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The Establishment of Bolshevik Power on the Russian Periphery: Soviet  
Karelia, 1918-1919

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Philosophy

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## **Abstract**

Using an array of original materials from Russian regional and central archives this detailed study of Soviet Karelia from 1918-1919 is the first to appear in English after the fall of the Soviet Union. It adds to the still limited number of regional studies of the civil war period and using the Karelian districts as a case study discusses how the Bolsheviks consolidated power on the periphery, what factors hindered this process and what were the sources of resistance. Karelia is unique for a combination of reasons. First, it is a grain deficit region and so was always in need of help with the supply of grain from the Volga and other parts of central Russia. Second, the political influence of the Left Socialist Revolutionary party (Left SRs) continued for a considerable time after the events of July 1918. The thesis explores how power was transferred in the region following the October revolution and how the planned political objectives of the Bolsheviks were stalled by the lack of political control in the districts not least of all, for most of 1918, because of the influence of the Left SRs. However, despite political, economic, social and military crises the Bolsheviks gained more experience in power as the civil war progressed and a semblance of order emerged from the chaos. They gained enough control over the food supply shortages for the population to subsist and increased their control in key Soviet institutions, such as the provincial security police (the Cheka) and the Red Army, which ultimately ensured the survival of the Bolshevik regime and victory in the civil war.

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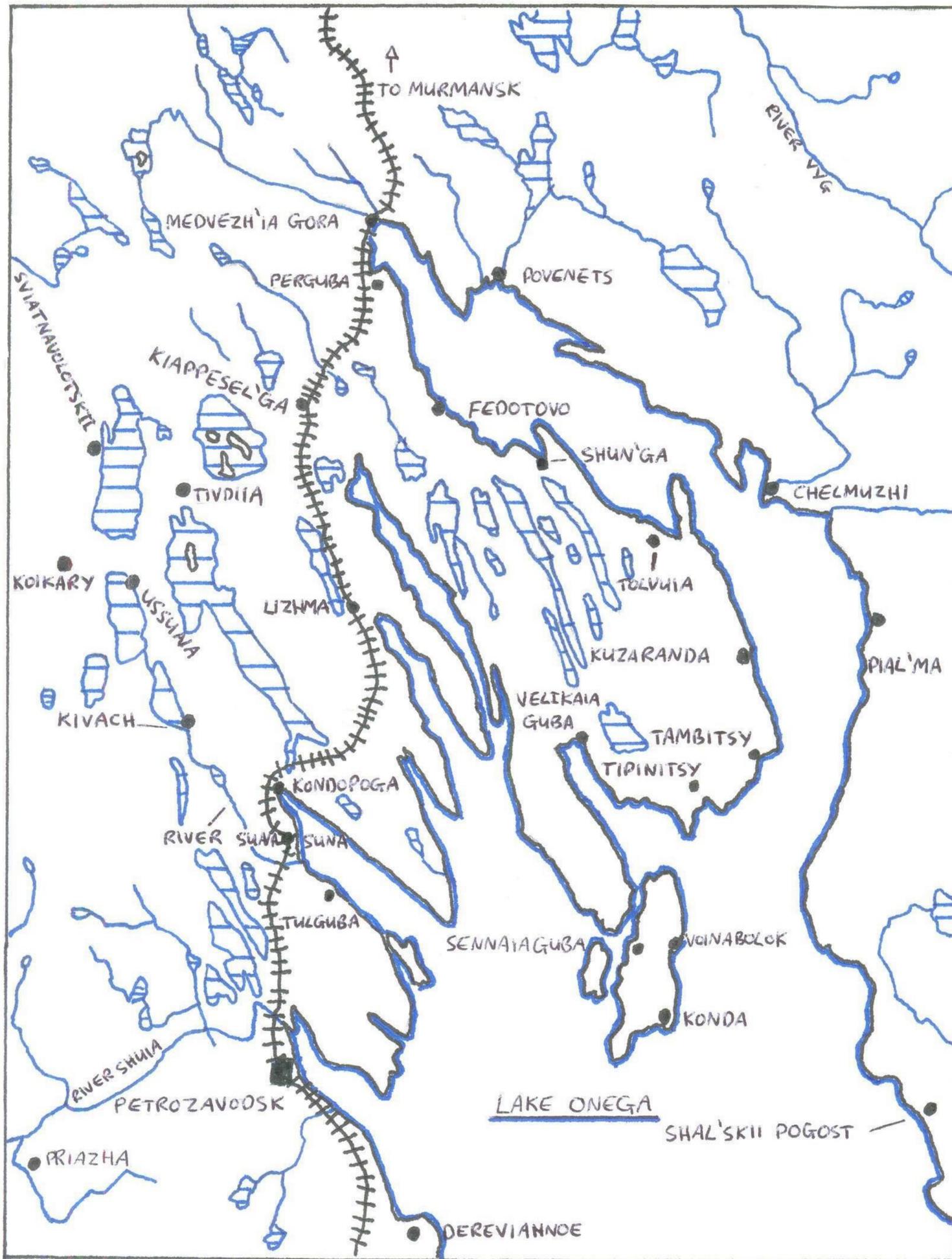
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KEY

- Town/village
- Petrozavodsk
- Railway line
- Water

### **Note on dates and transliteration**

All dates referred to up to February 1918 are given from the Julian calendar which ran thirteen days behind the Gregorian calendar, but dates for the corresponding Gregorian calendar are given in brackets. All dates from February onwards are from the Gregorian calendar which Russia adopted as of midnight on the 31 January 1918. I use the Library of Congress system of transliteration for Russian except for names commonly known in English, for example, Trotsky instead of Trotskii and Archangel instead of Arkhangel'sk. The following abbreviations are used for Russian archive materials: f. for collection (*fond*), op. for inventory (*opis'*), d. for file (*delo*) and l. for page (*list*), and ob. for verso (*oborot*).

### Note on Terms

The Bolshevik party renamed itself the Communist party in March 1918 and I use the terms Bolshevik(s) and Communist(s) interchangeably throughout the text. For ease of use I have chosen to use the nominative form of the Russian adjective for the naming of parishes i.e. Shungskaia parish, not Shun'ga parish. I chose to translate all territorial administrative units used in the text into English but for foreign words used in the text (e.g. weights and measures) I have anglicised the plurals with the exception of the Committees of the Rural Poor which are referred to as *kombedy*, not *kombeds*. All foreign words used in the text are italicized with the exception of more commonly known words e.g. Sovnarkom, Cheka.

#### **Translated territorial units used in the text**

Village (*Derevnia*)

Settlement (*Selo*)

Society (*Obshchestvo*)

Parish (*Volost'*)

District (*Uezd*)

Province (*Guberniia*)

County (*Okrug*)

Region (*Oblast'*)

#### **Russian weights and measures used in the text**

|                       |                                   |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>Verst(s)</i>       | 0.66 miles or 1.06 kilometres     |
| <i>Arshins(s)</i>     | 28 inches or 0.71 metres          |
| <i>Puds(s)</i>        | 36.11 pounds or 16.38 kilograms   |
| <i>Dessiatinas(s)</i> | 2.7 acres or 10,900 square metres |
| <i>Funts(s)</i>       | 0.9 pounds or 0.36 kilograms      |
| <i>Vedros(s)</i>      | 2.7 gallons or 12.3 litres        |

## **Acknowledgements**

It is with great pleasure that I have the opportunity to thank those who have helped me to complete this study. I was fortunate to receive a scholarship from the Centre for Russian, Central and East European Studies for the undertaking of my research in Russia and the UK. A small BASEES research grant also facilitated my attendance at an archive training scheme in Moscow and I would like to thank my fellow postgraduates and the small group of senior academics who made this such a worthwhile and useful experience. Thanks are also due to the members of the Study Group on the Russian Revolution and the organisers of its annual conference which provided a platform to present parts of my thesis and gain useful feedback.

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**Author's declaration**

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature:

Printed name:

## Introduction

This central thread of this thesis is how the Bolsheviks consolidated their hold in the Karelian districts after the October revolution. Like any study of revolution it is a study of power; who was in control and what was the nature of that power against the backdrop of political, economic, social and military crises. It was the Left SRs not the Bolsheviks who were the presiding political force in the Karelian districts for the majority of 1918 and the significance of local political factors was pivotal to the implementation of the capital's policies. Using Soviet Karelia as a case study I aim to describe the implementation of some of the national government's policies in the periphery and underline the importance of local conditions and practical exigencies in shaping the path of the civil war there. The food crisis in particular was a severe problem for central and local Bolsheviks for all of the civil war which was made more acute for Karelia because it was traditionally a grain deficit region and relied heavily on domestic imports to feed its population. The inability of the capital to prioritise anything but the most important military fronts and the lack of regular or sufficient material support meant that the Karelian districts were often forced to make do with their own resources to supplement the limited support that did make it through to them.

The thesis aims to underline how chaotic conditions were throughout the civil war in the Karelian districts but at the same time point to some key areas from late 1918 through which the Bolsheviks were able to increase their control. The dispatch of Red Army units from Petrograd, the adoption of repression as a tool of governance in September 1918, the election of a new provincial Cheka in October and the emergence of a local standing Red Army from the end of 1918 were all important steps towards gaining more control out of the disorder. Because of a lack of resources in the districts the introduction of central policies in Karelia was often a case of "one step forward, two steps back" but the recognition of past mistakes, a drive to increase organisation and party

discipline, increase centralisation to Moscow and the tempering of repression with conciliation meant that local Bolsheviks survived the economic, social and military hardships that they faced.

It is necessary to clarify from the outset the logic behind the chosen chronological framework of the study which covers the period from October 1917 to the end of 1919. The thesis is presented through a loosely chronological time frame because of the number of important developments which took place and overlapped one another. It was important to begin the thesis from October 1917 to contextualise what followed and show how the transition of power to the soviets occurred in a local setting. However, the core years of this study are 1918 and 1919, when the Soviet regime in Karelia faced and endured its most daunting challenge. The thesis comes to an end in the last quarter of 1919 because by this time the main military threat posed by the White Finns and the Allies, supporting the Whites, had gone. After the Allied withdrawal between September and early October 1919 the military front stabilised before the White forces were defeated by the Red Army with relative ease from February-March 1920 when the military campaigns resumed. This approach allows for a detailed discussion of the key civil war years and the development of the Soviet regime while under siege.

Because of word limitations and the author's own personal choice the decision was taken to concentrate on the Soviet regime in Karelia. Incorporating the problems faced by the Allied-White Russian regime in Murmansk and north Karelia into the thesis and drawing comparison with the Bolshevik governments further south had the potential to double the length of the work and is best left as a topic for future research. The thesis has been influenced by all of the recent regional studies on the civil war (see below) and, of course, those which discuss the Bolshevik regime in particular, but Alexander Rabinowitch's work on Petrograd from October 1917 to October 1918 deserves a

particular mention because of its links to the first few chapters of this study. Rabinowitch has argued that most important in shaping the Bolshevik party, the soviets and their relationship to each other were the realities the Bolsheviks faced as they struggled to survive. Furthermore, he has emphasised that the Soviet system evolved in an ad hoc fashion during the formative months of its existence and it did not immediately turn into a highly centralised regime.<sup>1</sup> It will become apparent that a study of Karelia adds weight to many of Rabinowitch's conclusions but also attempts to take things further. For instance one of the most intriguing aspects of Rabinowitch's story is the importance he attributes to the Left SRs in Petrograd and within the Northern Regional Soviet government, established at the end of April 1918.<sup>2</sup> The partnership with the Bolsheviks endured the splits in Moscow over the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty, continued to function after the establishment of the food supply dictatorship and would have survived longer if the Left SR Central Committee had not rebelled in early July.<sup>3</sup> The thesis will show that the Left SR party was an even stronger political force in Karelia and had a lasting legacy in the districts, even after July 1918, when the party had been marginalised in Karelia's administrative centre, Petrozavodsk. This special political dynamic and its consequences for the region is one of the main themes of the thesis that sets it apart from other regional studies.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A. Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power. The First Year of Soviet Rule in Petrograd*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> The decision to establish a regional government was preceded by the decision of the Petrograd Bureau of the Bolshevik Central Committee to create a Northern Regional Bolshevik Party Committee on 20 March 1918. The First Northern Regional Party Conference took place on 3-6 April 1918 and was represented by party delegates from Petrograd, Vologda, Novgorod, Pskov, Archangel and Olonets provinces. A Northern Regional Congress of Soviets took place on 26-29 April 1918 and established a regional soviet government, the Northern Regional Union of Communes. The above named provinces entered this Northern Commune and were joined later by North-Dvina and Cherepovets provinces. Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power*. 260-261. For an account of the Northern Regional Bolshevik Party Committee and the Northern Regional government also see V.P. Khmelevskii, *Severnyi Oblastnoi Komitet RKP(b)*. Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1972.

<sup>3</sup> Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power*. 260-309.

<sup>4</sup> Others to an extent have also noted the potency of the Bolshevik-Left SR alliance in the periphery. I have in mind P. Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution. Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1921*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002. 136-141; 149-150; 168. Donald Raleigh's study of Saratov also discusses the importance of the Left SRs but devotes more attention to the offshoot party, the Revolutionary Communists, which formed after the Left SR Central Committee's uprising in Moscow in early July 1918. D. Raleigh, *Experiencing Russia's Civil War. Politics, Society and Revolutionary Culture in Saratov, 1917-1922*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002. 142-172.

Adopting a regional approach to the civil war allows for detailed analysis of how certain Bolshevik and Soviet institutions developed outside of the capital. The local focus of this study has highlighted discussion of the creation and development of the Cheka, the Red Army and the *kombedy* in a regional context but also lesser studied institutions such as desertion commissions, all bodies which were designed to give the Bolsheviks' control. Karelia also contributes to our understanding of the Soviet regime during the civil war because it tells the story of a grain deficit region while other regional studies have so far concentrated on Moscow or Petrograd, central Russia's Black Earth zone or a province whose harvests, on average, produced a grain surplus.<sup>5</sup> The food crisis was the root of many of Karelia's problems and put the state's relationship with its population to the test. As a result, the thesis adds to our existing knowledge of peasant-state relations during the civil war and helps to explain why Russia's peasantry rebelled but ultimately sided with the Reds over the Whites.

Finally a study of Karelia stands apart from current regional studies because the dynamics of the civil war were different there. In short, for much of the fighting it was a non-priority military zone. It was the important military fronts of the south and east where the fighting was won, where the superior agricultural land and industries were situated and where the population was most voluminous. As will become evident below Karelia contrasted in all these respects and was only ever given military priority at fleeting moments for example when the military dangers faced by the region posed a potentially wider threat to Petrograd in April 1919. In this respect the study therefore allows for some discussion of the nature of centre-periphery relations which to date has received only limited coverage within the growing number of regional studies.<sup>6</sup> It will become evident to the reader that the relationship between Petrozavodsk and Petrograd or Moscow changed between 1918 and 1919 and that local Bolsheviks demanded support from the capital but at

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<sup>5</sup> See footnotes 18-22.

<sup>6</sup> On the relationship between Saratov and Moscow see Raleigh, *Civil War*. 74-106.

the same time resented the encroachment on local decision making which came with increased centralisation.

### **Russian primary sources**

The research for a regional study of Karelia during the civil war has drawn upon a number of important primary sources. Most importantly the study has utilised the rich collections held in the National Archive of the Republic of Karelia (NARK) situated in Petrozavodsk. In 2007 the former party archive, then called the Karelian State Archive of Recent History (KGANI), merged with NARK. As a result, references in NARK which refer to documents of the party are recognisable with the letter P (e.g. f.P-1). Documents held by NARK that are non-party related and from the Soviet period are indexed with the letter R (e.g. f.R-1). The research for this thesis has also made use of the local newspapers, *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta* and *Olonetskaia Kommuna*, and central archives in Moscow (GARF, RGAE, RGVA & RGASPI) and London (The National Archives). More detail on the specific collections used from these archives can be found in the bibliography.

These invaluable archival sources are supplemented with a few important documentary collections of which those specific to Karelia are worth mentioning briefly. No Soviet source can be taken at face value because of their portrayal of an all conquering and triumphant Bolshevik party but nevertheless one of the most useful published primary sources for the thesis has been the collection edited by V.I. Mashezerskii and N.F. Slavin, published in 1957.<sup>7</sup> Focusing on the years 1917-1918 I found many of the documents revealing and sometimes quite candid no doubt reflecting the ‘thaw’ in Soviet history after the death of Stalin. Furthermore, when necessary I have been able to cross check many, but admittedly not all, of their references which were relevant for the thesis. This collection of documents was taken chronologically forward by another collection published in 1964 and

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<sup>7</sup> V.I. Mashezerskii and N.F. Slavin, eds., *Bor'ba za Ustanovlenie i Uprochenie Sovetskoi Vlasti v Karelii: Sbornik Dokumentov i Materialov*. Petrozavodsk: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Karel'skoi ASSR, 1957.

edited by Ia.A. Balagurov and M.I. Mashezerskii. I did not find this collection so useful, which reflects the end of the ‘thaw’ and the Soviet regime tightening its control over historical publications at this time, but it was never the less informative on military aspects of the civil war.<sup>8</sup> Since the fall of the Soviet Union two further important documentary collections have emerged. The first published in 1993 covers the whole of the Soviet era but has useful documents on the revolutionary era from March 1917 to November 1920 which were omitted in the Soviet collections.<sup>9</sup> This is also the case for the third of a three volume 300 year documentary history of the town of Petrozavodsk which was published in 2003 and proved invaluable on certain political developments in the town during the civil war.<sup>10</sup>

## Historiography

This is the second study of the Soviet regime in Karelia during the civil war years to be written in English and the first after the fall of the USSR. The first study of the region in English was a PhD dissertation completed in 1967 but concentrated on Finnish-Soviet diplomatic relations and the Karelian autonomy movement.<sup>11</sup> It is the intention here to produce an internal history of Karelia and not to encroach on issues which centre on Karelia’s autonomy, Finnish nationalism or Finnish-Soviet relations except if necessary for means of contextualisation.<sup>12</sup> Other works in English language have also contributed to our

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<sup>8</sup> Ia.A. Balagurov and V.I. Mashezerskii, eds., *Kareliia v Period Grazhdanskoi Voiny i Inostrannoi Interventsii, 1918-1920. Sbornik Dokumentov i Materialov*. Petrozavodsk: Karel’skoe Knizhnoe Izdatel’stvo, 1964. Supplementing these documentary collections are memoirs and reminiscences of the civil war published in the 1950s and 1960s. Like the above document collections the publication in 1957 was more useful than that published in 1963. E.S. Gardin, P.P. Nezhel’skaia, M.I. Shumilov and M.N. Anisimova, eds., *V Bor’be za Vlast’ Sovetov. Vospominaniia Uchastnikov Bor’by za Ustanovlenie Sovetskoi Vlasti v Karelii*. Petrozavodsk: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel’stvo Karel’skoi ASSR, 1957; V.I. Mashezerskii, ed., *Za Sovetskuiu Kareliiu, 1918-1920. Vospominaniia o Grazhdanskoi Voine*. Petrozavodsk: Karel’skoe Knizhnoe Izdatel’stvo, 1963.

<sup>9</sup> N.A. Vavulinskaia, ed., *Sovety Karelii, 1917-1992. Dokumenty i Materialy*. Petrozavodsk, “Kareliia”, 1993. 20-82.

<sup>10</sup> N.A. Korablev, S.N. Filimonchik and D.Z. Gendeleev, eds., *Petrozavodsk: 300 Let Istorii. Dokumenty i Materialy v Trex Knigax*. Vol.3. Petrozavodsk: “Kareliia”, 2003. 94-169.

<sup>11</sup> S. Churchill, “The East Karelian Autonomy Question in Finnish-Soviet Relations, 1917-1922.” PhD, University of London, 1967.

<sup>12</sup> For those more interested in this topic see for instance: I. Siukiainen, *Karel’skii Vopros v Sovetsko-Finlianskikh Otnosheniakh v 1918-1929 godakh*. Petrozavodsk: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel’stvo Karelo-Finskoi SSR, 1948; V.M. Kholodkovskii, *Finlandiia i Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1918-1920*. Moscow: Nauka,

understanding of the civil war in Karelia and north Russia, more generally and from an Allied intervention perspective. The most notable works are the memoirs of Major-General Sir Charles Maynard and the relevant sections within the monographs by Kennan and Baron.<sup>13</sup> Soviet and post-Soviet writers have also concentrated on the military and intervention aspects of the civil war in the north.<sup>14</sup> Again it is not the intention of this thesis to discuss in detail the role of the intervention in the north but only when it is relevant to understand the actions of local soviets or the population in Karelia.

The majority of published materials discussing the development of the Soviet regime in Karelia have originated from local historians and were published in the Soviet period. The most noteworthy monographs are those by Shumilov, Mashezerskii, Balagurov and Bogdanova.<sup>15</sup> These works have proved to be useful in providing a portrait of some of the main problems faced by local Bolsheviks and how events developed in the region but, of course, were constrained by their interpretation and agenda to portray the Bolshevik party in solely a positive light. In the post-Soviet period only one major significant work has been published which focused on Karelia and it sought to supersede the two volume

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1975; M. Engman, "State Terrorism as Diplomacy: Aspects of Finnish-Soviet Relations, 1918-1920." *Studia Baltica Stockholmiensia*, No.8, 1991; A.I. Rupasov, & A.N. Chistikov, *Sovetsko-Finliandskaia Granitsa, 1918-1938 gg.*, St. Petersburg, Evropeiskii Dom, 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Major-General Sir C. Maynard, *The Murmansk Venture*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928; G.F. Kennan, *Soviet-American Relations, 1917-1920*. Vol.2, *The Decision to Intervene*. London: Faber and Faber, 1958; N. Baron, *The King of Karelia. Col. P.J. Woods and the British Intervention in North Russia, 1918-1919. A History and Memoir*. London: Francis Boutle, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> See for example: V.V. Tarasov, *Bor'ba s Interventami na Severe Rossii (1918-1920 gg.)*. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoi Literatury, 1958; K.A. Morozov, *Onezhskaia Flotiliia v Gody Grazhdanskoi Voiny i Inostrannoi Interventsii (1918-1920)*. Petrozavodsk: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Karel'skoi ASSR, 1961; V. Goldin, *Interventsiia i antibol'shevistskoe dvizheniie na Russkom severe, 1918-1920*. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo Universiteta, 1993; V.A., Shishkin, ed., *Interventsiia na severo-zapade Rossii, 1917-1920gg.* St Petersburg: Nauka, 1995.

<sup>15</sup> M.I. Shumilov, *Bor'ba Bol'shevistskikh Organizatsii Karelii za Pobedu i Uprochenie Sovetskoi Vlasti, 1917-1918*. Petrozavodsk: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Karel'skoi ASSR, 1957; M.I. Shumilov, *Vo Glave Oborony Severa Rossii v 1918-1920 gg. Iz Istorii Mestnykh Partiinykh Organizatsii*. Petrozavodsk: Karel'skoe Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo, 1967. V.I. Mashezerskii, *Ustanovlenie Sovetskoi Vlasti v Karelii (1917-1918)*. Petrozavodsk: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Karel'skoi ASSR, 1957; Ia.A. Balagurov, *Bor'ba za Sovety v Karel'skom Pomor'e*. Petrozavodsk: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Karel'skoi ASSR, 1958; G.N. Bogdanova, *Na Khoziaistvennom Fronte, 1918-1920. Khoziaistvennoe Stroitel'stvo v Karelii v Gody Inostrannoi Interventsii i Grazhdanskoi Voiny*. Petrozavodsk: Izdatel'stvo "Kareliia", 1980.

overview of Karelian history, *Ocherki Istorii Karelii* (1957 & 1964).<sup>16</sup> Published in 2001 its authors wished to produce a more objective appraisal of the historical development of the region. One chapter in the collection was devoted to the revolution and civil war, from the February revolution in 1917 to the formation of the Karelian Labour Commune in mid-1920 and was written by M.I. Shumilov.<sup>17</sup> Like its predecessor the material within it is useful and has been updated to give a more rounded picture of the civil war in Karelia but it is essentially a narrative account which makes little attempt to offer any concrete conclusions on the development of the local civil war or what Karelia's experience adds to our overall understanding of the period in general.

Essentially, this thesis seeks to contribute to the growing but still relatively few post-Soviet regional studies of the revolutionary period. Every historian who adopts a particular city, province or region of Russia naturally seeks to promote 'their' territory as being special in a particular way and to emphasise the diversity of experience during the revolution and civil war in spite of the inevitable wide ranging similarities that stand out from region to region. Analysing the diversity of the civil war in the periphery helps to increase our understanding of this highly influential period and reappraise the revolution through now more easily accessible archives.<sup>18</sup> Of the regional studies that have appeared since the late 1980s the focus has been placed away from the capitals of Moscow and Petrograd.<sup>19</sup> Instead the 'view from below', most notably of Russia's peasantry and their

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<sup>16</sup> V.N. Vernadskii, I.I. Smirnov and Ia.A. Balagurov, eds., *Ocherki Istorii Karelii*. Vol.1. Petrozavodsk: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Karel'skoi ASSR, 1957; V.I. Mashezerskii, ed., *Ocherki Istorii Karelii*. Vol.2. Petrozavodsk: Karel'skoe Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo, 1964.

<sup>17</sup> N.A. Korablev, V.G. Makurov, Iu.A. Savvateev and M.I. Shumilov, eds., *Istoriia Karelii s Drevneishikh Vremen do Nashikh Dnei*. Petrozavodsk: "Periodika", 2001. 342-440.

<sup>18</sup> From the regional studies in the west which appeared before the opportunity arose for foreigners to travel to Russia's provinces see for example: M. Fainsod, *Smolensk Under Soviet Rule*. London: Macmillan, 1959; P. Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia, 1918: The First Year of the Volunteer Army*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1971; O.H. Radkey, *The Unknown Civil War in Soviet Russia. A Study of the Green Movement in the Tambov Region, 1920-1921*. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1976; P. Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia, 1919-1920: The Defeat of the Whites*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977.

<sup>19</sup> The main exception here is A. Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power*. Also see: R. Sakwa, *Soviet Communists in Power. A Study of Moscow During the Civil War, 1918-1921*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988; M. McAuley, *Bread and Justice. State and Society in Petrograd, 1917-1922*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991.

relations with the state, has taken up a prominent position within the historiography.<sup>20</sup> Other regional studies since the turn of the century have been broader in scope and presented a more comprehensive political, social, economic and cultural history of the periphery during the civil war.<sup>21</sup> The chronological timeframe of studying the civil war has also varied and some historians have sought to underline the significance of viewing Russia's revolution and civil war through a broader time frame, incorporating the vital experience of World War One and the links between the Tsarist system, the Provisional government and the early Soviet regime.<sup>22</sup> Representing the range of interests in the civil war, scholars have also concentrated their efforts on examining the White regime to compensate for the majority of civil war works which focus on the Bolsheviks.<sup>23</sup>

### **Geographical and historical overview: population & economy**

Before beginning the main narrative some background information on Karelia is necessary. Situated between the White Sea and the Gulf of Finland Karelia is recognisable by its abundance of lakes, streams, marshes and forests. The Karelian people settled there some time approximately before 1000BC and the region would become a disputed borderland,

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<sup>20</sup> See for example: O. Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War. The Volga Countryside in Revolution, 1917-1921*. London: Phoenix Press edition, 2001; S.V. Iarov, *Krest'ianin kak Politik: Krest'ianstvo Severo-Zapada Rossii v 1918-1919 gg. Politicheskoe Myshlenie i Massovoi Protest*. St. Petersburg: "Dmitrii Bulanin", 1999; I. Narskii, *Zhizn' v Katastrofe. Budny Naseleniia Urala v 1917-1922 gg.* Moscow: Rosspen, 2001; E.C. Landis, *Bandits and Partisans. The Antonov Movement in the Russian Civil War*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008; A.B. Retish, *Russia's Peasants in Revolution and Civil War. Citizenship, Identity, and the Creation of the Soviet State, 1914-1922*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. This has also been the approach of studies which have emphasised the significance of the non-Russian territories. I have in mind the unpublished PhD thesis by M.R. Baker, "Peasants, Power and Revolution in the Village: A Social History of Kharkiv Province, 1914-1921." Harvard University, 2001. For a general study of the civil war based on the 'ordinary citizens' approach, see C. Read, *From Tsar to Soviets. The Russian people and their revolution, 1917-1921*. Routledge: London, 1996.

<sup>21</sup> I refer here to D. Raleigh, *Civil War*.

<sup>22</sup> P. Holquist, *Making War*. Retish, *Russia's Peasants* also adopts this chronological time frame. Influential in emphasising the links between the Tsarist system, the Provisional government and the Soviet state have been L.T. Lih, *Bread and Authority in Russia, 1914-1921*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990 and J.A. Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation. Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics, 1905-1925*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003.

<sup>23</sup> For a selection of works on the Whites see: Y. Kotsonis, "Arkhangel'sk, 1918: Regionalism and Populism in the Russian Civil War", *The Russian Review*, Vol. 51, No. 4, 1992; N.G.O. Pereira, *White Siberia: The Politics of Civil War*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1996; J. Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996; A.V. Smolin, *Beloe Dvizhenie na Severo-Zapade Rossii: 1918-1920 gg.* St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 1999; L. Novikova, "A province of non-existent state: The White government in the Russian North and political power in the Russian Civil War", *Revolutionary Russia*, Vol.18, No.2, 2005. 121-144.

locked in conflict and torn between Swedish influence in the west and Russian influence to the east.<sup>24</sup> During the 18<sup>th</sup> century the administrative-territorial divisions of Russian Karelia changed frequently, but by 1802 they stabilised and divided southern Olonets Karelia (Petrozavodsk, Olonets and Povenets districts) and northern White Sea Karelia (Kem' district) between Olonets and Archangel provinces.<sup>25</sup>

From the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the administrative-territorial divisions of Karelia remained largely intact until the establishment of the Karelian Labour Commune (KTK) in June 1920. Over the next two years the territories which made up the Commune were disputed between the capital, the KTK and the authorities in the co-existing Olonets province, along national and economic lines. Initially, the KTK kept a Karelian majority within its boundaries which included the populations of Petrozavodsk, Olonets, Kem' and parts of Povenets district but omitted parts of Povenets districts and all of Pudozh, Vytegra and Lodeinoe Pole districts (the latter districts were made up almost entirely of Russians and a few Veps,<sup>26</sup> which formed what was left of Olonets province). However, when Olonets province was disbanded in September 1922 all of Povenets district and almost all of Pudozh district was transferred to the KTK, taking away the Karelians' position as a 'national' majority within the KTK.<sup>27</sup> For the purpose of the thesis Karelia will be taken to be the districts of Petrozavodsk, Olonets, Povenets, Pudozh and Kem'. Furthermore it should be noted that by the end of June 1918 the Allies or Whites occupied Kem' until

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<sup>24</sup> For more detail on the geographical developments of Karelia see N. Baron, *Soviet Karelia. Politics, Planning and Terror in Stalin's Russia, 1920-1939*. London: Routledge, 2007. 9-12.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 12-13; 15.

<sup>26</sup> The Vepsian people within Karelia were situated in a small pocket 25 km or so north of Voznesen'e on the coast of Lake Onega. They spoke a language which was incomprehensible to Russians and Finns although it was closer to the latter in that it was closely related to the Karelian language. On the Vepsian language and the Veps see T. Homen, ed., *East Carelia and Kola Lapmark*. London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1921. 121-124. For those interested in the Karelian language see P.M. Austin, "Soviet Karelian: the Language that Failed", *Slavic Review*, Vol.51, No.1, 1992. 16-35.

