades were little more than bands, taking much more than food. The peasants resisted in a wave of uprisings and attacked the collectors. Bolshevik party officials were murdered. One Cheka man was found with his stomach slit open and stuffed with grain as a lesson to others. In another village, the twelve members of a brigade were decapitated and their heads put on poles.

The Cheka and Red Army units gave no quarter. They were supported by Lenin in a telegram to Bolshevik leaders in Petrograd he wrote, 'Hang no fewer than a hundred well-known kulaks [rich peasants], rich-bags and blood-suckers and make sure the hanging takes place in full view of the people.' He tried to encourage the poorer peasants to attack the kulaks but he failed to ignite class warfare in the villages. Thousands of peasants were arrested. In retaliation, the peasants hid their grain and stopped planting for the next season. Wheat harvests went into serious decline. It would not be unfair to say that the Bolsheviks were at war with the peasants.

To house all these dissident workers, thousands of peasant and bourgeois saboteurs, the Bolsheviks set up concentration and labour camps. The machinery of terror and the police state were created under Lenin, not Stalin. It is almost certain that hundreds of thousands perished, although no accurate figures are available from a time when there was so much dislocation and disorder, and proper records were not kept or were lost.


Pavelskov, Kerensky's Minister of Food, who was imprisoned in the Lubianka jail, recalls a conversation with a fellow prisoner, a trade unionist from Vladimir, who could not work not why he had been arrested. 'All he had done was come to Moscow and check into a hotel. What is your name?' another prisoner asked. 'Smirnov,' he replied, one of the most common Russian names. 'The name, then, was the cause of your arrest,' said a man coming towards us. 'Let me introduce myself. My name too is Smirnov, and I am from Kaluga. At the Taganrog there were seven of us Smirnovs... they somehow managed to find out that a certain Smirnov, a Bolshevik from Kazan, had disappeared with a large sum of money. Moscow was notified and orders were issued to the militia to arrest all Smirnovs arriving in Moscow and send them to the Cheka. They are trying to catch the Smirnov from Kazan.'

'But I have never been to Kazan,' protested the Vladimir Smirnov. 'Neither have I,' replied the one from Kaluga. 'I am not even a Bolshevik, nor do I intend to become one. But here I am.'

Was War Communism just a reaction to the Civil War and the economic crisis?

It is clear that the Bolsheviks adopted more centralised systems of control to run the economy in order to carry on the war. They had to make sure the army was supplied: they needed the factories to produce munitions and other goods and they needed food to feed the workers. But War Communism was not just a reaction to these pressures. For Lenin, it was an extension of class warfare and no different from the waging of the Civil War against external enemies. In fact, the Bolsheviks called it the 'internal front'. Lenin wanted to squeeze out the counter-revolutionary forces whether they came from the left or the right - those not being with us are against us'. It was a way of wiping out old bourgeois attitudes and any lingering bourgeoisie power. Terror was an essential component of this.

Lenin was supported by other Bolsheviks. They hated the market system and were not unhappy to see it collapse in 1918. They thought centralised control was the way to develop socialism. They had always wanted the nationalisation of industry and state control. Their attachment to War Communism shows their reluctance to abandon it when the Civil War ended. Trotsky wanted to see the 'militarisation of labour', in which the discipline and practices of the army would be taken into civilian life to build the new socialist state. At the end of the Civil War, he wanted units of soldiers to be drafted into the factories and fields to work under military discipline.
What was life like in Bolshevik
cities under War Communism?

