The Commune State in Moscow in 1918

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The first months of Soviet power raise important questions about the ideology of the transition to socialism and about the nature of Bolshevik power. The destruction of the old state apparatus was accompanied by vigorous institution building; the "red guard attack against capital" was balanced by the emergence of potentially powerful Soviet economic apparatus. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed in March 1918 was followed by a period of state capitalism in which a strong socialist state was to supervise elements of capitalism in the economy. All stages were accompanied by vigorous debate within the party and, from March 1918, by the political alienation of a section of the working class. By the onset of full-scale civil war and the transition to war communism in late spring 1918 the Bolshevik party and the institutions of the new Soviet state dominated the political life of the country. Was there something in Marxist ideology that, when interpreted by Lenin and the Bolsheviks, encouraged centralized and *dirigiste* forms of government regardless of actual conditions? A large body of literature now exists that examines this issue from various perspectives. This literature has recently been enriched by a number of studies that look at events from the perspective of lower-level participants and area case studies.[1] This article will focus on the interaction between the ideological convictions of the Bolshevik leadership and the practical difficulties facing the regime in molding the new revolutionary order.

On coming to power in October 1917 the Bolsheviks had two contrasting approaches to state organization. The first drew on the experience of the Paris Commune, created by a revolt of the Paris working class at the end of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871. In *The Civil War in France* Marx had stressed the commune state as a model of a decentralized and participatory workers' democracy that would transcend the limitations of the bourgeois system of government.[2] The second approach was outlined by Marx in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme* in which he spoke of a lower phase of socialism following the revolution. This "political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat" would be a period of unrestrained political authority designed to destroy bourgeois opposition. Only after the completion of this task would the state be destined, as Engels put it, to "wither away." Marx

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1. William G. Rosenberg, "Russian Labor and Bolshevik Power after October," *Slavic Review* 44 (Summer 1985): 213–238; S. A. Smith, *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); David Mandel, *Petrograd Workers and the Soviet Seizure of Power* (London: Macmillan, 1984); Donald J. Raleigh, *Revolution on the Volga: 1917 in Saratov* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986); Diane Koenker, *Moscow Workers and the 1917 Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981); Richard Sakwa, *Soviet Communists in Power: A Study of Moscow during the Civil War, 1918–21* (London: Macmillan, 1987).

In this article all dates up to and including 31 January 1918 are according to the Old Style calendar. Following a jump of thirteen days all dates from 14 February are New Style.

2. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1968), pp. 293–295.

himself a decade later disparaged the significance of the Paris Commune of 1871 as a model for the political organization of the new society.[3] In his *State and Revolution*, written in August and September 1917, however, Lenin took up Marx's radical critique of the modern representative state and proposed that the commune, now identified with the soviets, represented the beginning of the self-management of society by workers and was the first step towards transcending not only the capitalist state but all state forms.[4] The division between state and society would be transcended as the "talking shop" politics of parliamentarianism was replaced by the extension of democracy through the recall of deputies, the "imperative mandate," and the organization of an authority that would be "a working, not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time."[5] Lenin's *State and Revolution* was powerful precisely because it offered the possibility that the transitional state would already contain some of the elements of statelessness.[6] The vanguard party, considered the characteristic feature of Lenin's political thinking since his *What is to be Done?* of 1902, barely merits a reference in the later work. By focusing on the soviets as the kernel of the new system the pamphlet represented a major attempt (largely missing in Marx's work, which concentrated on the social implications of capitalism) to discuss "the institutions of an emancipated society."[7] It rejected the notion of Karl Kautsky and the socialists of the Second International that the bourgeois state could be taken over wholesale and used by the new revolutionary authorities for their own purposes. The old state would have to be smashed and in its place a unitary government with a single source of popular revolutionary authority would rule.

The general tasks of the new state were clear: the destruction of the political power of the bourgeoisie and the neutralization of their economic power and the construction of a new society on the basis of a collectively organized economy. The political forms of the state in the transitional period are less clear and tend to merge with the generalities of the commune state. Marx's centralized economic model of socialism stood in stark contrast to the vision of decentralized political authority.[8] This discrepancy is present in *State and Revolution*, but the emphasis was placed on the radical attributes of the political model. The crucial role of the state in economic organization, however, is given more prominence in Lenin's

3. Ibid., p. 331. In a 22 Feburary 1881 letter to the Dutch socialist Domela-Nieuwenhuis, Marx wrote that the Paris Commune was "merely the rising of a town under exceptional circumstances" and that "the majority of the Commune was in no sense socialist, nor could it be," Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow: Progress, 1965), p. 338. See Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Two Marxisms: Contradictions and Anomalies in the Development of Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1980), pp. 350–351. In the 1891 preface to the *Civil War in France* Engels argued, "Do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat."

4. See Lucio Colletti, *From Rousseau to Lenin: Studies in Ideology and Society* (London: Monthly Review, 1972), p. 224.

5. V. I. Lenin, "State and Revolution," *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii (PSS)*, 5th ed. (Moscow) 3:46.

6. Compare Colletti, *From Rousseau to Lenin*, p. 224, and R. C. Tucker, "Marx as a Political Theorist," in *Marx's Socialism*, ed. Shlomo Avineri (New York: Lieber-Atherton, 1973), pp. 139–145.

7. A. J. Polan, *Lenin and the End of Politics* (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 6.

8. Compare Radoslav Selucky's argument that Marx's economic model of socialism was highly centralized, whereas the political model was highly decentralized, in *Marxism, Socialism, Freedom: Towards a General Democratic Theory of Labour-Managed Systems* (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 73.

articles written soon afterwards during the revolution.[9] In the chaotic conditions of late 1917, however, the development of direct democracy and decentralization, in both the political and economic spheres, was not so much a policy implemented by the Bolshevik party as one that emerged largely regardless of its wishes and out of circumstances. The institutions of the dictatorship of the proletariat were only consolidated by June 1918. The practical implementation of commune ideas before then has given rise to a highly idealized if barely credible vision of a golden age of Bolshevism that came to an end in spring 1918.[10] The brief flowering of the commune state, with the genuine emergence of a form of workers' democracy in the soviets and in the workplace, is held, in this version, gradually to give way from March 1918 to the more centralized forms associated with the dictatorship of the proletariat under the effect of economic dislocation, hunger, and war. One aspect of this change was greater reliance on the leading role of the Communist party.[11] Lenin's idea of state capitalism in April and May 1918 combined his thinking, in *State and Revolution*, of socialism as extended administration, which envisaged postrevolutionary politics being reduced to the functional equivalent of running a postal service, with his greater emphasis on centralization during the revolution. This view was grafted on to his idea of the centralized war economy of Germany as a model of centralized power working with consolidated trusts in a form of state capitalism.[12] Hence, the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the political sphere and the practice of state capitalism in economic life combined to undermine worker self-management in politics and industry. The change prompted the Left Communists, the group of radical Bolsheviks opposed to the signing of the onerous Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, to criticize Lenin's economic policies between March and June 1918.

This article will argue that the political and economic development of the revolution had a logic that derived from the ideological preferences of the Bolsheviks; that the democracy and decentralization of the first period was ambiguous and was undermined in political institutions and at the workplace through a combination of Bolshevik ideological tendencies and circumstances; that this process was substantially complete by June 1918; and finally that the political ideas of the commune state, especially the emphasis on "the positive abolition of parliamentary democracy" in favor of direct democracy, contained major contradictions which themselves affected the conduct of Soviet politics.[13]

Contrary to expectations the idea of the commune state encouraged the growth of a bureaucratic administrative state apparatus against which not only the workers' movement but also all of civil society stood defenseless. If the French Revolution swept away the guilds and feudal devices in society, the Bolshevik

9. *Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power* and *The Impending Catastrophe and How to Fight It.* See Rolf H. W. Theen, "Party and Bureaucracy" in *The Soviet Polity in the Modern Era*, ed. Erik P. Hoffmann and Robin F. Laird (New York: Aldine, 1984), pp. 139–141.