<sup>27</sup> N. Baron, "Nature, nationalism and revolutionary regionalism: constructing Soviet Karelia, 1920-1923." *Journal of Historical Geography*, 33, No.3, 2007. 585-593. By January 1924 the Karelian population consisted of 42.8% Karelians and Veps and 55.7% Russians. 593, fn. 120.

early 1920, thus limiting the focus of this study to the remaining four districts after June 1918.

The national 1897 census found that the total number of people living in the five districts of eastern Karelia amounted to nearly 215,000 people.<sup>28</sup> From this total approximately 59% spoke Russian, 36% Karelian, 4% Veps and 1% Finnish.<sup>29</sup> The population rose in 1913 to roughly 285,500 people, approximately 91% of whom were rural inhabitants.<sup>30</sup> Petrozavodsk was the largest town in Karelia but had a total population of only 18,879 people in 1913.<sup>31</sup> The leading industry in the region before the revolution was the production and export of timber. On the eve of the First World War the main timber factories in Karelia were situated in Petrozavodsk and on the inlets of the White Sea coast and Lake Onega, a number of which were foreign owned.<sup>32</sup> The single largest industrial enterprise however was the Aleksandrovsk munitions and steel works factory (renamed the Onega factory after the October revolution), which was situated in Petrozavodsk and employed 1096 people in 1913.<sup>33</sup> According to a Soviet historian there existed a total of only 5321 industrial workers employed in enterprises that produced more than 1000 roubles a year in Karelia before 1914.<sup>34</sup>

The importance of the timber industry to the local economy enabled Karelia's peasants to make earnings through seasonal employment in logging and floating work. Karelian men also traditionally travelled each year to the factories of St. Petersburg or Riga

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<sup>28</sup> I.P. Pokrovskaja, "Naselenie Dorevoliutsionnoi Karelii po Materialam Perepisi 1897 g." *Voprosy Istorii Evropeiskogo Severa*, 1974. 94. For an English discussion on the size of the population see Homen, *East Carelia*. 125-130; 178.

<sup>29</sup> Pokrovskaja, "Perepisi 1897". 103.

<sup>30</sup> Shumilov, *Bor'ba*. 6-7.

<sup>31</sup> Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 26.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 133-134; Mashezerskii, *Ustanovlenie*. 6-8; 11-12; Homen, *East Carelia*. 230-234.

<sup>33</sup> Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 133. Other industrial enterprises in Petrozavodsk operating in 1913 included the aforementioned timber factories, a grain grinding mill, a distillery (closed in August 1914) and four printing works. 133-135.

<sup>34</sup> Mashezerskii, *Ustanovlenie*. 6.

to work.<sup>35</sup> This supplementary seasonal labour was necessary because the majority of peasants were not able to subsist on their own land holdings alone. According to an economic historian of the region, 61% of the land in the four districts of Olonets Karelia (Povenets, Petrozavodsk, Olonets & Pudozh) in 1912 was owned by the state and 32% by the peasants. The bulk of the peasants allotments were however unsuitable for tillage or haymaking because of sections of forests, marshes and stony ground. As a result, for the four districts of Povenets, Petrozavodsk, Olonets and Pudozh respectively, only 8.3%, 21.2%, 16.5% & 14.5% of the peasants' land was suitable.<sup>36</sup> Because of its natural conditions, such as its geographical position and climate, Karelia was therefore reliant on food imports to support its entire populace. According to statistics calculated for the main foodstuffs consumed in the country, in *puds* and on average over the years 1909-1913, Olonets province suffered a deficit of 8.1 *puds* per person. Olonets was the third highest deficit province behind Moscow and Petrograd which had deficits of 10.58 and 11.98 respectively. Archangel province had the sixth highest deficit of 7.25 behind Iaroslavl (7.83) and Vladimir (7.72).<sup>37</sup> In short, the Karelian districts were amongst the most demanding of all the non-grain producing regions in Russia outside of the two capitals.

Fertile agricultural land was (and still is) only found to any significant extent in southern Karelia around Lake Onega, in particular on the Zaonezh'e peninsula and also in parts of Olonets district bordering Finland.<sup>38</sup> The latter district produced an impressive crop of oats which in the early part of the twentieth century was exported to St. Petersburg. Yet rye and wheat were still imported even to this area. Indeed rye accounted for two-thirds of the total domestic imports for Petrozavodsk, Povenets and Olonets districts before

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<sup>35</sup> Baron, *Soviet Karelia*. 16.

<sup>36</sup> Bogdanova, *Na Khoziaistvennom Fronte*. 73-74. For Homen's figures, which vary slightly because he bases them on an earlier time period and on Petrozavodsk, Povenets and Olonets districts only, see *East Carelia*. 154-155; 161.

<sup>37</sup> N.D. Kondrat'ev, *Rynok Khlebov i ego Regulirovanie vo Vremia Voiny i Revoliutsii*. Moscow: Nauka, 1991. 313. Also see the map diagram on 441. Like all of the above figures they are, of course, contentious.

<sup>38</sup> Homen, *East Carelia*. 148-149.

the war.<sup>39</sup> Famine could occur in the villages especially in spring when stocks were running low. This was especially true of areas furthest from conveyance routes and in the harsher regions of northern Karelia. When starvation threatened it was not uncommon for people to mix tree bark with grain to make bread.<sup>40</sup> The diet and economy of the populace was however supplemented by cattle, pig and sheep rearing.<sup>41</sup> Peddling in various goods across the border, especially in Kem' district, with Finland was traditionally important for the local inhabitants, facilitated by the lateral waterways.<sup>42</sup> The hunting and fur trade also played an important role in the early twentieth century economy with hares, hazel-grouse, capercaillies and squirrels amongst the most commonly hunted animals. However, because of an absence of protection laws at this time animal and bird numbers fell and hunting became less pursued as a livelihood.<sup>43</sup> Finally, the fishing industry, particularly in the north of the region on the White Sea, which boasted 40 different species of fish with herring, salmon and navaga being the most important, was of great significance. On the gulf of Lake Onega herring was also the main catch as it was in the gulf of Soroka where fish were caught annually in the late autumn with as many as five to six hundred boats working the waters at a time.<sup>44</sup>

Petrozavodsk was only linked by rail with St. Petersburg in 1913 so imports of grain from the south bought and transported yearly, mainly in the summer time from Iaroslavl', Vologda and Rybinsk, was undertaken along the country's waterways. Additional cereals also arrived from the Moscow region, Riazan, Viatka, Saratov and Finland. Because domestic imports of grain were vital to the region, a host of individual merchants and representatives of the government and *zemstvos* (elected local rural

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 168.

<sup>40</sup> Homen, *East Carelia*. 136.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 168-171.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 133-134; 240-241.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 221-225. Squirrels, for their fur, were especially targeted. Between 1900 and 1908 of the 124,494 mammals killed in Olonets province, 105,674 were squirrels. 223.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 211-221; 229-230. For some supplementary information on the fishing industry in the north of Karelia also see Balagurov, *Bor'ba*. 7-13.

government institutions) were active in obtaining and transporting grain. Provinces, towns, communes and even villages often had their own food funds for the purpose.<sup>45</sup> Despite the lack of a railway line before the eve of the First World War Karelia's administrative centre Petrozavodsk was easily linked (during the thaw) to the capital by Lake Onega, along the river Svir' into Lake Ladoga and then down the river Neva. Before the war boats ran three times a week between Petrozavodsk and Petrograd in the summer time and regular water communications were established with Voznesen'e, a grain storage and transshipment point situated in Lodeinoe Pole district, and the towns of Pudozh and Povenets. Povenets, situated on the northern tip of Lake Onega, was particularly important for Karelia and served as a transit point for fish and timber products from further north destined for Petrograd and for grain products moving in the contrary direction.<sup>46</sup> But even when supplies reached Karelia distribution was made difficult because of inadequate internal conveyance routes. Roads were few, even in southern Karelia, where by 1905 nearly half the villages in Olonets district and more than half in Petrozavodsk and Povenets districts were still without any suitable roads for wheeled traffic.<sup>47</sup>

Significantly for Karelia the tsarist government, at the end of 1914, decided to construct a railway line to the port of Murmansk which was navigable all year round. The proposal to build a railway through Karelia originated in the 1870s and then received fresh impetus in the 1890s during Sergei Witte's period as Russia's finance minister. Construction work began briefly on the St. Petersburg to Petrozavodsk section in 1895 but was suspended because of financial problems and the fact that Siberian and other railway lines were considered more important. The Russian-Japanese war (1904-5) and the first Russian Revolution (1905-1907) again postponed construction before work on the

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<sup>45</sup> Homen, *East Carelia*. 226-227.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* 173.

Petrozavodsk section was finally completed in 1913.<sup>48</sup> The building of the rest of the line did not begin until autumn 1915 but its rapid completion was imperative for the import of vital foodstuffs and munitions from the Allies into the Russian hinterland during the First World War. A total of up to 170,000 people took part in the construction of the line at various times of its construction and the vast majority of labourers were malnourished and endured primitive working and living conditions.<sup>49</sup> Workers on the line were drawn from a number of sources and included approximately 100,000 migrant peasant workers from different Russian provinces, up to 40,000 Austrian, Hungarian and German prisoners of war, 10,000 Chinese from Manchuria, 5,500 Finns, 2,000 Kazakhs and 500 Canadian engineers.<sup>50</sup> The railway track was finally completed at the beginning of 1917 but was only a single track line with a number of intermittent sidings. Nevertheless, at 1,459km long (see Table 1), it connected Karelia to the rest of the country via rail, made supplying the territories close to the line easier and provided a spine to which future supplies could be distributed or military strategy grafted. The economic and logistical advantages of the railway also prompted the development of plans for a lateral line, starting at Soroka, which would run east and eventually connect to the Siberian railway.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 245. On the problems which delayed the construction of the Murmansk railway also see A.A. Golubev, "Problemy proektirovaniia Murmanskoi zheleznoi dorogi v kontse XIX-nachale XX veka." *Voprosy Istorii Evropeiskogo Severa*. 2007. 155-160.

<sup>49</sup> Baron, *Soviet Karelia*. 1-2.

<sup>50</sup> Exact numbers vary from source to source. The figures cited here are from: P. Agafonov and I. Pokoliavin, "Inostrannye rabochie na stroitel'stve Murmanskoi zheleznoi dorogi", 3-5; and E. Kalieva, D. Rodionov and E. Smirov, "Stroitel'stvo Murmanskoi zheleznoi dorogi", 16-18 in *Upravlenie: Istoriiia, Nauka, Kul'tura. Tezisy dokladov 8-i nauchnoi mezhdudovskoi studentcheskoi konferentsii*. Petrozavodsk: Petrozavodsk State University, 20-21 April 2004. Both papers in question used archive materials from the National Archive of the Republic of Karelia to confirm the approximate number and nationality of the Murmansk railroad construction workers. With regards to the Chinese workers, many were transported to work on the Murmansk line because of their experience in building railway lines in the Far East. See *Upravlenie: Istoriiia, Nauka, Kul'tura. Tezisy dokladov 10-i nauchnoi mezhdudovskoi studentcheskoi konferentsii*. Petrozavodsk: Petrozavodsk State University, 25-26 April, 2006. 18-20.

<sup>51</sup> Homen, *East Karelia*. 246.

**Table 1 – Distance between stations on the Murmansk railway line<sup>52</sup>**

| <b>Destination</b>   | <b>Distance (km)</b> |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| Petrograd-Zvanka     | 122                  |
| Zvanka-Petrozavodsk  | 284                  |
| Petrozavodsk-Soroka  | 380                  |
| Soroka-Kandalaksha   | 395                  |
| Kandalaksha-Murmansk | 278                  |

The First World War, which had an incapacitating effect on the transport system and economy throughout the country, also destabilised the Karelia economy.<sup>53</sup> Mobilisation took away thousands of men from the countryside and fishing industry, the number of sown fields fell, timber firms closed down and prices rose.<sup>54</sup> But Karelia was no revolutionary hotbed. By the revolutions of 1917 the Bolshevik party only consisted of a small number of uncoordinated groups or cells. However, if there was a revolutionary centre in the region it was Petrozavodsk and the town's workers, most notably those from the Aleksandrovsk factory, took part in the revolutionary events, 1905-1907 and the February revolution.<sup>55</sup> The capacity for Petrozavodsk to become a base from which the Bolshevik party could grow increased through the effects of the war and the aforementioned construction of the Murmansk railway line that linked the Karelian region with a stronger revolutionary hub such as Petrograd which facilitated the dispatch of agitators, organisers and literature. In addition the construction of the railway line created a number of potential supporters for the Bolshevik party in the form of railroad workers.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 246. Zvanka is now called Volkhov and Soroka is called Belomorsk.

<sup>53</sup> For a general overview of how the First World War affected food supply in Russia see P. Gatrell, *Russia's First World War. A Social and Economic History*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2005. 154-175.

<sup>54</sup> For more detail see Mashezerskii, *Ustanovlenie*. 19-20; Shumilov, *Bor'ba*. 13-15; Vernadskii, et al., *Ocherki*. 373-374.

<sup>55</sup> For example see Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 31-35; 42-43; 45-50; 94-99. For more detail on this revolutionary period in Karelia see Ia.A. Balagurov, *Fabrichno Zavodskie Rabochie Dorevoliutsionnoi Karelii, 1801-1917*. Petrozavodsk: Karel'skoe Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo, 1968. 93-123; M.N. Vlasova, ed., *Revoliutsionnye Sobytiia v Karelii v Gody Pervoi Russkoi Revoliutsii, 1905-1907. Sbornik Dokumentov i Materialov*. Petrozavodsk: "Kareliia", 1981.

<sup>56</sup> Balagurov, *Fabrichno Zavodskie Rabochie*. 162-166; Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 21-33; P.F. Metel'kov and E.V. Nefed'eva, "Bor'ba Bol'shevikov Murmanskoi Zheleznoi Dorogi za Ustanovlenie i Uprochenie Sovetskoi Vlasti v Pervye Mesiatsy Diktatury Proletariata." *Voprosy Istorii Evropeiskogo Severa*. 1987.

## Structure

The thesis is organised into eight chronological chapters. Chapter 1 traces the short term origins of how and when Soviet power was established in Karelia, emphasises the numerical and influential weakness of the Bolshevik party in the region immediately following the October coup in Petrograd and introduces the beginnings of the Left SR-Bolshevik bloc in the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee. Chapters 2 and 3 analyse the Left SR-Bolshevik alliance in more detail and emphasise, up to July 1918, how this relationship endured a number of local political, economic and military crises and functioned relatively well, sometimes in collaboration with the Menshevik Internationalists, despite fundamental disagreements over policy. Chapter 4 concentrates on the period after the ousting of the Left SRs from the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee following the coup by this party's Central Committee in Moscow. It investigates how the Bolsheviks, now the sole party in power in Petrozavodsk, struggled to implement central policy in the Karelian districts because of the continued influence of the Left SRs in the soviets and a lack of resources.

The last four chapters of the thesis continue the focus on the development of Bolshevik power in Karelia and indicate that the clichéd phrase “one step forward, two steps back” best describes the process by which the Bolsheviks slowly increased their hold over the region. Chapters 5 and 6 investigate the last three to four months of 1918 and underline the party's lack of control in the countryside but at the same time the beginnings of increased organisation and order through the introduction of the Red Terror in September and the reorganisation of the provincial Cheka in October. Chapter 7 examines further Bolshevik attempts to consolidate their authority in Karelia and how successful these attempts were against the background of the military dangers in the spring and summer of 1919. Finally, Chapter 8 explores how the Bolsheviks were able to endure the

economic, military and social upheavals of 1919 and ultimately consolidate their hold over Soviet Karelia.

## Chapter 1

### Karelia's October: Winter 1917-1918

An analysis of the political dynamics in Karelia in late 1917 and early 1918 illustrates how important local factors were during the Bolshevik revolution. The Bolshevik party seized power in Petrograd on 25 October (7 November) 1917 but the authority of the new central government was fragile and there was no certainty that the rest of the country would fall in line with the capital. Every locality was compelled to accept or reject the authority of the Bolshevik government, the Soviet of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom), and the transition to the Soviet regime, a process which stretched out over a period of weeks and months after October. This chapter will argue that because of local political factors, recognition of the Bolshevik revolution in Petrozavodsk was delayed by approximately three months. Unlike in Petrograd the Bolshevik party was weak in Petrozavodsk in October 1917 but, towards the end of the year, it became more influential and drew important support from soldiers and industrial workers. The party also began to organise and coordinate its activities better with the help of a few party representatives sent from Petrograd. However, even when the local Bolsheviks did gain a political foothold in Karelia in early January this was largely assisted by their support for the Left SR party which declared its own independence as a local party in Olonets province that same month. These Left SRs then entered into a political bloc with the local Bolshevik party and only then, in early February 1918, was Sovnarkom officially recognised as the central government by the Olonets provincial soviet.

#### **The weakness of the local Bolsheviks**

On the eve of the Bolshevik insurrection in Petrograd the Olonets provincial soviet, on 18 (31) October, discussed the imminent Second Congress of Soviets at which the transfer of power to the soviets was scheduled for debate. The Menshevik Internationalists,<sup>1</sup> mirroring

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<sup>1</sup> The First World War divided the Menshevik party into Internationalists and Defencists. The left wing Internationalists opposed Revolutionary Defencism which stressed the importance of a swift negotiated peace,

the Menshevik central committee, believed an insurrection premature and a provocation to civil war and instead sounded out the party's support for the convening of the Constituent Assembly. Similarly a SR representative, A.A. Sadikov, who would soon move to the left of the party, balked at the passing of authority to the soviets because he believed the Second Congress was unrepresentative of the peasantry.<sup>2</sup> However, a Bolshevik representative of the Petrograd soviet sent north as an agitator to his native town of Petrozavodsk, A.A. Kopiatkevich, advocated the transition of all power to the soviets.<sup>3</sup> The news of the October insurrection in Petrograd therefore received a mixed reaction from soviet political elites in Petrozavodsk: the Bolsheviks greeted it eagerly, the Mensheviks and SRs indignantly.<sup>4</sup>

Although, as we will see below, the Bolshevik uprising in Petrograd helped local Bolsheviks influence events in Petrozavodsk they were not yet powerful enough to dictate the political discourse like their senior party counterparts in the capital because political opinion still favoured the Mensheviks and SRs. On 27 October (9 November) the Olonets provincial soviet, in a joint session with the main (*glavnyi*) committee of the Murmansk railroad and representatives of the soldiers' committees and other public organisations (*obshchestvennye organizatsii*), officially recognised the Olonets provincial soviet as the highest governing authority in the province. However, at the same time, the provincial soviet refused to recognise Sovnarkom's authority and the Menshevik Internationalists

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but supported the defence of the country and revolution until that could be achieved. The Internationalists often cooperated with the Bolsheviks and Left SRs in a radical bloc in 1917, but opposed the October revolution. They believed the Bolsheviks were trying to build socialism but in the wrong way and by using the wrong methods and so tried to influence and put pressure on the Bolsheviks by putting forward alternative proposals. On the 'basic currents of Menshevism' see L. Lande "The Mensheviks in 1917", in L.H. Haimson, ed., *The Mensheviks. From the Revolution of 1917 to the Second World War*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974. 6-14.

<sup>2</sup> Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 109-111. The composition of the Second Congress of Soviets was drawn largely from Bolshevik dominated urban soviets and military councils. Many peasant organisations refused to participate. R. Pipes, *The Russian Revolution, 1899-1919*. London: The Harvill Press, 1990. 498.

<sup>3</sup> For some biographical details of A.A. Kopiatkevich see Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 56; 60. Vavulinskaia, *Sovety Karelii*. 401.

<sup>4</sup> M.I. Shumilov, "Rozhdenie Sovetskoi Vlasti v Petrozavodske i Karelii." *Voprosy Istorii Evropeiskogo Severa*, 1999. 84. Sadikov and Kopiatkevich were the two representatives of Olonets province present at the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets. Vavulinskaia, *Sovety Karelii*. 481.

retained the leadership of the provincial soviet.<sup>5</sup> So, while the Mensheviks and SRs were unable to halt the transition of power in the capital to the Bolsheviks, their counterparts in Petrozavodsk, in the absence of a sufficiently strong Bolshevik party were able to resist. The local Menshevik and SR parties sought a homogeneous socialist government of all socialist parties, including the Bolsheviks, but not a government dominated by the latter.<sup>6</sup> As a result, on 5 (18) November, the Olonets provincial soviet demanded the immediate creation of a national homogeneous socialist government. Until this was realised the provincial soviet announced that it would reject the authority of any other form of central government and act independently of the centre.<sup>7</sup>

Local Bolshevik organisations were weak in influence at the time of the October revolution. In fact the first Bolshevik groups in Petrozavodsk had only been formed in the autumn of 1917 and one of the first Bolshevik cells, created at the Aleksandrovsk munitions factory, did not establish communication with the Bolshevik party Central Committee until October 1917.<sup>8</sup> Granted, as the October revolution drew closer the Bolsheviks gathered more political support and a few small Bolshevik organisations gradually established themselves sporadically across the region.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, in the first few days and weeks following the October revolution, the provincial soviet was radicalised with the entry of workers from the Aleksandrovsk factory, woodworkers and soldiers from the local garrison.<sup>10</sup> But the Bolsheviks remained uncoordinated, disorganised and second in influence to the Mensheviks and SRs. On 6 (19) November V.M. Kudzhiev and A.A.

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<sup>5</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 99; 566, fn.36. V.M. Kudzhiev was the chairman of the Olonets provincial soviet (June-December 1917). The vice-chairmen were the Menshevik Internationalists N.V. Komarov and M.A. Kaplan.

<sup>6</sup> For a glimpse at how other local Menshevik party organisations developed and reacted to the Bolshevik revolution, some of which mirrored Karelia and others which differed, see Lande, "The Mensheviks in 1917" in Haimson, *The Mensheviks*. 68-70; 78-82. On the SRs see O.H. Radkey, *The Sickle under the Hammer. The Russian Socialist Revolutionaries in the Early Months of Soviet Rule*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1963. 258-277.

<sup>7</sup> Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 111-112.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 534, fn. 45.

<sup>9</sup> Mashezerskii, *Ustanovlenie*. 62-64. Mashezerskii, *Ocherki*. Vol.2. 26-28; 30; 32.

<sup>10</sup> Shumilov, "Rozhdenie". 86.

Sadikov were elected the Olonets provincial delegates to the Second All-Russian Congress of Peasants' Deputies which convened in Petrograd on 11 (24) November.<sup>11</sup> Because of their lack of coordination and relative weakness as a party in the region, the Bolsheviks did not put forward a candidate for election when voting took place for the Constituent Assembly in Olonets province, 12-14 (25-27) November. The Menshevik M.D. Shishkin<sup>12</sup> and the SR A.F. Matveev<sup>13</sup> were chosen to represent the province.<sup>14</sup>

Despite their influential and numerical weakness locally the existence of a de facto Bolshevik government in Petrograd helped strengthen the Bolsheviks' political position in Petrozavodsk, although not immediately. For example, agitators were sent from the capital. A representative of the Bolshevik party Central Committee arrived in Petrozavodsk in November 1917 and spoke out at a town meeting on 28 November (11 December) against the Constituent Assembly: 'Long live the republic of Soviets of workers', soldiers' and peasants' deputies, not the democratic republic!' he declared. But again the Mensheviks and SRs still dominated local political opinion. Following speeches by the Menshevik Internationalists L.V. Nikol'skii and V.M. Kudzhiev the meeting resolved to support the Menshevik position in favour of the Constituent Assembly, 'The calm water where the state ship can harbour during politically bad weather', as Kudzhiev described it.<sup>15</sup>

Support for the Constituent Assembly in Karelia continued towards the end of 1917 when a general gathering of more than 200 people took place in Petrozavodsk. Represented

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid; A. Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power*. 50; 414, fn.129.

<sup>12</sup> For some short biographical details on Shishkin see L.G. Protasov, *Liudi Uchreditel'nogo Sobraniia. Portret v Inter'ere Epokhi'*. Moscow: Rosspen, 2008. 423; Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 533-534, fn. 44.

<sup>13</sup> For some short biographical details on Matveev see Protasov, *Liudi*. 341; Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 533, fn. 44.

<sup>14</sup> Mashezerskii, *Ustanovlenie*. 70; 73-74. A total of 76% of votes went to the SRs or Social Democratic parties, 22.4% to the Kadets and 1.3% to the extreme right social democratic group known as Edinstvo. Korablev, et al., *Istoriia Karelii*. 362. For a break down on the numbers voting within Archangel and Olonets provinces see O.H. Radkey, *Russia Goes to the Polls. The Election to the All-Russian Constituent Assembly, 1917*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989. 148-149. On the results for Petrozavodsk, where the Mensheviks and SRs also dominated, see: Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 113; L.M. Spirin, *Klassy i Partii v Grazhdanskoi Voine v Rossii*. Moscow: "Mysl'", 1968. 420-421.

<sup>15</sup> Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 112-113.

at the gathering were people from the Olonets provincial and Petrozavodsk district *zemstvos*, members of the *duma* (town and city councils), office employees, priests, doctors, statisticians and agronomists; all spoke out in support of convening the Constituent Assembly and condemned the Bolsheviks' seizure of power.<sup>16</sup> These opinions were echoed by many in the Olonets provincial soviet at one of its sessions on 7 (20) December. The Bolshevik faction, of course, expressed their desire to fully recognise Sovnarkom, carry out all its decrees and abstained from voting on any other resolution.<sup>17</sup> But the Mensheviks and SRs within the soviet defended the convening of the Constituent Assembly, attacked the Bolshevik party, Sovnarkom and its decrees. V.K. Karatygin, a SR, believed that socialism in Russia alone was impossible and Lenin and the Bolsheviks were being naïve if they thought the revolution in Russia would spread to other countries. L.V. Nikol'skii also reproached Lenin for getting carried away with the success of the Bolshevik takeover: 'In the Bolshevik party programme the slogan of the Constituent Assembly comes first, despite the fact that Lenin is waging a struggle against the Constituent Assembly. This is a mistake – the result of a hot head and the ecstasy of temporary victories.'<sup>18</sup>

Despite these criticisms, the Olonets provincial soviet adjusted its position of outright independence from the centre which it had declared a month earlier (see above) and showed a willingness to cooperate with the Bolsheviks in a limited manner; the SRs and Menshevik Internationalists preferred to be in contact with Sovnarkom and to make Olonets province an autonomous region. In spite of his criticism of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, Kudzhiev's resolution of working with Sovnarkom, but conditionally, was accepted. It read as follows:<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> V.G. Badanov, "Zemskie Uchrezhdeniia Evropeiskogo Severa v 1917-1918 gg." *Voprosy Istorii Evropeiskogo Severa*, 1999. 104.

<sup>17</sup> Vavulinskaia, *Sovety Karelii*. 31.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 30.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 31.

While confirming our former position in regards to Sovnarkom and the question of central state authority but taking into consideration that all the apparatus of state power, especially in the economic sector, is in Sovnarkom's hands, the Olonets provincial soviet, based on the proposition that it is impossible to isolate Oloniia from the state organism, we decided:

- 1) To recognise the possibility of business dealings (*delovie snosheniia*) with Sovnarkom as an organ that is in de facto (*fakticheski*) possession of state authority;
- 2) To subject Sovnarkom's decrees to appraisal at a general meeting of the Olonets soviet and to implement those which are rational from a revolutionary-democratic point of view and also decline those which would heighten the ruination of the economic, political and judicial structure of the country.

A western historian of the Mensheviks has called the Menshevik Internationalists 'the most energetic champions of negotiating with the Bolsheviks.'<sup>20</sup> Considering that the Menshevik Internationalists headed the Olonets provincial soviet and it was their resolution which was passed at the above conference, this viewpoint holds true at this time in Karelia. However, dictating the need for negotiation in Karelia were the local practical difficulties of being quarantined from the centre. Whether the Olonets provincial soviet liked it or not Karelia, as a grain deficit region, was economically bound to the centre.

After the October revolution the Olonets provincial soviet concentrated on regulating the work of the local *zemstvo* and maintaining social order. It also tried to control grain profiteering but struggled to stave off growing accusations of inactivity as grain deliveries decreased in quantity and regularity towards the end of the 1917. At the end of November the provincial soviet decided to requisition food from local timber firms and grain traders with armed soldiers; the 55<sup>th</sup> railroad workers' battalion, situated in Petrozavodsk, was used as a requisitioning detachment in late 1917 and early 1918. Of course food supply detachments were not officially introduced until May 1918, as part of the food supply dictatorship, but the requisitioning undertaken by the 55<sup>th</sup> railroad workers' battalion was nothing unusual; similar detachments had been operating across the country

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<sup>20</sup> Lande, "The Mensheviks in 1917" in Haimson, *The Mensheviks*. 59.

unofficially since the Bolshevik revolution.<sup>21</sup> In addition to this detachment's efforts the provincial soviet created a food commission attached to the soviet to help stop speculation while grain seizures from local merchants and businesses also took place spontaneously.<sup>22</sup> However, this was not enough and the expected grain deliveries began to decrease towards December.<sup>23</sup>

### **The rise of the local Bolshevik party**

As we have seen, the transfer of power in Karelia developed differently than in the capital. The primary reason for this was the weakness of the Bolshevik party and the relative strength of the Menshevik and SR parties who dominated local government in Petrozavodsk. However, despite the provincial soviet's initial aspirations to ignore Sovnarkom and rule independently of the centre, it soon became apparent that this was impossible. Economically Karelia was reliant on Petrograd's cooperation to secure food supplies but with the formation of a Bolshevik dominated government in the capital relations with the centre were potentially jeopardised. How could the Mensheviks and SRs in the Olonets provincial soviet be sure that the existence of a Bolshevik government in the capital would not marginalise their need for central help in gaining supplies? In addition, both Menshevik and SR Central Committees were in a state of paralysis owing to internal splits over their reactions to the October revolution. Because of a lack of organisation and the poor coordination of their parties' activities they achieved little in the interval leading up to the opening of the Constituent Assembly.<sup>24</sup> The provincial party organisations could

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<sup>21</sup> For example, from November 1917 a number of early detachments were sent from Petrograd to other provinces and a number of detachments were formed locally and for local needs by military-revolutionary committees, soviets and provincial food committees. See R. Medvedev, *The October Revolution*. London: Constable, 1979. 100-101; Iu.K. Strizhkov, *Prodovol'stvennyye Otriady v Gody Grazhdanskoi Voiny i Inostrannoi Interventsii, 1917-1921 gg.* Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Nauka, 1973. 40; 45-49. For reasons unknown, the 55<sup>th</sup> railroad workers' battalion was disbanded in the middle of January 1918 but not before the various food products it had gathered were transferred to the Olonets provincial food committee. Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 378; 573, fn. 124.

<sup>22</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 100-101.

<sup>23</sup> Korablev, et al., *Istoriia Karelii*. 362-363.

<sup>24</sup> On the developments within the Menshevik party at this time see Lande, "The Mensheviks in 1917" in Haimson, *The Mensheviks*. 43-91. For the SR party see Radkey, *Sickle*. 198-199.

not call upon their party hierarchies for advice or guidance on how to govern independently. Consequently the Olonets provincial soviet sought to negotiate with the Bolsheviks in Petrograd and advocated a form of autonomy whereby it could discuss and then discard or accept the introduction of Sovnarkom's decrees.