Life in Russia between 1918 and 1921 was a matter of survival. Less than a third of
the urban diet came from state-provided rations; the rest came from the black
market. ‘Bag-men’ travelled between villages and cities selling their produce.
The urban workers eked out their rations by selling or exchanging handmade
or stolen goods for food. Many travelled into the countryside with goods to
barter for food. This became known as ‘cigarette lightering’ since cigarette
lighters featured in the products they made, along with shoe soles made from
conveyor belts, pennies, nails and ploughs made from iron bars. This
movement of people created chaos in factories in 1918 because at any one time a
high percentage of workers might be absent. The railway system was choked
with bag-men moving between cities. The Bolsheviks tried to stamp out the free market under War Communism,
but it was futile. The Cheka raided trains to stop bag-men travelling, and they
raised markets where the goods were sold. But they could not be everywhere
and it was always easy to bribe officials. As a result, the Bolsheviks had little
choice but to tolerate the black market or see the cities starve. Everybody
hunted for food at prices rocketed. Horses disappeared from the streets simply to
reappear as ‘Civil War sausage’. Vages in 1919 were reckoned to be at two per
cent of their 1913 level and on average an urban worker spent three-quarters
of his income on food. Fuel for heating was also critically short. In the freezing
winter of 1919–20, some 5000 wooden houses in Petrograd were stripped to
provide fuel. Trees disappeared. Sanitary conditions were appalling and water
had to be collected from pumps in the streets.
The middle classes were in a worse position than the workers. They were the
class enemy and were not allowed to work, although some were drafted back
as managers in the nationalised industries or to work in the civil service. Most
survived by selling clothes and jewellery, in fact anything they owned, for bread.
One study in the 1920s found that 42 per cent of prostitutes in Moscow were
from bourgeois families. Emma Goldman found young girls ‘selling themselves
for a loaf of bread or a piece of soap or chocolate’ (My Disillusionment in Russia,
1925, page 11). Members of the nobility fared no better. The wives of
foreign ex-emigres, for instance, Princess Golityn sold homemade pies, Courtesan White cakes and pies. For the ‘former people’ life was arduous, queues up with the poor for food and fuel.

SOURCE 7.19 Middle-class women selling items on the street in order to survive

SOURCE 7.20 E. Goldman, My Disillusionment in Russia, 1923, pp. 8–9. Goldman is writing
about the Petrograd she found on returning there in January 1920. She had lived there as a
teenager in the 1880s but had gone to live in the USA. She was an anarchist with sympathies
towards the Communist revolution.

It was almost in ruins, as if a hurricane had swept over it . . . The streets were
dirty and deserted; all life had gone from them . . . The people talked about
like living corpses; the shortage of food and fuel was steadily sapping the city's
grim death was choking at its heart. Emaciated and fruit-bitten men, women
and children were being whipped by a common lash, the search for a piece
of bread or a stick of wood. It was a heart-rending sight by day, an oppressive
weight by night. It fairly haunted me, this oppressive silence broken only by the
occasional shots.

The workers at least benefited from the social revolution insofar as the palaces
and town houses of the rich were taken over and the living space divided up
amongst poor families. One owner of a palace ended up living in his former
bathroom. The houses were run by building committees, often with the
control of former domestic servants who relished the opportunity to turn the
rooms on their old masters. There was a popular mood to humiliate the old
bourgeoisie. City Soviets rounded up army officers, civil servants, aristocrats,
stockbrokers and other formerly wealthy people and made them clean rubbish
or sweep from the streets, much to the amusement of workers and soldiers
passing by.
The workers were not so happy about the corruption that surrounded
the Bolshevik Party. Many areas were run by local maistri of Bolshevik officials
who lived well whilst others starved. It came from the top. Five thousand Bolsheviks
and their families lived in the Kremlin and best hotels in Moscow with access
to saunas, a hotel and three vast restaurants with cooks trained in France. In
Petrograd, Zinoviev, the party boss of the city, lived at the Astoria Hotel, coming
and going with his Cheka bodyguards and a string of prostitutes. The hotel,
where many Bolsheviks lived, retained its old waiters, now ‘comrade waiters',
who served champagne and caviar in room service. Bribery and corruption was
rife throughout the party. Almost anything could be had from corrupt Bolshevik
officials: foodstuffs, tobacco, alcohol, fuel. The wives and mistresses of party
bosses went around ‘with a jeweller's shop window hanging round their necks'.

was a British journalist who later went on to
write the famous children's books Swallows and Amazons.