10. M. Raptis, *Socialism, Democracy and Self-Management: Political Essays.* (London: Alison and Busby, 1980), p. 187.

11. For the shift in Lenin's thought in this period from commune forms to the dictatorship of the proletariat, see Neil Harding, *Lenin's Political Thought*, vol. 2, *Theory and Practice in the Socialist Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 196.

12. Thomas F. Remington, *Building Socialism in Bolshevik Russia: Ideology and Industrial Organization, 1917–1921* (Pittsburgh, Penn.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984), pp. 16–17.

13. Polan, *Lenin and the End of Politics*, p. 159, and passim; compare Ferenc Feher, "The French Revolutions as Models for Marx's Concept of Politics," *Thesis Eleven* 8 (January 1984): 73.

Revolution went further and realized the ideal of an untrammelled class sovereignty, the dictatorship of the proletariat, buttressed by the commune emphasis on unity between state and society. The commune idea was flawed in several respects. First, Lenin vastly underrated the problem of administration and bureaucracy in industrial societies. It was not so easy to replace "government over persons" with the "administration of things and the direction of production processes," and, when reality failed to meet his expectations, scapegoats had to be found.[14] The commune state was prone to centralization and bureaucratization. Second, Lenin's concept of the postrevolutionary state contained no mechanism to integrate the political activity of the public sphere with the structures of the commune state. While public participation was constantly invoked, the theory of unitary political processes hastened the descent of "participation into mobilization" as contestatory politics gave way to expanded administration. Third, the experience of the first few months of Bolshevik power once again confirmed for Lenin and the Bolsheviks the fact that a more tangible organizational form, the Communist party, was required to give meaning to the bureaucratic mechanism and to channel popular participation. Instead of power being reabsorbed by society it was concentrated in the state and the party.[15] The practice of revolutionary democracy denied a role for competing groups but placed few limits on the powers of revolutionary sovereignty. Hence, the commune idea, as interpreted by Lenin in *State and Revolution*, had profoundly authoritarian implications.

All this took place against the background of profound changes in the city of Moscow. From October 1917 military orders dried up and the factories supplying the war effort had to find new customers. From late 1917 the energy crisis was compounded by intensified food shortages that brought the city to the verge of starvation in spring 1918.[16] The city was separated from the grain-producing regions by the Germans in the Ukraine, by Krasnov on the Don, and by the Dutov groups in Central Asia. With the Czech revolt in May 1918, supplies from the Volga region were halted. Even in the areas closest to Moscow the peasants were reluctant to give up their grain without adequate compensation. The market price of such a staple as rye bread increased by nearly seventy-one times in the year from July 1917, whereas in the first half of 1918 wages barely doubled. Productivity fell dramatically, and betwen 1917 and 1918 the value of gross production in the city nearly halved, the greatest decline of any single year between 1913 and 1920. The exodus from the city, begun in 1917, continued, and between September 1917 and August 1918 Moscow lost nearly 150,000 people, or 10 percent of the population. The decline in Moscow's industrial working class was much steeper as numbers fell by nearly a quarter.[17] The number of workers in

14. Polan, *Lenin and the End of Politics*, p. 78.

15. J. E. S. Haywood and R. N. Berki, eds., *State and Society in Contemporary Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), p. 12.

16. The plan for supplying the city was fulfilled in January 1918 by only 7.1 percent, in February, by 16 percent, in April by 6.1 percent, and in May by only 5.7 percent; *Istoriia velikoi oktiabr'skoi sotsialisticheskoi revoliutsii* (Moscow, 1962), p. 436. According to another source the city received only 341 wagons of grain instead of 2,205 (15.5 percent) in April, 684 instead of 2,001 (34.9 percent) in May; *Istoriia rabochikh Moskvy, 1917–1945 gg.* (Moscow, 1983), p. 78.

17. *Biulleten' statistiki truda Moskovskoi gubernii*, MGSPS, 5–6 March–April 1921), pp. 4–5; *Statisticheskii ezhegodnik g. Moskvy i Moskovskoi gubernii*, issue 2, 1914–25 (Moscow, 1927), p. 172 (on p. 171 the decline in the Moscow working class is given as going from 205,919 in 1917 to 155,026

the industrial Butyrskii *raion*, for instance, plummeted from 20,000 in October 1917 to 5,000 in April 1918, and the metal and textile industries lost more than half of their workers.[18] Economic dislocation, unemployment, food shortages, and absorption in the state apparatus all took their toll of the working class. The drain was compounded by increasing military demands for manpower, beginning with the so-called revolutionary detachments, whose formation intensified after March 1918 when "The majority of workers did not accept the position taken by the Soviet government at Brest and enthusiastically joined the voluntary detachments."[19]

The transfer of the Soviet government from Petrograd to Moscow in March 1918 had a profound effect on the political culture of the new capital. Lenin's personal presence meant that he could take an active role in directing the affairs of the city. He spoke frequently at the Moscow Soviet, workers' conferences, and party gatherings. He addressed 140 meetings in Moscow and its environs between March and July 1918.[20] Lenin was accompanied by a phalanx of leading party figures, such as the party organizer Ia. M. Sverdlov. Moscow and its party committee came under the direct supervision of the party leadership and the Central Committee. Above all, after two hundred years Mosow had once again become the capital of the country, a fact of great symbolic significance. The city's working class became the proxy for the whole country's workers; their moods were closely monitored and special efforts were made to ensure them adequate supplies. Soviet power would ultimately stand or fall in the capital.

Following the revolution of February 1917 a whole range of new institutions, ranging from *raion* dumas (borough councils) to soviets and factory committees, emerged in Moscow as part of the extraordinary effervescence of revolutionary democracy. Gradually, however, after the Bolsheviks came to power in October 1917, the turbulence became stilled and the soviets became the dominant institution of municipal government. Despite the slogan of "all power to the soviets," the process was neither inevitable nor a foregone conclusion. On 25 October 1917 the Bolshevik P. G. Smidovich presided over a joint session of the Moscow workers' and soldiers' soviets and argued that power would be transferred to the soviets. He conceded that "we cannot say with certainty what form this will take" and insisted that "at the end of this session we must reach unanimous agreement on a plan . . . in which we can all participate for the creation of a body which will guarantee order and tranquility during our lives here in Moscow."[21] In contrast to Lenin, he extended his hand to other parties and sought a peaceful solution to the transfer of power. The Military Revolutionary Committee formed to transfer power to the soviets initially contained Mensheviks. The absence of a clear-cut short-term program was reflected in the vacillations of the local leaders during the ten days of "civil war" on the streets of the city. Even at the height of

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in August 1918, including those in idle enterprises); *Statisticheskii spravochnik g. Moskvy i Moskovskoi gubernii 1927g.* (Moscow, 1928), pp. 12–13.

18. *Pravda*, 6 April 1918. In 1917 there were 84,347 workers in the textile industry and 49,209 in the metal industry (*Statisticheskii ezhegodnik*, p. 198), whereas in August 1918 there were 40,373 and 23,285, *Krasnaia Moskva: sbornik statei* no. 31 (Moscow, 1920), col. 177.

19. *Put' k oktiabriu*, issue 3 (Moscow, 1923), p. 119.