In contrast to the Menshevik and SR parties the Bolsheviks were proactive after October and continued to strengthen their grip on the country. It is clear that Sovnarkom began to pay more attention to the Karelian region by the end of 1917 and attempted to exert an element of control over it: communications were established with the local party in Petrozavodsk; and agitators were sent from Petrograd along with literature and weapons to help coordinate party work, form links with the town's garrison and create a local Red Guard. At the beginning of January four more agitators, 3 Bolsheviks & 1 Left SR, arrived from Petrograd to help establish soviets and develop party work in the region (see below). And yet just as important to the Bolsheviks' rise in power and influence in Karelia, as will become evident, was the break up of the SR party and the emergence of the local Left SRs.<sup>25</sup> Up to January 1918 the local SR party remained a united organisation, albeit composed of left, centre and right-wing groups with all the educated leaders supportive of Victor Chernov's centre-left faction. Only with the arrival of a few party workers from Petrograd in early January did a split take place and the majority of SRs moved to the left to form the local Left SR party at the end of that month.<sup>26</sup> This occurrence brought an opportunity for the Bolsheviks to ally themselves with the Left SRs, gain a foothold in local government and form a bloc against the Mensheviks and remaining SRs.

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<sup>25</sup> Donald Raleigh also believes the opinion that the rupture of the SR party and the emergence of the Left SRs strengthened the Bolsheviks' hand in the provinces. See D. Raleigh, *Revolution on the Volga. 1917 in Saratov*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986. 293-294.

<sup>26</sup> K.M. Anderson, et al., eds., *Partiia Levykh Sotsialistov-Revoliutsionerov. Dokumenty i Materialy. 1917-1925 gg. Tom 1: Iiul' 1917 g. - Mai 1918 g.* Vol.1. Moscow: Rosspen, 2000. 263. The allegiances of local party members following the SR party split appears to have followed the national trend; intellectuals remained within the parent party and the Left SRs attracted a more plebeian character. See: E. Cinella, "The Tragedy of the Russian Revolution. Promise and Default of the Left Socialist Revolutionaries in 1918." *Cahiers du Monde russe*, Vol.38, No.1-2, 1997. 48.

Following defeat on the Constituent Assembly issue and the unconditional recognition of Sovnarkom and its decrees, in November and December there were signs that the Bolsheviks in Petrozavodsk were beginning to put pressure on the provincial soviet to recognise the government in Petrograd. Organisation was important; a Bolshevik party Central Committee representative in Petrozavodsk helped shape the local party organisation by establishing joint meetings between the Bolshevik representatives of the Aleksandrovsk factory and the Murmansk railroad.<sup>27</sup> Together these two organisations formed a joint Bolshevik party committee in Petrozavodsk in mid-December and at the end of the month two of its founding members, Kh.G. Doroshin and G.S. Mirontsev, visited Petrograd to establish communication with the centre and receive advice on how to organise the party. Doroshin and Mirontsev met with Ia.M. Sverdlov who, it has been argued, was instrumental in forming party ties between centre and locality through his own personal networks.<sup>28</sup> Sverdlov questioned them about conditions in Petrozavodsk and Olonets province, offered organisational advice and supplied them with literature and weapons. He also promised to send an experienced Bolshevik party worker to help with party work.<sup>29</sup> On 1 (14) January 1918 a member of the Bolshevik party Central Committee and the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, A.I. Alekseev, arrived in Petrozavodsk.<sup>30</sup>

Realising that dealings with the Bolsheviks were coming to a head the Menshevik-SR dominated executive committee of the Olonets provincial soviet tried to disband the 55<sup>th</sup> railroad workers' battalion at the end of December but failed. The joint Bolshevik party committee in Petrozavodsk decided on 27 December (9 January) to send two party representatives to the battalion to agitate against the disbandment and to invite its members

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<sup>27</sup> Memoirs of Kh.G. Doroshin in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 12.

<sup>28</sup> G.M. Easter, *Reconstructing the State. Personal Networks and Elite Identity in Soviet Russia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. 68-69.

<sup>29</sup> Memoirs of Kh.G. Doroshin in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 12-15.

<sup>30</sup> Shumilov, *Bor'ba*. 68.

to the next party meeting on 31 December (13 January).<sup>31</sup> The provincial soviet also appealed to the war ministry (*Voennoe ministerstvo*) in Petrograd for machine guns to defend Petrozavodsk and arm Red Guards not currently situated in the town. It is not known if the soviet explicitly stated their intentions to the capital but local Bolsheviks understood this move to be a threat to them. On 31 December (13 January) the Petrozavodsk Bolshevik party committee wrote to the party Central Committee to ask that the Olonets provincial soviet's demands for machine guns be turned down.<sup>32</sup> The Bolsheviks then organised a Red Guard detachment composed of railroad workers and the workers of the Aleksandrovsk factory which met on 3 January to plan a demonstration for the following day in Petrozavodsk against the Menshevik-SR leadership of the provincial soviet. When the demonstration took place the 55<sup>th</sup> railroad workers' battalion joined in the protest despite the efforts of its commander to stop them doing so; he was disarmed and replaced.<sup>33</sup> Thereafter the demonstration passed without incident or bloodshed but forced the Olonets provincial soviet into an emergency session on the evening of the 4 and 5 (17 and 18) January.<sup>34</sup>

At this session the representatives of the soldiers called for the full recognition of Sovnarkom and threatened to leave the provincial soviet and create their own soviet of soldiers' deputies if the central government was not recognised. The representatives of the union of metal workers at the Aleksandrovsk factory and the representative of the union of woodworkers also supported the motion to recognise Sovnarkom. But there was still no consensus of opinion to permanently recognise the de facto government. Kudzhiev stressed that the timing of the socialist revolution was not right, that the peasantry prevailed over the workers in the ratio of social classes and as a consequence Sovnarkom would last but a

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<sup>31</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 114; 566, fn.41.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 114-115.

<sup>33</sup> Memoirs of A.A. Kharlamov in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 60.

<sup>34</sup> Memoirs of Kh.G. Doroshin in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 15-16; Shumilov, *Bor'ba*. 68.

matter of months.<sup>35</sup> The centre SRs and other Menshevik Internationalists also supported the Constituent Assembly at the session. F.I. Prokhorov, a Menshevik Internationalist, remarked:<sup>36</sup>

Picture yourselves on a wide, deep, stormy river with flowering banks on both sides and all the dangers of crossing it. All of us, Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, yearn for socialism...we prefer to cross the river by canoe and not to take chances... The canoe is the Constituent Assembly. We want to be on the right track while you [the Bolsheviks] want to take risks.

However the Bolsheviks found support in their criticism of the Mensheviks and remaining SRs from I.V. Balashov, a Left SR who had recently arrived as a representative of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee:<sup>37</sup>

The triumph of Bolshevism is only a reaction against the slack politics of the opportunistic socialists...And the criminal here is he who with shaky and overcooked (*perederzhannyi*) structures undermine the latest stage of the revolution and call for war against the soviets...The people are with us and not with this cowardice...Forward! To peace, to land, to freedom!

Unlike their Left SR counterparts in Petrograd who quickly dismissed their support for an all socialist coalition government and accepted government posts in Sovnarkom, the local Left SRs still advocated the formation of a socialist coalition in early January.<sup>38</sup> The Bolsheviks, realising that they were outnumbered on this issue, voted for the Left SR resolution to undermine the leading position of the Menshevik-SR bloc in the provincial soviet.<sup>39</sup> The Left SR resolution was passed by 67 votes to 41 but it did not change the provincial soviet's political position. Supporting their previous stance, declared on 7 (20) December, the Olonets provincial soviet resolved that in order to help the country in its current financial and economic position it would only recognise a government formed from

<sup>35</sup> Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 115-116.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 116.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 114-115.

<sup>38</sup> Negotiations regarding a Bolshevik and Left SR coalition government began in mid-November 1917. Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power*. 51-52.

<sup>39</sup> Memoirs of Kh.G. Doroshin in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 16-17.

all the socialist parties.<sup>40</sup> The soviet also resolved to call for the immediate convening of the Constituent Assembly and to hold new elections to the executive committee and presidium of the provincial soviet. These new elections were paramount to providing the Bolsheviks a more influential position in local government especially, when under pressure, Kudzhiev and his vice-chairman Komarov announced they would leave the presidium of the soviet.<sup>41</sup> Therefore when elections took place the following day the Left SRs and Bolsheviks had the opportunity to vote and make sure the political leadership of the province was in the hands of someone new.

Indeed a new soviet executive committee and presidium, dominated by the Left SRs and Bolsheviks, was elected at the following session of the Olonets provincial soviet, 5-6 (18-19) January. 63 representatives in total were present at the session: 18 Menshevik Internationalists, 17 SRs, 14 Bolsheviks, 10 representatives of the soldiers and 4 non-party members. The newly elected provincial executive committee consisted of 5 Bolsheviks, 6 Menshevik Internationalists, 6 SRs (5 of whom were Left SRs), 3 representatives from the soldiers section and 1 non-party member.<sup>42</sup> The elections to the presidium of the provincial soviet provided the Bolsheviks with a majority. This body consisted of 2 Bolsheviks, 2 Left SRs, 1 Menshevik Internationalist, and 1 representative of the soldiers.<sup>43</sup> A Bolshevik

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<sup>40</sup> It has been argued that a coalition socialist government had the broadest popular backing to replace the Provisional government. M. Melancon, "The Left Socialist Revolutionaries and the Bolshevik Uprising" in V.N. Brovkin, *The Bolsheviks in Russian Society. The Revolution and the Civil Wars*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997. 71-77.

<sup>41</sup> Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 117.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 118. Entering the newly elected provincial executive committee were the Bolsheviks N.T. Grigor'ev, G.S. Mirontsev, P.K. Aksent'ev, I.N. Sukhanov & N.I. Odintsov, the Menshevik Internationalists V.M. Kudzhiev, B.S. Gaup, A.V. Kharitonov, V.A. Popov, P.I. Odintsov & M.A. Nikonov and the SRs K.V. Almazov (Left SR), M.A. Evstifeev (Left SR), I.N. Novozhilov, G.G. Fleisher (Left SR), N.I. Sidorov (Left SR) & P.A. Gorlov (Left SR). The three members from the soldiers' section were F.B. Pichurin (Bolshevik), A.S. Fenin (party affiliation unknown) & F.Z. Shumilov (Bolshevik). A final place was reserved for a non-party member to be decided at a future date. Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 132.

<sup>43</sup> The newly elected presidium consisted of the Bolsheviks Kh.G. Doroshin & I.F. Prianikov, the SRs A.A. Sadikov (Left SR) I.N. Kapustkin & the Menshevik Internationalist N.V. Komarov. The name and party affiliation of the soldiers' representative in the presidium is unknown. Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 132; Korablev, et al., *Istoriia Karelii*. 364.

majority was achieved when Valentin M. Parfenov was elected the new executive committee's chairman and head of the presidium.<sup>44</sup>

### **The limits of Bolshevik authority and the beginnings of the Left SR-Bolshevik alliance**

With the help of the Left SRs the Bolsheviks were transformed from a minority party to one in power within the space of a few days. Yet, the Bolsheviks' development was only relative; despite their misgivings regarding a socialist coalition government they were forced to accept it. Moreover their growing influence in Petrozavodsk did not mean that they were strong throughout Karelia. The Kem' district soviet, headed by the Mensheviks and SRs, did not recognise Sovnarkom and the Bolsheviks did not become the dominant political force there until 13 March, at which point, together with the Left SRs, they captured the leadership of the district soviet executive committee.<sup>45</sup>

As with the Menshevik-SR administration the Bolsheviks and Left SRs replaced, the administrative potential of the *zemstvo* institutions were exploited by the Bolsheviks and Left SRs. In short, the *zemstvos* provided a support base for the soviets in the localities, many of which had been formed in a makeshift manner. In fact a number of *zemstvos* were simply renamed as soviets with little change to their staff and without altering their structure or functions:<sup>46</sup> former *zemstvo* representatives entered the Olonets district soviet in mid-January 1918; in February the Tolvuiskaia parish *zemstvo* (Petrozavodsk district) was renamed the parish soviet of peasants' deputies; and when the Povenets district soviet was founded in March its executive committee included members of the dissolved *zemstvo*,

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<sup>44</sup> Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 118-119; Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 131.

<sup>45</sup> Shumilov, *Bor'ba*. 72; The Kem soviet's executive committee chairman became A.I. Mosorin (Bolshevik). His deputies were A.A. Kamenev (Bolshevik) and V.A. Bakhirev (Left SR). Korablev, et al., *Istoriia Karelii*. 366.

<sup>46</sup> Korablev, et al., *Istoriia Karelii*. 369.

including its former chairman.<sup>47</sup> The *zemstvos* remained part of Karelia's governing administration up to March 1918; the Olonets provincial *zemstvo* was dissolved on 22 February,<sup>48</sup> the Petrozavodsk district *zemstvo* was abolished during that same month while those in Kem', Pudozh, Olonets and Povenets districts remained until March.<sup>49</sup> Parish *zemstvos* continued to function in Karelia into the summer of 1918.<sup>50</sup>

Similarly the *duma* administration continued to operate alongside the soviets. For example, the Pudozh town *duma* managed to force the Pudozh district soviet to broaden its membership during February 1918 after the *duma's* original protest against the creation of a district soviet.<sup>51</sup> The Petrozavodsk town *duma* functioned up to 2 May 1918, and only then did a Bolshevik resolution dissolve it in spite of the SRs' and Menshevik Internationalists' complaints.<sup>52</sup> The fact that these non-soviet organs of local government remained intact and operated parallel to the soviets up to spring 1918 and in some cases even longer reflected the weak infrastructure of the Bolshevik and fledgling Soviet apparatus. The Bolshevik party were not yet influential enough to govern throughout the countryside without relying on the already existing governing institutions. The influence of the Left SRs here was also important considering that the party's Central Committee in principle advocated the continuation of already existing and democratically elected organs to carry out various economic and social functions.<sup>53</sup> Local conditions therefore meant that

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<sup>47</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 170-171; 163; Memoirs of F.E. Pottoev in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 188-189.

<sup>48</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 146.

<sup>49</sup> Shumilov, *Bor'ba*. 98; NARK, f.R-106, op.1, d.10, l.12; S.I. Filimonchik, "Olonets v Gody Revoliutsii i Grazhdanskoi Voyny (1917-nach. 1920-x godov)", in A.M. Pashkov, ed., *Olonets. Istoriko-Kraevedcheskii Ocherki v Dvukh Chastiakh. Chast' II*, Petrozavodsk: Izdatel'stvo Petrozavodskogo Universiteta, 1999. 9. Figes, Raleigh and Retish found similar occurrences in the transition from *zemstvo* to Soviet rule in their respective regional studies. See, Figes, *Peasant Russia*. 64-66; Raleigh, *Civil War*. 100; and Retish, *Russia's Peasants*. 134-135.

<sup>50</sup> Korablev, et al., *Istoriia Karelii*. 368.

<sup>51</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 181; 568, fn.63.

<sup>52</sup> Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 127-128.

<sup>53</sup> *Znamia Truda*, 29 December 1917, cited in R. Kowalski, "Fellow Travellers' or Revolutionary Dreamers? The Left Socialist Revolutionaries after 1917." *Revolutionary Russia*, Vol.11, No.2, 1998. 5; K.V. Gusev, *Krakh Partii Levykh Eserov*. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Sotsial'no-Ekonomicheskoi Literatury, 1963. 117-119.

it was pragmatic for the Bolsheviks and Left SRs to work alongside the *zemstvos* and *dumas* until the soviets were more firmly established.

Although the Bolsheviks became more influential in terms of their representation in the provincial soviet it is worth underlining that they were given the spring board to do so through their collaboration with the Left SRs. When the Left SRs convened their first meeting, on 28 January (10 February) 1918, its party members resolved to officially enter into a bloc with the Bolsheviks and elect a Left SR executive committee. I.V. Balashov became its chairman and A.A. Sadikov his deputy.<sup>54</sup> As mentioned above Ivan Balashov arrived as a representative of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee earlier in the month to help organise soviets and implement the decrees of the centre. He was joined by A.I. Alekseev, O.I. Toliarenok and M.M. Timonen, all of whom were Bolsheviks and helped establish soviets in Olonets, Pudozh and Povenets districts in January 1918.<sup>55</sup> The potential for a politically dominating Left SR-Bolshevik bloc was evident at the Third Olonets Provincial Congress of Peasants' Deputies, 30 January (12 February) – 5 February (18 February) 1918.<sup>56</sup> In attendance were 44 Bolshevik delegates, 44 Left SRs, 48 Mensheviks and Right SRs and 19 non-party representatives. In spite of protests from the SRs and Menshevik Internationalists, the majority of congress delegates resolved to endorse the dismissal of the Constituent Assembly and pass all power in Olonets province to the soviets, thus abandoning hopes for an all socialist coalition government.<sup>57</sup>

Therefore it was not until early February 1918, just over three months after the transition of power in the capital that the authority of Sovnarkom was finally recognised in

<sup>54</sup> Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 119-120.

<sup>55</sup> Shumilov, "Rozhdenie". 89; Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 169; 173-175; 181; 189-190. The future chairman of the Olonets provincial executive committee, P.F. Anokhin also arrived in January and soon after was elected the chair of the Petrozavodsk railway station Bolshevik party committee. Kh.G. Doroshin, *Bol'shevik P.F. Anokhin*. Petrozavodsk: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Karel'skoi ASSR, 1957. 22.

<sup>56</sup> This was the first provincial congress of soviets at which the Bolshevik party were represented. For some of the resolutions passed at this congress see Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 151-158.

<sup>57</sup> Korablev, et al., *Istoriia Karelii*. 365-366; Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 120.

Petrozavodsk and this was only made possible by the cooperation between local Left SRs and Bolsheviks. However, following the official recognition of Sovnarkom in Petrozavodsk the Bolshevik party did not become the presiding political authority in the region; instead the emergent Left SRs became increasingly influential. A reflection of their influence is visible in the important portfolios they held in the Olonets provincial soviet by the end of February 1918: K.V. Almazov was commissar for finance; A.A. Sadikov commissar for agriculture and state property; A.P. Tikhomirov commissar for food and P.P. Panin commissar for internal affairs.<sup>58</sup>

Yet this onward march of the Left SRs did not occur without setbacks. On 1 March the Left SRs elected a temporary provincial party committee, but owing to the preoccupation of party members working in the soviets' commissariats, a lack of finances and poor communications, the Left SRs found it difficult to form a permanent provincial organisation. By the time of the second national party congress (17-25 April 1918) this had still not been possible.<sup>59</sup> A.S. Rybak, the Olonets provincial representative, pointed out some of the reasons for this at the congress. He believed his province to be one of the remotest and most distant of all the provinces, not because of its geographical location but because of its accessibility. Rybak also pointed out that because of the province's backwardness all events, like the recognition of Sovnarkom, took place belatedly. The arrival of Left SR party workers from Petrograd proved significant for the party's organisational efforts but they remained constrained because, like the Bolsheviks, they had only a small number of intellectuals. In spite of these difficulties Rybak did state that the

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<sup>58</sup> Posts held by other Left SRs included: I.V. Balashov, commissar for medical affairs; A.M. Kuznetsov commissar for state control; and G.G. Fleisher commissar for charity. Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 159-160; Anderson et al, *Partiia*. 799, fn. 302. Positions held by Bolsheviks included: N.T. Grigor'ev, commissar for labour; V.M. Parfenov, commissar for education (*prosveshchenie*); G.S. Mirontsev, commissar for posts and telegraphs; and I.N. Sukhanov, commissar for the Red Guards. Posts held by the Menshevik Internationalists included: B.S. Gaup, commissar for justice; and N.V. Komarov, commissar for communications. The party affiliation of S.G. Borodulin, who took up the position of military commissar and V.I. Zaozerskii, commissar for the administration of soviet property is, to date, unknown. Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 159-160.

<sup>59</sup> Anderson, et al., *Partiia*. 264; 264, fn.303.

construction of the Murmansk railroad facilitated the development of the Left SR party in Karelia: ‘...the influence of the party is unquestionable, its moral influence is great and spreads not only to the limits of Olonets province, but also to neighbouring districts and even to Archangel province because the Murmansk railroad passes through there...’<sup>60</sup>

According to Rybak the Left SRs were the dominant political force in Olonets province. He boasted: ‘in short, almost all local life was administered and is administered by the Left SRs.’<sup>61</sup>

Meanwhile the Bolsheviks suffered from the same organisational problems and remained an infant party in Karelia despite their strengthened position as a consequence of their political alliance with the Left SRs. A Petrozavodsk town Bolshevik party central committee did not come into existence until February 1918, at which time the party had no more than 100 members.<sup>62</sup> Party work was also undermined because members were overloaded with work in the soviets which meant attendance at party gatherings was poor. A number of ‘unreliable’ (*neustoichivyi*) members flocked to the party in early 1918 but their attendance at party gatherings was poor and the payment of contributions to the party suffered. The local party recognised its indiscipline and proposed to carry out a new and stricter registration of its members.<sup>63</sup> On 14 April 1918 local Bolsheviks re-organised the Petrozavodsk Bolshevik party central committee into a Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik party committee.<sup>64</sup> On the same day the party sent a telegram to the Secretariat of the Bolshevik party Central Committee stating that these re-elections had taken place. The

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 264.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 263-264. The proceedings of the Second Left SR Party Congress are published in Ibid. 210-676.

<sup>62</sup> Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 534, fn. 45. A soviet account contradicts the size of the Bolshevik party in Petrozavodsk at this time and states that it had 500 members by January 1918. Mashezerskii, *Ustanovlenie*. 102. A presidium to the Petrozavodsk central Bolshevik party committee was elected on 21 February 1918. Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor’ba*. 195.

<sup>63</sup> *Perepiska Sekretariata TsK RKP (b) s Mestnymi Partiinymi Organizatsiiami (Noiabr’-Dekabr’ 1918 g.)*. *Sbornik Dokumentov*. Vol. 5. Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Politicheskoi Literatury, 1970. 141.

<sup>64</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor’ba*. 197-198. Elected to the presidium of the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik party committee on 15 April 1918 were: its chairman Kh.G. Doroshin; his deputy N.N. Dorofeev; the secretary A.A. Zuev; the secretary’s deputy A.G. Gershanovich and the treasurer D.Z. Akulov. Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor’ba*. 198.

reason given by the local party for the re-elections was that the committee was too cumbersome (*gromozdkii*) because it had too many members; a smaller party committee, composed of seven people, would be more streamlined and more efficient because it was made up of ‘steadfast (*ustoichivyi*) and sound (*zdorovyi*)’ party members.<sup>65</sup>

## Conclusion

The above events reflect the importance local political factors played in the transfer of power to the soviets, in a peripheral region where Bolshevik influence was almost non-existent. Despite the geographical proximity of Petrozavodsk to Petrograd the recognition of Sovnarkom’s authority occurred three months after the October coup and this was achieved not by the Bolsheviks but the Left SRs. It was their proposals put forward at the emergency session of the provincial soviet between 4 (17) and 5 (18) January which initiated a change of the ruling parties in Petrozavodsk. The Bolsheviks latched on to this opportunity and took up the leadership of the provincial soviet in what appears to be a Left SR-Bolshevik compromise; the Left SRs took up posts in the most important commissariats (with the exception of the military) while the Bolsheviks took the chairmanship of the presidium and executive committee. As will be shown in the following chapter the Left SR-Bolshevik bloc worked in relative harmony to endure a number of local crises in the spring of 1918.

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<sup>65</sup> *Perepiska Sekretariata TsK RSDRP (b) s Mestnymi Partiinymi Organizatsiiami (Mart-Iiul’ 1918 g.). Sbornik Dokumentov. Vol. 3. Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Politicheskoi Literatury, 1967. 177. On the reasoning behind the creation of a smaller local party committee also see *Perepiska* Vol.5. 141.*

## **Chapter 2**

### **The Left SR-Bolshevik Alliance: Cooperation Amidst Crisis, March-June**

#### **1918**

The previous chapter showed how weak the Bolshevik party was in Karelia at the time of the October revolution and how, through the dispatch of party agitators and organisers from Petrograd and most importantly their collaboration in a bloc with the Left SRs, the Bolsheviks had gained a relatively strong foothold in the Olonets provincial soviet by early February 1918. This Left SR-Bolshevik alliance within the provincial soviet remained united during the spring of 1918 when it faced the important task of overcoming various external and internal threats to the local Soviet regime. This chapter will argue that local political, military and economic factors shaped the revolution in Karelia and that there was little central control from the capital. Instead, local leaders survived the spring of 1918 largely through their own efforts and the story of Karelia's civil war at this time is one of remarkably staunch local resistance and political unity in the face of serious threats and challenges to Soviet power.

Left SRs and Bolsheviks in Petrozavodsk were united in their condemnation of two policies favoured in Moscow, the Allies' involvement in Murmansk and Trotsky's insistence on appointing former tsarist officers to the fledgling Red Army. In fact the local Menshevik Internationalists also found common ground with their political adversaries on both these issues. Despite its differences with Moscow, and with minimal support from the centre, the Soviet regime in Karelia was also able to defeat an attack made on the region by White Finns in April while the unity of the Left SR-Bolshevik alliance in the Petrozavodsk town soviet was reflected in its marginalisation of the remaining parties within this body. Although the revolution and civil war was shaped by political events peculiar to the region such as the Left SR-Bolshevik alliance and the landing of the Allies, the civil war in Karelia was also affected by the poor economic conditions prevalent across Soviet Russia.

During the spring of 1918 little central direction or control existed nationally, political power was “devolved” to the periphery, but Karelia was strapped for finances and on the brink of starvation due to the almost complete cessation of funds and grain supplies reaching Petrozavodsk from the capital. This led to local soviets relying on their own initiatives and what local resources were available to try and ease the shortages. However, these resources could only stretch so far and food and financial hardships contributed to a rebellion in Olonets town in June 1918. It was a problem which the Left SRs and Bolsheviks worked together to overcome, but ultimately collaboration with Moscow would be essential for the future.

### **The Allied landings and the Karelian reaction**

The first landing of British soldiers in Murmansk on 6 March has been fairly well documented but only as far as this affected the relationship between the Murmansk soviet and the capital and the wider diplomatic consequences against the background of the First World War.<sup>1</sup> The relevance of the British landings in relation to the Olonets provincial soviet, however, has been overlooked, particularly in the English based historiography. As a result, how the collaboration of the Murmansk soviet with the Allies affected the Olonets provincial soviet demands further discussion. Essentially, the major issue for local leaders surrounding the landing of the Allies was the lack of coordination between the Soviet capital and Petrozavodsk. In other words Bolshevik authority at this stage of the revolution was particularly decentralised and because of a lack of contact from the centre local leaders were in a state of confusion over how to react to the landing of the Allies and the threat to the Murmansk railway line. As we shall see below this lack of communication was not the result of indecision in Petrozavodsk over how to react but in the capital. It was in Petrograd, against the background of the military threat from the Germans and the negotiations for the

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<sup>1</sup> The most detailed account on the diplomatic and local issues surrounding the initial Murmansk landings is in Kennan, *The Decision to Intervene*. 31-57.

Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, where Bolshevik leaders hesitated and were unsure what their relationship with the Allies should be.

The most striking feature of the landing of 130 or so British marines on 6 March in Murmansk was the fact that it occurred in concurrence not only with the wishes of the Murmansk soviet but the central authorities in Petrograd, most notably Trotsky.<sup>2</sup> In a book written at the height of the anti-Trotsky campaign a leading Bolshevik Mikhail Kedrov chastised both Trotsky and the Murmansk soviet for accepting Allied aid but Kedrov made a valid observation concerning the effect of the telegram on local conditions:<sup>3</sup>

It brought confusion into the relations between the soviets of the Murmansk region and the Olonets and Archangel provinces, in that it authorised the Murmansk Soviet alone to conduct negotiations with the “Allies”, to assume leadership in the defence of the whole vast region, and to guard the entire Murmansk Railway, failing at the same time to apprise the other provincial centres of the measures taken....

Kedrov supported his assessment of the situation by producing a telegram issued by the Murmansk soviet sent on 5 March to all soviets along the railroad declaring that it had placed the district of Aleksandrovsk (Archangel province) and the railway from Murmansk to Zvanka under martial law on 2 March. The soviet asked all local governing administrations and committees to begin forming Red Army detachments and to carry out their work as normal while following instructions for the defence of the region from the Murmansk soviet and its military soviet. The latter included members of the English and French military missions situated there.<sup>4</sup> On 15 March the Olonets provincial soviet

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<sup>2</sup> The decision was taken at a time when Trotsky and Lenin believed that cooperation with the Allies was a pragmatic way to help reconstruct the Russian army. The decision was also made just before the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, signed on 3 March, when for a brief moment it seemed peace negotiations had broken off. G. Swain, *The Origins of the Russian Civil War*. London: Longman, 1996. 132-135; J.W. Wheeler-Bennett, *Brest-Litovsk: The Forgotten Peace, March 1918*. London: Macmillan, 1938. 267. For Trotsky's telegram to the Murmansk soviet, telling it to accept aid from the Allies see M.S. Kedrov, *Bez Bol'shevistskogo Rukovodstva*. Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo “Krasnaia Gazeta”, 1930. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Kedrov, *Bez*. 28.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 38-39.

executive committee declared its bewilderment at the Murmansk soviet's apparent jurisdiction over the guarding of the railway line:<sup>5</sup>

We recognise that the concluding of an agreement between the Murmansk Soviet and the government agents of the Anglo-French on the one hand contradicts the general direction of the politics of a worker-peasants' Russia, which rejects active collaboration with international imperialists, while on the other hand the agreement will subject the Murmansk region to the economic and military influence of the European governments, leading, in the end, to the development of separatism in conditions favourable to a capitalist system.

We recognise that the revolutionary protection of the Murmansk railroad must be fulfilled exclusively by the Soviets and Railroad workers' deputies, outside of any extraneous elements, and the best realisation of this goal would be through the sending of representatives from the Murmansk, Kem' and Soroka Soviets to the Olonets provincial Soviet.

This particular statement is significant because it showed that the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee, presided over by the Left SR-Bolshevik alliance but also including Menshevik Internationalists, was united in its concern about the presence of the Allies in Murmansk and the defence of the railroad. The railway line was the spine to which all military strategy could be grafted and formed an important and direct link to the most important town in Karelia, Petrozavodsk, which in turn was an important preceding stop before Petrograd. It was therefore understandable that Petrozavodsk wanted to communicate with Murmansk, Kem' and Soroka to find out exactly what was going on and where these soviets' allegiances lay. Furthermore, from the standpoint of the Olonets provincial executive committee, the Murmansk soviet looked to have undermined Sovnarkom's position towards the Allies which was against any kind of collaboration with imperialist countries.

Because of the lack of clarity and the absence of any correspondence from the centre V.M. Parfenov and the chairman of the executive committee of the Murmansk railroad, L.V. Nikol'skii (a Menshevik Internationalist), contacted Trotsky's secretary by

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<sup>5</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 221.

direct wire on 16 March to voice their concerns about the actions of the Murmansk soviet.

Because of its importance it is worth quoting part of this conversation at length:<sup>6</sup>

The tactics of the Murmansk soviet is completely incomprehensible, on the one hand it appeals for the organisation of the Red Army for the defence of Soviet power, while on the other hand it is entering into a triumvirate with the representatives of England and France in the military soviet. It seems to be a strange and unintelligible fact that telegram No. 176 [from 5 March] was not addressed to Sovnarkom. All of this needs to be explained urgently, because the final tactic to be adopted towards the Murmansk soviet by the Olonets soviet and the soviet executive committee of the Murmansk railroad is dependent on it....

We ask you to immediately communicate this question with comrade Lenin and to send his answer to us...send an answer before ten o'clock, or in extreme circumstances, before eleven o'clock this evening. It will have decisive significance.