Rooms are distributed on much
the same plan as clothes. Housing
is considered a State monopoly,
and a general census of housing
accommodation has been taken.
In every district there are housing
committees to whom everybody
wants rooms applies. They work
on the rough and ready theory that
until every man has one room no
one has a right to two . . . This plan
has, of course, proved very hard on
house-owners, and in some cases the
new tenants have made a horrible
mess of the houses, as might indeed
have been expected, seeing that they
had previously been of those who had
suffered directly from the devaluing
influences of overrunning.

SOURCE 7.22 L. de Robien, The Diary of a Diplomat in Russia 1917–18, 1969. De Robien
was a French diplomat used to moving in court circles.

Friday 8 February 1918
We are living in a madhouse, and in the last few days there have been an
avalanche of decrees. First comes a decree cancelling all banking transactions,
then comes another one confiscating houses. I have made no mention of taxes,
which continue to hit people from whom all source of income has been removed:
500 rubles for a servant, 500 rubles for a bathroom, 680 rubles for a dog and
as much for a piano. All inhabitants under the age of 30 are forced to join the
'personal labour corps'. Princess Obolensky has been ordered to go and clear
the snow off the Fontanka Quay. Others have to sweep the tramlines at night.

EMISSION

By the end of the Civil War, many of the ‘former people’ had fled abroad.
Two to three million emigrated in the first years after the revolution.
Groups of Russians arrived in countries throughout the world. Many emigres
settled in Germany, France and other Western European countries while
others established communities developed in the USA and Australia. Berlin
was the emigre capital at first. Then they moved to Paris where Tsar Cyril I
was acclaimed by emigre monarchists. Restaurants and hotels were staffed
by the old bursch in and there were thousands of Russian taxi drivers in
Paris in the 1930s. Soviet Russia lost a great deal of mercurial and managerial talent,
along with scholars, scientists and other skilled groups. Much of the top
educational elite fled, many becoming prominent in Western universities
and industry, such as Sklonsky who developed the helicopter for the USA.

TALKING POINT

Why do you think Lenin’s use of
class warfare played to well with the
workers and soldiers in Russian cities?
Do you think the attitudes displayed by
the workers and others towards the
old bourgeoisie were reasonable and
understandable?

ACTIVITY

1. What aspects of the experience of War Communism are revealed in Sources
7.19–7.22?

2. How reliable do you think these sources are? Consider the writers and their
backgrounds. Do their backgrounds make them less or more reliable?
ACTIVITY

Either

1. a) Choose a small group (four or five students) to be Communist Party activists. This group prepares a speech which justifies the policies of War Communism. You could mention:
   - the economic situation
   - the needs of the military in order to conduct the Civil War
   - the longer-term objectives of the Communist state and the workers' state that will develop
   - why it is important to use terror to deal with the bourgeoisie, to 'root out the traitors'
   - why grain requisitioning is necessary
   - why it is necessary to have central control of the economy
   - the problems caused by the workers' committees.

b) The rest of the class are workers. In groups of three or four, list your complaints about the actions of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party since the October Revolution and the economic situation you find yourself in during 1920. You support the revolution but not necessarily the Bolshevists. Explain how you expect to see things change now that the Civil War is coming to an end.

c) One or two members of the Communist group should present the speech. Workers from different groups should then make their points and a debate/argument can take place in role.

Or

2. a) Explain how the Communists would have justified War Communism and the use of terror.
   b) Describe how workers fared under War Communism and their attitudes towards the Bolshevik government.

KEY POINTS FROM CHAPTER 7

How did the Bolsheviks win the Civil War?