20. Iu. S. Savel'ev, *V pervyi god velikogo oktiabria* (Moscow, 1985), p. 109.

21. *Izvestiia Moskovskogo soveta rabochikh deputatov*, 26 October 1917.

the battles on 31 October G. A. Usievich, one of the militants on the Bolshevik Moscow party committee, drew up a list of organizations that could form a provisional committee of a socialist government without capitalists.[22] He admitted that all power did not automatically belong to the soviets and played down the role of the Bolshevik party. Surveying Moscow on the day of their victory on 2 November 1917 local Bolshevik leaders had a clear idea neither of the forms that their power would take nor of the speed or scale of the political and economic transformation that would accompany their revolution.[23]

The debate over how the new institutions would reflect the changed balance of power continued in the weeks following the revolution. The bitterness of the discussion revealed the depths of the divisions within the Bolshevik party. The question concerned the immediate aims of power as much as its actual organization. Several of the leaders of the Moscow Party Organization were the most consistent in their support for some form of socialist coalition government. Two, V. P. Nogin and I. A. Rykov, resigned from their posts in support of coalition government.[24] They recognized the dangerous political implications of a government dominated by Bolsheviks alone. The debate acknowledged that the way that power had been achieved during the revolution—by armed action led by the Military Revolutionary Committee—was not necessarily the form in which to institutionalize that power. At issue was the question of whether there was a role for a "third force" of moderate socialists and nonsoviet institutions in postbourgeois Russian politics. Moscow's social balance and political complexion made it the place where the possibility was greatest and the idea taken to the limit. The Moscow moderates saw no contradiction between soviet power and one, to use the contemporary expression, that contained all of "democracy." Even the radicals, ensconced in the party's Moscow Oblast Bureau, serving Russia's Central Industrial Region, could envisage a role for bodies beyond the soviets as long as the Bolsheviks were assured of hegemony within the coalition.[25] The moderates were disturbed by Lenin's radical formulations about the new type of state power but even more so by the implications for the conduct of politics in the socialist society. Lenin once again had to wage a struggle to educate his own party, this time on the October program of power, which envisaged the radical destruction

22. *Podgotovka i pobeda oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii v Moskve: dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow, 1957), p. 442. The list included representatives from the dumas and *zemstvos*, the bodies they had been fighting for a week, and the rail union's committee *Vikzhel*, for a total of seventeen people of whom only ten would be Bolsheviks.

23. Boris Dvinov, *Moskovskii sovet rabochikh deputatov, 1917–22: vospominaniia* (New York: Inter-University Project on the History of the Menshevik Movement, 1961), p. 58. Bolshevik deputies to the Moscow Soviet "had no idea of what should follow the victory and the realization of the slogan 'all power to the soviet.'"

24. *The Bolsheviks and the October Revolution: Minutes of the Central Committee of the RSDLP(b), August 1917–February 1918*, trans. Ann Bone (London: Pluto, 1974), pp. 140–142.

25. The organization of power in Moscow was discussed at the 4 November 1917 joint meeting of the Moscow party committee, the Moscow Oblast Bureau, the *gubernia* committee, and the Bolshevik faction of the Moscow Workers' Soviet. I. A. Piatnitskii, secretary of the first of these groups, proposed "the formation of a democratic government composed of all the socialist parties." Although it gained support, the proposal was rejected and a resolution passed in support of the party Central Committee's line of all power to the soviets. Nevertheless, it was still conceded that power could include representatives of some nonsoviet organizations, such as the socialist part of the *zemstvo* organizations and municipal government; *Triumfal'noe shestvie sovetskoi vlasti: dokumenty i materialy*, part I (Moscow, 1963), pp. 327, 337.

of the old state institutions and the creation of a new state centered on the soviets. The commune concept provided Lenin with ready-made constitutional precepts but it left unanswered many vital questions over the role of the Bolshevik party and the structure of power within the soviets. The coalition debate was only resolved in Moscow after a bitter debate that rumbled on into the new year.

In practice elements of institutional coalition survived into spring 1918 as the plethora of municipal bodies developed in 1917 struggled to survive. The city duma maintained a resolute hostility to the new regime and was dispersed on 6 November 1917; the designated new elections never took place. Duma members gave active support to the strike committee formed to oppose the seizure of power.[26] The management of municipal affairs was not transferred to the Moscow Soviet, which still lacked the necessary administrative resources, but to a body called the Bureau of Raion Dumas,[27] which had been hastily formed on 8 November. Its creation was a practical recognition of the limitations of the slogan of all power to the soviets. In the *raions* the main work of local administration was conducted not by the *raion* soviets but by the *raion* dumas, of which all but six of the seventeen had been in Bolshevik hands since the elections of 25 September 1917. The eleven *raion* soviets were constituted more as the local organizations of workers' control than as municipal authorities. A large proportion of workers elected to a factory committee automatically represented the enterprise in the *raion* soviet.[28] This fact probably explains the radicalism of the *raion* soviets for most of 1917. Organized in this way they united the political and economic aspirations of the revolution at the local level. The division between politics, embodied in the Moscow soviets, and adminstration, in the bureau and the *raion* dumas themselves, reproduced a form of dual power within the Soviet state, an unsatisfactory state of affairs for two reasons: Ideologically, the commune idea stressed the fusion of executive and legislative functions with direct administration and, practically, the actual arrangement made it difficult to demarcate functions and duplicated resources. The duma bureau and the *raion* dumas became increasingly redundant as the soviets developed their own administrative departments. The dumas were abolished in spring 1918 and both administrative and political power were concentrated in the hands of the soviets.[29] At that time institutional coalition disappeared in the city.

The consequences of fusing executive and legislative power quickly became apparent in the Moscow Soviet itself. The contradictory impulses for centralization and self-management were vividly manifested in its internal development. In Moscow, in contrast to Petrograd, the workers' and soldiers' soviets maintained separate identities from their foundation in February 1917. By October 1917 the

26. M. F. Vladimirskii, "Moskovskie raionnye dumy i sovet raionnykh dum v 1917–18 gg.," *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia* 8 (20) (1925): 83, 88.

27. N. M. Aleshchenko, *Osushchestvlenie Leninskikh ukazanii v period stanovleniia sovetskoi vlasti v Moskve (metodicheskii material dlia lektorov i propagandistov)* (Moscow, 1968), pp. 12, 19.

28. *Oktiabr'skaia revoliutsiia i fabzavkomy: materialy po istorii fabrichno-zavodskikh komitetov*, part 1 (Moscow, 1927), p. 16.

29. *Krasnaia Presnia v 1905–17 gg.* (Moscow, 1930), p. 44. Already in January 1918 one of the six *raion* dumas not in Bolshevik hands, Alekseevskii, where the Kadets were dominant, had allegedly set on the path of "sabotage." On 11 January the duma was dissolved and its assets were transferred to Alekseevsko-Rostokinskii *raion* soviet; G. S. Ignat'ev, *Moskva v pervyi god proletarskoi diktatury* (Moscow, 1975), p. 47.

Bolsheviks dominated in the Workers' Soviet, but the Socialist-Revolutionaries kept their hold on the Soldiers' Soviet until new elections held a few days after the revolution. Despite the opposition of the Mensheviks, who argued that the soldiers required separate representation,[30] the two soviets were united on 14 November 1917. Menshevik misgivings about the new institutional structure were further aroused by the creation of a powerful presidium to head the joint soviet. Their fears that this body would take power away from the floor of the assembly were almost immediately realized as the presidium inherited the extraordinary powers of the Military Revolutionary Committee. Each department was controlled by a committee, called a collegium, but with the presidium in almost continuous session even the most minor of departmental questions had to be referred to it for approval.[31] The Moscow Soviet Presidium, much more than the Moscow Party Committee, dominated the institutional life of the city in the first months after the revolution. Following the April 1918 Moscow Soviet elections attempts to "deconcentrate" the soviet, by relieving the presidium of some of its everyday duties and increasing the powers of the seventeen departments, were unsuccessful.[32] During the civil war the collegia themselves were abolished and replaced by one-person management. Their abolition only formalized a balance of power established before the war. The structures established in November 1917, against the warnings of the Bolshevik coalitionists and moderate socialists, engendered the concentration of institutional power. Shortly after its establishment the presidium, and with it the executive committee (*ispolkom*), dominated the soviet to an extent that suffocated both the plenum and the collegia. The commune model's insistence on fusing executive and legislative functions within one body allowed power to move from the plenum to ever smaller groups at the apex of the soviet's structure.[33]

As the institutional boundaries of the postrevolutionary settlement contracted, political life focused more on the remaining institutions. In the absence of other major local political forums the Moscow Soviet, after October 1919, became the site of intensified political conflict and took on a national role after the transfer of the government from Petrograd to Moscow in March 1918. The headquarters of all political parties moved to Moscow at that time, raising the political temperature. The nonsocialist parties and the rightwing of the Socialist Revolutionaries, their press closed down after November 1917, lost the ability to intervene effectively in politics, other than by helping organize the strike of civil functionaries. From December 1917 the left wing of the Socialist Revolutionaries (constituted as a separate party in late November), despite policy difference, joined in formal coalition with the Bolsheviks.[34] After the local Mosocw security

30. *Triumfal'noe shestvie*, pp. 331–335.