— [Trotsky's secretary] I will convey everything to Lenin in Moscow immediately, but it is not likely that an answer will be given today because I will need to hand the note over to Moscow...

— [Parfenov & Nikol'skii] Again we ask you to provide an answer by eleven o'clock, otherwise the circumstances compel us to make a final decision while not knowing Sovnarkom's point of view, and it is highly possible, by all probability, separate from the point of view of the Murmansk Soviet which is fraught with serious consequences. That is all. We await your response. Good bye.

The presence of the Allies therefore united local leaders in Petrozavodsk against a common enemy. Furthermore, Parfenov and Nikol'skii's conversation again underlined the anxieties of the Olonets provincial executive committee; in their opinion what right had the Murmansk soviet, now supposedly in league with the Allies, to dictate terms to the other soviets along the Murmansk railroad in matters of defence? Was the Murmansk soviet now the higher authority in the region, according to some sort of agreement with Moscow? As the conversation highlights, Parfenov and Nikol'skii simply did not know and were alarmed at any proposed co-operation with the Allies, hence their pressing demand for clarification on the matter from Lenin himself. The confusion was not assisted by the fact that the government and its commissariats had recently been relocated to Moscow, the first evacuations taking place on 10 March. Lenin did not reply to Petrozavodsk but Trotsky did on 22 March. His response followed a note received by him sometime shortly after 16

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<sup>6</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 222-223.

March, from a member of the Main soviet for the administration of the Northern railroad.

It stated:<sup>7</sup>

I have spoke decisively and categorically through the apparatus with the chairman of the Murmansk soviet and received the answer from them that the aforementioned triumvirate of the Military soviet [meaning the English and French representatives] is working with your consent. It is incomprehensible to me that not even a copy of the telegrams from them to us, are being addressed to Sovnarkom. They have declared martial law all along the line from Murmansk to Zvanka. For the present I am annulling the orders...I spoke about all of this on the apparatus with comrade Lur'a, who was alone in Petrograd in the military commissariat. He did not answer me with anything concrete, having said that you are in Moscow, therefore I asked him to communicate with you in Moscow through the apparatus; up till now, however, I have heard nothing from you.

Trotsky's reply was brief but at least it managed to clarify for the local soviets what the situation was:<sup>8</sup>

The Murmansk soviet is right when referring to my permission. I cannot enter into a polemics of principle by direct wire, concerning this comrade Lenin has published an article in "*Pravda*", to which I refer you. It goes without saying that the military and technical advisors need to be watched carefully.

The article Trotsky was referring to was 'The Itch' (*o chesotke*) published on 9 (22) February<sup>9</sup> and in order to understand its relevance to the confusion and lack of communication with Petrozavodsk it is necessary to briefly discuss the political situation in the capital. Peace was signed with Germany on 3 March but Lenin had been forced to overcome 'left communist' and Left SR critics over the separate peace. However, in the days immediately preceding the signing of the treaty Lenin was also at odds with 'left communists' and Left SRs over a different but connected issue.

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<sup>7</sup> Kedrov, *Bez.* 42.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> L.I. Strakhovsky, *The Origins of American Intervention in North Russia (1918)*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1937. 32. For the article see V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed., Vol.35, Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoi Literatury, 1962. 361-364.

‘The Itch’ came in the aftermath of Lenin’s endorsement of accepting Allied military aid for a revolutionary war against the Germans on 22 February, after the latter’s renewed advance on 18 February. The article also aimed to counter the opposition Lenin’s endorsement received from the ‘left communists’ and Left SRs who favoured a partisan based revolutionary war but without the interference of foreign imperialist aid.<sup>10</sup> Lenin accused his critics of suffering from the itch of ‘The Revolutionary Phrase’ which was the title of another article published by him in *Pravda* on 8 (21) February.<sup>11</sup> The Bolshevik leader defined the term as ‘the repetition of revolutionary slogans irrespective of objective circumstances at a given turn in events, in the given state of affairs obtaining at the time.’<sup>12</sup> Lenin hoped to convince his doubters of the impracticalities of a revolutionary war and the need to accept Allied help against the Germans in such a revolutionary war *if* a separate peace was no longer possible. Nikolai Bukharin tendered his resignation from the Bolshevik Central Committee and his editorship of *Pravda* after the Central Committee voted, by a narrow majority of six votes to five, to accept a military agreement with the Allies on Trotsky’s proposal which was also supported by Lenin.<sup>13</sup> Lenin’s rationale was that the acceptance of help from one imperialist state in order to defend itself against the attack of another was acceptable if no other alternative was available and that the purpose of accepting the assistance was honourable i.e. for self-defence and not further plunder (as Kerensky had sought). Anyone not understanding this, Lenin wrote, was either out of their mind or had contracted the itch.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Lenin, *Polnoe*. Vol.35. 361, fn.142.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 343-353.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 343.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 361, fn.142. Lenin was not present but sent the following statement: ‘Please include my vote in favour of accepting potatoes and arms from the bandits of Anglo-French imperialism.’ Lenin, *Polnoe*. Vol.35. 361, fn.142. On Lenin’s support of Trotsky’s proposal see L. Trotsky, *My Life*. New York: Pathfinder, 2001. 455.

<sup>14</sup> Lenin, *Polnoe*. Vol.35. 362-363. At this time Lenin wrote a number of other articles against the revolutionary phrase making of the ‘left communists’ and the need to act pragmatically and accept a separate peace. See for example, ‘Peace or War?’, ‘An Unfortunate Peace’, ‘A Painful But Necessary Lesson’, ‘Strange and Monstrous’, ‘On a Businesslike Basis’ and ‘A Serious Lesson and a Serious Responsibility’ in Lenin, *Polnoe*. Vol.35. 366-368; 382-383; 393-397; 399-407; 408-409; 415-420.

Were the Bolsheviks in Petrozavodsk suffering from ‘the itch’? The obvious answer is that at least some of them were. Because of the shallow roots of the party in Karelia it is difficult to identify which Bolsheviks were ‘Leninists’ and which were ‘left communists’. This is made even more challenging by the fact that the First Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference did not take place until 6-7 August 1918, by which time the controversy over this matter had subsided and no mention was made of it. Of course Parfenov was the local party’s leading member at the time and spoke on behalf of the whole Olonets provincial soviet executive committee (Bolsheviks, Left SRs and Menshevik Internationalists) but the evidence remains too speculative to state that the Bolsheviks in Petrozavodsk were ‘left communists’ because of their hostility towards the Allies. Moreover, as we will see in Chapter 3, Bolshevik party members accepted the ratification of the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty thus suggesting a significant number of Bolsheviks supported or came to support the ‘Leninist’ position.<sup>15</sup> Whatever the case, the important fact worth underlining here is that Petrozavodsk differed from the capital and the presence of a foreign foe united the Left SRs and Bolsheviks and the Menshevik Internationalists. The proximity of Murmansk to Petrozavodsk naturally gave local leaders in Karelia greater cause for anxiety than those in Petrograd or Moscow. The driving force of the correspondence coming from Petrozavodsk was local concerns; in the event of a military advance south by the Allies the Karelian region was in the front line and, as we will see in Chapter 3, this is what occurred.

### **Arming the soviets: early organisation and recruitment efforts**

The evidence above indicates that the military threat faced by the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee in March 1918 united Left SRs, Bolsheviks and Menshevik Internationalists within this committee. This is made easier to understand considering that the military threat was accentuated by the lack of an armed force to defend the Soviet

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<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of the ‘left communists’ in 1918 see R. Kowalski, *The Bolshevik Party in Conflict. The Left Communist Opposition of 1918*. London: Macmillan, 1991.

regime. The Red Army, like in the majority of areas across the country at the beginning of 1918, was still in its infancy. In Karelia its development began in earnest on 12 (25) January when the Olonets provincial executive committee recognised the need to organise a 480 person strong battalion composed of three equally numbered fighting squads (*druzhini*) from the workers of the Aleksandrovsk factory, Petrozavodsk's other workers' institutions and enterprises and the Murmansk railroad employees.<sup>16</sup> However, it was the breakdown in the Brest-Litovsk peace negotiations in February 1918 which marked a significant turning point in the development of the Soviet army when Lenin announced the revolution to be in danger from the Germans.<sup>17</sup> It became imperative to work towards establishing a 'regular' and larger fighting force throughout the country which could defend the new Soviet state from the threat posed by imperialism or internal counter-revolution. Hence on 23 February the Olonets provincial executive committee resolved to elect an emergency board with the authority to adopt plenipotentiary powers during periods of threat to the soviets.<sup>18</sup>

It is worth noting that the elections to this emergency board reflected the strong influence of the Left SRs. The Bolshevik chairman of the executive committee, V.M. Parfenov and the Left SRs A.A. Sadikov and A.M. Kuznetsov were elected its full members; its probationary members were the Left SRs N.I. Sidorov and I.V. Balashov. Thereafter, on 28 February, the Olonets provincial executive committee decided to organise Red Army detachments in Petrozavodsk and instruct the districts to do likewise. The executive committee ordered the creation of a nine man military soviet which reflected the cooperation of the main political parties in the Olonets provincial soviet. The military soviet included the three full members of the emergency board mentioned above plus the

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<sup>16</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 137.

<sup>17</sup> For Sovnarkom's 'The Socialist Fatherland in Danger!' on 21 February see Lenin, *Polnoe*. Vol.35. 357-358.

<sup>18</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 205.

Bolshevik A.V. Dubrovskii, a Menshevik Internationalist B.S. Gaup, S.G. Borodulin (party affiliation unknown) and three ‘military specialists’.<sup>19</sup>

By the beginning of March 1918 the Germans were no longer advancing into Russian territory but in spite of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk the military threat posed by Germany remained and it was not known how long the peace would last. In the case of Karelia, Lenin’s concerns about the ability of the fledgling Soviet regime to fend off a German attack were fully justified. New recruits entering the ranks of the new Red Army were all but non-existent and the number of Red Guard units remained low. 173 of the total 230 recruits in Petrozavodsk in March came from the Aleksandrovska factory, the majority of whom (150) were communists. A few small Red Guard detachments were also created in the district centres of Olonets province, in some villages and along the railway line but numbers were low.<sup>20</sup> In spite of the region’s manpower shortages 123 men drawn from party and trade union organisations in Petrozavodsk were sent to Petrograd after the capital appealed for the immediate dispatch of Red Army detachments to it on 4 March.<sup>21</sup>

Numbers remained low in the Red Guard because it relied on widespread support from the working classes while Karelia was a region, as noted in the introduction, which had a small urban population and few revolutionaries. This was confirmed by a report written sometime after 21 March but before 19 April to the All-Russian Board for the Organisation and Administration of the Red Army by its representative in the region, I.V. Matveev. He noted that upon his arrival in Petrozavodsk from Petrograd on 1 March no Red Army existed and there were few people available to organise one. On 7 March he spoke at a meeting in the Aleksandrovska factory to attract its workers to the ranks of the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 206-207.

<sup>20</sup> All figures are contentious but Shumilov estimates a further 200 men in the district centres and 385 along the railway. Shumilov, *Bor’ba*. 107-108.

<sup>21</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor’ba*. 208.

army but with little success because, he stated, the workers of the factory had little enthusiasm to join the Red Army and there were very few genuine revolutionary workers.<sup>22</sup>

### **Resistance to former tsarist officers in the Red Army: the Skachkov case**

Nationally, the number of volunteers that made up the Red Guard was not high enough to defend the whole country and the revolution so a workers' militia was substituted for a less class conscious but larger and more professional Red Army. This army was made up largely of peasant soldiers supplemented by a backbone of communists but it was the officer ranks of the Red Army which was its most controversial component: former tsarist officers. However, People's Commissar for Military Affairs Trotsky realised the difficulties of forming a new Red Army without the military expertise of officers who had served in the tsarist army, 'military specialists' as he termed them. Beginning in March 1918 and with the support of Lenin, Trotsky was able to pursue his policy of recruiting from the old officer corps despite strong opposition from the 'left communists' within the Bolshevik party who questioned the dependability of these officers and the adoption of a command structure similar to the Imperial army. Trotsky too had concerns over the reliability of some of the officers he aimed to conscript but sought to counter this with the appointment of a dual command system whereby the orders of former tsarist officers had to be countersigned by an appointed political commissar.<sup>23</sup>

The controversy over the use of military specialists filtered through to Karelia in the spring of 1918 where local leaders, unlike the capital, were united in their opposition. On the 5 April the chairman of the Olonets provincial soviet, V.M Parfenov, sent a telegram to the Military board in Petrograd expressing his displeasure at the scant support they were receiving and rejected the accusation, which had presumably been made on a

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 215-216.

<sup>23</sup> F. Benvenuti, *The Bolsheviks and the Red Army, 1918-1922*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. 20-37.

separate occasion from the centre, that the Red Guard in Olonets province was composed of agent provocateurs:<sup>24</sup>

The Red Army is being organised from selected elements. We are not assigning Skachkovs and the non-party workers being sent from Petrograd. We will arrest provocateurs, spies, swindlers, or whoever... You are sending liars and provocateurs to us... We reject [your] criticism of our strenuously intensive work and did not deserve it.

The apprehension of the 'left communists' in the capital based on the appointment of former tsarist officers to the army was therefore mirrored by the Bolsheviks in Petrozavodsk. Furthermore, the above telegrams showed that local leaders were attempting to recruit a more 'reliable' Red Guard by selecting workers who supported or sympathised with the party. Of course as Matveev's experience at the Aleksandrovsk factory showed, there was little enthusiasm for joining the Red Army in Petrozavodsk and numbers were low, thus explaining Parfenov's reference to Olonets province's 'strenuously intensive work.' The capital was insensitive to these conditions and their accusations brought about Parfenov's sharp response.

At the same time as the Olonets Red Guard struggled to enlarge its forces, the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee refused to enlist officers sent to them from Petrograd. One such officer sent from Petrograd which sparked Parfenov's indignation was Ia.P. Skachkov. A former tsarist officer, Skachkov was the commander of a battalion assigned by Trotsky on 28 February to defend the Finnish border and he demanded a strict discipline amongst his men. However, when he ordered the arrest of the chairman of the battalion's soldiers' committee along with three other soldiers the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee accused Skachkov of counter-revolution and recruiting 'White Guards' because he had appointed former tsarist officers to his staff. On 20 March the

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<sup>24</sup> Vavulinskaia, *Sovety Karelii*. 38-39.

executive committee decided unanimously to arrest him and his battalion was temporarily disarmed. The following day a telegram was sent to Trotsky stating that Skachkov was under arrest and a request was made to send a representative of the People's Commissariat for Military Affairs to take part in an investigation commission. In the meantime a search of Skachkov's flat revealed little except a number of maps and forms, a few boxes containing explosives and an Okhrana notebook about trains.<sup>25</sup>

The Olonets provincial soviet executive committee was clearly uncomfortable with the establishment of a command structure within the Red Army which seemed to resemble, in part, the old Imperial army. It therefore wanted to know how many former tsarist army officers were in Petrozavodsk and where they were. On 23 March 1918 the executive committee ordered all officers residing in the town to register with the soviet and all officers who were unemployed and non-natives of Olonets province to return to their own homes.<sup>26</sup> In Skachkov's case, he was put on trial on 18 April by the Olonets provincial revolutionary tribunal which found him guilty of 'separatist aspirations', 'ignoring the principles of revolutionary construction' and 'undermining the authority of the measures taken by the workers-peasant government for the creation of a Red Army.' He was sentenced to one month imprisonment and deprived of the right to serve in the army indefinitely.<sup>27</sup> According to one memoir Skachkov was arrested again sometime after and shot for counter-revolutionary activity.<sup>28</sup>

The Skachkov incident showed the united front put up by the Bolshevik and Left SR parties in opposition to the Leninists in the capital who advocated the appointment of former tsarist officers. Although there are no direct references to the Left SRs expressing their opinion of the Skachkov affair the local Left SR party leader, Ivan Balashov, spoke

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. fn.16; Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 242-244.

<sup>26</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.21, l.100.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. d.86, l.324.

<sup>28</sup> Memoirs of A.V. Dubrovskii in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 64.

out against the creation of a regular Red Army in Petrozavodsk on 28 March.<sup>29</sup> Because, in principle, the party advocated a militia style army to wage a revolutionary war against capitalism, it is therefore logical that they opposed the appointment of former tsarist officers. Finally, the decision to arrest Skachkov was made unanimously by the provincial executive committee which reflected the collaboration of Bolsheviks and Left SRs with the Menshevik Internationalists.

The controversy over tsarist officers joining the Red Army coupled with the threat of the Allies also influenced a compromise of sorts between the Left SRs and the Bolsheviks over the formation of a regular army. For instance, although Balashov had spoken out against the creation of the Red Army, as part of the give and take in the Left SR-Bolshevik alliance he agreed to sit on a commission for the organisation of a Red Guard and Red Army alongside 4 Bolshevik members on 8 April.<sup>30</sup> The establishment of a provincial Cheka also reflected the desire for compromise within the alliance. Later in the year at the opening day of a conference of Chekas from the Northern region, on 15 October, the Olonets provincial representative N.N. Dorofeev explained that his Cheka was formed in connection with the operations of the Anglo-French and the Czechs.<sup>31</sup> On 18 April at a session of the Vecheka, the highest organ of the Bolsheviks' security police, a report from Petrozavodsk was discussed in which the latter asked Moscow to send representatives of the Vecheka to Petrozavodsk to investigate a 'White Guard' organisation. The Vecheka refused, stressing that the Petrozavodsk soviet carry out the investigation independently.<sup>32</sup> As a result a five member Olonets provincial Cheka was established on 19 April, almost a month after the Vecheka ordered all local soviets to immediately begin creating their own

<sup>29</sup> Mashezerskii, *Ustanovlenie*. 159.

<sup>30</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.87, l.6. This decision was made after a report was given to the Olonets provincial executive committee by a Left SR member of the soviet, G.N. Shegolev. This came following his trip to Moscow to speak with the central authorities about the military situation in the region. The Bolshevik members of the commission were A.V. Dubrovskii, M.F. Tarasov, I.A. Danilov and Ivashkov.

<sup>31</sup> V.K. Vinogradov, ed., *Vchk Upolnomochena Soobshchit'*.... Moscow: Kuchkovo Pole, 2004. 255. The conference which took place in the Smolny Institute in Petrograd was attended by 72 delegates from eight provinces of the Northern region.

<sup>32</sup> V. Vinogradov, A. Litvin and V. Khristoforov, eds., *Arkhiv Vchk*. Moscow: Kuchkovo Pole, 2007. 217.

Chekas.<sup>33</sup> Although it has not been possible to ascertain the party affiliation of all the provincial Cheka members at this time, at least two were Bolsheviks and at least two were Left SRs.<sup>34</sup>

### **United local resistance: the attack of the White Finns**

The attack and advance of the White Finns into Karelia during March to April 1918 also strengthened the local Bolshevik-Left SR alliance and reflected its willingness to work with the Menshevik Internationalists as they met this military threat with little outside help and assembled a force capable of repelling the White Finns. The Finns crossed the border at three main points towards the end of March/early April with the hope of engaging the Red Finns based in the Kandalaksha region and capturing Kem' town. The two most northern advances of White Finns were defeated on 7 and 8 April at Tolvandozero and Sokolozero respectively. By this time the battle for Kem' was drawing to a climax and on 9 April the White Finns were only 3-4 kilometres from the town. They attacked the following morning but were defeated and sent into retreat towards the Finnish border.<sup>35</sup> However, owing to the spring thaw, the poor conditions of the roads and a lack of Soviet troops the White Finns remained on Karelian soil in the border parishes of Kem' district until the autumn of 1918.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, on 20 April the Menshevik Internationalist chairman of the Murmansk railway executive committee, L.V. Nikol'skii, reported to the People's Commissariat for Military Affairs that Kem' was in Soviet hands.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Vavulinskaia, *Sovety Karelii*. 40. On the Vecheka decree dated 22 March 1918 see G.A. Belov, et al., eds., *Iz Istorii Vserossiiskoi Chrezvychainoi Komissii, 1917-1921 gg.* Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoi Literatury, 1958. 78-79.

<sup>34</sup> The Cheka members were: A.S. Proskuriakov (Left SR); M.M. Timonen (Bolshevik); I.V. Elpedinskii (Bolshevik); Nikitin (Left SR); Abramov (party affiliation unknown). The two probationary members of the provincial Cheka were F.E. Lavrent'ev (Bolshevik) and Sazonov (party affiliation unknown). For the names of the individuals see Vavulinskaia, *Sovety Karelii*. 40. The party affiliation information is drawn from the name index in Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba* and NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.87, l.16; GARF, f.R-1235, op.4, d.45, l.150.

<sup>35</sup> For more detail on the battles with the White Finns see Balagurov, *Bor'ba*. 48-56; Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 236-241.

<sup>36</sup> Mashezerskii, *Ustanovlenie*. 132. The three parishes occupied by the White Finns were Olangskaia, Ukhtinskaia and Voknavolskaia. They were cleared of White Finns by Allied forces from August to October 1918. See Col. P.J. Woods' 'Karelian Diary' in Baron, *The King of Karelia*. 173-179; 184-187; Maynard, *The Murmansk Venture*. 96-97.

<sup>37</sup> RGVA, f.1, op.1, d.175, l.93.

Broadly speaking, when the White Finns attacked, the local soviets were left to defend themselves despite their lack of Red Army recruits and weapons. Although Matveev's attempts to recruit troops at the Aleksandrovsk factory in March, described above, were largely unsuccessful, 200 workers did agree to enrol into partisan detachments to face the White Finns.<sup>38</sup> However, upon arriving in Petrozavodsk that month I.V. Matveev also noted that Petrozavodsk only had enough provisions to support 200 men for a month, there were hardly any uniforms and the barracks in the town had been destroyed by fire. In fact he was forced to travel back to Petrograd in March to acquire uniforms and weapons because all Petrozavodsk had were old Berdan rifles.<sup>39</sup> Despite his trip Matveev's efforts were inadequate for the conflict with the White Finns and during the fighting Petrozavodsk received regular requests from Kem' and Povenets districts demanding men and supplies.<sup>40</sup> The demands then passed further up the administrative chain; at the height of the main White Finnish push for Kem', the People's Commissariat for Military Affairs received pressing reports from Petrozavodsk on 4, 11, 12 and 13 April, stressing the insufficient strength of the Red forces and the urgent need for reinforcements, weapons, money and commanding personnel.<sup>41</sup> It is unclear if these demands were met by the capital. Matveev's aforementioned report to the All-Russian Board for the Organisation and Administration of the Red Army, during the White Finnish attacks, stated that the Olonets provincial executive committee's demands for resources had been refused but they were promised help in the future. However, more than three weeks had passed by the time of Matveev's report and local leaders still knew nothing about the allocation of funds to Petrozavodsk. Consequently, the recruitment of soldiers to the Red Army was taking place without uniforms or money and Matveev warned that if they did not receive funds soon it

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<sup>38</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Borb'ba*. 216.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. Berdan rifles were standard issue in the Russian army from 1869-1891 and were also widely used as a hunting weapon.

<sup>40</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Borb'ba*. 225-227; 230-234.

<sup>41</sup> RGVA, f.1, op.1, d.175, l.20; 1.46; 1.52; 1.60.

was impossible to stop the enlisted men returning home: 'I have appealed to you before with a request for the sending of finances, but up to now I have received no reply.'<sup>42</sup>

The defence of the region, albeit a makeshift one, was therefore made possible largely through local measures. For instance, more partisan detachments were created in Olonets and Povenets districts during March and April.<sup>43</sup> On 25 March the Kem' district executive committee, which consisted of both Bolsheviks and Left SRs, sent out telegrams to all the parishes under its jurisdiction to register weapons and organise a Red Army to meet the advance of the White Finns. Furthermore, on 30 March a military board was created from representatives of the Kem' district soviet executive committee, Kem' railway station, workers from the neighbouring Popov Island and local inhabitants of Kem' town.<sup>44</sup> A few Red Guard detachments were also formed in the surrounding towns and railway stations but they were few in number and poorly armed.<sup>45</sup>

More personnel and material support were therefore imperative and it came from almost every source available. Support arrived from Archangel on 6 April when an ice-breaker brought 120 Red Guards, weapons and ammunition to Kem'.<sup>46</sup> Shortly afterwards, the local soviet's position was strengthened further with the arrival of Red Guard troops from Petrograd under the command of I.D. Spiridonov.<sup>47</sup> Red Finnish troops, 800 of whom were based at Kandalaksha, were also brought into action and helped defeat the White Finns at Tolvandozero, Sokolozero and Kem'.<sup>48</sup> Finally, the Allies, who had landed in

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<sup>42</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 216.

<sup>43</sup> Memoirs of F.I. Egorov and F.E. Pottov in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 125; 194.

<sup>44</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 228; 231.

<sup>45</sup> Balagurov, *Bor'ba*. 52-53.

<sup>46</sup> Although the supplies were immediately carted inland the troops on the ice-breaker, because of the thickness of the ice on the approach to Kem', did not arrive and take part in the town's defence until the 9 and 10 April.

<sup>47</sup> Memoirs of I.I. Sivkov in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 230; Balagurov, *Bor'ba*. 54-55.

<sup>48</sup> These Finnish Red Guards, mainly woodcutters and sawmill workers, had taken part in the construction of the Murmansk railway, 1915-1916, on the Kem' to Kandalaksha section. Hearing of the Finnish Revolution the decision was taken on 3 February 1918 to form a Red Guard detachment and to send a delegation to Helsinki for arms. A trainload of rifles and ammunition arrived in Kandalaksha on 18 March, obtained with the help of the Finnish Red Government from the Soviet authorities in Petrograd. A number of Reds from

Murmansk the previous month to defend the northern supply port against a possible German attack out of Finland, were called upon to help fend off the White Finnish incursions. A leading official of the Murmansk government at the time, G.M. Veselago, held a conversation by direct line with the head of the military soviet in the northern railway town of Kandalaksha (Kem' district), on 8 April. The local military official in Kandalaksha informed Veselago that he had been contacted by the Soroka military board and the commander of the Kem' military sector, a former tsarist officer, for help to defend Kem'. Veselago was non-committal but stated he would ask Moscow.<sup>49</sup> Veselago himself did not receive a reply but the chairman of the Murmansk soviet A.M. Iuriev did and it came from Stalin who wired 'Accept aid'.<sup>50</sup> Subsequently an armoured train with a combination of Russian and French troops made its way to guard Kandalaksha station.<sup>51</sup> Despite this move the Allies did not become involved in any military action; instead their presence in Kandalaksha and this town's willingness to accept them indirectly supported the Kem' sector by acting as defensive cover for the Red Finns who were in action against the northern White Finnish advance mentioned above.

The defence of Karelia between March and April 1918 underlined the unity of the local soviets against a common enemy in the shape of the White Finns. This solidarity was reflected further by the need to suppress a short lived rebellion in Kem' town which came

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Finland, seeking refuge after the victory of General Gustav Mannerheim and the Finnish Whites, also entered the detachment, which became known for a while as the 'Northern Section' and numbered approximately 800 men. Mashezerskii, et al., *Ocherki*. 58; Churchill, "Autonomy Question". 167-168. The Red Finns also had a presence in Petrozavodsk and at the time of the White Finnish advance a Finnish Red Guard detachment was sent from there to Kem'. Shumilov, *Bor'ba*. 111.

<sup>49</sup> Kennan, *The Decision to Intervene*. 252. For Veselago's conversation by direct wire see Kedrov, *Bez*. 64-65. A soviet source dismisses any hint of pro-Allied feelings on the part of the former tsarist officer situated at Kem': 'He provided a lot of support in the creation of Red Guard detachments and in organising the defence of Kem' from the White Finnish bands. Captured by the interventionists and put in a military-penal prison he always supported the Bolsheviks, having rejected all proposals to join the White Army in 1919, he was tortured by the interventionists.' Balagurov, *Bor'ba*. 52.

<sup>50</sup> R. Pipes, *The Unknown Lenin. From the Secret Archive*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996. 45.

<sup>51</sup> G.M. Veselago, "Dokumental'naia Spravka iz moikh Murmanskikh Bumag za 1917-1918 gg." in A.A. Kiselev, ed., *Grazhdanskaia Voina na Murmane Glazami Uchastnikov i Ochevidtsev: Sbornik Vospominanii i Dokumentov*. Murmansk: Murmanskoe Oblastnoe Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo, 2006. 100.

hot on the heels of the White Finns' retreat from there.<sup>52</sup> Together these crises also showed the isolated position Karelia was in owing to the lack of any substantial support from the capital. During March and April Sovnarkom was preoccupied with the Germans and the uncertainty of how long the Brest-Litovsk peace would last. Priority was given to creating defensive positions further south, directed against the Germans in the Baltic States, Belarus and the Ukraine. It was only when the White Finns crossed the border that some small efforts were made to support the region in the form of Spiridonov's regiment and some weapons and ammunition. But broadly speaking a hastily constructed force, achieved through local efforts, defeated the White Finns.

Some indirect support for Kem' had come from the Allies but it was the Kandalaksha soviet, much closer to Murmansk in geography and opinion towards the Allies, which accepted the defensive cover provided by the Russian and French task force. Petrozavodsk had no control over what was going on there and local conditions dictated the need to take independent measures. On 23 April the Kandalaksha soviet received a telegram from Petrozavodsk ordering the withdrawal of Allied troops from there which was met defiantly. The SR chairman of the Kandalaksha soviet considered the order 'an usurpation of soviet authority in the localities' and believed there was a complete ignorance of the military situation on the part of Petrozavodsk: '...this compels the Kandalaksha soviet to consider your order insufficient (*nedostochno*)...the Kandalaksha soviet will not allow (*dopustit* ' any kind of centralisation.'<sup>53</sup>

### **Neutralising the political opposition**

Although the Left SRs and Bolsheviks were willing to put differences with Menshevik Internationalists to one side when it came to external military threats to the Soviet regime

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<sup>52</sup> The short lived rebellion in Kem' was a response to the final ending of 'dual power' between the local soviets and the *zemstvos* in the district, made worse by long-standing local political rivalries. For some information about it see: Balagurov, *Bor'ba*. 56-57; Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 244-246.

<sup>53</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.86, l.601.

the Left SR-Bolshevik alliance marginalised the political position of the Menshevik Internationalists and remaining SRs in Petrozavodsk during the spring. On 3 April 1918 the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee met and elected a temporary presidium of the provincial executive committee which reflected the dominance of the Left SR-Bolshevik alliance. The permanent election of the presidium was scheduled to take place but was delayed because of the White Finnish attacks which prevented some of the peasants' deputies in the districts from taking part. Nevertheless three representatives each from the Bolshevik and Left SR parties were elected to the temporary presidium.<sup>54</sup>

The Menshevik Internationalists, the largest minority in the Olonets provincial soviet, were still tolerated in Petrozavodsk during the spring of 1918. The party's minority standing in the town was reflected, in part, at a session of the provincial soviet executive committee on 15 April where two Bolsheviks, two Left SRs and one Menshevik Internationalist were elected to represent Olonets province at the forthcoming First Congress of Soviets of the Northern Region on 25 April in Petrograd.<sup>55</sup> However, the remaining SRs in Petrozavodsk were persecuted by the Left SR-Bolshevik bloc from February 1918 and relied on it for the party's political expression. In mid-late February the chairman of the SRs, G.I. Prokhorov, appealed to the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee for information about the detainment by an investigatory commission of its members for publishing leaflets. On 18 February the Olonets provincial executive committee appealed to the investigatory commission to release the SRs but to destroy all copies of the published leaflets.<sup>56</sup> On 11 April the provincial executive committee then turned down an appeal from the Petrozavodsk SR party executive committee to allot them

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<sup>54</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.87, l.1. The temporary presidium was composed of: V.M. Parfenov (Bolshevik and chairman); Uskov (Left SR and deputy chairman); Lukin (Left SR and deputy chair); F.B. Pichurin (Bolshevik and secretary); A.V. Dubrovskii (Bolshevik and secretary) and Popov (Left SR and treasurer).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. l.16. Those elected were: I.A. Danilov (Bolshevik), M.M. Timonen (Bolshevik), P.P. Panin (Left SR), Nikitin (Left SR) and N.V. Komarov (Menshevik Internationalist).

