Russian Civil War 1918-1921
Bolshevik Reforms During Civil War

1) **Decree of Peace** – Led to the end of the war with Germany and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

2) **Decree of Land** – private property was abolished.

3) **Government** – Was theoretically democratic because the soviets were elected but:
   - The power to make decisions was held by a small group of officials called the **Politburo**. Power came from above, not below.
   - All political parties were outlawed except for the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) – which was the Bolsheviks and their allies.
Local Soviets

• Representatives were elected by the workers / leaders were appointed by the General Secretary. Each region had one.

**Congress of Soviets**

• Representatives of all the local Soviets. This group approved the decisions of the Communist Party Central Committee.

Central Committee

• This group held executive power (they made the decisions) which were to be approved at each Congress of Soviets. Members were elected for five years from the Congress of Soviets.

Politburo

• Appointed by the Central Committee. Five members virtually controlled everything.

Local Soviets

• Representatives were elected by the workers / leaders were appointed by the General Secretary. Each region had one.
Original Politburo Members

LENIN

TROTSKY

STALIN

KAMENEV

KRESTINSKY
• This type of government is called **Democratic Centralism**.

• Lenin described it as:  

  “freedom of discussion, unity of action”
Social Reforms

- Many Bolsheviks saw religion as the “opiate of the people”. The Church lost influence in government, education, and had their lands seized.

- Lenin saw education as key to creating a productive society and for indoctrinating youth. Schools for boys and girls were created and the system was improved.

- Gender equality was promoted (ex. women now had the right to divorce a man). Women were not confined to the home. They even joined the Red Army.

http://www.marxists.org/archive/kollonta/1920/communism-family.htm
5) **War Communism**

- This policy was the most radical. It partly reflected the fact that the Bolsheviks were fighting for survival.
- There were severe food shortages due to war, trade blockades, and drought.
- Lenin wanted to harness all the resources of the state for the civil war effort – the following was implemented:
  - All land and industry was **nationalized** (owned by Gov)
  - Elimination of private trade and currency
  - Supplies and commodities would be provided to citizens for free based on “need” (this is a **command economy**)
- One result of this was that all farm produce was requisitioned (taken) from the farmer by the State.
Bolsheviks sent food to the army and the cities first—often the farmers were not compensated. Led to:

- Decline in production (no incentives)
- Hoarding
- Violence
- Death (5 million died from the famine by 1922) (see handout for more details)

This increased opposition to the Bolsheviks. Assassination attempts made on Lenin.

As a result the Bolsheviks create the Cheka. A counter-revolutionary secret police force that swept through Russia to punish “counter-revolutionaries”.

This violent period is known as the Red Terror.
Opposition to the Bolsheviks

- When the Bolsheviks seized power they only controlled Petrograd, Moscow, and the territory in between.
- Many groups resented the Bolshevik coup and took up arms against it.

  - **Conservatives** rejected the losses from the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. They also fought for their property rights and for the Orthodox Church.

  - **Liberals** also resented Brest-Litovsk. They wanted a democracy and not a Lenin dictatorship.
Peasants – some supported the Bolsheviks but many others felt the SRs should shape the future. The peasants were more socially conservative. They especially hated War Communism.

Foreign Troops – Britain, France, USA, Italy, Japan, Czech troops all helped the anti-Bolshevik forces because:
  • They wanted Russia to rejoin fight against Germany.
  • They feared communism
  • They were angry that the Bolsheviks repudiated (refused to pay) their debts to allies.

Minorities - Many regions took the opportunity to declare their independence (ex. Ukraine, Finland, Georgia) and they were willing to fight the Red Army.
Opposition forces were collectively known as the **WHITES**

The **REDS** (Bolsheviks) fought for their political survival and to bring rebellious regions back into the “Union of Soviet Socialist Republics” (USSR).
The Course of the War

- The war was going very poorly for the Bolsheviks – in 1919 Lenin was forced to move the capital city to Moscow because it appeared Petrograd may fall to the Whites.
- Fearing that they served as a rallying point for the Whites, the Reds murdered the royal family in Ekaterinburg in 1918.
- There were atrocities committed on both sides.
Photograph of Red Army soldier about to be executed by members of the White Army
Why did the Bolsheviks Win the Civil War?

1) Trotsky’s Leadership
   • He did not have a lot of military training but he was highly organized and understood how to lead men.
   • He was brutally efficient – promoted the successful and punished the un-successful.
   • He made use of ex-Czarist officers for their experience (Stalin opposed this).

2) Geography
   • The Bolsheviks controlled the centre of Russia and had access to better and shorter rail lines.
3) **White Armies were Divided**
   - Too many groups and leaders only united by their hatred of the Bolsheviks. Not enough coordination.
   - Peasants feared they would lose their land if the whites won. They refused to fight on either side.

4) **Withdrawal of Foreign Troops**
   - After the end of WW1 and the signing of the Paris Peace Treaties most of the foreign countries fighting in Russia lost interest or could not afford to fight the Bolsheviks.

   - The Bolsheviks won the war, maintained power, and reincorporated some areas into the USSR that had declared their independence (ex. Ukraine, Georgia).
Kronstadt Rebellion (Feb. - Mar. 1921)

- The Bolsheviks had won the civil war but still faced opposition within Russia.

- Sailors sparked a large protest of civilians who demanded free elections, freedoms, and increased bread rations (end to war communism)

- Revolt was put down but the message was made clear.
The New Economic Policy (NEP)

- Lenin decided to compromise some of his communist ideals to save the country.
- War communism was abandoned – some elements of capitalism were re-introduced:
  - Large industries and foreign trade were still controlled by the government (the “commanding heights”) but smaller shops and factories could be privately owned.
  - Peasants now paid only a percentage of their crops as a tax – the rest they could sell for extra income or consume.
  - Private trade within Russia and currency were re-introduced. Only the most basic goods (milk, bread) were now provided by the State.
Results

- The NEP was successful in improving and stabilizing the economy by 1924-25.
- It led to the creation of a more productive and wealthier class of peasants called the Kulaks. Also a small class of industrialists.
- Led to controversy – “pure communists” saw this system as creating a new class system and wanted to get rid of it. Others saw it as necessary.
- This creates “factions” within the party that disagree on issues.
- When Lenin died in 1924 these factions would struggle for power.