31. The presidium was in almost continuous session, meeting 123 times between November 1917 and March 1918 (*Krasnaia Moskva*, col 32), and thirty times in the last two weeks of November 1917 (Aleshchenko, *Osushchestvlenie Leninskikh ukazanii*, p. 27).

32. *Krasnaia Moskva*, col. 34.

33. Marc Ferro argues that the process had already begun in 1917; see "The Birth of the Soviet Bureaucratic System" in *Reconsiderations on the Russian Revolutions*, ed. R. Carter Elwood (Cambridge, Mass.: Slavica, 1976), pp. 113–120. Compare Roi Medvedev, *On Socialist Democracy* (London: Spokesman, 1975), 140–141.

34. Raleigh, *Revolution on the Volga*, p. 319, stresses the importance of the Left Socialist Revolutionaries joining Lenin's government (together with the effect of "skin deep" Bolshevized soldiers returning from the front) in consolidating the new political regime in the provinces.

police (Cheka) were incorporated with the national body in March 1918, the first to feel the new intolerant atmosphere were the vigorous anarchist groupings, who had contributed much to the growing banditry in the city. The Mensheviks were left to lead the opposition to the Bolsheviks. Between November 1917 and June 1918 Menshevik press articles and declarations are an extraordinary commentary on the first months of Bolshevik rule. While the complete accuracy of their statements is perhaps not always assured, they are the best non-Bolshevik mirror to the events of this period. In an important declaration of 28 April 1918, they denounced Bolshevik chicanery in the recent elections to the Moscow Soviet. The Bolsheviks had returned 56.5 percent of the deputies, compared to 32.8 percent in June 1917. The Mensheviks received 9.9 percent of the 1918 Moscow results, compared to 31.6 percent in June 1917 but enjoyed victories in all the provincial capitals of European Russia in spring 1918. The Bolshevik victory was assisted by the Bolshevik Central Committee, and Lenin had personally launched a vigorous campaign to assist the local Bolsheviks.[35]

The central, and as yet unresolved, question was whether there was a role for political opposition in a state of the commune type.[36] In his memoirs one of the members of the Menshevik faction at this time, Boris Dvinov, argued that "power, from the very first, wavered between complete party dictatorship and 'proletarian freedom.'"[37] Wavering over this issue was evident in the reluctance of the local Bolshevik leaders, such as L. B. Kamenev, to expel the Mensheviks altogether from the Moscow Soviet, as stipulated by the 14 June 1918 Central Executive Committee resolution. The Moscow Bolsheviks limited themselves to expelling the Mensheviks from the soviet's *ispolkom*.[38] A residual sense that party politics should continue remained, but, with the expulsion of the Left Socialist Revolutionaries from the soviet following their abortive "uprising" in Moscow in July 1918, opposition was reduced to carping from the floor of the assembly. Not only the Mensheviks, but also the moderate Bolsheviks, as represented by the "waverers" and coalitionists, were defeated by Lenin's commune concept of revolutionary authority.

The old state's political apparatus was "smashed," but in its place a new bureaucratic and centralized system emerged with extraordinary rapidity. After the transfer of government to Moscow in March 1918 it continued to expand, especially after merging with the Moscow oblast commissariats.[39] As the functions of the state expanded so did the bureaucracy, and by August 1918 nearly a third of Moscow's working population were employed in offices.[40] The great increase in the number of employees (*sluzhashchie*) took place in early to mid-1918 and,

35. *Moskovskii sovet za desiat' let raboty* (Moscow, 1927), pp. 78–79; *Krasnaia Moskva*, cols. 39–48; Vladimir Brovkin, "The Mensheviks' Political Comeback: The Elections to the Provincial City Soviets in Spring 1918," *Russian Review* 42 (1983): 1–50; Savel'ev, *V pervyi*, p. 110.

36. See David W. Lovell, *From Marx to Lenin: An Evaluation of Marx's Responsibility for Soviet Authoritarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

37. Dvinov, *Moskovskii sovet rabochikh deputatov*, pp. 64, 62, 152.

38. Ibid., p. 67.

39. A. M. Anikst, *Vospominanila o Lenine* (Moscow, 1933), p. 8.

40. By that date 147,134 were employed in state institutions and 83,886 in local; *Statisticheskii ezhegodnik*, pp. 46–47, a total of 231,000 (13.7 percent of the total adult population and 29.6 percent of the independent population of 846,095). *Krasnaia Moskva*, col. 167; M. Ia. Vydro, *Naselenie Moskvy* (Moscow, 1976), p. 39.

thereafter, despite many campaigns to reduce their number, they remained a steady proportion of the falling population. The old city council (*uprava*) had employed about 40,000 people before October 1917, but by August 1918 the number of municipal workers had doubled to more than 80,000, and it remained at this level for the rest of the war.[41] At first the problem was dismissed by arguments that the impressive participation of the working class in state structures was evidence that there was no "bureaucratism" in the bureaucracy. According to the industrial census of 31 August 1918, out of 123,578 workers in Moscow only 4,191 (3.4 percent) were involved in some sort of public organization.[42] In the major plants the proportion was much higher. In the Mikhel'son plant, for instance, by early autumn 1918 only 350 workers remained out of the 1,800 from earlier that year; the rest were involved in soviet or political work.[43] Class composition is a dubious criterion of the level of bureaucratism. Working-class participation in state structures did not ensure an organization against bureaucratism, and this was nowhere more true than in the new organizations that regulated the economic life of the country.[44] The commune ideal of the reintegration of person and citizen, state and society was achieved, though not to the advantage of society but to that of a bloated bureaucratic state. The Left Communists' demands for genuine working-class power were in part a recognition of this unexpected turn of events.[45]

Nowhere were the overlapping jurisdictions and confused competencies of the first period of Bolshevik power more vividly illustrated than in the formation of the Moscow Oblast Council of People's Commissars in early 1918. This council was essentially the national Sovnarkom writ small (it even had its own foreign affairs commissariat) to cover the oblast and the city of Moscow. Its functions duplicated that of the city soviet, much to the latter's chagrin, and it did not fit into any neat system of democratic centralism (just as the national Sovnarkom failed to do). Oblast organizations like this council of commissars, and the equivalent party and soviet groups, defined the aspirations of the regions to autonomy and marked a major flowering of the decentralizing impulse within the commune idea. As Rigby puts it, the Moscow Oblast Council of People's Commissars was an expression of "autarkic tendencies and a distinctive local style of rule."[46] After a long struggle it was, in May 1918, the first of these oblast organizations to be abolished when regionalism (*oblastnichestvo*) was condemned. There were solid

41. *Kommunisticheskii trud*, 5 May 1920. Some of the numerical increase was perhaps due to the inclusion of categories, such as teachers and nurses, previously not counted as local administrative workers, but the upward trend at a time of falling population is clear.

42. D. A. Chugaev, ed., *Rabochii klass Sovetskoi Rossii v pervyi god diktatury proletariata: sbornik dokumentov i materialov* (Mosow, 1965), doc. no. 52.

43. *Kommunar*, 18 October 1918.

44. A survey of the 460 employees of Moscow Oblast Council of the Economy found that out of 383 technical personnel, 180 had previously worked for bourgeois economic bodies. Only 7 (1.8 percent) were Communists, and of the whole 460 only 25 (5.4 percent) were Communists. All 77 of the council's leading workers had earlier worked in various soviet organizations and in the workers' groups of bourgeois organs, and 18 (23.4 percent) of them were party members; V. Z. Drobizhev, "Obrazovanie sovetov narodnogo khoziaistva v Moskovskom promyshlennom raione (1917–1918 gg.)," in *Iz istorii velikoi oktiabr'skoi sotsialisticheskoi revoliutsii* (Moscow, 1957), pp. 107–108.