<sup>56</sup> Vavulinskaia, *Sovety Karelii*. 35; 516, fn.14.

premises to organise lectures because ‘your party [the SRs] does not participate and does not wish to take part in soviet work.’<sup>57</sup>

The dominant position of the Left SRs and Bolsheviks in Petrozavodsk was a topic of a heated debate at a meeting to discuss the reorganisation of the Petrozavodsk town soviet on 11 April.<sup>58</sup> A.G. Kapustkin of the centre SRs complained that his party had only been apportioned one place and that all parties should be represented equally within the soviet. V.M. Kudzhiev of the Menshevik Internationalists also expressed the desire to have a more equal distribution amongst the parties in the soviet and recommended five places to every party. His motion was supported by another member of the centre SRs, G.I. Prokhorov. Furthermore, Kudzhiev condemned the effect the controlling influence of the Left SR-Bolshevik coalition was having on political freedoms: ‘At the current time there is a system of terror in Petrozavodsk so how, then, are opposition parties meant to elucidate their ideology if they are not permitted to arrange meetings where different political tendencies can engage with one another. How can you talk about sympathy for the lower strata when you do not wish to speak with them?’<sup>59</sup>

What did Kudzhiev mean by a system of terror? He was almost certainly making reference to a resolution at the Third Olonets Provincial Congress of Peasants’ Deputies, on 14 February 1918, which supported the disbanding of the Constituent Assembly, a resolution condemned by the Menshevik and Right SR representatives.<sup>60</sup> The local Bolsheviks’ and Left SRs’ support of the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly came as a serious blow to Kudzhiev and all other Menshevik Internationalists because it fatally undermined their political goals; the party as a whole advocated an agreement between

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 40.

<sup>58</sup> The party representatives were as follows: 15 Bolsheviks, 10 Left SRs, 5 Left Menshevik Internationalists, 2 Menshevik Internationalists, 2 Anarchists and 1 centre SR. Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 123.

<sup>59</sup> Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 124.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 120; 534, fn.47.

Bolsheviks, all other socialist parties and democratic organisations and the formation of a homogenous socialist government.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, Kudzhiev's reference to a system of terror and the lack of political freedoms could also have been linked to the decision by the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee on 9 April to arrest five leading members of the Kadet party who had taken part in a recent meeting of the Petrozavodsk town union of teachers, a movement deemed to be anti-Soviet.<sup>62</sup>

In the face of criticism the Bolsheviks and Left SRs stuck by one another. On behalf of the Bolsheviks A.A. Zuev defended their use of 'terror' because it was being used against the 'enemies of the people' and denounced Kudzhiev, as a member of the intelligentsia, for not siding with the proletariat as he had previously refused the position of commissar for justice.<sup>63</sup> Therefore if Kudzhiev was accusing the Bolsheviks of not listening to the lower strata of society then Zuev believed Kudzhiev too was guilty for not accepting the post of commissar for justice. Why Kudzhiev rejected the position is difficult to know for certain because he could have had the opportunity to influence and tone down any political repressions. It therefore may have been simply a matter of moral principle and Kudzhiev did not want to be involved in a Bolshevik-Left SR system of justice. The Bolshevik seizure of power had placed the Internationalists in a dilemma over how to react; they wanted to support the proletariat but were repelled by the actions of the Bolsheviks. Arrests and the outlawing of political freedoms was something despised by both Kudzhiev and his party.<sup>64</sup>

When the Left SR K.V. Almazov spoke he defended the preferential representation of the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs within the Petrozavodsk soviet: 'It is clear that only the

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<sup>61</sup> Lande, "The Mensheviks in 1917" in Haimson, *The Mensheviks*. 58-59.

<sup>62</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.87, l.8.

<sup>63</sup> Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 124. The Bolshevik A.I. Fedulin was elected to the position on the 6 April. NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.87, l.3.

<sup>64</sup> On the Menshevik Internationalists' and its leader's position, Iulii Martov, after October 1917 see: D. Dallin, "The Period of War Communism and the Civil War" in Haimson, *The Mensheviks*. 101-104.

Bolsheviks and the Left Socialist Revolutionaries will carry out the policies of the Soviet government.’<sup>65</sup> The debates then became very heated as the SRs and Menshevik Internationalists repeatedly harangued the next Bolshevik speaker, I.V. Elpedinskii, and accused his party of forcing them underground. Valentin Parfenov, the chairman of the meeting, struggled to keep the gathering under control and the SRs and Menshevik Internationalists walked out. The proposal of the provincial executive committee regarding the composition of the Petrozavodsk town soviet was then passed by a majority by 33 votes to 17 with 7 abstentions.<sup>66</sup> Outside of the Left SR-Bolshevik coalition all political parties were now virtually powerless to influence the decisions of the Petrozavodsk soviet. There was no Menshevik-SR bloc or a Menshevik political comeback in Petrozavodsk during the spring of 1918, as there was elsewhere.<sup>67</sup>

### **Local food supply initiatives**

The economic breakdown of the Soviet regime was particularly acute in Karelia and was recognised as a problem by the local soviets to try and alleviate. On 12 January the Olonets provincial soviet attempted to improve the food shortages by reshuffling the food supply apparatus in Petrozavodsk. The soviet selected new members to enter the provincial food committee and created a food commission attached to the provincial soviet to work together with the existing food committees.<sup>68</sup> However, the food commission was only a temporary measure and was dissolved in early February along with the existing provincial food committee by the Third Olonets Provincial Congress of Peasants’ Deputies. In the place of these food supply organs the congress created a provincial food board which consisted of eleven members, nine from the congress and two from the soviet of workers’

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<sup>65</sup> Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 124-125.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 125-126.

<sup>67</sup> V. Brovkin, “The Mensheviks’ Political Comeback: The Elections to the Provincial City Soviets in Spring 1918”, *The Russian Review*, Vol.42, 1983. 1-50. Brovkin asserted that in the five months after the disbanding of the Constituent Assembly ‘the Bolsheviks suffered resounding defeats in the elections to the city soviets in most provincial capitals of European Russia.’ 3. At the time of his research Brovkin admitted that he had no data for Petrozavodsk. 47.

<sup>68</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor’ba*. 373-374.

and soldiers' deputies. The food board was attached to the provincial soviet and was headed by a provincial commissar for food who, in light of the acute food shortages, was given 'wide discretionary powers' (*shirokie polnomochiia*).<sup>69</sup> The new commissar for food was A.P. Tikhomirov, the former chairman of the Lodeinoe Pole district soviet executive committee and a Left SR.

His task was an extremely difficult one. No sooner was he appointed than regular reports came in from the districts telling of the food shortages and requesting more grain. Because of the lack of sufficient support the districts were often allowed to struggle with what local supplies they had and compelled to carry out makeshift solutions and initiatives. Some peasant parishes took it upon themselves to gather foodstuffs and targeted local businesses. At the beginning of February 1918 the peasants of Lekh-Navoloka village, Shuiskaia parish, Petrozavodsk district, requisitioned 38 sacks of flour from a local timber firm and redistributed it around seven villages of a parish peasant society.<sup>70</sup>

The Pudozh district executive committee decided to send its commissar for finance, L.A. Gizhitskii, to Petrozavodsk in person on 29 January (11 February) 1918 to discuss and attempt to find solutions to his district's lack of food and finances. The Pudozh district soviet had only recently been established on the 16 (29) January and shortly after, on the 17 (30) or 18 (31) January, had appealed to the Olonets provincial soviet for instructions and the transfer of 5000 roubles for organisational expenses.<sup>71</sup> It is not known if this request was met in part, in full, or not at all but whatever the case, shortly after arriving in Petrozavodsk, Gizhitskii was permitted to travel to Petrograd to discuss and seek assistance to Pudozh district's problems. He arrived in Petrograd on 14 February and during his trip met with a number of high ranking commissars including the People's Commissar for

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 375-376.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 379.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 179-181.

Finance, V.R. Menzhinskii, and M.I. Latsis, head of the Commissariat for Internal Affairs' department of local government.<sup>72</sup> The trip was a material success; Latsis authorised the transfer of a 10,000 rouble loan to the Pudozh district treasury and Gizhitskii secured another 10,000 roubles, this time an allowance, for the maintenance of the orphanage in Pudozh.<sup>73</sup> On the 15 February he also met with Lenin himself. In Gizhitskii's account of the conversation with the Bolshevik leader, which lasted over an hour, he stated: 'In particular I acquainted comrade Lenin with all the needs of Pudozh district at this time and the general situation in Olonets province with regards to living conditions. Lenin was particularly interested in the population's everyday life, with the timber and fishing industries and other ways of life in the North.'<sup>74</sup> As a result of this meeting, celebrated in the regional soviet historiography, Lenin wrote and passed to Gizhitskii a note which was used to secure for Karelia two trains loads of grain from Ekaterinoslav province, part of which had arrived in Petrozavodsk by Gizhitskii's return on 20 February 1918.<sup>75</sup>

Gizhitskii's sojourn in Petrograd was significant because it showed that Lenin and a number of other commissars in the capital were acquainted with Karelia's problems and that petitioning in person and making personal contacts had proved successful. In other words, responding to a telegram request for support could be shelved or ignored more easily than a request made in person. Gizhitskii's meetings in the capital are made more significant when considering that he was not a Bolshevik. Although his party affiliation is unknown, when the Pudozh soviet was created he was referred to as a representative of the

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<sup>72</sup> Some of the other commissars who met and spoke with Gizhitskii included: M.I. Bogolepov, a prominent Soviet economist and A.P. Spunde, a Bolshevik party leader who was also involved in financial affairs. These two individuals and their efforts in the financial sphere during the first half of 1918 are mentioned intermittently in E.N. Sokolov, *Finansovaia Politika Sovetskoi Vlasti (Oktiabr' 1917- Avgust 1918 gg.)*. Riazan: Riazanskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet imeni S.A. Esenina, 2008.

<sup>73</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 185-186.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* 184-185.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* 185-186; 183. On the championing of the meeting in the local historiography see Mashezerskii, *Ustanovlenie*. 110-111; Mashezerskii, et al., *Ocherki*. 48; A.I. Afanas'eva and K.A. Morozov, "V.I. Lenin i Sovetskaia Kareliia" in A.I. Afanas'eva, V.I. Mashezerskii and K.A. Morozov, eds., *50 Let Sovetskoi Karelii*. Petrozavodsk: Izdatel'stvo "Kareliia", 1970. 7.

‘working intelligentsia’.<sup>76</sup> His discussions with the commissars in the capital also underlined the ‘devolution’ of Soviet power in this period. According to Gizhitskii’s account the conversations he held during his stay in Petrograd led him to believe that:<sup>77</sup>

It was made specifically clear that in the localities all soviets are autonomous in their own affairs...only in provincial wide issues do local soviets enter into discussion with the provincial soviet, while Sovnarkom’s orders and decrees, of course, are to be carried out without fail but the methods of implementing them...depends entirely on the soviets in the localities.

The assistance received by Gizhitskii did not solve the food shortage problem for the entire Karelian region, particularly in the spring when stocks were at a general low point. Because of the lack of sufficient support from the provincial centre or the capital the supply of the region with foodstuffs continued in a localised and makeshift fashion during the spring of 1918. Again the wealthier members of society were targeted. Up to April 1918 local ‘*kulaks*’ (wealthy peasants) in Kem’ district and timber firms and ‘*kulaks*’ in Petrozavodsk district were singled out for requisitioning by soldiers and the local peasantry.<sup>78</sup> But the dilemma of food supply was often a problem of distribution. In other words certain districts or parishes were inevitably slightly better off than others so competition and rivalry between districts and parishes for scarce resources was common. On 1 March 1918, the chairman of the Olonets district soviet, Mikhail Chubriev, sent a telegram to Tikhomirov asking that food products be urgently sent to the district because hundreds of people from the parishes had gathered in Olonets town to demand grain. Chubriev was however unable to meet their requests because the stores of the district food committee were empty and the neighbouring Lodeinoe Pole district soviet had detained produce destined for Olonets district. As a result, he planned to send an armed detachment

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<sup>76</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor’ba*. 179-181.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* 185.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* 380-381.

to Lodeinoe Pole.<sup>79</sup> It is not known if the armed detachment was sent but whatever the case, it did not solve the food supply problem in the district.

A similar conflict within the parishes occurred on 20 March. The chairman of the Kondopozhskaia parish soviet in Petrozavodsk district informed Tikhomirov that the village of Lizhma had a stock of 540 *puds* of grain but its citizens refused to issue any to other villages and refused to recognise the parish soviet.<sup>80</sup> Presumably Lizhma still supported the *zemstvo* system but such conflicts over food stores in the Karelian districts, regardless of politics, can also be interpreted as the natural desire of individual district or parish authorities to look after the interests of their own citizens while forsaking other neighbouring districts or parishes. This parochial outlook was of course ironic considering that the Karelian districts depended on the grain surplus provinces to supply the consumer provinces with foodstuffs and not simply look after their own interests.

The reliance on local solutions to aid the food crisis and the strain on relations this caused between different governing agencies resurfaced in April. On this occasion the competition for resources involved the executive committee of the Murmansk railroad which refused to release grain from its stores, rumoured in the spring of 1918 to contain up to ten months worth of grain (this was impossible, in reality, because of the lack of storage facilities). In a telegram to the Kem' soviet on 22 April the chairman of the railroad executive committee, L.V. Nikol'skii, reported that the Murmansk railroad executive committee could offer no assistance to the isolated parishes of Kem' district because the committee only had enough grain to last another month and the amount of grain in their stores had been grossly overestimated. Furthermore, they were obliged to supply the Red

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<sup>79</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.23, l.151-152. Rivalry between districts within a province for foodstuffs was not an issue confined to the civil war period. For instance see the conflict between the districts of Nizhnii Novgorod province in September 1917 in S. Badcock, *Politics and the People in Revolutionary Russia. A Provincial History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 216-217.

<sup>80</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.23. l.199-200.

Finns guarding the railway line from the White Finns. Nikol'skii in fact believed the railroad workers should be prioritised and asked for assistance in helping to supply them. After all if work on the line stopped because of a lack of food then this would have a disastrous effect on the transportation of provisions to the population in the provinces of Olonets and Archangel.<sup>81</sup>

### **Local finances**

The adoption of independent initiatives in Karelia to ease local problems in the spring of 1918 was also evident in the financial sphere. On 3 April 1918 the majority of Left SRs in the Olonets provincial executive committee proposed that the alcohol kept in the storehouse in Petrozavodsk should be made available for sale. The Bolsheviks on the other hand believed that the alcohol should be destroyed. The desire to get rid of the alcohol no doubt sprang from entirely practical reasons: to remove the temptation for drunkenness and unruly behaviour amongst the population, especially amongst the Red Guards. Less than a month previously, at another session of the provincial executive committee on 11 March, a few civilians and Red Guards had been sent to prison for drunken and violent conduct.<sup>82</sup> What to do with the alcohol however remained a contentious issue; a final decision was not reached despite there being a majority vote (14 votes to 8) to destroy the alcohol. As something of a compromise between the Left SRs and the Bolsheviks a commission was established to draw up plans on how its destruction would be carried out but also to discuss further the possibility of selling the liquor.<sup>83</sup>

A relatively trivial issue therefore brought out important differences of approach regarding the prioritisation of military security or finance. However, there may also have been a different approach to the alcohol in Petrozavodsk because of the two parties'

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 1.280.

<sup>82</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.17, 1.77.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. d.87, 1.2.

differing approaches towards free trade; the Left SRs advocated independent initiatives within the economy whereas the Bolsheviks adhered to centralism and state control. That said, both parties realised the need for finance and the Bolsheviks apparently bowed to the Left SRs preference to sell the alcohol. On 31 May the Bolshevik dominated Petrozavodsk town soviet appealed to the provincial soviet executive committee to transfer money to the town soviet made from the sale of approximately 2500 *vedros* of vodka.<sup>84</sup>

Gizhitskii's trip to Petrozavodsk was also used by local leaders in Petrozavodsk to sound out the potential for some future investment in Karelia. Before departing from Petrozavodsk Gizhitskii was asked by the provincial soviet to find out the progress of their application for the construction of a lateral railway line from Medvezh'ia Gora to Kotlas, which would intersect the main route to Archangel and pass near Pudozh.<sup>85</sup> The goal of the project was described as the exploitation of Pudozh's rich forestry but naturally it would make supplying the district with foodstuffs easier and connect it with superior grain producing regions in central and southern Russia. In short it was a southern alternative to the northern option which would begin in Soroka and move eastwards to Onega in Archangel province. These plans, at such a chaotic period, appeared to be extremely ambitious but at the same time the construction of a railway line offered important economic benefits for a grain deficit region like Karelia; the change of regime must have brought fresh encouragement for planners and the hope for financial investment in the region.

Nevertheless, it was grossly impractical to undertake such a project during the civil war when the centre's resources were scarce and its efforts were channelled towards basic survival. Moreover the construction of a lateral railway line was presumably a longer-term plan for the economic development of the Russian north; it would take time to offer the

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<sup>84</sup> NARK, f.28, op.1, d.66, l.31.

<sup>85</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 184.

beginnings of any economic improvement. Even with the completion of the Murmansk railway line the supply of Karelia was hamstrung by the country's logistical problems in general. On 10 April the All-Russian Executive Committee learned from N.P. Bruikhanov, of the People's Commissariat for Food that, had it not been for the chaotic conditions of the railway lines, the central regions would have received 150 million *puds* of grain from Siberia instead of the 5 million *puds* which did make it through.<sup>86</sup> From 24 December 1917 (6 January 1918) to 4 April 1918, 91 train carriage loads of vital products (*predmety pervoi neobkhodimosti*) destined for Karelia were delayed at Ekaterinburg, Vologda, Tikhvin, Cherepovets and Zvanka stations.<sup>87</sup>

These logistical problems encouraged local leaders to persist in their requests for a southern lateral railway line in Karelia lest they lose out in central financing and the northern line option received approval. On 27 April the chairman of the Olonets provincial executive committee, wrote to Moscow to complain about the plan to build a northerly lateral line, beginning in Soroka. He protested ardently that the plan completely overlooked the rich districts of Povenets, Pudozh and Kargopol' not to mention all of Vologda. In turn he asked for the project to be re-examined and to look further into the southern option beginning in Medvezh'ia Gora. He also stressed that if the line ran to Luza station on the Kotlas line and connected to Perm then it would shorten the transit of loads from Siberia. Furthermore, the rich forestry of Olonets province, the minerals in the Zaonezh'e region and the development of cattle rearing in the province's parishes would open up a significant market of goods for trade with other regions.<sup>88</sup> The Olonets provincial executive committee's hopes for a southern lateral line were never achieved with

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<sup>86</sup> Moreover, the modest improvement made possible by the opening up of water navigations nearer the end of March was undermined by the Treaty of Brest Litovsk which saw the loss of the Ukraine and the Southern Caucasus. S. Malle, *The Economic Organisation of War Communism, 1918-1921*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. 356.

<sup>87</sup> RGVA, f.1, op.1, d.175, l.38.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. d.213, l.12-13.

preference given to the northern option; a branch line from Soroka to Obozerskaia station however was not operational until September 1941.<sup>89</sup>

Outside of the direct allocation of funds from the capital the most obvious way to produce much needed revenue was local taxation that targeted the wealthier members of society. This was in fact encouraged from the centre; in February 1918 the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs circulated a telegram urging soviets to tax the propertied classes.<sup>90</sup> On 22 February 1918 the Olonets provincial executive committee introduced a tax in the province with a total allotted target (*razverstka*) of 9 million roubles. All people having capital or enterprises of a value more than 7200 roubles were obliged to contribute to the target.<sup>91</sup> Local taxation was something agreed upon by the Left SR-Bolshevik bloc in Petrozavodsk. However, the implementation of the taxation order depended on local political conditions. In Povenets district in early March 1918 the district soviet executive committee, which had no Bolshevik party members and consisted of a mixture of SRs, Mensheviks and Kadets, rejected the imposition of a tax in preference for the collection of a loan from the propertied classes in the district.<sup>92</sup>

Parish soviets also took it upon themselves to tax local individuals because of a lack of any alternative source of income.<sup>93</sup> At the second Spasopreobrazhenskaia parish congress of soviets (18-22 April) in Petrozavodsk district the delegates imposed a parish wide tax amounting to 93,884 roubles on local traders, mill owners and speculators. In this instance, the tax was introduced on a sliding scale and depended on the size of the enterprise subjected to pay it. For example, a wholesale merchant in the parish was

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<sup>89</sup> G.A. Kumanev, *Sovetskie Zheleznodorozhniki v Gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny (1941-1945)*. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1963. 259.

<sup>90</sup> Sokolov, *Finansovaia Politika*. 51.

<sup>91</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 570, fn. 89.

<sup>92</sup> Memoirs of F.E. Pottov in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 189; 192.

<sup>93</sup> For a general overview of local taxation from 1918-1919 see R. Abrams, "The Local Soviets of the RSFSR, 1918-1921", PhD dissertation, University of Columbia, 1966. 65-66; 345-359.

required to pay 15,000 roubles while on the other hand a small-scale trader working from a stall was obliged to pay 100 roubles. 90% of the parish budget's income for 1 April 1918 to 1 January 1919 was compiled from the taxation of local 'kulaks'. 35% of the collected tax was transferred to the Petrozavodsk district soviet with the remaining sum being used by the parish for road construction, medical services, schools and administrative costs for the parish executive committee and rural soviets. The collection of the tax was met aggressively in some cases: two representatives of the Spasopreobrazhenskaia parish soviet were attacked by the inhabitants of Pialozero village for trying to explain and implement the parish congress's decisions at a peasant gathering.<sup>94</sup>

Finally, in the absence of sufficient support from the centre but encouraged by Sovnarkom's decree declaring the separation of church and state which nationalised all church property (20 January/2 February 1918), local soviets targeted the church.<sup>95</sup> On 27 January 1918 the Olonets provincial executive committee confirmed Sovnarkom's decree on the separation of church and state and agreed to transfer a number of local ecclesiastical premises to the Commissariat of Enlightenment. The executive committee also resolved to make all church houses, property and land public property.<sup>96</sup> From the Soviet regime's point of view, the church's property was seen as a much needed source of income. This was evident in Olonets district where the soviet, headed by the Left SR M.F. Chubriev, inherited a 60,000 rouble debt from the *zemstvo* administration. To help ease this financial burden the soviet imposed a tax on the Aleksandr-Svirskii monastery<sup>97</sup> and decided to make an inventory of its property.<sup>98</sup> In response the clergy of the monastery created a

<sup>94</sup> Memoirs of F.E. Pottoev in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 168-170.

<sup>95</sup> For the decree see *Dekrety Sovetskoi Vlasti. 25 Oktiabria 1917g.-16 Marta 1918g.* 18 Vols., Vol.1. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoi Literatury, 1957. 371-374.

<sup>96</sup> B.F. Detuchev and V.G. Makurov, *Gosudarstvenno-Tserkovnye Otnosheniia v Karelii (1917-1990 gg.)*. Petrozavodsk: "SDV-OPTIMA", 1999. 12-13.

<sup>97</sup> The monastery was situated in Lodeinoe Pole district but according to one historian of the area, omitting a precise date or any more detail, it became part of Olonets district together with Alekseev parish. F.I. Egorov, *Olonets. Istoriko-Kraevedcheskii Ocherk o Gorode i Raione*. Petrozavodsk: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Karel'skoi ASSR, 1959. 44.

<sup>98</sup> Filimonchik, "Olonets" in Pashkov, *Olonets*. 9.

Union for the Defence of Religion and the Church, numbering up to 1000 local people. In turn the district soviet, on 9 April 1918, declared all those standing up for the defence of religion to be counter-revolutionaries and liable to arrest. The soviet also resolved to persist in recording the monastery's property and grain produce, immediately exact the tax from the monastery and elect a three man delegation for the task. This delegation was assisted by five Red Army men and four militiamen.<sup>99</sup> However, the delegation was not successful. On 16 April the Olonets district soviet ordered its military board to immediately form a detachment of no less than 50 men to be sent to the Aleksandr-Svirskii monastery, arrest the leaders of the Union for the Defence of Religion and the Church, carry out the planned inventory and exact the tax.<sup>100</sup> At this stage the local soviet's interests in the monastery appears to have been primarily economical; the monastery was not closed down and there is no evidence of any fatalities amongst the clergy until the winter of 1918, by which time local circumstances had changed (see Chapter 6).

These attempts to fund the soviets in Karelia highlighted the decentralised nature of soviet power in this period of the civil war. This was the natural response to the general breakdown of state finances and the inability of the centre to support provincial soviets, made worse by the inexperience of the Bolsheviks in implementing a new socialist economic system.<sup>101</sup> In an attempt to ease the burden on local soviets the state encouraged the implementation of local initiatives. In mid-January 1918, addressing local soviets, the Bolshevik M.S. Olminskii proclaimed in *Izvestiia*: 'Do not await orders from the centre! Get down to business yourselves! Quickly organise new taxes and collections for the Soviets!'<sup>102</sup> As seen above the capital also urged local soviets to tax the propertied classes

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<sup>99</sup> S. Smith, "Bones of Contention: Bolsheviks and the Struggle against Relics, 1918-1930." *Past and Present*, Vol.204, 2009. 155; V. Vdovitsyna, "Aleksandro-Svirskii Monastyr' v Pervye Gody Sovetskoi Vlasti" in *Urok Istorii Daet Arkhiv. Iz Opyta Issledovatel'skoi Raboty Uchashchikhsia Shkoly-Kolledzha*. Petrozavodsk: "Verso", 1994. 97.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. 98.

<sup>101</sup> Sokolov, *Finansovaia Politika*. 143.

<sup>102</sup> *Izvestiia*, 13 January 1918, cited in Ibid. 50.

in February 1918 and many soviets throughout the country in fact survived on these contributions from the wealthier members of society.<sup>103</sup> The Karelian region therefore received encouragement from the centre to undertake independent taxation as a matter of pragmatism; the Bolsheviks wished to consolidate their hold on power but could not do so with a still weak Soviet and party infrastructure and limited central finances, so the capital temporarily but consciously allowed a level of autonomy to develop in the periphery. Arguably this level of autonomy helped consolidate the fledgling Soviet regime; the soviets and their institutions were not yet fully established throughout the periphery or were in a transitional phase operating alongside remaining *zemstvos* and *dumas*. Enforcing centralisation was pointless without the apparatus to support it; conceding central control in the short term for the sake of survival was therefore a means of achieving an end.

In Karelia this devolution of power during spring 1918 was a double-edged sword; local leaders complained about the lack of central support but at the same time took pride in their own revolution and how they had consolidated the local Soviet regime.<sup>104</sup> The Left SR-Bolshevik alliance remained strong throughout the spring of 1918. From the turn of the year it had faced serious challenges to the Soviet regime but managed to consolidate their hold on local power, largely by themselves. On 5 April Parfenov sent a telegram to the centre about the lack of support the soviets and the Red Army had received: ‘Almost without any help from Petrograd the soviet has strengthened its authority in the province. We will stand firm for the power of the Soviets and its autonomy...The Red Army has not received a kopeck of money.’<sup>105</sup> However, despite pride in the survival of the Soviet regime in the periphery, local leaders in Petrozavodsk still required the centre’s support, especially in a grain deficit region like Karelia. In short, food supplies bound the Karelian

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<sup>103</sup> Sokolov, *Finansovaia Politika*. 95.

<sup>104</sup> The pride of local leaders in their own revolution is also noted by R. Service, *The Bolshevik Party in Revolution. A Study in Organisational Change, 1917-1923*. London: Macmillan, 1979. 77; Raleigh, *Civil War*. 75-76.

<sup>105</sup> Vavulinskaia, *Sovety Karelii*. 39.

region to the centre. Bolshevik leaders in Moscow also realised that the dislocation of the provincial soviets from the centre hindered any attempt to organise a coordinated and planned course of action to ease the financial or food supply situation across Soviet territory. The allocation of supplies from the capital and a more centralised system to help the Bolsheviks gain more control over food supply distribution was introduced in May 1918.

### **The beginning of the food supply dictatorship**

On 13 May 1918 the All-Russian Central Executive Committee responded to the country's food provision crisis by introducing the food supply dictatorship. It aimed to improve the food shortages by tightening central control over the periphery and thus combat the localism of Soviet power which was making it difficult to introduce and organise any kind of national solution to the shortages. The decree had its origins in the grain monopoly established by the Provisional Government in March 1917 but reinforced the principles of centralisation and coercion under the People's Commissariat for Food to obtain the peasants' surpluses. The Commissariat for Food was given plenipotentiary powers and license to do as it pleased in order to secure grain. These included the right to meet resistance to grain requisitioning with armed force, dismiss or reorganise local food supply organs and dismiss any employees who interfered with or disrupted the commissariat's work.<sup>106</sup> The decree also formed the basis for future legislation, such as the creation of food supply detachments (*prodovol'stvennye otriady*) and the *kombedy*, which widened the People's Commissariat for Food's powers to retrieve foodstuffs from the peasantry.

The introduction of the food supply dictatorship did not have an immediate effect in the Karelian districts because of local political factors (e.g. see Chapter 3), grain shortages and delays in transportation from Soviet held grain surplus provinces. By May

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<sup>106</sup> For the decree in full see *Dekrety Sovetskoi Vlasti. 17 Marta-10 Iulia 1918 g.* Vol.2. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoi Literatury, 1959. 264-266.

grain deliveries to Olonets province had come to a complete halt, there was nothing in the local stores, many districts were beginning to starve and rebellions were predicted.<sup>107</sup> These conditions were confirmed by telegrams received from Pudozh district at the end of May. On the 23 May 1918 the chairman of the Pudozh district soviet asked for the prompt dispatch of food for the starving population of the district because his soviet had no means of its own to solve the problem and no money to pay its employees. He predicted an uprising if there was any delay in supplying the district with food.<sup>108</sup> At the same time the Pudozh soviet could not afford to wait for the help it sorely needed and as a result more ad hoc local measures were introduced. On 30 May the Pudozh soviet established a special commission to carry out searches of local merchants in the district centre.<sup>109</sup>

On the 31 May 1918 the Olonets provincial food commissariat sent an urgent telegram to its representative in Moscow, A.F. Martynov, to ask the People's Commissar for Food, Aleksandr Tsiurupa, for the quick dispatch of grain to Olonets province and to hasten the dispatch of six carriages of sugar which had been assigned to Petrozavodsk station.<sup>110</sup> The author has not been able to ascertain when Martynov travelled to Moscow and exactly why he was there but it does appear he was establishing personal contacts with commissars in the centre and acting as a lobbyist to try and secure grain for his region and, by doing so, attempting to improve the flow of information between the capital and Petrozavodsk. After all the petitioning of central authorities in person had worked when Gizhitskii travelled to Petrograd the previous February. The Olonets provincial food commissariat also asked Martynov to inform officials in Moscow that four districts of Olonets province were completely starving with the remainder only having enough food to last them another week. As a result, there were now instances of people dying of hunger and supplies via the waterways had come to a halt because there was no food to feed the

<sup>107</sup> RGAE, f.1943, op.3, d.230, l.102.