1. The Civil War was very complex with many forces operating over a large territory. It was a very confusing period during which the sides were not clearly defined.
2. White forces made substantial gains in late 1918 and up to the autumn of 1919, putting the Bolsheviks in a crisis situation. By October 1919 the Bolsheviks had turned the tide, picking off White armies one by one, and thereafter pushed the Whites back until their final defeat at the end of 1920.
3. The Reds were in a better position geographically, and had better organisation, better communications and a clearer line of command. However, the Red Army had problems, particularly the high desertion rate.
4. Trotsky made a significant individual contribution to winning the war by his organisational abilities (transforming the Red Army), his energy and his personal bravery.
5. The Whites lacked good leadership, unity and co-ordination between armies during campaigns. They were riven by internal divisions and squabbles.
6. The Whites lacked support from the peasants and national minorities because of their reactionary policies.
7. Lenin adopted War Communism to meet the needs of the army and to conduct a civil war on the 'internal front'.
8. Terror was an essential component of this internal civil war to defeat counter-revolution.
9. Communists saw War Communism as the route to socialism.
10. Most people's experience of War Communism was that it was a terrible time of privation and chaos.

ACTIVITY

Either

1. a) Choose a small group (four or five students) to be Communist Party activists. This group prepares a speech which justifies the policies of War Communism. You could mention:
   - the economic situation
   - the needs of the military in order to conduct the Civil War
   - the longer-term objectives of the Communist state and the workers' state that will develop
   - why it is important to use terror to deal with the bourgeoisie, to 'root out the traitors'
   - why grain requisitioning is necessary
   - why it is necessary to have central control of the economy
   - the problems caused by the workers' committees.

b) The rest of the class are workers. In groups of three or four, list your complaints about the actions of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party since the October Revolution and the economic situation you find yourself in during 1920. You support the revolution but not necessarily the Bolshevists. Explain how you expect to see things change now that the Civil War is coming to an end.

c) One or two members of the Communist group should present the speech. Workers from different groups should then make their points and a debate/argument can take place in role.

Or

2. a) Explain how the Communists would have justified War Communism and the use of terror.
   b) Describe how workers fared under War Communism and their attitudes towards the Bolshevik government.

How was the Bolshevist state consolidated between 1921 and 1924?

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

In 1921, Lenin and the Bolsheviks were on the edge of disaster. With the Civil War over, workers and peasants expected to see an improvement in their standard of living and an end to wartime policies. However, by the spring of 1921 economic conditions had deteriorated and there was open revolt against the Bolshevist government. Lenin was forced into making economic concessions in his New Economic Policy (NEP) to ensure the survival of the regime. The economy recovered and the Bolsheviks were repressed. The NEP was accompanied by political repression and a strengthening of the centralised one-party state. By the time of Lenin's death in 1924, Bolshevist power had been consolidated and the foundations of the future Communist regime put in place.

1. Why were the Bolshevists in trouble in 1921? (pp. 149-153)
2. How successful was the New Economic Policy? (pp. 154-159)
3. How did the centralised state develop in Russia between 1918 and 1924? (pp. 160-166)

SOURCE B.1 Victims of the famine of 1921. This famine may have killed as many as five million people. It was partly caused by a drought in southern Russia which led to crop failures. But it was also caused by the Bolshevik requisitioning programme which had depleted the peasants' reserve stocks of grain and persuaded large numbers of peasants not to plant so much. The net result was one of the worst famines of the twentieth century. It was so bad that it attracted international aid, particularly from the USA. In some areas, there were reports of cannibalism.

A Why were the Bolshevists in trouble in 1921?

ACTIVITY

Why was 1921 a year of crisis for the Bolsheviks?

1. Use Sources B.1–B.6 to identify and explain the difficulties in which the Bolsheviks found themselves in 1921.
2. Look at Source B.2 carefully. Then draw a line graph showing what was happening in Petrograd between 1914 and 1920. You will need three different scales (for population, births and deaths).
3. a) What were the Kronstadt sailors calling for in Source B.3? (p.152)?
   b) At what other time in the last ten years might the sailors have been making similar demands?
   c) Why was the Kronstadt rising so significant?
4. If you had to choose the most serious problem facing Lenin, which would it be and how would you deal with it?