45. *Kommunist* I (20 April 1918): 9.

46. T. H. Rigby, *Lenin's Government: Sovnarkom 1917–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 58.

administrative reasons for eliminating intermediary bodies between the center and the localities, and in any case Lenin had never envisaged Russia being transformed into a federation of self-governing communes. Nevertheless, the abolition of the regional party, economic, and soviet tiers in late 1918 and early 1919 only confirmed a trend established before the onset of civil war. By mid-1918 the structural roots of a bureaucratic state had taken a strong hold as coalition forms were excluded and political and administrative power became centralized within local soviets and at the national level. On this secure foundation largely sheltered from social forces the Bolsheviks built their power.

If the institutional revolution in municipal administration after October 1917 combined unitary authority with elements of decentralization and rule by collegia, the theoretical emphasis on the economic level was more unequivocally on greater centralization. Prerevolutionary Marxist or Bolshevik ideology offered little support for the decentralization of economic organization and, as the economic crisis intensified from late 1917, the factory committees, the beneficiaries of the first weeks of Bolshevik power, themselves called for greater central guidance and nationalization.[47] The initial five-cornered compromise between the direct expression of workers' management (factory committees), the capitalist owners, the economic departments of local soviets, the trade unions, and the state regulatory organizations was gradually resolved in favor of the last. The profound economic and social crisis, which in its first stages had encouraged autonomous working-class organization, ultimately worked to destroy it. Changes in the size and composition of the Moscow working class weakened the factories as the site of revolutionary activity. A 1 August 1918 resolution of the Guzhon metallurgical plant, for instance, held that before "only workers were employed in the plant, but now things have changed completely. The best comrades have either died . . . or gone to the front. . . . We must turn the comrades away from the speculationist temper that has seized them."[48] War and hunger had weakened working-class differentiation in favor of stratification based on administrative criteria.

The "red guard" onslaught against capitalists and capitalist relations in industry was conducted against this background. Implicit in the government decree on workers' control of 14 November 1917 was the notion of state control over the organs of workers' control. The enterprise control bodies were to be supervised in one way or another by the local soviets of workers' control directly subordinated to the soviets of workers' deputies and not to the trade unions.[49] The instruction on workers' control adopted by the economic department of the Moscow Soviet in late November 1917, however, provided a more limited view of the functions of workers' control, largely restricted to stocktaking with no mention of financial control.[50] It forbade control and economic commissions to

47. Rosenberg, "Russian Labor and Bolshevik Power," pp. 220–222; compare Smith, *Red Petrograd*; Mandel, *Petrograd Workers and the Soviet Seizure of Power.*

48. *Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii*, TsGAOR 7952/3/212/217.

49. *Uprochenie sovetskoi vlasti v Moskve i Moskovskoi gubernii: dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow, 1958), p. 168. The short-lived soviet of workers' control of the Central Industrial Region, formed toward the end of 1917, was considered subordinate to the Moscow Soviet, E. M. Al'perovich, "Ot rabochego kontrolia k pervym shagam promyshlennogo stroitel'stva," in *Ocherki po istorii oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii v Moskve* (Moscow, 1927), p. 148.

50. Aleshchenko, *Osushchestvlenie Leninskikh ukazanii*, p. 41.

interfere in the management of enterprises and subordinated the organs of workers' control to the trade unions, not to the workers' soviets as envisaged in the government decree. What was intended to be a more limited interpretation of workers' control in fact gave greater authority to the trade unions (which themselves were being integrated into the new apparatus of power) and deprived the soviets of direct authority. This restricted view clearly coincided with that of the Mensheviks, who were closely involved in drafting the Moscow instruction.[51]

From the outset the state tried to regulate the pace and scale of the economic revolution. For this purpose an economic apparatus separate from the soviets was developed. The Moscow Raion Economic Committee, formed in December 1917, included Mensheviks and representatives of capitalist industry. It signified the retention of coalition policies in the local economic sphere and prefigured the compromise of the state capitalist period. Its subsequent abolition and the creation in its place of the Moscow Oblast Council of the Economy (MOSNKh) at the Second Oblast Economic Conference (20–25 May 1918) signaled the end of compromise in practice. The Moscow Soviet's own economic department gave up a large part of its powers to the newly constituted body,[52] though up to early 1919 the economic councils were subordinate in theory not only to the Supreme Economic Council (VSNKh) but also to local soviets.

In practice, the November 1917 Moscow instruction on workers' control was implemented in a more radical form, especially in the metal plants, than had been initially envisaged.[53] Even before the nationalization decree of 28 June 1918 many Moscow enterprises had already been nationalized usually at the initiative of the workers themselves since the economic bodies were loath to take on additional financial burdens. The exact number of enterprises taken on has been disputed, but the usual figure of 200, or one-fifth of all the census enterprises in the city, is exaggerated. By June 1918, 23 enterprises were directly under the control of MOSNKh and another 14 under some form of state supervision, for a total of 37 of the largest enterprises.[54] All the others were under the previous managements supervised by control commissions selected by factory committees.

By spring 1918 the general principles of economic management and of the labor process for the nationalized economy had already emerged. The dramatic decline in labor productivity, for example, encouraged attempts to link wages to productivity through work norms and piece rates.[55] The new labor process emphasized strict labor discipline, opposition to the equalization of wages, the

51. V. Z. Drobizhev, "Bor'ba russkoi burzhuazii protiv natsionalizatsii," *Istoricheskie zapiski* 68 (Moscow, 1961), p. 37.

52. N. M. Aleshchenko, "Moskovskii sovet v 1918–1920 gg.," *Istoricheskie zapiski* 91 (1973), p. 94.

53. *Uprochenie*, pp. 90, 91.

54. The figure of 200 comes from the Moscow Raion Economic Committee list of 2 April 1918 (*Uprochenie*, pp. 243–249) and that of the Central Economic Council of 1 June, *Narodnoe khoziaistvo* 4 (1918):5; A. V. Strakhov, "Natsionalizatsiia krupnoi promyshlennosti goroda Moskvy," *Uchenye zapiski Mos. gos. ped. inst. im. Lenina* 200 (Moscow, 1964), p. 223.

55. For example, the resolution of 2 June 1918 Moscow oblast textile union factory committee conference, in *Uprochenie*, p. 261. As for economic policy, "there were some constants, like centralization of economic decisions, collective commodity exchange, and the ability to make use of financial means of control, which preceded the major involvement in war and prepared the way for some later economic developments," Silvana Malle, *The Economic Organisation of War Communism 1918–1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 14.

use of material and financial incentives, approval of the Taylor system of time accounting, and the strengthening of management, although one-person management was not as yet on the agenda. Raising the productivity of labor, argued the key resolution of the Fourth Moscow Factory Committee Conference in June 1918, had become the most important question of the day.[56] To this concept of the labor process the Left Communists counterposed worker self-discipline. Already at the Seventh Moscow Provincial (*okrug*) Party Conference on 24 March 1918 Bukharin had declared that "self-discipline" was the best manifestation of "class self-activity" and had opposed the use of compulsion, a view he was to revise drastically during war communism. Valerian Osinskii argued that piece rates and the Taylor system turned the worker into a petty salesperson of labor power.[57] Such arguments were echoed by the Mensheviks, and the print trade union, which they dominated, launched a campaign against piece rates in favor of hourly paid work. Even the metalworkers, usually close to the Bolsheviks, opposed the Taylor system and piece rates at their First Moscow Oblast Conference (19–22 April 1918).[58] It was not altogether surprising that the Mensheviks and the Bolshevik Left agreed on key aspects of the question. The Mensheviks favored an autonomous workers' movement, while the Left (though by no means a homogenous body of thought) argued for the maximum initiative (*samodeiatel'nost'*) of the working class.[59] The debate over the labor process was a crucial one that focused on the alienation of broad sections of factory workers.