<sup>108</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.23, l.352.

<sup>109</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 381-382.

<sup>110</sup> NARK, f.R-98, op.1, d.100, l.71.

boats' crews.<sup>111</sup> Despite Martynov's presence in the capital there was no rapid solution to the shortages in Karelia. On 3 June Petrozavodsk received a report from the Povenets district soviet which asked for the quick dispatch of grain in order to avoid 'a hunger catastrophe'.<sup>112</sup> The Olonets provincial commissar for food Tikhomirov informed Moscow that people had begun to slaughter horses to eat and people were falling ill because of starvation. He asked the centre to send even a partial load of grain because without it work in the province would become impossible and stop completely. He concluded that if grain did not arrive immediately then the provincial food board would not hold itself responsible for the consequences.<sup>113</sup> An example of the consequences that he predicted occurred in Olonets town on 10 June when an armed peasant rebellion broke out.

### **The Olonets rebellion**

The causes of the Olonets district rebellion were two major problems facing Karelia in the spring of 1918: financial and food supply shortages. On 23 March, Chubriev, the Left SR chairman of the district soviet, sent a telegram to the food commission in Petrozavodsk to ask it to urgently dispatch a minimum of two months worth of cereal products to Olonets district. He predicted grave consequences if his requests were not met, in particular for the children of the district who he believed would die of starvation. Because of the shortages Chubriev also believed the population was on the brink of rebellion and demanded that the provincial centre take immediate action.<sup>114</sup> Chubriev was correct and armed clashes did occur, although not until over two months after the above request was made. This delay does not necessarily imply that his original demands were met. On 10 May the Olonets district commissar for food reported to the provincial commissar for food that because of the reduction in the amount of grain reaching the district many of the region's population had been forced to consume rye and barley seed to feed their families and livestock. As a

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.23, l.383.

<sup>113</sup> GARF, f.R-1235, op.93, d.409, l.20.

<sup>114</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.23, l.231-232.

result there was a huge shortage of seed for spring sowing which meant a significant number of fields would go unsown thus proving disastrous for the future. The commissar therefore asked for three carriage loads of barley seed without which famine in Olonets district would inevitably occur.<sup>115</sup>

On 3 June, on the eve of the rebellion, the Olonets provincial food board received a warning telegram from Chubriev who asked the provincial centre to secure the dispatch of food products to the district because demands for bread were being made by hundreds of people arriving in Olonets town on a daily basis. Without it, he believed, correctly as it turned out, bloodshed was unavoidable.<sup>116</sup> Dissatisfaction was also commonplace because of the 9 million rouble tax, introduced by the provincial soviet in February. Complaints were so numerous that the local soviet convened a congress of representatives for those subjected to pay the tax. The soviet asked for five delegates to be sent from each parish but Rypushkal'skaia parish alone sent up to 50. Of the few hundred representatives who attended everyone also came to demand more bread. The atmosphere at the gathering on 10 June was intense and at some point negotiations deteriorated; local citizens burst into the town food store and captured the town's weapons store. They then encircled the buildings of the soviet and the district executive committee, carried out a number of arrests, including Chubriev, disarmed the local Red Army detachment and released a number of people from the town prison.<sup>117</sup> The rebels then created a five man organisational bureau, tried to widen the mutiny and demanded an end to the tax. However, their efforts were combated by a combination of soft and hard measures by individuals loyal to the soviets. The secretary of the Rypushkal'skaia parish soviet, the Bolshevik F.I. Egorov, wrote and distributed leaflets with appeals to the peasantry to defend the soviets and called the organisers of the revolt enemies of the working people. Bolsheviks from other parishes of

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<sup>115</sup> NARK, f.R-98, op.1, d.126, l.73-73ob.

<sup>116</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.23, l.382.

<sup>117</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 251-252; Filimonchik, "Olonets" in Pashkov, *Olonets*. 9.

the district also took part in agitation work condemning the rebellion and former front line soldiers held meetings and talks explaining the wrongs of the uprising.<sup>118</sup>

However, it was the arrival of Red Army troops from outside the district which brought the rebellion to a head. Before his arrest a member of the soviet had managed to make a report to the Lodeinoe Pole soviet informing them of events. In turn Petrozavodsk was informed and under the overall command of I.V. Matveev both soviets dispatched detachments of Red Army men to the Aleksandr-Svirskii monastery where they awaited news on the situation in Olonets, seizing some of the monastery's food stores and later 16 of its horses for good measure. However, before the Red Army men arrived in Olonets town, the rebels tried to delay the troops' arrival by forcing Chubriev under threat of execution to sign a telegram stating that armed assistance was not needed. According to Matveev's memoirs the ruse did not succeed because Chubriev 'signed the telegram in such a way that I would know things were not okay.' In response he sent a telegram back with his own bluff stating he had a force of more than 500 men ready to advance on Olonets (Matveev's detachment alone had only 85 men). It appears to have worked. The rebels sent a seven man delegation to negotiate at the Aleksandr-Svirskii monastery where it met with two members of the provincial Cheka, its chairman I.V. Elpidinskii and the Left SR A.S. Proskuriakov. The rebels agreed to restore the soviet, free the arrested soviet officials and Red Army men, disarm themselves and hand in their weapons on the condition that Matveev's Red Army detachment did not march on Olonets. This was also agreed to by the two provincial Chekists on condition that they were allowed to travel to the town to make sure the demands were met. However, in the end the detachment made for Olonets as the rebels dragged out the uprising in the hope of help from the White Finns, which did not materialise. Fearing reprisals the rebels surrendered their weapons, released

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<sup>118</sup> Egorov, *Olonets*. 44-45; Mashezerskii, *Ustanovlenie*. 155; Memoirs of F.I. Egorov in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 127.

the arrested prisoners and some even expressed the desire to join the ranks of the Red Army.<sup>119</sup>

The abortive revolt in Olonets town reflected common peasant discontent at the tax levy and the shortage of food. However, at this point in the history of the civil war in Karelia, their complaints were not aimed solely at the policies of the Bolsheviki but at the Olonets district soviet as a whole which, as we will see, was dominated by the Left SRs. But that is not to say that the rebellion was necessarily anti-Left SR. Regardless of the local authority in control the opposition was characterised by its focus on the material shortages faced by the local Olonets soviet, which, as we have seen, was a common problem faced by soviets throughout Karelia and one which provincial authorities struggled to control. Furthermore, the rebellion's suppression was accomplished with a combination of 'educational' measures alongside brute force, a tactic which would be repeated in quelling other rebellions later in the civil war. Two Red Army detachments were required from outside the district to put the rebellion down and two of the insurgents were killed.<sup>120</sup> It was also reported in the provincial *Izvestiia* on 5 October 1918 that a further two individuals connected to the uprising had been executed by the Olonets district Cheka.<sup>121</sup> Such measures however went hand in glove with efforts to distribute propaganda and agitate amongst the peasantry. After the rebellion was suppressed Chubriev telegraphed the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee on 13 June to send ten agitators to Olonets 'for preparing the population' for the planned Third Olonets district peasant congress on 20 June.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 252; Mashezerskii *Ustanovlenie*. 155; Memoirs of I.V. Matveev in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 70-73.

<sup>120</sup> Korablev, et al., *Istoriia Karelii*. 371.

<sup>121</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 5 October 1918. The death of four of the rebels is confirmed by an overview on the activities of the Olonets district Cheka in GARF, f.R-393, op.13, d.268, l.8.

<sup>122</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.96, l.284.

## **Conclusion**

What is most striking about the Soviet regime, only a few months old in the spring and early summer of 1918, is that it was able to maintain its hold on the periphery during this period of crisis. The case of Karelia shows that a local Left SR-Bolshevik alliance controlled the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee and the two parties remained united and worked together, sometimes in collaboration with Menshevik Internationalists, to consolidate the Soviet regime at a time of localised war, rebellion and economic strife. It did so with nothing but limited help from the capital but it was only a matter of time before central and local leaders came to understand that the survival of the regime would depend on more coordinated and centralised action. The Karelian region had pulled through a difficult period, largely through its own efforts, but as one of the highest Soviet grain deficit regions, communication with and support from the capital was essential. The introduction of the food supply dictatorship marked an important stage in the state's attempts to take control of food supply and distribution. However, as we shall see in the following chapter, the implementation of central decrees was dependent on local political and economic conditions.

### Chapter 3

#### The Left SR-Bolshevik Alliance: From Compromise to Collapse, March-July

#### 1918

Although the Left SR-Bolshevik alliance in Petrozavodsk worked well during the spring and summer of 1918 growing disagreements began over policies determined at the centre. The first cracks in the Left SR-Bolshevik alliance emerged against the background of the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty and the decision of the Left SR commissars to withdraw from Sovnarkom in protest. However, unlike in Moscow, but similar to the situation in Petrograd, the local alliance continued to work well after March 1918. The reason for this was partly the Left SRs' willingness to compromise but also their growing dominance in Petrozavodsk. This dominance reflected the general growth of the party; one Russian scholar has estimated that by July the number of Left SR party members stood at approximately 150,000.<sup>1</sup> In Karelia this influence meant that the Left SRs were in a position to block Sovnarkom's policies when elections took place at the Fourth Olonets Provincial Congress of Soviets (25 June-2 July 1918) and capture the chairmanship of the provincial executive committee.

The Left SR-Bolshevik alliance in Karelia would have continued but for the uprising of the Left SR Central Committee in Moscow on 6 July which weakened the Left SR party's position across the country and undermined the Left SR-Bolshevik alliance in Karelia. This chapter will argue that the Left SRs' uprising in Moscow presented the Bolsheviks with the opportunity to gain control over provincial capitals where they were not yet dominant by demanding that local party committees remove from the local soviets all Left SRs who did not condemn the actions of their own Central Committee. The Bolsheviks controlled the news about the uprising in Moscow and were therefore able to

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<sup>1</sup> According to Ia.V. Leont'ev the Left SRs held a majority (*pereves*), up to July 1918, in the Kazan, Viatka, Penza and Kherson provincial soviets and in no less than 50 district soviets throughout the country. See Ia.V. Leont'ev, "*Skify*" *Russkoi Revoliutsii. Partii Levyykh Eserov i ee Literaturnye Poputshiki*. Moscow: Seriya Airo-Monografiia, 2007. 69-71.

wrong foot the local Left SRs. By exploiting this knowledge and their control of the army and the Olonets provincial military commissariat the Bolsheviks forced the Left SRs to leave the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee. The Bolsheviks then established their own Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee.

### **Brest-Litovsk and bowing to the Bolsheviks**

On 6 March the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed by Sovnarkom at Lenin's insistence, despite opposition from the Left SRs and within the Bolshevik party from the 'left communists'. The Bolshevik leader argued that the new socialist state needed a short term respite to protect the revolution and only peace could stop the Bolshevik regime falling the same way as Tsar Nicholas II and Alexander Kerensky.<sup>2</sup> In protest at the peace treaty, ratified at the Fourth All-Russian Congress of Soviets (15-16 March 1918), the Left SRs resigned from Sovnarkom on 18 March. Broadly speaking the majority of Left SRs despised the treaty and deemed it as an attack on the gains of the revolution. To them the Bolsheviks had turned their back on the party's revolutionary principles by negotiating with an imperialist power, had ignored Left SR protests when signing the terms of the peace and were now taking orders from the Germans. However, at the Second Left SR Party Congress on 19 April 1918 differences within the leadership were clear. The leading Left SR Boris Kamkov commented: '...our party is truly revolutionary...We cannot get involved in double dealing.'<sup>3</sup> On the other hand Mariia Spiridonova, the leader of the Left SR party, supported the Bolsheviks' decision to sign the peace, opposed withdrawing from Sovnarkom and believed that it was better to work from a position of power alongside the Bolsheviks in spite of the treaty: 'The withdrawal is a crime against the peasantry, because from their point of view it was necessary that the apparatus of central power be in our hands.'<sup>4</sup> Despite this lack of agreement at the top on whether or not to withdraw from

<sup>2</sup> For Lenin's opinion of the peace treaty see R. Service, *Lenin. A Biography*. London: Macmillan, 2000. 338-344.

<sup>3</sup> Anderson, et al., *Partiia*. 333.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 334.

Sovnarkom in protest at the signing of the Brest-Litovsk treaty, the decision to leave was approved at the party congress.<sup>5</sup>

In Petrozavodsk, the local Left SRs were similarly divided, but ultimately adopted a stance closer to Spiridonova's position. At a session of the Olonets provincial soviet on 7 March, local Left SRs and the Bolsheviks clashed over Brest-Litovsk. A Bolshevik representative followed the Leninist party line: 'A breathing space is needed... Let the Soviet government become stronger, let the problems of food supply improve, let socialist consciousness grow and then we will no longer fear the imperialists.'<sup>6</sup> In response the Left SR leader Ivan Balashov spoke out against the peace treaty and called for the organisation of an armed struggle against the Germans.<sup>7</sup> After the peace was ratified at the Fourth Congress of Soviets, a general Bolshevik party meeting in Petrozavodsk on 12 March resolved to accept the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty in the belief that it would be short lived and the revolution would soon spread to Germany and Austria anyway.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand Balashov continued to oppose the peace and at a mass gathering in Petrozavodsk on 28 March he appealed for an 'uprising' (*vosstanie*) against the illegal peace.<sup>9</sup>

Whether or not Balashov supported the withdrawal from Sovnarkom is not clear but, mirroring the diversity of opinions in the capital within the Left SR party, not all local Left SRs were supportive of a withdrawal. At the Second Left SR Party Congress in April, Arkhip Rybak, the Olonets provincial representative informed the congress that 'large-scale disagreements' existed amongst the Left SRs in Olonets province over the decision to withdraw from Sovnarkom. However, Rybak did announce that the majority, by the time

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<sup>5</sup> Cinnella, "Tragedy". 61-64; Ibid. 541-542.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Mashezerskii, *Ustanovlenie*. 158.

<sup>7</sup> When elections took place at this session to finalise the election of delegates to the Fourth All-Russian Congress of Soviets the chosen candidates were Balashov and the Bolshevik P.K. Aksent'ev. Ibid. 158

<sup>8</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 208.

<sup>9</sup> Cited in Mashezerskii, *Ustanovlenie*. 159.

of the party congress, had bowed to the idea of supporting the official party line (to withdraw from Sovnarkom).<sup>10</sup>

Despite their criticisms of the Brest-Litovsk peace and acceptance of the party Central Committee's withdrawal from Sovnarkom the Left SRs in Karelia did not wish to follow the example of the capital by splitting with the Bolsheviks. By 22 April the Left SRs had become the dominant political party in the Olonets provincial soviet. This dominant position was achieved by the arrival of peasant deputies from the districts which allowed the elections for a permanent presidium of the provincial soviet's executive committee to take place. Local Soviet historians have suggested that a number of Bolshevik deputies were absent from the proceedings and because of this the Left SR leader, Ivan Balashov, captured the leadership of the presidium by 22 votes to 19.<sup>11</sup> Whatever the case, the result was a shock for the Bolsheviks; they walked out of the soviet executive committee session, and threatened to take no further responsibility for the functioning of the soviet and to recall all their members from it.<sup>12</sup> In response the Left SRs agreed to compromise with the Bolsheviks; at the following executive committee session on the 23 April new elections took place, not for the chairmanship of the presidium but the provincial soviet executive committee as a whole. The Bolshevik candidate Petr Anokhin defeated the Left SR candidate, P.P. Panin, by 26 votes to 22.<sup>13</sup>

The compromise therefore appears to have allowed for new elections to take place to the provincial soviet executive committee which resulted in a Bolshevik remaining chairman of this committee (which had been the case before the elections anyway) and the presidium. At the same session of the executive committee on 23 April and as part of the compromise two Left SRs became the presidium's deputy chairmen, another Left SR took

<sup>10</sup> Anderson, et al., *Partiia*, 264.

<sup>11</sup> Mashezerskii, *Ustanovlenie*. 159; Doroshin, *Anokhin*. 24.

<sup>12</sup> Mashezerskii, *Ustanovlenie*. 159; Doroshin, *Anokhin*. 25.

<sup>13</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.87, l.27; Doroshin, *Anokhin*. 25.

up the position of treasurer while two Bolsheviks became the presidium's secretaries.<sup>14</sup>

The presidium therefore consisted of three Bolsheviks and three Left SRs.

The Left SRs in Karelia had shown that they did not want to upset the Left SR-Bolshevik alliance. In other words the Bolsheviks had called the Left SRs' bluff at a time when tensions were at a peak between the two parties. Were the Left SRs willing and ready to take on the responsibility of governing Olonets province alone? If they were then the move would be unprecedented and could only have wider and disruptive repercussions for the party and their relationship with the Bolsheviks. Naturally, they sought to increase their authority in the province through the soviets so they could modify Bolshevik policy but there is no evidence to suggest that they wished to rule on their own, especially in the face of the various problems facing the region (see Chapter 2). Like the situation in Petrograd, it appears that local Left SRs did not want to contribute to the instability of the Soviet regime and so suppressed their differences with the Bolsheviks and sought compromise.<sup>15</sup> The Left SR Olonets provincial representative at the national party congress in April, Arkhip Rybak, reflected this standpoint when he announced: 'regarding the Bolsheviks we, of course, kept to precautionary tactics, in the sense that we did not take a stand in open opposition to them, but endeavoured to hold them back...'<sup>16</sup>

### **Resisting the food supply dictatorship**

"Holding the Bolsheviks back" proved more difficult for the Petrozavodsk Left SRs after Moscow introduced the food supply dictatorship in the middle of May 1918. The official introduction of food supply detachments, subordinated to the People's Commissariat for Food on 27 May, and particularly the introduction of the *kombedy* on 11 June put Left SRs and Bolsheviks at loggerheads. The Left SRs opposed the Bolsheviks' attempts to

<sup>14</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.87, l.28.

<sup>15</sup> This is the conclusion drawn by Alexander Rabinowitch with regards to the Petrograd Left SRs. See Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power*. 395.

<sup>16</sup> Anderson, et al., *Partiia*. 264.

centralise the economy and utilise violence to obtain grain. The food supply detachment decree appealed to local food organs, particularly in the grain deficit regions, to form special detachments of ‘conscious’ workers who supported the soviets. The decree also ordered local food organs to use the detachments primarily for agitation purposes and for organising the working peasantry against the ‘*kulaks*’.<sup>17</sup> Although this decree made no official mention of armed force, the responsibilities of the detachments had been guided a few days earlier in Lenin’s ‘Theses on the Current Situation’, written on 26 May. These theses recognised that the detachments would be used for agitation but also championed the importance of prioritising ‘a war on grain’ over the coming months and emphasised the need to militarise its collection by way of armed detachments.<sup>18</sup> The detachments were subordinated to the People’s Commissariat for Food and came together in what became known as the Food Army.

With regards to the *kombedy* Lenin aimed to instigate and promote class war in the countryside by using the *kombedy* as alternative political organs in the countryside which were subordinated to central Bolshevik policy. They were to be elected from the poorer strata of peasant society and were responsible for identifying grain surpluses, organising the collection of grain from so called ‘*kulaks*’, redistributing grain and putting a stop to free trade and speculation. With this, Lenin wanted to isolate the poor peasantry, turn them against the more affluent ‘*kulaks*’ and win over large sections of the countryside to Bolshevism. The Left SRs however complained about the ambiguity of splitting the peasantry and distinguishing ‘poor’ from ‘*kulak*’. In other words how should one define a poor or a rich peasant? Moreover, the Left SRs believed – correctly as it turned out - that the peasantry would resist the state’s attempts to use the *kombedy* alongside the food

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<sup>17</sup> *Dekrety*. Vol.2. 307-312. For the appeal to form detachments in the localities: 310.

<sup>18</sup> V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed., Vol.36. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoi Literatury, 1962. 374-377; 374, fn.142.

supply detachments to extract surpluses from the countryside and that a violent struggle between town and countryside would ensue.<sup>19</sup>

Shortly after the decree establishing the food supply detachments was introduced Petrozavodsk received a telegram from Moscow, circulated to all non-grain producing provinces at the time, which instructed the provincial commissariat for food to begin forming detachments. Within the telegram Aleksandr Tsiurupa, the People's Commissar for Food, reiterated the decree of 27 May and asked for 'conscious' and 'recommended' workers from soviet and trade institutions to be hastily dispatched to the grain producing regions where they would come under the control of the local food authorities. Before these workers were sent to different regions around the country Petrozavodsk was requested to record a list of all those who wished to take part in the detachments and then send them to the People's Commissariat for Food in Moscow. On arrival detachment members would receive a short 3-5 day training course before their onward journey.<sup>20</sup>

The formation of the food supply detachments in Karelia was first discussed at a session of the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee on 31 May 1918. There a conflict of interests emerged between local Bolsheviks and Left SRs, which threatened the implementation of central policy. The Bolsheviks endorsed Sovnarkom's food supply policies but the Left SRs believed that sending 'punitive expeditions' into the countryside would only strengthen the discord between town and countryside and disrupt commodity exchange (*tovaroobmen*) between the two. The Left SRs proposed tighter communications between the peasantry and the food supply organisations and the taking of 'decisive measures' (they did not specify what these might be) to deliver vital products (*predmety pervoi neobkhodimosti*) to the countryside in exchange for grain at corresponding prices.

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<sup>19</sup> Lih, *Bread and Authority*. 139-148; 157-158; 160-161. For the decree establishing the *kombedy* see, *Komitety Bednoty Severnoi Oblasti. Sbornik Dokumentov*. Leningrad: Leningradskoe Gazetno-Zhurnal'noe Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo, 1947. 29-32.

<sup>20</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.23, l.374.

To the frustration of the Bolsheviks the Left SRs dominant position in the provincial soviet executive committee prevailed and it was their proposal which was adopted; Sovnarkom's decree to create food supply detachments was rejected.<sup>21</sup>

However, on 12 June, the Petrozavodsk town soviet resolved by a majority vote, opposed only by the Menshevik Internationalist party, to create food supply detachments because of the general food shortages in the town. Notably, the proposal to form food supply detachments at this meeting was tabled not by the Bolsheviks but the Left Menshevik Internationalists.<sup>22</sup> Surprisingly, there is no evidence that the Left SRs objected to the decision, this was left solely to the Menshevik Internationalist M.A. Kaplan who stressed that the detachments would set the peasantry and the proletariat against one another.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, even if the Left SRs had protested it is unlikely that it would have changed the resolution because they were outnumbered by the Bolsheviks in the Petrozavodsk town soviet, who supported the Left Menshevik Internationalists' motion. Although the precise make up of the Petrozavodsk town soviet on 12 June is unknown, on 2 May 1918 it consisted of 33 Bolsheviks, 12 Left SRs, 5 Left Menshevik Internationalists, 2 Menshevik Internationalists and 2 Anarchists.<sup>24</sup>

Why did the Left SRs in the Petrozavodsk town soviet not object to the introduction of the food supply detachments? Firstly, at the same session, the town soviet also resolved to create a military revolutionary committee. This was significant because it helped the Bolsheviks tighten their control in the town by creating a potentially alternative source of authority in times of emergency. The Bolsheviks announced that the motivation for the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. d.87, l.78-79.

<sup>22</sup> Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 129.

<sup>23</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 3 July 1918.

<sup>24</sup> Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 128. At the beginning of July, on the eve of the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets, the Bolsheviks had 45 members in the town soviet compared to 10 Left SRs and 5 Left Menshevik Internationalists. GARF, f.1235, op.4, d.43, l.100. These figures were given in the congress questionnaire filled in by the Bolshevik delegate from Petrozavodsk, A.F. Kopnin.

creation of such a committee came from the current food crisis and the recent rebellions in Olonets province at the time (in Olonets town). As a result they proposed to give the new committee ‘unlimited powers.’ The Left SRs protested but showed their willingness to compromise by proposing that a Cheka should be created and attached to the town soviet instead. However, the Menshevik Internationalists M.A. Kaplan and V.M. Kudzhiev immediately recognised that a new committee with ‘unlimited powers’ would limit the rights of the town soviet’s executive committee and widen the opportunity for political terror. Ultimately their efforts to block the military revolutionary committee were in vain; the Left Menshevik Internationalists voted with the Bolsheviks for the creation of the military revolutionary committee which consisted of 3 Bolsheviks, one Left Menshevik Internationalist and 1 Left SR.<sup>25</sup> It is therefore reasonable to suggest that with the creation of this new emergency committee the Left SRs felt powerless to stop the introduction of food supply detachments in Petrozavodsk and this is why they did not object.

However, the evidence available also indicates that the lack of protest from the Left SRs in the Petrozavodsk town soviet concerning the introduction of food supply detachments can be attributed to the fact that the severity of the food shortages left little alternative. In the past week the Petrozavodsk town soviet had appealed to Sovnarkom for help because crowds of starving people were besieging the soviet on a daily basis.<sup>26</sup> Local Left SRs in the Petrozavodsk town soviet were therefore willing to put their political differences to one side and work together with the Bolsheviks for the sake of easing the food crisis. Finally, the Left SRs could be confident that the introduction of the food supply detachments would not be introduced on a provincial wide scale as they had already blocked their introduction in the provincial executive committee. In short, practical

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<sup>25</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 253-254; *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 3 July 1918. The members of the military revolutionary committee were the Bolsheviks P.V. Spiridonov, A.A. Zuev, M.T. Glushchenko and the Left SR Kokushin. The Left Menshevik Internationalist member was left undecided.

<sup>26</sup> Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 129.

exigencies and their need to compromise brought about a mute response from the Left SRs in the Petrozavodsk town soviet.

In spite of the Bolsheviks' success in the Petrozavodsk town soviet, the vast majority of food detachments did not leave the town until the end of August (see Chapter 4). The Left SRs' silence on the matter also seemed vindicated when the inability of the Bolsheviks in the Olonets provincial soviet to introduce Moscow's decrees surfaced later in the month. This led to frustrations in the Soviet capital where Bolshevik leaders were eager to centralise grain collection and dispatch food supply detachments to the grain surplus provinces as quickly as possible. On 21 June Petrozavodsk received another circular telegram, this time from the military commander of the Food Army, G.M. Zusmanovich, demanding haste in the forming of food detachments: 'Comrades, do not waste a minute, an armed force is needed for the struggle with the *kulaks* for bread, the quicker you dispatch food supply detachments the better for us.'<sup>27</sup> However the Olonets provincial soviet, like a number of other soviets across the country, was not responsive. Petrozavodsk received further telegrams, this time from Tsiurupa on 26 and 27 June, complaining about the inactivity of the provincial soviets and the sluggishness of some local organs in forming food supply detachments.<sup>28</sup>

In short, the introduction of the food supply dictatorship showed, in this instance, that it was the special political dynamics in Petrozavodsk which determined the successful introduction of the food supply detachments. Unlike in Petrograd, where the Bolsheviks' organisation of food supply detachments gathered pace immediately after the decree from 27 May, in spite of Petrograd Left SRs' complaints, the Left SRs in Petrozavodsk

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<sup>27</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.96, l.323. On Zusmanovich see Iu.K. Strizhkov, "Komandarm Prodoval'stvennoi Armii G.M. Zusmanovich." *Istoriia SSSR*. No.3, 1965. 146-150.

<sup>28</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.23, l.413; l.423.

succeeded in defying Moscow and hindered the establishment of the detachments.<sup>29</sup> However the Left SRs also adopted a delicate balance of policy and pragmatism; where they had no opportunity to change Bolshevik policy, as the example of the Petrozavodsk town soviet showed, they were willing to compromise with the Bolsheviks to keep disruption amidst an economic crisis to a minimum. Therefore in spite of growing political differences in Petrozavodsk there was still life in the Left SR-Bolshevik alliance.<sup>30</sup> The Left SRs' ability to impede the implementation of Moscow's policies, but willingness to continue working with the Bolsheviks, was proven once more at the Fourth Olonets Provincial Congress of Soviets.

### **The Fourth Olonets Provincial Congress of Soviets (25 June – 2 July 1918)**

Out of a total number of 189 delegates who attended the Fourth Olonets Provincial Congress of Soviets 62 were Bolsheviks, 47 were Left SRs and 80 were non-party.<sup>31</sup> Proving that the Brest-Litovsk peace was still a contentious topic amongst the delegates the treaty was central to discussions at the evening session of the 27 June. On behalf of the Bolsheviks the chairman of the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee Petr Anokhin addressed the congress. He defended his party Central Committee's decision to conclude peace and responded to Left SRs who had spoken out for an annulment of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty.<sup>32</sup> Anokhin stressed the practicalities of concluding a separate peace with the Germans because following the February revolution the army was entirely exhausted and no longer wished to fight. Furthermore, he stressed that a respite was needed in order to consolidate and reinforce the revolution which would then allow for a future and final attack on worldwide capital.<sup>33</sup> Anokhin proclaimed.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>29</sup> On 2 June the presidium of the Petrograd soviet announced that the first detachments, numbering 400 workers, had left Petrograd. On this, the early establishment of food supply detachments in Petrograd and the Left SR reaction see Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power*. 270-273.

<sup>30</sup> This chimes with Rabinowitch's conclusions. See, *The Bolsheviks in Power*. 395-396.

<sup>31</sup> Shumilov, *Bor'ba*. 102. Shumilov does not mention the Menshevik Internationalists. However, the proceedings of the congress on the 27 June, mentioned below, show that the Menshevik Internationalists were present.

<sup>32</sup> Shumilov, *Bor'ba*. 102; Mashezerskii, *Ustanovlenie*. 163.

<sup>33</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 30 June 1918.

We had to conclude peace. What our comrades say, like our comrades the Left SRs are saying just now, is that it would have been better to have given up Petrograd and Moscow in order not to conclude the Brest peace, it would have been better to die rather than conclude a shameful peace. But it must be said that peace cannot be shameful if it offers democracy to the workers and peasants, it is not shameful but perhaps only unfortunate.

The food supply detachments were then discussed and also defended by Anokhin:<sup>35</sup>

It is said to us that with such detachments, such punitive expeditions, as they are being called by a few representatives of the parties, we will not obtain grain. They say that we can only get it with barter and with the deepening of class self-consciousness amongst the peasantry. It is correct comrades, barter is a good thing, the deepening of self-consciousness amongst the peasantry is a good thing, but the deepening of class self-consciousness is the question of tomorrow... the question of today demands the most energetic and extreme measures in order to feed every person... who at the current time is starving, they need to be fed, therefore the food supply detachments at the current time are a necessity. They are not being sent to the village with weapon in hand to say: give us everything there is – a funt or 20 *puds* of flour, give us everything in one pile and you will be left with no grain. No, the detachments are being sent, together with the poor peasants who are swelling with hunger, to take the *kulaks'* grain, grain which is rotting in barns and grain that has still not been threshed. This grain must be taken and given to those peasants who are starving and swelling with hunger...

What is most striking about Anokhin's comments is, although he defended the Leninist party line on peace and food supply, he refused to openly criticise the Left SRs with harsh polemics; they were still referred to as the Bolsheviks' comrades and he was in agreement with them over the long term goals of the regime. This contrasted starkly with the capital where Lenin lambasted the Left SRs on 22 May for being weak willed and defenders of the *kulaks*.<sup>36</sup> Instead Bolshevik speakers at the Olonets provincial congress singled out common enemies in the shape of the Mensheviks and Right SRs, mirroring the actions of both parties in the Petrozavodsk town soviet the previous April (see Chapter 2). A Bolshevik commissar from Petrograd, G.E. Evdokimov, reproached V.M. Kudzhiev of the

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<sup>34</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 259.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 259-260.