In the spring and summer of 1918 worker "initiative" was increasingly in evidence as a gulf between the working class in the factories and the new political structures became apparent. This conflict was no longer fundamentally social since many former workers staffed the new political and economic apparatus. Even before the civil war a current of labor militancy was directed not only against capitalists but also against Bolshevik power.[60] From the outset Mensheviks led the worker movement critical of the Bolsheviks, but the movement was not theirs alone. The Menshevik refusal to collapse the workers' movement into the political institutions of the proletarian dictatorship coincided, however, with the aspirations of a large segment of Moscow's working class. Mensheviks retained their influence in the Moscow railway, chemical, teachers', and employees' trade unions, and in January 1918 they held 13 places out of the 114 on the Moscow Trade Union Council (MSPS).[61] The Menshevik-dominated print union conducted the most cogent criticism of Bolshevik labor and political policies and the Moscow union's journal, *Pechatnik*, contained searing critiques of Bolshevik practice. The key charges leveled against the Bolsheviks were that their "adventurist" seizure of power had weakened the initiative of the working class

56. *Uprochenie*, p. 271.

57. K. I. Varlamov and N. A. Slamikhin, *Razoblachenie V. I. Leninym teorii i taktiki "levykh kommunistov" (noiabr' 1917–1918 gg.)* (Moscow, 1964), p. 309.

58. *Pechatnik* 5 (31 May 1918), p. 12 (the Mensheviks were not opposed to piece rates on principle but only in given circumstances). *Vestnik metallista* 3 (May 1918): 75.

59. *Kommunist* 1 (20 April 1918): 9; compare p. 16 and no. 2 (27 April 1918): 9.

60. Charles E. Ziegler, "Worker Participation and Worker Discontent in the Soviet Union," *Political Science Quarterly* (Summer 1983), p. 247.

61. These are the figures for 46 out of 54 unions in the Moscow Trade Union Council. Of the other 101 members, 70 were Bolsheviks, 9 in other parties, and 22 nonparty, *Izvestiia Moskovskogo soveta rabochikh i soldatskikh deputatov* 17 (24 January 1918).

and that rule by "decree" undermined the autonomy of the working-class movement. The print leaders asserted that after the Brest peace the mood of the workers had either turned against the Bolsheviks or had sunk into apathy.[62] Political resignation and withdrawal into the struggle for personal survival marked the transition from the aspirations of the Revolution of 1917 to the grim realities of protest in 1918.

In Petrograd the discontent had developed into a series of protest meetings, beginning with the 13 March 1918 gathering of factory committees. Even in Moscow extremely hostile resolutions were passed by worker assemblies. Bolshevik successes in the soviet elections of April 1918 were attributed to the use of coercion, and by July the Mensheviks claimed that Bolshevik majorities on factory committees were only obtained by fraudulent means in the face of worker hostility.[63] In the huge Miusskii tram park, where the number of Bolsheviks had declined from 300 in October 1917 to 9 as Communists left to take up posts elsewhere, all the elected positions were filled by Mensheviks or Socialist Revolutionaries.[64] In mid-1918 no Bolsheviks were on factory committees and control commissions in several plants including Guzhon itself, and the Postavshchik and Gnom i Rom plants.[65] In early summer hostility coalesced in the "nonparty conferences" and "conferences of factory and plant delegates" (*soveshchaniia upolnomochennykh fabrik i zavodov*). On 16 May 1918 the Menshevik-dominated Bogatyr' Chemical Plant passed a resolution against the civil war and Bolshevik supply policies and for the immediate convocation of a freely elected constituent assembly, the restoration of the old municipal authorities and of freedom of speech and meeting, and an end to the shooting of citizens and workers. The high point of the movement against Bolshevik institutions was the organizational meeting of 5 June attended by about 4,000 workers.[66] Lenin admitted in early June that "the agitation of enemies and 'waverers'" had influenced Moscow's workers.[67] His claim at the Fourth Moscow Factory Committee Conference on 28 June that the protest movement was supported by few workers[68] tried to play down worker involvement but was not simply propaganda. The Bolsheviks could still draw on substantial sources of working-class support, although the rationale of this support had changed from 1917.[69] By 1918 support for the Bolsheviks was based more directly on political factors as segments of the working class were incorporated into the new state structures and gained a stake in the new system.

Resentment against the Bolsheviks was expressed through strikes and disturbances, which the authorities treated as arising from supply difficulties, from

62. Ronnie Kowalski has concluded that after the Brest peace the Left Communists quickly lost the support of workers and lower-level officials in Moscow for their revolutionary war and economic programs, "The Left Communist Movement in 1918: A Preliminary Analysis of its Regional Strength," *Study Group on the Russian Revolution, Shornik* 12 (1986): 32–39.

63. *Pechatnik* 3–4 (4 April 1918): 4; 7–8 (28 July 1918): 8.

64. *Krasnaia Presnia*, pp. 460, 465.

65. Ignat'ev, *Moskva v pervyi*, p. 159.

66. M. S. Bershtam, *Issledovaniia noveishei russkoi istorii*, vol. 2, *Nezavisimoe rabochee dvizhenie v 1916 godu: dokumenty i materialy* (Paris: YMCA, 1981), pp. 145–146.

67. Lenin, *PSS* 50:90.

68. Ibid., 37:90–91. Even at this conference twenty-three out of fifty-five delegates were Mensheviks; *Pechatnik* 7–8 (28 July 1918): 8.

69. Mandel, *Petrograd Workers and the Soviet Seizure of Power*, analyzes working-class support for the Bolsheviks in 1917 in terms of the rationale of class circumstances.

"lack of consciousness," and because of the "criminal demagogy" of certain elements.[70] Lack of support for current Bolshevik policies was treated as the absence of worker consciousness altogether, but the causes of the unrest were more complicated. In 1917 political issues gradually came to be perceived through the lens of party affiliation,[71] but by mid-1918 party consciousness was reversed and a general consciousness of workers' needs restored. By July 1918 the protest movement had lost its momentum in the face of severe repression and was engulfed by the civil war. At the same time, the various strands of opposition lacked a clear language of protest since the rhetoric of the socialist movement and its institutions, such as the trade unions, was colonized by the Bolsheviks. Nevertheless, this first worker opposition to a socialist state created a new counter-state organization in the delegate (*upolnomochennye*) system. William Rosenberg distinguishes between the state and government in 1917 and argues that, while the ineptitude of the latter could be condemned, the former's economic apparatus offered some shelter for workers.[72] In 1918 the *upolnomochennye* movement supported the socialist state in general but opposed the Bolshevik government's commune identification with the state. The creation of the one-party state reflected this fusion and emerged, largely by the end of the civil war, politically as restrictions on non-Bolshevik parties in the soviets and socially as the destruction of organized interests, if not opposition, in the workers' movement. The disintegration of the working class in 1918 (sometimes described by the highly problematical term of *declassing*) was accompanied both by the eclipse of autonomous working-class participation in economic organization and by the emergence of a movement expressing worker alienation from the regime. Political and ideological concerns buttressed the economic realities that determined worker behavior in 1918. Faced with political opposition within the soviets and worker dissatisfaction in the factories Bolshevik power increasingly came to rely on the party apparatus itself, and hence a program for the organizational revival of the party was launched.

Perhaps the most neglected topic in Bolshevik literature of the period before October 1917 is the role of the party in the postrevolutionary society. As noted, the subject was barely mentioned in Lenin's *State and Revolution*. As Neil Harding points out, after the revolution the party's role was unclear since, once it had organized the takeover of power, its functions were now in theory to be carried out by the proletariat as a whole.[73] Yet, it would be hasty to assume that the "leading role" of the party was a development engendered by the multiple crises of mid-1918 and not as part of a substantially consistent element of Bolshevik ideology. From the first the party was assigned a key role in the workers' movement. While the organization faded in the first six months after the revolution, the party never conceded its critical political role. The experience of organiza-

70. For example, the Moscow oblast committee of the metalworkers' union in early summer 1918 when commenting about disturbances in some metal plants; TsGAOR 7952/3/212/199.

71. Diane Koenker, "The Evolution of Party Consciousness in 1917: The Case of the Moscow Workers," *Soviet Studies* 30 (January 1978): 38-62. Smith, *Red Petrograd*, demonstrates that revolutionary consciousness emerged out of struggles within factories rather than solely from the actions of the parties themselves.

72. Rosenberg, "Russian Labor and Bolshevik Power," p. 218.

73. Harding, *Lenin's Political Thought* 2:177.

tional decline in the first period did, however, determine the nature and definition of its organizational revival later.

Far from the state withering away after October, it grew and extended its scope; the party was in danger of withering away. Out of its membership of about 17,000 in October 1917 the Moscow organization had to find the thousands of cadres needed to run the important posts in the city. By mid-1918 membership had fallen below 8,000.[74] During this period the *raion* committees barely functioned. The Gorodskoi *raion* committee, for example, lacked a permanent secretary up to August and it had few full-time activists at its disposal. In the factories the party's presence declined as the cells became smaller and party organizations disbanded. A party meeting in the Dinamo Plant on 1 April 1918, for instance, discovered that party activity in the plant had ceased because its members were too involved in public duties. The decline in party work, it was alleged, was one of the main reasons for workers becoming "less Bolshevik minded, . . . wavering,"[75] a reference to the nonparty workers' movement of the time. The concentration on building up the new state in the first months stimulated the idea that the party was no longer required as a separate movement. This mood was marked at the Fourth Moscow Oblast Party Conference (15–16 May 1918) where only two hours were allowed to discuss party organization and the rest of the time was devoted to general political discussion.[76] Later, Evgenii Preobrazhenskii even went so far as to suggest that the Bolshevik party could be disbanded since it duplicated the structure of the proletarian state.[77]

This period saw the greatest development of commune forms within the party. The Moscow Party Committee was composed of delegates from the *raion* party organizations who could be, and were, recalled and replaced at any time. It was able to maintain only a weak level of control over the individual party member in the factories or state posts, while the party factions in the soviets worked with the party committees yet defended their autonomy. The issue of party committee control over Bolshevik factions in soviets and offices later became acrimonious. The party member working in a soviet institution often felt greater allegiance to the place of work than to the party organization.[78] A survey of Moscow Communists at the end of May 1918, for example, discovered that "it is clear that a large number of comrade communists are so only in name since they are not involved in party work."[79] The bitterness of the Brest-Litovsk debate and the emergence of the Left Communists indicated that the party was in danger of becoming no more than a political debating club with little real control over its membership. The term *withering away* should be used carefully in reference to the party, however, since it refers only to the organization of the membership and not to the role of its leading committees, however understaffed. The Moscow Party Committee throughout functioned as the supreme political coordinating body in the city, and it exercised this role in the course of the various

74. *Perepiska sekretariata TsK RKP(b) s mestnymi partiinymi organizatsiiami* 7 (Moscow, 1972), p. 438, note 1; Chugaev, ed., *Rabochii klass*, p. 76.

75. *Pravda*, 31 August 1918, 4 April 1918, 7 July 1918.

76. *Voprosy istorii KPSS* 6 (1971): 86.

77. Charles Bettelheim, *Class Struggles in the USSR, First Period: 1917–1923* (Brighton, U.K.: Harvester, 1976), p. 302.

78. *Pravda*, 5 January 1919, 27 July 1918.

79. *Perepiska* 3 (Moscow, 1957): 121.

debates over the critical policy issues and increasingly over the Moscow Soviet and the trade unions.

Central to the shift from commune forms to dictatorship of the proletariat forms in spring 1918 was the enhanced administrative role of the party as the only force cohesive enough in the transitional period to ensure the execution of the socialist program. According to Harding, by mid-1918 Lenin realized that the working class as a whole had proved itself incapable of managing the country on its own.[80] The role of the Communist party in the Soviet state was reappraised, the internal organization of the party improved, and its leading role in the state confirmed. The state had come to dominate society, and now the party tried to assert a similar dominance over the state. Centralized and bureaucratic state forms had already emerged by mid-1918, but now the integration of the various elements of the new state was to be achieved explicitly by the party and not by the communality of the proletarian dictatorship. While there was a change of emphasis in spring 1918, the shift towards improving party organization had been maturing even while the dominance of state work and the discussions over the Brest peace and economic policies had relegated party organization itself to the background. A letter from the party secretariat on 20 January 1918 stated that the party had "bled out" its best forces and argued that the only remedy was increased attention to organizational questions.[81] At the Seventh Party Congress in March Iakov Sverdlov took this a step further when he argued that "the interests of the party as a whole are higher than the interests of the individual party member." A new approach was required, he argued, in which both internal party organization and the party's integrity in relation to such mass organizations as the soviets had to be improved.[82] Sverdlov attempted to make the Moscow Party Organization a model of his desired changes in the party. The transfer of the government brought the Moscow Party Committee under the direct supervision of the Central Committee and on 30 March it issued a number of directives to improve the work of the local organization. In April the Moscow committee insisted that the *raion* committees must more closely coordinate their work with the center.[83]

At this time the first reregistrations, reflecting concern over "careerists" joining the party, were conducted in the city organization. Contrary to the common view, these first checks on party membership, in Moscow at least, began immediately after the revolution. In Basmannyi *raion*, for instance, Communist numbers had risen from about 1,800 in October 1917 to about 2,000 in January 1918. According to the secretary of the *raion* committee the Brest peace had revealed that the organization was "not at the required level"; a reregistration launched in March 1918 had left only 400 members. Only fifteen of the cells existing in January survived to June.[84] Even with extremely lax bookkeeping these figures illustrate the low number of "October Communists," those joining

80. Harding, *Lenin's Political Thought* 2:196.

81. *Perepiska* 2 (Moscow, 1957): 171.

82. *VII ekstrennyi s"ezd RKP(b), mart 1918 goda: stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow, 1962), pp. 171–172.

83. Savel'ev, *V pervi*, pp. 110, 124.

84. Marcel Liebman, *Leninism under Lenin*, trans. Brian Pearce (London: Merlin, 1980), p. 308, states that the first reregistrations were held in 1919; I. I. Baganov, *Moskovskie bol'sheviki v ogne revoliutsionnykh boev* (Moscow, 1976), p. 143; Chugaev, ed., *Rabochii klass*, p. 96.

the victorious party usually for careerist reasons, and the great flux and large-scale nature of expulsions even at this stage.

The turning point in the reevaluation of the role of party organization came with the Central Committee resolution of 18 May 1918, passed at Sverdlov's prompting. It required that "the center of gravity of our work be shifted somewhat towards building up the party" and stated that, "All party members, irrespective of their employment or their functions, are obliged to participate directly in party organizations and must not deviate from party instructions issued by the relevant party center."[85] The resolution for the first time incorporated in a party document the main concerns of the civil war period: the subordination of all Communists, irrespective of their posts, to their party organization; the purity of membership; the detailed organization of local party groupings; and party education to inculcate the party's values in new members. In stressing the need for quality in a cadre party and against its dilution into a mass party the resolution marks the end of the whole period from February 1917. On the threshold of the civil war some of the elements of the underground party were revived. At the same time, the stress on the party as separate from state bodies was an aspect of the attempt to prevent the absorption of the party into the pervasive bureaucratism.

The 18 May resolution and the two follow-up letters of 22 and 29 May can be characterized as constituting a May program for the revival of the party.[86] A common theme of the resolutions of lower-level party organizations, which lacked people and resources, was the call for improved leadership from above. Centralization within the party was not derived purely from a Bolshevik ideological disposition but came in response to demands "from below" as much as it was imposed "from above."[87] Indeed the change was promoted not only by the Lenin-Sverdlov group, but also by the Left Communists, who were apprehensive about the weakening of party influence in the soviets and the infiltration of the party by so-called bourgeois careerists: "The party itself, which is better shielded against degeneration, must strengthen control over soviet factions and make public workers subordinate and responsible to it."[88]

The organizational revival envisaged by the May program and that proposed by the Left Communists and lower-level activists were very different. Both agreed that an effective party organization was essential. The Left Communists censured the one-sidedness of the Central Committee's reform program. The Central Committee was concerned with the formal organizational resurrection of the party and was not concerned with making it, as the Left put it, a forum for all of proletarian democracy.[89] The whole concept of the party and the role of individual members and lower organizations was being recast, a change to be confirmed

85. *Perepiska* 3 (Moscow, 1967):64; *Pravda*, 19 May 1918.