<sup>36</sup> Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power*. 271.

Menshevik Internationalists for criticising the Bolsheviks' policies and called the Right SRs and Mensheviks 'stooges of the capitalists' and 'lackeys of the bourgeoisie'.<sup>37</sup>

The Left SRs addressed the congress in a similar manner to the Bolsheviks; despite their disagreements with Bolshevik policy they refrained from openly attacking them. For instance, the Left SRs stuck unswervingly to their international vision of the revolution. Their resolution on the international situation criticised any collaboration with the imperialist powers such as Japan, Germany, France and England, who were now on Russian soil, had cut off eastern, southern and northern parts of the country and were attempting to destroy the gains of October. The Left SRs therefore called for the cancellation of all agreements or treaties with these 'enemies of the people' and the beginning of a merciless struggle against them. The Left SRs resolution on the internal policies of the Soviet regime also condemned the introduction of armed food supply detachments and the *kombedy*. Echoing what they said at the end of May 1918 the Left SRs believed the detachments would cause fratricidal war in the countryside and destroy the revolution. Instead the Left SR faction believed in commodity exchange and the independence of the working peasantry who would have the strength to take *kulak* surpluses by themselves.<sup>38</sup> In typical Left SR fashion, the party's critique of Bolshevik policy was prophetic but its representatives were sketchy on how viable implementing commodity exchange was in a period of acute economic ruin.<sup>39</sup>

Regardless of the Left SRs' critique of the Bolsheviks' policies the former did not openly condemn the latter during the session, which suggest there was still life in the Left SR-Bolshevik alliance. Instead, like the Bolsheviks the Left SRs singled out the alliance's

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<sup>37</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 30 June 1918.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*; Mashezerskii, *Ustanovlenie*. 163. M.D. Samokhvalov, a Left SR party representative from Petrograd attended the congress and protested against sending food supply detachments to the countryside.

<sup>39</sup> For a discussion of the Left SRs' critique of Bolshevik policies and the viability of their own programme see Kowalski, "The Left Socialist Revolutionaries". 11-23.

common adversaries. Ivan Balashov attacked local Mensheviks and Right SRs for, in his opinion, their condescension towards the peasantry: ‘All these opposition socialists who speak assume that they are the only intelligent ones and all of this gathering is made up of blockheads. But the peasants have intellect, although they are not educated and this intellect tells them which path to follow.’<sup>40</sup>

At the end of the congress the Left SRs’ resolutions declared all agreements with the capitalist countries void and rejected the sending of food supply detachments to the countryside and the organisation of the *kombedy*. These resolutions were passed by a slim majority of five votes.<sup>41</sup> However, the Left SRs did not get everything their own way at the congress; the threat posed by the recent advance of the Allies from Murmansk (see below) helped convince the majority of voting delegates to support the Bolshevik resolution for the creation of a regular Red Army.<sup>42</sup> Despite this setback, the Left SRs’ still provided half of the 18 delegates elected to attend the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets (4-10 July 1918).<sup>43</sup> The strength of their position was also apparent at a session of the newly elected Olonets provincial executive committee on 3 July. When voting took place for the executive committee’s presidium Petr Anokhin, the Bolshevik candidate, was defeated by the Left SR leader Ivan Balashov for the chairmanship of the executive committee which now consisted of 18 Left SRs and 12 Bolsheviks.<sup>44</sup> At a Bolshevik party gathering in Petrozavodsk later that month a party member recalled events at this time: ‘Our status became difficult. We were not in the position to carry out the policies of the October

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<sup>40</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 30 June 1918. Rabinowitch also notes the unwillingness of the Left SRs in Petrograd to come into conflict with the Bolsheviks over the food supply detachments. Like in Petrozavodsk the Petrograd Left SRs instead harassed the SRs and Mensheviks. Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power*. 273.

<sup>41</sup> 73 delegates voted for the Left SR resolution and 68 for the Bolshevik resolution. *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 30 June 1918.

<sup>42</sup> Mashezerskii, *Ustanovlenie*. 164-165.

<sup>43</sup> K.V. Gusev, *Krakh Partii Levykh Eserov*. Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Sotsial’no Ekonomicheskoi Literatury, 1963. 220, fn.1. Unfortunately this source does not mention who these representatives were or which party the remaining nine delegates were affiliated to.

<sup>44</sup> Mashezerskii, *Ustanovlenie*. 165; Shumilov, *Bor’ba*. 103. In contrast to Mashezerskii, Shumilov states the Olonets provincial executive committee consisted of 17 Left SRs and 14 Bolsheviks.

revolution and all its achievements. Before us were two alternatives: either to go with the Left SRs or to leave the executive committee.<sup>45</sup> The Bolsheviks initially chose the latter and threatened to relinquish all their responsibilities for governing the region but, unlike in April, the ruse did not succeed this time and they quickly changed their mind.

### **The movement of the Allies**

The main reason for the Bolsheviks' change of heart was the panic created by the landing of approximately six hundred, mostly British, Allied troops in Murmansk at the end of June. This event occurred as the civil war intensified across the country from May to the summer of 1918. The Bolsheviks in Moscow divided up the country into military fronts with Karelia coming under the jurisdiction of the Northern Front which was created in July 1918. Under the command of General D.P. Parskii the front consisted of two armies: the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Red Armies. The former covered a sector from Viatka up to Lake Onega and the latter from Lake Onega to Pskov.<sup>46</sup>

Following the retreat of the White Finns from northern Karelia in May a provincial military commissariat was created on 16 May 1918. All district military commissariats were also organised by the beginning of July.<sup>47</sup> Still, despite the establishment of military commissariats the number of Red Army troops remained low. Part of the reason for this was that the military commissariats at this time relied on the enlistment of volunteers and a

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<sup>45</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 25 July 1918.

<sup>46</sup> On 19 February 1919 the 7<sup>th</sup> army was transferred to the Western front. The headquarters of the Northern front in Iaroslavl' were also abolished in February 1919 because of its distance from the battle positions and the delays this caused in communications. As of February 1919 the 6<sup>th</sup> Army became independent and in direct contact with the Main Command of the Red Army. Overall command was originally placed in the hands of M.S. Kedrov but as of 11 September command of the 6<sup>th</sup> army was given to Colonel V.M. Gittis and then on 22 November to General A.A. Samoilo who remained in the post until April 1920. Tarasov, *Bor'ba*. 152-154; V.I. Goldin, P.S. Zhuravlev and F.Kh. Sokolova, *Russkii Sever v Istoricheskom Prostranstve Rossisskoi Grazhdanskoi Voiny*. Archangel: Izdatel'stvo "Solti", 2005. 95.

<sup>47</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 255-257; 569, fn.75; A.I. Afanas'eva, "Organizatsiia Dobrovol'cheskikh Otriadov Krasnoi Armii v Karelii v 1918 g." in V.I. Mashezerskii and K.A. Morozov, eds., *Iz Istorii Interventsii i Grazhdanskoi Voiny v Karelii*. Petrozavodsk: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Karel'skoi ASSR, 1960. 17.

mass mobilisation of troops was not carried out until the end of November 1918.<sup>48</sup> In the meantime the military commissariats were forced to cast the net wide for recruits and enlisted a number of Chinese who remained in the region after being sent there to help with the construction of the Murmansk railway line.<sup>49</sup> However, by 20 July 1918 Boris Pozern, the commander of the Petrograd County sector of the Northern Front, sent a telegram to Petrozavodsk asking them to put a stop to the enrolment of Chinese into the army, presumably for fear that these troops would develop partisan tendencies.<sup>50</sup>

The landing of the Allies followed a congress of district military commissars (24-25 June) where reports proved that only limited progress had been made in organising military units since the defeat of the White Finns. At the congress the provincial military commissar Dubrovskii explained that communications with the districts were also troublesome and he had no detailed information on the Red Army from Pudozh or Povenets districts. There were now 500 Red Army men in Petrozavodsk and up to 150 men in each of the other districts within Olonets province which he had information for. At the same time the military commissariat in Petrozavodsk still relied on partisan detachments alongside regular Red Army men to guard the borders of the district. In fact Povenets district had nothing but partisan detachments. On the other hand reinforcements had arrived from Petrograd in the form of 100 men for border defence, 14 men for the staff of a Petrozavodsk division and a field radio station and a unit of radio-telegraph operators (*iskrovaia komanda*) of 21 men. Two army detachments, also sent from Petrograd, under the command of a Captain Orlov, L.M. Komlev, V.N. Kolosov and I.D. Spiridonov were also situated along the Murmansk railway line.<sup>51</sup> Although all figures relating to numbers

<sup>48</sup> Afanas'eva, "Organizatsiia" in Mashezerskii and Morozov, *Iz Istorii Interventsii*. 19.

<sup>49</sup> For some information on Chinese units in the Red Army during the civil war see N.A. Popov, "Uchastie kitaiskikh internatsional'nikh chastei v cashchite Sovetskoi respubliki v period grazhdanskoi voiny (1918-1920gg.)", *Voprosy Istorii*, No.10, 1957. 109-123.

<sup>50</sup> NARK, f.R-573, op.1, d.72, l.37. On national units in the Red Army see J. Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917-1923*. Macmillan Press, London: 1999. 34-39.

<sup>51</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 255-256. A report to the Olonets provincial military commissariat on 8 September stated that the majority of troops defending the railway line were said to be Letts and Poles.

in the army are contentious, a Soviet source suggests states that Spiridonov's troops which arrived in April numbered roughly 350 men and were responsible for guarding the railway section from Kem' to Petrozavodsk. Komlev's detachment, sent in May, numbered 450 men and was responsible for the Northern sector from Kem' to Murmansk.<sup>52</sup>

As the June congress of military commissars clearly shows, the ability of the Red Army to meet the challenge of the Allies was weak. This was proven by 3 July when units of General Charles Maynard's 'Syren' force had moved rapidly south, occupied the Northern section of the Murmansk railway line, disarmed the railroad guard, secured Kem' town and arrested a number of leading members of the local soviets, killing three members of the Kem' district soviet in the process.<sup>53</sup> There was genuine alarm in Petrozavodsk and it came as a total surprise; I.V. Balashov had dissolved the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee immediately following the Fourth Olonets Provincial Congress of Soviets until 16 July so some of the new committee members elected straight from the congress could return home to sort out their own personal and public affairs.<sup>54</sup>

Preparations for the defence of the region were therefore left to the special commissar representing Moscow in the region, S.P. Natsarenus, who informed Lenin on 3 July that he had declared the Murmansk and White Sea region under martial law.<sup>55</sup> Natsarenus estimated the size of the Allied forces to be between 12,000 and 15,000 troops but in reality the total size of 'Syren' force at this time amounted to no more than 2500

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Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 290. For more information on the detachments for the defence of the railroad also see Kedrov, *Bez*. 99-101.

<sup>52</sup> Tarasov, *Bor'ba*. 56.

<sup>53</sup> On the Allies' trip south see Maynard, *The Murmansk Venture*. 39-53. On the killing of three members of the Kem' soviet (A.A. Kamenev, R.S. Vitsup and P.N. Malyshev) on 2 July see: Balagurov, *Bor'ba*. 75-76; C. Dobson and J. Miller, *The Day We Almost Bombed Moscow*. London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1986. 55-56.

<sup>54</sup> Balagurov and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period*. 14; *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 25 July 1918; Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 297.

<sup>55</sup> Natsarenus was sent by Moscow to negotiate with the Allies and the Murmansk regional soviet in May but was now situated in Petrozavodsk. Keenan, *The Decision to Intervene*. 271-275.

troops of various nationalities and varying degrees of medical fitness.<sup>56</sup> However, without this information and with a further advance south imminent the Bolsheviks who had threatened to leave the newly elected provincial soviet executive committee decided to remain in it.<sup>57</sup> The Petrozavodsk town soviet also united around the advance of the Allies, condemned the Murmansk soviet and resolved to defend the revolution. In vibrant mood the Petrozavodsk soviet called on all workers to the defence of the revolution.<sup>58</sup>

The Petrozavodsk soviet calls on all workers...to decisively repulse the insolent imperialists of the Anglo-French coalition. Having raised the sword, they will perish from the sword, and let all obvious (*iavnyi*) and secret (*tainyi*) accomplices of the imperialist predators remember that they will be wiped from the face of the earth in the most merciless manner before their allies have the time to come to their aid.

Down with the international brigands of capital and their servants the Mensheviks and Right SRs

Long live the dictatorship of the proletariat and the poor peasantry!

Long live the revolutionary Red Army!

All to the defence of the Socialist Fatherland!

So on the eve of the Left SR Central Committee's uprising in Moscow on 6 July local Bolsheviks and Left SRs braced themselves to meet the threat of the Allies together. Military help from the centre, despite warnings from local leaders was delayed. No later than 3 July the Red Army's All-Russian General Staff's head of operations informed the Chief of Staff that troop reinforcements for the Murmansk railroad had been turned down by the Extraordinary Commission for the Defence of Conveyance Routes because there was a shortage of accommodation and provisions for the troops along the railway line.<sup>59</sup> Local forces and leaders were therefore compelled to do all they could in the meantime to

<sup>56</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 276. The few hundred or so troops who landed in Murmansk were supplemented by an assortment of other Allied troops upon arrival. See Maynard, *Murmansk*. 14; 27-28.

<sup>57</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 297.

<sup>58</sup> Balagurov and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period*. 14-15.

<sup>59</sup> *Direktivy Komandovaniia Frontov Krasnoi Armii (1917-1922 gg.). Sbornik Dokumentov v 4-kh Tomakh. Noiabr' 1917 g.-Mart 1919 g.*, Vol.1. Moscow: Voenizdat, 1971. 211-212. An order from the military soviet of the Northern Sector to the military head of the Iamburg sector (Petrograd province) on 7 July stated that two artillery platoons destined for the Olonets sector from elsewhere had not arrived. The head of the Iamburg sector was therefore requested to prepare one light artillery platoon for dispatch to the Olonets military sector. *Direktivy*, Vol.1, 216.

defend themselves.<sup>60</sup> On 5 July Natsarenius declared martial law in the whole of Olonets province and along the Murmansk railway line from Murmansk to Zvanka and the provincial military commissariat was made responsible for the defence of the region.<sup>61</sup> On the same day, the Olonets provincial military commissariat also resolved to evict all non-native inhabitants of the town who were not assisting the soviet; to recruit former officers to work alongside the soviet; register all weapons and provisions; and punish anyone caught damaging cables and wires in Petrozavodsk. Finally, all establishments and citizens were required to prepare for a possible evacuation of Petrozavodsk on the Petrograd to Vologda railway line.<sup>62</sup>

The new military crisis therefore breathed further life into the Left SR-Bolshevik alliance; Natsarenius appealed for help from Moscow as the provincial military commissariat and the Petrozavodsk town soviet hurried to construct a defence capable of holding back the Allies. It also gave the Left SRs and Bolshevik parties the opportunity to put recent differences to one side and provided a solid base for further collaboration. However, this opportunity was destroyed by events in Moscow.

### **The Left SR 'uprising' in Petrozavodsk**

On 6 July 1918 the Left SRs assassinated the German ambassador in Moscow, Count Wilhelm Mirbach. Left SR military units then took control of the telegraph building in Moscow from where P.P. Prosh'ian sent messages around the country declaring their justification for Mirbach's assassination, criticising the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and calling for a revolutionary war against imperialism. The Cheka headquarters were also taken over for a short time and its head, Felix Dzerzhinsky, placed under arrest. Yet, the so called Left

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<sup>60</sup> Lenin informed Natsarenius on 7 July he would put 2 million roubles at his disposal but information about military aid would be sent separately. V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*. 5<sup>th</sup> edition, Vol.50. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoi Literatury, 1965. 116-117.

<sup>61</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 277.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* 277-278.

SR uprising came to nothing. More than 400 Left SR party members attending the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets were surrounded inside the Bolshoi theatre by troops loyal to the Bolsheviks, some Left SRs were subsequently imprisoned and then gradually released. Following a small confrontation the uprising was suppressed by the Bolsheviks. According to the official statistics 13 of the leaders were shot on 7 July.<sup>63</sup>

The historiography of the Left SR uprising in the provinces remains generalised and only some of the few recent regional studies have detailed the event in a local context.<sup>64</sup> In the case of Petrozavodsk events in Moscow were pivotal to undermining the Left SR-Bolshevik alliance, forcing the Left SRs out of the provincial soviet executive committee and handing control to the local Bolsheviks. Owing to the detention of many Left SR delegates in Moscow the Bolsheviks had the advantage of dictating to the nation what had occurred from their own point of view.<sup>65</sup> Most important in the immediate aftermath of the uprising in Moscow was the fact that the Left SRs' communications with their local organisations had been blocked by the Bolsheviks at a crucial moment. It is clear that a lack of knowledge of what had occurred in Moscow put local Left SRs in an awkward position and they did not know how to react.<sup>66</sup> Ia.V. Leont'ev, a leading Russian historian of the Left SRs, has attempted to characterise the different scenarios of the Left SR uprising around the country from roughly June to October 1918. He believes an

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<sup>63</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the Left SR uprising see: Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power*. 290-309; L. Hafner, "The Assassination of Count Mirbach and the "July Uprising" of the Left Socialist Revolutionaries in Moscow, 1918." *The Russian Review*, Vol.50, 1991. 324-344.

<sup>64</sup> The main exceptions are: Raleigh, *Civil War*. 145-149; Holquist, *Making War*. 168-170. Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power* gives a detailed account of the event in Petrograd (see fn.63). For a general overview in Russian of the Left SRs during the summer and autumn of 1918 across the country, which does not discuss the Olonets provincial soviet, see: T.V. Osipova, *Rossiiskoe Krest'ianstvo v Revoliutsii i Grazhdanskoi Voine*. Moscow: "Strelets", 2001. 132-161.

<sup>65</sup> For the Bolshevik press releases sent around the country see: *Dekrety*. Vol.2. 529-536.

<sup>66</sup> Left SRs in Saratov and Petrograd also stressed that they did not have all the facts surrounding Mirbach's assassination. Raleigh, *Civil War*. 147; Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power*. 298-299.

‘information war’ took place in Petrozavodsk and that the Left SRs were ‘squeezed out’ from their positions in the provincial soviet executive committee.<sup>67</sup>

It is not known if the messages which were sent out by Prosh’ian on 6 July were received in Petrozavodsk. If the messages did arrive in the town then it is dubious if local Left SRs learnt about them because the provincial head of posts and telegraphs was a Bolshevik. Therefore the first news of what had happened in Moscow does not appear to have reached Petrozavodsk until 8 July when the Petrograd Military Commissariat sent out a circular telegram, not to the soviets, but to all military commissariats under its jurisdiction. This meant that because the Olonets provincial military commissariat was headed by the Bolsheviks (see below), they heard the news first.<sup>68</sup> The commissariat was informed that the uprising in Moscow had been liquidated and the Left SRs in Petrograd, after some small skirmishes, had been disarmed. Finally and most importantly the Petrograd Military Commissariat ordered any Left SRs who did not disassociate themselves from the actions of their counterparts in the capitals to be removed from all positions of responsibility.<sup>69</sup>

The following day, 9 July, the local Left SRs, having heard the news, made an announcement at a session of the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee and backed their party. They upheld their determination to defend the gains made by the revolution, the authority of the soviets and the class struggle against international imperialism: ‘The faction [of Left SRs] confirms that it will not deviate from this position’. Secondly, the Left SRs declared that the telegraph communications received about events in Moscow had been one-sided and as a result it was still not clear to them what had

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<sup>67</sup> Ia.V. Leont’ev, “6 Iiuliia 1918 Goda: Regional’nyi Aspekt” in N.A. Ivitskii, *Grazhdanskaia Voina v Rossii. Sobytiia, Mneniia, Otsenki. Pamiati Iu.I. Korableva*. Moscow: Raritet, 2002. 362-387. On his references to events in Petrozavodsk see 362; 373-375.

<sup>68</sup> Bolsheviks in Petrograd also heard the news before Petrograd Left SRs. Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power*. 297-298.

<sup>69</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.96, 1.425-426.

exactly occurred. How the party was going to react could only be decided with the participation of all its delegates, a number of whom were currently dispersed around the countryside. In the meantime the Left SRs defied the Bolsheviks and concluded that: ‘...the Left SR party has always fought for the rights of the working people and it will not desert them now, so it proposes to its members to remain in all positions entrusted to them by the labouring peasants of the Olonets region.’<sup>70</sup>

Regardless of these statements the Bolsheviks moved quickly in response to the information received from the Petrograd Military Commissariat. On the 10 July the provincial military commissar, A.V. Dubrovskii, issued an order to all military units in the province not to carry out any orders forthcoming from Ivan Balashov or any other Left SR without the sanction of the provincial military commissariat or the Petrozavodsk town revolutionary committee.<sup>71</sup> On the night of 11/12 July the Left SR headquarters in Petrozavodsk were raided; all weapons and ammunition found were removed and taken to the Red Army headquarters while some of the Left SRs were arrested.<sup>72</sup> Balashov’s flat was also surrounded but he was not at home and his flat was left undisturbed.<sup>73</sup> On the 14 July the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik party committee decided to form a four man Cheka specifically for the task of disarming all members of the Left SR party.<sup>74</sup> Two days later an order was received from Grigorii Petrovskii, the People’s Commissar for Internal Affairs, which asked for Left SRs to be immediately removed from all leading posts, departments of administration and provincial and district Chekas. Naturally they were to be replaced with communists.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 11 July 1918.

<sup>71</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor’ba*. 264.

<sup>72</sup> Memoirs of I.V. Matveev and V.F. Usov in Gardin, et al., *Vlast’ Sovetov*. 75; 93-94.

<sup>73</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 14 July 1918.

<sup>74</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor’ba*. 266.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* 267.

On the same day that Petrozavodsk received the order from Petrovskii, 16 July, a session of the provincial soviet executive committee took place where the Left SRs were presented with a request from the Bolshevik A.A. Zuev: he asked the local Left SRs to announce what their own position was in relation to what had happened in Moscow and to explain whether or not they supported the Left SR Central Committee. Arkhip Rybak refused to make any announcement because it was still unclear to the local Left SRs what had occurred in the capital and he instead responded indignantly that the Bolsheviks had no right to demand an explanation. Dubrovskii dismissed Rybak's retort and announced that it was entirely clear that the Left SRs had undertaken a rebellion in Moscow. This he said had been confirmed by Bolsheviks arriving in the province from the capital. In response the Left SR, A.A. Sadikov, announced a resolution in the name of the party which stated that they did not believe any kind of uprising had taken place and that all actions against the party which had subsequently taken place were intolerable. Sadikov demanded the immediate cessation of any repressive measures or violence against the party's organisations and its members, the restoration of the party's press and the freedom to convene party congresses.<sup>76</sup>

V.M. Parfenov then spoke out on behalf of the Bolsheviks and declared it no longer possible for his party to work with the Left SRs in the provincial soviet executive committee. Next he asked the Left SRs to explain what their position was towards their Central Committee and if they were willing to adhere to the decisions of the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets.<sup>77</sup> Rybak replied that only with the arrival of the Left SR representative from Moscow, A.P. Tikhomirov, an eyewitness to events, could the whole issue be fully understood. Moreover, justifiably from his viewpoint, the Bolsheviks had no

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<sup>76</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 30 July 1918.

<sup>77</sup> After the uprising in Moscow the Fifth Congress of Soviets resumed minus the Left SRs on 9 July. It passed a resolution condemning the uprising as an attempt to seize power, endorsed the actions that were taken by the Bolsheviks to suppress the rebellion and banned all Left SRs who did not condemn these actions from participation in the soviets.

right to demand an answer to Parfenov's propositions because the Bolsheviks were in the minority within the executive committee, whereas the Left SRs were in the majority. Parfenov refused to budge and again categorically demanded an exact answer to the Bolsheviks' questions but agreed to wait for the arrival of the Left SR representative from Moscow while suggesting that the Bolshevik representative at the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets, A.F. Kopnin, should also be consulted.<sup>78</sup> After a short recess Sadikov announced the Left SR's resolution:<sup>79</sup>

In response to the question from the Bolshevik faction the Left SR faction – recognises the decisions of the Fifth All-Russian Congress and announces that at no time did the Left SR faction or the party bring disorganisation to the ranks of the workers and peasants and always obeyed the will of the higher organ – the decisions of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets and now will again submit to all the plenipotentiary decisions of the Fifth congress passed by all the authorised representatives of the peasants and workers and not only one faction. Furthermore the faction protests against the methods of the Bolshevik faction within the higher organ of authority in Olonets province, having expressed in publication only parts of the adopted resolution...the [Left SR] faction demands in the name of the Olonets provincial executive committee the proclamations in writing of all the work of the mandate commission at the Fifth All-Russian congress, not excluding the objection of its members, now arrested, but elected and authorised members of the congress and for full clarification of the true representation at the congress before every peasant and worker.

The above statement showed that the local Bolsheviks did not receive full recognition from the Left SRs of the resolutions of the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets because they were only representative of the Bolshevik party. Furthermore, the Left SRs resented the fact that the local Bolsheviks had retained important information about the congress for themselves.<sup>80</sup> It does not appear that the Bolsheviks were willing to share this information and the Left SR 'uprising' in Petrozavodsk came to a head. In a

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<sup>78</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 30 July 1918.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* 31 July 1918.

<sup>80</sup> As the Left SRs' statement implied, such deceptive actions mirrored those of the Bolsheviks in Moscow who seem to have gained a false majority of delegates at the Fifth Congress of Soviets. The opening of the congress was delayed twice as the Bolsheviks scrambled to increase the number of their delegates attending the congress without which the Left SRs would have equalled if not slightly topped the number of Bolshevik representatives at the congress. The discrepancy of roughly 399 delegates was challenged by the Left SRs but to no avail. See: Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power*. 287-288; Leont'ev, *Skify*. 73-74.

further Bolshevik resolution Parfenov stated that because the Left SRs considered the decisions of the Fifth congress to be only representative of the Bolshevik faction and not the congress as a whole and because they continued to dodge the issue of whether they were willing to implement the settlements made at the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets, all Left SRs endorsing the politics of their party central committee must immediately leave their posts in the provincial executive committee. All authority in the region was to pass to a new Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee.

This effectively marked the beginning of the end for the Left SRs in provincial politics. Sadikov announced that they agreed to leave the executive committee and the commissariats but suggested this was only because of the Bolsheviks' presence within the provincial military commissariat. As a result, the Left SRs were forced to obey the 'coarse strength of the Bolsheviks, founded on the point of a bayonet.'<sup>81</sup> On 16 July a new provincial soviet revolutionary executive committee was formed and began to appoint commissars to its commissariats. The committee was chaired by Anokhin and made up entirely of Bolsheviks.<sup>82</sup> The following day Anokhin informed Lenin and the district soviets about the transition of authority in Petrozavodsk and asked the district soviets to inform him about the party structure of their executive committees.<sup>83</sup>

### **Understanding the Left SR 'uprising' in Petrozavodsk**

Nothing remotely like events in Moscow took place in Petrozavodsk. In a similar vein to Petrograd, news of the uprising in the capital came as a surprise, Left SR headquarters were surrounded, searches took place and those Left SRs who failed to condemn their

<sup>81</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 31 July 1918.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* 1 August 1918. At its first session the new revolutionary committee consisted of the following twelve members: P.F. Anokhin, Podgornikh, N.V. Smelkov, A.V. Dubrovskii, I.A. Danilov, A.A. Zuev, N.N. Dorofeev, I.F. Petrov, A. Malyshev, A.N. Svetinskii, A. Filippov and F.G. Kapustin. This committee expanded in the summer of 1918 and made new additions to its staff. By this time it included: V.M. Lanev, S.K. Pukhov, I.A. Iakovlev, A.V. Dubrovskii, I.A. Danilov, N.V. Smelkov, P.F. Anokhin, A.F. Kopnin, A. Filippov, A.N. Svetitskii, V.M. Parfenov, I.F. Petrov, T.D. Anisimov, M.A. Pakhomov, Shkividorov, Ivanov, A. Malyshev, N.N. Dorofeev, O.K. Kanter, M.T. Glushchenko, F.G. Kapustin, S.A. Sobolev, M. Polozov.

<sup>83</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 269; 271.

Central Committee were forced to leave the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee. How then did the Bolshevik party in Petrozavodsk manage to oust the numerically more influential Left SR party from the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee and take sole power in a new revolutionary executive committee? In a national context Ettore Cinella claims that: ‘Where the left Populists had the majority the Bolsheviks used sheer force in disbanding the Socialist Revolutionary soviets...’<sup>84</sup> However, the evidence for Petrozavodsk challenges this observation. Sadikov’s parting shot mentioned above that the Bolsheviks’ strength was ‘founded on the point of a bayonet’ is important to understanding why the Bolsheviks were able to gain control in Petrozavodsk but ultimately it was only the threat of force and the party’s dominance of the provincial military commissariat that was required. Instead more important to the local Bolsheviks was the fact, described above, that the information of events in Moscow was relayed to them first. On the other hand local Left SRs were left dawdling and, as we will see, did not know how to react which ultimately led to a split within the party.

In the months and weeks leading up to the expulsion of the Left SRs the Bolsheviks had taken control of the military bodies in Petrozavodsk and Karelia as a whole (although the precise stages and the means of how this was achieved are not revealed in the sources). It cannot be simply coincidence that the Olonets provincial and the district military commissariats were almost all headed by Bolsheviks but rather this seems to indicate a conscious Bolshevik policy in the north.<sup>85</sup> The Olonets provincial military commissariat was headed by two military commissars, A.V. Dubrovskii and M.F. Tarasov; both were Bolsheviks as was the commissariat’s secretary, M.G. Varfolomeev.<sup>86</sup> The most important

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<sup>84</sup> Cinella, “Tragedy”. 68.

<sup>85</sup> Rabinowitch’s study of Petrograd reinforces this assertion. On 11 April a meeting of the Petrograd Labour Commune agreed to offer positions to the Left SRs in a regional government: ‘Agriculture, transportation, and internal affairs, but not military affairs, under any circumstances.’ See Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power*. 261.

<sup>86</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor’ba*. 581; 584; 602; Afanas’eva, “Organizatsiia” in Mashezerskii and Morozov, *Iz Istorii Interventsii*. 18; NARK, f.R-573, op.1, d.26, l.8.

positions in Karelia's district military commissariats were also dominated by communists. From the ten military commissars whom headed the military commissariats in Petrozavodsk, Olonets, Povenets, Pudozh and Kem', nine were communists.<sup>87</sup>

Therefore the Left SRs may have held many of the important posts in the provincial soviet executive committee but it was the Bolsheviks who controlled the military commissariats. Although the historiography of the Left SRs military capabilities is limited Lutz Hafner has refuted any suggestion that the Left SRs in Moscow were inferior to the Bolsheviks in military matters.<sup>88</sup> Neither was the lack of Left SR influence within the Olonets provincial military authorities mirrored by the situation in other parts of the country; at the time of Mirbach's assassination the Left SRs headed ten provincial military commissariats.<sup>89</sup> Why, then, did the Left SRs pay so little attention to the Red Army and military matters in Petrozavodsk? The answer lies somewhere in between practical and theoretical issues. The Left SRs had been willing to cede military influence to the Bolsheviks in return for occupying other important provincial commissariats, partly in order to keep the alliance intact, but also because the party were ideologically against the raising of a fixed and permanent army. It believed in the spontaneity of the masses, that they would to rise up if the revolution came under threat and their perception of the viability of this option in Karelia was encouraged by the spontaneous formation of partisan detachments during the attack of the White Finns, and the continued existence of these detachments throughout the region. The local Left SRs therefore kept their distance from supporting Bolshevik attempts to establish a regular army.