86. The circular letters to local party organizations of 22 and 29 May 1918 are in *Perepiska* 3:72–74; 81–83; *Pravda* 22, 29 May 1918. The term "May program" is from M. M. Helgesen, "The Origins of the Party-State Monolith in Soviet Russia: Relations Between the Soviets and the Party Committees in the Central Provinces, October 1917–March 1921," (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1980).

87. This is a major theme of Robert Service, *The Bolshevik Party in Revolution, 1917–1923: A Study of Organisational Change* (London: Macmillan, 1979).

88. *Kommunist* 4 (June 1918):7. See Helgesen, "Origins of the Party-State Monolith," p. 194.

89. *Kommunist* 4 (June 1918):15.

during the civil war. The initiative of party members and lower organizations was to be subordinated to the larger concerns of the party leadership.

The resolution and letters were followed by attempts to improve party organization in the city. The "all party point of view" was now to take precedence over "the local, professional, group view," and the party was to be purged of "all elements of decay and degeneration."[90] A new model party began to be forged and drew its inspiration partly from prerevolutionary ideas developed by Lenin and partly from the requirements of the moment itself. The democratic centralism of the ruling party called for no organizational unity or alliances with other parties or groups without Bolshevik supremacy; for the primary allegiance of Bolshevik factions to go to the party and not to the organizations, such as soviets or trade unions, in which they worked; for a principle of individual party member allegiance and subordination to the party above all else; and for hierarchical command structures. At the center of the program lay the extension of the political role that the party committees had played in public organizations to the party itself. As if to reiterate the political consequences of the organizational revival of the party, the reregistrations were apparently now applied to discipline the Left Communists. The 22 May Central Committee circular had suggested that the Left Communist movement was a result of the organizational weakness of the party and of the influx of new members. The 10 June Moscow committee meeting noted that "the *raions* are increasingly interested in purging the party," and I. A. Piatnitskii made the point explicit when he said of the Left Communists, "If they do not want to bear responsibility for the general line of the party, they can leave it. We do not need honorary party members."[91]

On the eve of the civil war the Central Committee outlined the general program for the new period whose centerpiece was to be the party in the political sphere and the abolition of commodity production in the economy. In language and analysis remarkably similar to that of the Tenth Party Congress resolutions of March 1921 the Central Committee added:

> Without a firmly united party, acting as one person, we will not be able to cope with the tasks facing us. The working masses will not be able to retain in their hands the power gained during the October days if there is not a powerful core, permeated with a single will and a single aspiration.[92]

Inner-party opposition during war communism was in part resistance to the implementation of the May program. The program itself was not so much a recognition of the limited bases of national order in Russia[93] as of the narrow political base of the Bolsheviks. More than a defensive reaction to the civil war, the program defined both the type of party required and its central role in the new society.

90. The 28 May city party conference as quoted in Varlamov and Slamikhin, *Razoblachenie*, p. 372.

91. *Perepiska* 3:73; Piatnitskii is quoted in Varlamov and Slamikhin, *Razoblachenie*, p. 378.

92. *Perepiska* 3:73.

93. Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 206.

By the eve of the major campaigns of the civil war a pattern of relationships had emerged within and between the main constituent elements of the new Soviet polity. Political and organizational coalition had given way to the consolidation of institutional power in the hands of the soviets and political power in the Bolshevik party. An economic apparatus emerged that, however disjointedly, tried both to run the whole economic life of the country without the organized participation of capitalists or Mensheviks and to induct many old regime officials as specialists. The period witnessed the first workers' movement directed against the socialist state. To control the unexpected emergence of a bureaucratic state apparatus the party itself began to be transformed into a bureaucratic machine. While demands for assistance and resources from the center came from below, consolidation was also a process with a logic from above. The Left Communists and *raion* party activists demanded improved party organization but not at the expense of their own autonomy as individuals or organizations. Factory workers called for assistance from state authorities but objected when it was accompanied by piece rates and the Taylor system. By early summer 1918 the facet of the commune idea that stressed decentralization and participation had decisively given way to the dictatorship of the proletariat expressed by the consolidation of state power guided by the party. The very ambiguities of the first image, which oversimplified the political and administrative processes of industrial society, contributed to the successful implementation of the second.

Interpreting the first period of Soviet power through commune ideas helps put into perspective the ideological effect of Lenin's political approach, while making allowances for conflicts within the party; the importance of lower-level factory, soviet, or party activists; and the economic and social difficulties faced by the regime. Lenin's concept of the commune state filled the vacuum in the conceptualization of the transitional period between capitalism and socialism. From the first the idea of all power to the soviets reflected a commune concept of integrated power but did not provide specific instructions for the precise level of centralization or decentralization or even the role of the party at any particular time. It did address the type of institutional and political relations that would operate in the postrevolutionary society. The commune model, even before the generalized application of democratic centralism, established certain relationships between the state and society and between the soviets, political life, and opposition and conditioned the relationship between the party and the class. The commune model limited the institutional and political choices.

The Bolsheviks had no masterplan that they proceeded to implement on coming to power. They did have an understanding of the relationship between political power and society, but this relationship was capable of differing interpretations. The debates in Moscow during and after the revolution illustrate Lenin's difficulties in bringing his own party round to his views. The confusion over immediate aims engendered the vigorous debates over political and institutional coalition, the Left Communist criticisms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and Bolshevik economic and labor policies, and, ultimately, the outbreak of worker protest. The "wavering" of the moderate Bolsheviks was overcome and political society was effectively integrated into the unitary state. The weakness of the moderate socialists did not stem from their insistence that it was premature to talk of socialism in Russia,[94] even those who accepted the revolution as socialist

94. Raleigh, *Revolution on the Volga*, p. 322.

and adopted the call to transfer power to the soviets were no more effective in resisting the emergence of the integrated power system. The key issue was the nature of power in the postrevolutionary system. In this, paradoxically, the moderate Bolsheviks and the Left Communists were as much victims as the Mensheviks and other socialist parties. The coalitionists and the Left Communists were riven by internal divisions and theoretical inconsistency. Nevertheless, even in conditions of economic and social collapse and military emergency, alternatives were available on concrete issues of policy that did not deny the basic fact of Bolshevik rule. The institutionalization process was governed both by sociological pressures and political decisions. Authoritarian politics does not necessarily emerge from lengthening bread lines. The political choices of the coalition debate were an intrinsic part of the institution-building process, and the Left Communist critiques of Bolshevik economic and party-building policies affected the nature of the policies themselves. To ascribe an inevitability to the outcome is to be as guilty of determinism as Lenin was of historicism in hoping that history itself would solve the manifold problems of socialist administration.

In the first months, because of weak party organization and general chaos, the commune idea of decentralization was implemented in some respects. The commune idea's major legacy, however, was the destruction of organized political and social particularities in society and the denial of contestatory politics in the new system. By mid-1918 espousal of the dictatorship of the proletariat had eclipsed hopes for communal self-management. The discipline of the party over society and its own membership was established. Relations between Soviet bodies may have changed since 1918 but only within a pattern set in the first period. The ultimate balance between power and participation, order and initiative, and centralization and local autonomy was achieved through interaction between the contradictory impulses of the ideology and the pressure of circumstances, but the ideological terrain on which the battle was fought was a narrow one. The authoritarian potential within the idea of the commune state was rapidly demonstrated by developments in Moscow in 1918. Executive bodies became inflated and contestatory politics gave way to an administrative ethos. The Communist party defined the single proletarian will. In a period devoted to building up the state, the ideal of political and economic self-management defined more the aspirations of increasingly marginalized social and political groups than the reality of power. The plurality of political organizations at that time should not be taken for an embryonic socialist pluralism nor the symbols of commune democracy for democracy itself.