However it would be wrong to suggest that the Left SRs had no influence among the military units in Petrozavodsk because the party did have military expertise within their

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<sup>87</sup> Afanas'eva, "Organizatsiia" Mashezerskii and Morozov, *Iz Istorii Interventsii*. 17-18; Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 220.

<sup>88</sup> Hafner, "Assassination". 338.

<sup>89</sup> Osipova, *Rossiiskoe Krest'ianstvo*. 150.

ranks. For instance, before moving to Petrozavodsk, Ivan Balashov had been head of the Left SRs' All-Russian Battle organisation in Moscow.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, when Balashov and Rybak addressed a general meeting of the recently arrived Red Army Oranienbaumskii battalion on 14 July they succeeded in persuading the soldiers' to adopt resolutions which were strongly pro-Left SR.<sup>91</sup> Balashov and Rybak's success amongst the battalion's troops came in spite of the fact that the majority of its soldiers were supposedly aligned with the Bolshevik party. At the First Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference in August 1918 the battalion's representative noted that 225 of the 278 soldiers in the battalion were 'in the [Bolshevik] organisation.' However he also noted that the battalion's commander and commissar were Left SRs.<sup>92</sup> The Left SRs therefore did for a time have the 'real' power in Petrozavodsk. This fact was underlined at the Fourth Left SR Party Congress (2-7 October 1918) where the Olonets provincial delegate remembered that the previous July: 'both of us were scared of one another: we were scared that they would arrest us and they were scared that we would arrest them.'<sup>93</sup>

Yet the Left SRs' attempt to redress the military balance which was in the Bolsheviks' favour was short lived; the following week, at another Oranienbaumskii battalion gathering on 21 July, the soldiers' resolutions were toned down and not so supportive of the Left SRs. Rumours circulated from an unknown source after their last gathering that the battalion was adopting negative slogans concerning the revolution and the Soviet regime. The battalion's soldiers unanimously denied this but the provocation, wherever it stemmed from, had a significant effect; the troops now condemned the Left SR Central Committee for attempting to draw Russia into a war with Germany but at the same

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<sup>90</sup> Leont'ev, *Skify*. 50.

<sup>91</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 18 July 1918. The troops stressed that they wished to continue the fight against the Allies and the Germans and declared that they were willing to defend the Soviet regime. They also protested against the search of the Left SR's property, asked for the freedom of press for all Left SR newspapers and for the influx of their members into the local soviet and the military commissariat.

<sup>92</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.2, l.7.

<sup>93</sup> Cited in Leont'ev, *Skify*. 89.

time expressed the desire to work hand in hand with those Left SRs who had condemned the actions of their own central committee.<sup>94</sup>

The threat of military force therefore existed on both sides but there was no exchange of fire in Petrozavodsk between local Left SRs and Bolsheviks, no fatalities and nowhere near the 260 or so arrests made in Petrograd. Instead, the evidence points to the relative docility of the local Left SRs when it came to withdrawing from the provincial soviet executive committee. They had no desire to provoke an armed conflict with their former alliance partners and perhaps felt strong enough to bide their time in the belief that the Bolsheviks would not be strong enough to rule alone. The change in the political dynamics in Petrozavodsk was forced more significantly by the Left SR Central Committee's uprising in Moscow which in the short-term handed local Bolsheviks control of the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee: to repeat, the transfer of power to the local Bolsheviks was facilitated by the fact that the Bolshevik party heard the news first about what had happened in the capital. In turn this allowed the Bolsheviks to set the pace of events and take a leading role in the provincial soviet executive committee sessions in Petrozavodsk. Furthermore, by setting an ultimatum to the Left SRs to either accept the decisions of the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets or face expulsion from local government, the Bolsheviks induced a split within the Left SR party in Petrozavodsk.<sup>95</sup>

Some Left SRs were ready to accept the decisions of the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets and for that matter a few Bolsheviks outside of the provincial soviet appealed for unity during this crisis and had no desire for a split between the two parties. At a meeting of the Murmansk railroad soviet, reported in the provincial *Izvestiia* on 14 July, a representative of the Left SRs announced that the disorder occurring in the centre

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<sup>94</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 26 July 1918.

<sup>95</sup> This choice not only divided Left SRs in Petrozavodsk but many party members throughout the country. Cinella, "Tragedy". 67; Raleigh, *Civil War*. 146-149.

between the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs should not be echoed in the north when the seriousness of the current situation (the attack of the Allies) should unite everyone around the soviets. He further added that the assassination of Mirbach had not been committed by the Left SRs but by the Allies or the Germans. With reference to the recent southern advance of the Allies the Bolshevik, A.A. Khoroshevskii, also stressed the importance of unity, especially on the Murmansk railroad, and appealed for the Left SRs not to separate from the communists. Another Bolshevik by the name of Pakhomenko also felt pulling together under the current difficult circumstances was desirable.<sup>96</sup>

Nevertheless, calls for unity were not representative of the entire membership of the local Left SR party. This was expressed at the same meeting of the Murmansk railway soviet in Petrozavodsk. A.A. Sadikov spoke out on behalf of the Left SRs and summarised what many members of his party had repeatedly been saying: the destruction of the revolution was coming ever closer as a result of the dictates of the Germans (i.e. the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk). Was it not better to appeal for the worldwide revolution than die without a fight? Khoroshevskii believed the Left SRs were being entirely unrealistic in wishing to resume the war with Germany and responded condescendingly: ‘It is pointless to construct fantastical plans on soapy bubbles because our army is in no condition to fight.’<sup>97</sup> The Left Menshevik Internationalists also voiced their opinion through their representative L.V. Nikol’skii who, like Khoroshevskii, believed that fighting the Germans was impossible.<sup>98</sup> Ultimately, the lack of a general agreement within the Left SR party was reflected when 25 of the party’s delegates in the Murmansk railroad soviet resolved to condemn the actions of their Central Committee while 16 supported it.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 14 July 1918.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> P.F. Metel’kov and E.V. Nefed’eva, “Bor’ba Bol’shevikov Murmanskoi Zheleznoi Dorogi za Ustanovlenie i Uprochenie Sovetskoi Vlasti v Pervye Mesiatsy Diktatury Proletariata”. *Voprosy Istorii Evropeiskogo Severa*, 1987. 48.

Despite differences of opinion neither Left SRs nor Bolsheviks resorted to military force against one another. The past six months or so had seen the Left SRs willingly compromise with the Bolsheviks in a relatively effective alliance. Despite disagreements the Left SRs had also become the dominant force in the provincial soviet and they wished for this democratically achieved success to continue. In other words the evidence points to the unwillingness of the Left SRs to retain their position in Petrozavodsk through force. Likewise the Bolsheviks, despite their presiding military influence in Petrozavodsk did not need or necessarily want to resort to force to push the Left SRs out of the provincial soviet executive committee. The Bolsheviks acted pragmatically when it came to the immediate future of their former allies, primarily because the Bolsheviks still required them for administrative purposes. The void left by the expulsion of the Left SRs in Petrozavodsk was evident at the first session of the new Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee which consisted of only 12 members; at the last session of the old executive committee on 16 July the committee had consisted of 24 members.<sup>100</sup> Although the Bolsheviks added to the committee sometime thereafter and its numbers rose to 23 members, they accepted V.M. Lanev, a teacher and Left SR who had disassociated himself from his Central Committee.<sup>101</sup>

More important to the Bolsheviks gaining control of Petrozavodsk was the reaction of the local Left SRs to events in Moscow. The Left SRs now faced the dilemma of either condemning their own party Central Committee in favour of remaining in a position of power but subordinate to the Bolsheviks or going their own road in open opposition.

Statistics for the reaction to the Left SR uprising in the Northern and North-Western region

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<sup>100</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 30 July & 1 August 1918.

<sup>101</sup> To make up the numbers the Bolsheviks also tapped other soviets, soviet organisations and members of the Petrozavodsk County party organisation: the proposed provincial commissar for finance, I.A. Iakovlev was assigned from the Povenets district executive committee; and N.N. Dorofeev added to his responsibilities as deputy chairman of the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik party Central Committee by becoming provincial commissar for internal affairs and a member of the provincial revolutionary tribunal. Mashezerskii, *Ustanovlenie*. 167; 167, fn.2; *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 1 August 1918.

of the country as a whole show that the Left SRs in the wider region were effectively split in two. 42% of Left SR organisations condemned their party Central Committee after the July uprising while 58% supported it. In short, there was no unity within the Left SRs in these different localities and no circumstance whereby a consensus of opinion was reached on how to react.<sup>102</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The uprising in Moscow on 6 July was disastrous for the Left SRs in Petrozavodsk. Before the uprising the Left SRs and Bolsheviks were united in the face of various crises as shown in the previous chapter and, as shown above, their alliance remained intact to meet a new military threat from the Allies despite growing and major disagreements on how to respond to the centre's policies. Political power was still localised and distinct from the capital and Karelia was a region governed by both Left SRs and Bolsheviks. However, events in Moscow left local Left SRs bewildered, the party split in two over how to react and lost its presiding position in the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee. In contrast, the Bolsheviks received the opportunity to become the presiding authority in the Olonets provincial soviet and it was an opportunity they were willing to take.

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<sup>102</sup> Osipova, *Rossiiskoe Krest'ianstvo*. 152.

## Chapter 4

### Problems in the Periphery: Politics and Resources, July-November 1918

Ettore Cinnella claims that ‘Throughout Russia that July [1918] there was an enormous purge of the local soviets (provincial, district and rural soviets), and by the end of the purge, the Left SRs had been expelled from all the organs of power.’<sup>1</sup> However, this was not the case in Karelia where the Left SRs kept their positions within the soviets and soviet executive committees in Olonets, Povenets, Pudozh and Petrozavodsk districts up to October and November 1918.<sup>2</sup> In fact provincial Bolsheviks and district Left SRs sometimes found themselves cooperating even after July, for instance regarding the control of the local Cheka. In Petrozavodsk itself the Left SRs continued to have a presence for a time, but only a minor one. They were expelled from the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee in July but they had some influence in the press after this; on 14 August, in the provincial *Izvestiia*, the Petrozavodsk Left SR party committee appealed to all its members to attend a general meeting of the party scheduled for the following day.<sup>3</sup> It also appears that some Left SRs were tolerated by the Bolsheviks for their administrative experience and capabilities; up to the beginning of October the leader of the Olonets provincial Left SR party Ivan Balashov remained a member of the Petrozavodsk town soviet.<sup>4</sup> Thus although the local Bolsheviks, for the first time, had the opportunity to govern the region the way they wanted without the likelihood that their proposals would be blocked and without the need for compromise with the Left SRs, their control of the region was far from absolute.

As we will see below and in the forthcoming chapters the Bolsheviks’ path towards control across Karelia was uneven and progressed with various setbacks. However, the

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<sup>1</sup> Cinnella, “Tragedy”. 68.

<sup>2</sup> Mashezerskii, *Ustanovlenie*. 168; Shumilov, *Bor’ba*. 106; *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 19 November 1918.

<sup>3</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 14 August 1918.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 17 October 1918.

party recognised the need to “Bolshevisé” the districts and attempted to do so through a number of measures: the sending of communist agitators to the periphery; the use of the Cheka and the Red Army; the gathering of information; increased communication between centre and peripheral party organisations; increased propaganda; the threat of force and isolation from supply plans. This chapter will argue that local Bolshevik leaders in Petrozavodsk now sought to introduce the capital’s decrees which had previously been blocked by the Left SRs at the Fourth Olonets Provincial Congress of Soviets but struggled to do so for much of the remainder of 1918 because of their lack of political dominance in the districts. Even the creation of a network of Bolshevik institutions during the second half of 1918 designed to give the communists control over the districts, such as the *kombedy*, registration-control commissions, food supply detachments and the Cheka, failed to achieve this end. However, the effectiveness of these institutions was only partly hamstrung by political factors; equally as important in hindering the implementation of central Bolshevik policies was the lack of financial, personnel and material resources. In short from summer to winter 1918 Bolshevik policies faced practical as well as political stumbling blocks in the Karelian districts.

### **Food supply: the need for action**

The food shortages that existed in the Karelian districts up to early June 1918 have already been described in Chapter 2 and in Chapter 3 where the main aims of the *kombedy* and food supply detachment decrees were briefly outlined. Broadly speaking, these two instruments of governance were introduced as part of the food supply dictatorship to give the Bolsheviks greater political influence and control in the countryside while at the same time help ease the food crisis. This crisis which faced the new Olonets provincial commissar for food, I.F. Petrov, showed no signs of abating after the Left SRs left the Olonets provincial executive committee. On 29 July the commissar for food in Pudozh district reported in a telegram to Avdeevskaia parish that a number of parishes were

starving and people were dying in Iangozerskaia parish.<sup>5</sup> The need to ease the food shortages by introducing the capital's food supply policies therefore became all the more important.

Because the region relied heavily on food supplies from other Russian provinces, developments in other parts of the country during the civil war, near and far, directly affected the civil war in Karelia and accentuated the food shortages there. S.P. Natsarenus informed Lenin towards the end of June that he expected the evacuation south of more than 10,000 to 15,000 people who did not wish to remain under an Allied regime. He asked for the transfer of a sum of money to him and the urgent dispatch of foodstuffs to last 15,000 people a period of ten days because the local stores could not meet the demand.<sup>6</sup> The number of people moving south was not as high as Natsarenus expected but by the middle of July hundreds of people not wishing to live under the Allies did move south, many of whom were reported to have gathered at Segezha.<sup>7</sup> The commandant of the Petrozavodsk sector of the Murmansk railway, V.P. Solunin, explained the effect this movement of people had in Petrozavodsk:<sup>8</sup>

Upon taking up my post as commandant, on 16 July, I found a fully loaded station, all the lines were crammed with carriages with evacuated loads and with evacuated employees and workers, the station was choked in every sense of the word and evacuated workers wandered around with the homeless crowds.

Karelia's food supply problems were also affected by the revolt and conquests achieved by the Czechoslovakian Legion which on 25 May, stranded in Russia after the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, rebelled against the Soviet authorities in the east. By the end of July 1918 large sections of the Trans-Siberian Railway from Samara to Vladivostok were captured by the Whites with the assistance of the Czechs. Its significance for Karelia was

<sup>5</sup> NARK, f.R-106, op.1, d.10, l.98.

<sup>6</sup> Balagurov and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period.* 26.

<sup>7</sup> Korablev, et al., *Istoriia Karelii.* 392; NARK, f.P-6159, op.1, d.92, l.197-198.

<sup>8</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba.* 296.

underlined in a telegram on the 24 July sent by Lenin to Natsarenus. In response to a recent request for foodstuffs, Lenin wrote:<sup>9</sup>

I am passing your telegram on to the Commissariat for Food. The food situation is as bad as it can be. We shall hardly be able to help. Everything that is best and most reliable has to be organised for sending detachments to the Czechoslovak front. Without victory over the Czechoslovaks there will be no more grain.

The Czech mutiny had cut off the eastern grain producing regions from the grain deficit regions which placed increased pressure on the producing provinces not affected by the Czech uprising or the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. At the First Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference (6-7 August, 1918) I.F. Petrov noted: ‘our orders in Siberia have been met but owing to the movement of the Czechs they have been delayed.’<sup>10</sup> The Olonets provincial *Izvestiia* reported on 8 August that not one delivery of grain had reached the Olonets provincial commissariat for food for the current month.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, as Lenin’s above telegram testifies, the Czech mutiny forced the central Bolshevik government to prioritise its resources and send them to the most threatened military fronts. The Czech front therefore took precedence over Karelia and Petrozavodsk. Petrov explained at the First Olonets Provincial Party Conference in August that the plan to dispatch 100 workers to Petrozavodsk from Petrograd had been changed. Instead the workers were redirected to the Czechoslovak front.<sup>12</sup>

Of course the food crisis was not a problem isolated to the Karelian districts; the food supply dictatorship was introduced because food supply was a nationwide problem.

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<sup>9</sup> Lenin, *Polnoe*. Vol.50. 127.

<sup>10</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.2, l.15. The First Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference was attended by 22 delegates representing approximately 2000 party members. Elected to the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik Party Committee on 7 August 1918 were: Ia.K. Berztys, A.A. Zuev, Ia.F. Igoshkin, P.V. Kulagin, Z. Tushovskaia, K.A. Luzgin and A.N. Svetitskii. On 14 August a party committee presidium was elected: Berztys became chairman, Kulagin deputy chairman, Tushovskaia secretary, Zuev deputy secretary and Igoshkin treasurer. Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor’ba*. 574, fn.139; 506.

<sup>11</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 8 August 1918.

<sup>12</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.2, l.15. These workers had previously been promised by S.P. Voskov, the Commissar for Food of the Northern Region.

For local Bolshevik leaders in Petrozavodsk this meant that it was common for food loads directed to them to be commandeered by other district or provincial authorities. In early August 1918 a carriage load of wheat flour from Saratov and a load of oats, transhipped at Niandoma station in south-western Archangel province for Petrozavodsk, was seized at Tikhvin station in Cherepovets province by the local soviet. According to the local *Izvestiia* report all that reached the provincial food board so far for August was a carriage-load of hempseed oil and 45 boxes of enamel crockery.<sup>13</sup> At the First Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference Petrov noted that a total of 130 carriage loads worth of grain had been unhooked and appropriated at a number of stations en route to Petrozavodsk.<sup>14</sup> In short, the further food loads had to travel the greater the chance they were going to be hijacked by other districts along the way or pilfered at stations which were not prepared to receive them.<sup>15</sup> To quote one historian of the railways during the civil war: ‘Transporting grain by rail was like carrying water in a leaky bucket — it was a good idea to move as rapidly as possible.’<sup>16</sup> If this was the case then Olonets province was at a distinct disadvantage because whether loads came from the south or east of the country they would have to go through a number of important urban centres and transit points before reaching the Murmansk railway line and Petrozavodsk. Other local soviets naturally took the opportunity to seize food loads when the opportunity arose and prioritised their own food supply needs over those of other needy regions such as Karelia. However, the stop for Olonets province, which would allow the Karelian districts to be supplied, was often at the end of the line.

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<sup>13</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 8 August 1918.

<sup>14</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.2, l.15.

<sup>15</sup> A study of Saratov during the civil war has noted that the pilfering of grain carriages at stops and stations reached ‘colossal proportions.’ Raleigh, *Civil War*. 296.

<sup>16</sup> R. Argenbright, “Bolsheviks, Baggers and Railroaders: Political Power and Social Space, 1917-1921.” *Russian Review*, Vol.52, No.4, 1993. 517. On the advantages of working in a position on the railroad system and pilfering along the line during the civil war see 516-517.

Therefore something had to be done to ease the food supply crisis which by August had reached crisis point for local leaders. Because Karelia was a grain deficit region it did not come into conflict with food supply detachments to the same extent as the grain producing provinces. The anger of the local population was saved for the local commissariat for food and its apparent inability to supply the region. Petrov sent a telegram to the provincial revolutionary executive committee on 10 August which stated that huge crowds had appeared at his commissariat to demand an extra issue of grain but there was nothing to give them. As a result, the crowds threatened to take up arms in revolt and dissolve the food commissariat.<sup>17</sup> In the short term, independent local measures were adopted which suggests that some grain was still available in Petrozavodsk; on 12 August the provincial revolutionary executive committee ordered the Petrozavodsk town soviet to urgently organise a general issue of baked bread instead of flour to the town's citizens. While this distribution of bread was being organised, the town soviet would continue to issue flour to the population, and would do this weekly instead of fortnightly.<sup>18</sup> However, the provincial revolutionary executive committee also resolved to appeal to Sovnarkom and the Northern Regional government in Petrograd which hitherto had failed to respond to repeated telegrams from Petrozavodsk for help.<sup>19</sup>

The food crisis made the implementation of the party's food supply dictatorship decrees even more important. At the First Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference in early August I.K. Berztys, a prominent local party committee member, announced:<sup>20</sup>

Our task at the current moment is to organise food supply detachments and the village poor. We need to implement the grain monopoly and establish fixed prices. We must compel the *kulaks* to obey our system by force. We need to monopolise all food products...the class struggle must be organised in connection with the food issue.

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<sup>17</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.23, l.503.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. d.66, l.84; *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 6 September 1918.

<sup>19</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.66, l.84.

<sup>20</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.2, l.16.

In the short term the crisis continued unabated amidst the continued failure of appeals for help from the centre. On 20 August Petrov sent another telegram to the People's Commissar for Food with a heightened sense of urgency. He stressed that not one carriage load of grain had reached Olonets province according to the supply orders for the months of July and August and that if grain was not delivered to him in the next few days the Olonets provincial commissariat for food would cease to operate, he would resign and refuse to accept any responsibility for the consequences.<sup>21</sup> Local Bolsheviks received more bad news shortly thereafter. On 26 August the Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee found out that Petrov's request to receive a monetary loan from the centre to purchase food stuffs had been turned down.<sup>22</sup>

Help from the centre, which was not forthcoming, was therefore pivotal to the survival of the Karelian region but at the same time the food supply crisis added fresh impetus to the formation of the *kombedy* and the food supply detachments. For the first time since the removal of the Left SRs from the Olonets provincial executive committee Bolsheviks in Petrozavodsk had the opportunity to introduce the central government's food supply policies without the opposition of their coalition partners. However, as we shall see below, the introduction of the *kombedy*, a registration of the harvest and the creation of the food supply detachments was troubled and continued to be hindered by political obstacles in the Karelian districts.

### **The introduction of the *kombedy***

Local Bolsheviks placed great emphasis on the use of agitators in the creation of Bolshevik institutions in Karelia.<sup>23</sup> On 4 August the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik Party Committee decided to dispatch communists, three to each district of Olonets province, to establish

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<sup>21</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.23, l.508.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. l.521.

<sup>23</sup> Aaron Retish also recognises the importance of Bolshevik agitators in setting up *kombedy*. *Russia's Peasants*. 193-195.

food supply detachments, *kombedy* and carry out a register of food products.<sup>24</sup> On 20 August a meeting of the communists chosen to organise the *kombedy* in the districts decided which communists would go to which districts.<sup>25</sup> An organisational bureau was also set up to co-ordinate the dispatch of these organisers who became an important link with the countryside and whose aim was to increase Petrozavodsk's knowledge of conditions in the countryside and promote the party there. In Karelia they were required to gather information about the *kombedy* and to dispatch literature and newspapers to the districts.<sup>26</sup> The presence of Red Army units also hastened the establishment of the *kombedy*. A member of the Povenets district soviet executive committee, F.E. Pottoev, noted that the communist party members of the 166<sup>th</sup> Beloraiskii regiment, part of the 6<sup>th</sup> Beloraiskii battalion which arrived in the district in July, was particularly active in establishing *kombedy*.<sup>27</sup> A considerable number of Bolshevik organisers were also sent from Petrograd; the Northern Regional Bolshevik Party Committee dispatched 58 agitators to Olonets province from September to December 1918 along with a fifty-five man food supply detachment which helped with the registration of the harvest (see more on this detachment below).<sup>28</sup> The presence of Bolshevik agitators was clearly important to the establishment of the *kombedy* and helps to explain the rise in the number created during August and September 1918 (see below).

However, a study of Karelia also highlights how important local soviets were in initially resisting these Bolshevik institutions. A local Soviet historian stressed that the formation of the *kombedy* in Karelia was effectively delayed by the Left SR majority in the

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<sup>24</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 410-12. The following Bolsheviks were elected to undertake this task: A.N. Svetitskii, N.A. Smirnov, T.D. Anisimov, P. Morozov, Kh.G. Doroshin, F.Z. Shumilov, Shchirovskii, P.V. Kulagin, A.A. Zuev, A.S. Metelkin, N.N. Dorofeev, D.Z. Akulov and Solomkin.

<sup>25</sup> Additional party members were assigned to take part in the organisation of the *kombedy* to those named in the above footnote. Dispatched to the Karelian districts were: K.A. Luzgin, F.Z. Shumilov, Ivanov (Povenets district); N.N. Dorofeev, Basinov, Iudanov (Pudozh district); Fedorov, Ivanov, Men'shikov (Olonets district). NARK, f.P-2, op.1, d.10, l.1

<sup>26</sup> NARK, f.P-2, op.1, d.10, l.1-2. A.S. Metelkin was elected the head of this organisation bureau.

<sup>27</sup> Memoirs of F.E. Pottoev in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 198-199.

<sup>28</sup> Shumilov, *Bor'ba*. 152.

provincial soviet and the district soviets of Olonets, Pudozh and Povenets.<sup>29</sup> In some instances the *kombedy* were only established in the parishes in August and September when the soviets were reorganised and the influence of the Bolsheviks began to rise. This trend was reflected in the information gathered from the 718 *kombedy* delegates from Olonets province questioned at the First Congress of *Kombedy* of the Northern Region (3-6 November 1918). Only 4 *kombedy* were established in June, 16 in July, 192 in August, 343 in September and 163 in October.<sup>30</sup>

The case of the Tulguba village *kombed* in Sunskaia parish, Petrozavodsk district, reflected the importance of Bolshevik party organisers to the introduction of the *kombedy* but also the ability of local soviets to frustrate their introduction. At one of its sessions on 16 August the Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee learned that local ‘*kulaks*’ had not distributed agricultural land proportionately (by the number of people per family) and refused to issue grain surpluses. As a result, some of the villagers in Tulguba made a complaint. In response the Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee decided to assign two party members and a member of the food board to Tulguba to organise a *kombed* and address the peasants’ complaint.<sup>31</sup> However sending these agitators had no immediate effect because on 2 September the Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee found out that the ‘*kulaks*’ of Sunskaia parish did not recognise the authority of the *kombed*. It is clear that the ‘*kulaks*’ referred to belonged to the parish soviet which refused to create a parish *kombed*. On 2 September the provincial revolutionary executive committee ordered the Sunskaia parish soviet to immediately organise *kombedy* in the villages and not to hinder the *kombedy* which had already been

<sup>29</sup> Mashezerskii, *Ustanovlenie*. 151. More generally, post-Soviet historians have emphasised the setbacks faced by the Bolsheviks and their food supply policies as a result of the resistance from the Left SRs in the districts across Soviet held territory. I have in mind Osipova, *Rossiiskoe Krest'ianstvo*. 132-143.

<sup>30</sup> *Komitety Bednoty Severnoi Oblasti*. 429. It is worth underlining that the figures for Olonets province represent all the districts of the province and not solely the Karelian districts. Also, because of the total number of delegates at the congress it was only possible to gather information from a fraction of those attending. Out of the 1389 delegates from Olonets province 718 took part in the information gathering process. *Komitety Bednoty Severnoi Oblasti*. 422.

<sup>31</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 412-413.

created.<sup>32</sup> Finally, on 8 September the Sunskaia parish soviet informed the Petrozavodsk district executive committee that a parish *kombed* had been elected.<sup>33</sup>

However, even after their creation the *kombedy* were still resisted by the Sunskaia parish soviet. A letter to the chairman of the provincial revolutionary executive committee on the 3 October, from a Bolshevik organiser sent to the parish, noted that individuals in the parish soviet were unsympathetic to the Bolsheviks. The Bolshevik organiser therefore asked for an official letter to be sent to him which ordered the abolition of the parish soviet and the transfer of authority to the parish *kombed*. The provincial revolutionary executive committee resolved to elect a new parish soviet by calling a congress of representatives of all the *kombedy* in the parish.<sup>34</sup> This congress would elect a new parish soviet which naturally would be sympathetic to the *kombedy* and the Bolsheviks would, they hoped, gain a firmer administrative hold over Sunskaia parish.<sup>35</sup>

Sending agitators from the centre was seen as a viable means of facilitating the formation of *kombedy* but they did not have an immediate effect in Karelia because local soviets were able to hinder the introduction and functioning of the *kombedy*. The importance of local political factors in relation to the implementation of the *kombedy* was also evident in Pudozh district. In response to a request from the newly formed provincial revolutionary executive committee the Pudozh district executive committee informed Petrozavodsk on 18 July it was made up of three Bolsheviks, one Left SR and nine non-party socialists.<sup>36</sup> Despite being outnumbered by the Bolsheviks the Left SRs' influence amongst the non-party members of the Pudozh district soviet was strong. On the 19 July

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 413.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 417.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 423-424.

<sup>35</sup> It was not unusual for a local *kombed* to re-elect the local soviet and take on this organ's functions if there was inactivity or resistance to the Bolsheviks' decrees. At a general meeting of *kombedy* in Shuiskaia parish, Petrozavodsk district, on the 6 October, the gathering decided to transfer the functions of the food and land departments of the parish soviet to the *kombed* and re-elect the soviet and its executive committee. Ibid. 444-445.

<sup>36</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.75, l.19.

the Pudozh district executive committee heard a report from their Left SR representative in the provincial executive committee which stated that he had been dismissed by the Bolsheviks in Petrozavodsk and that provincial executive committee representatives belonging to the Bolsheviks and their sympathisers were being dispatched from the districts to Petrozavodsk. In response the non-party socialist members of the district executive committee protested against the dismissal of the Left SR representatives from Petrozavodsk. They believed that the joint efforts of the district executive committee members were beneficial to the Soviet regime as a whole and the dismissal of the Left SRs would undermine their work amongst the peasantry.<sup>37</sup> A few days later, on the 24 July, the Pudozh district executive committee then informed the Olonets provincial commissar for food that it refused to organise *kombedy* in the district and questioned the need for these organs of power in the countryside because their introduction had been discussed and rejected by a recent district congress of soviets and the Fourth Olonets Provincial Congress of Soviets. As a result the Pudozh district executive committee concluded that the provincial soviet should not assume that *kombedy* would be organised in the district.<sup>38</sup>

The influence of the Left SRs in the Pudozh district soviet executive committee in relation to the creation of the *kombedy* at parish level became apparent in the case of Berezhnodubrovskaja parish where the Bolsheviks created a twenty-five member party organisation on 15 August.<sup>39</sup> The Bolsheviks therefore had a relatively strong influence in this particular parish and two weeks later, on 29 August, the executive committee of the parish soviet appealed directly to Sovnarkom for support. It explained that the parish soviet operated 'independently and without the knowledge of the *kulak* Pudozh district soviet' and that the Pudozh district soviet had refused to introduce the *kombedy* or food supply detachments. The parish soviet therefore asked Moscow to dispatch a Bolshevik organiser

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 1.35.

<sup>38</sup> Vavulinskaia, *Sovety Karelii*. 48.

<sup>39</sup> *Perepiska Sekretariata TsK RKP (b) s Mestnymi Partiinymi Organizatsiiami (Avgust-Oktiabr' 1918 g.)*. *Sbornik Dokumentov*. Vol.4. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoi Literatury, 1969. 143.

and orator to it. Furthermore, the soviet informed the capital that they were not receiving any central decrees because their telegrams were being withheld by the head of the posts and telegraphs department. As a result they had to rely on the newspapers for information. Nevertheless, even gathering information from newspapers was problematic; the parish soviet stressed it had no more than a third of the issues, the newspapers were not in sequence and any issue with important information was withheld by the Pudozh district head of posts and telegraphs.<sup>40</sup>

However, by this time the provincial executive committee was running out of patience with the Pudozh district executive committee. On 26 August the Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee reviewed the decision made by the Pudozh district executive committee to reject the creation of the *kombedy* and transferred the matter to the provincial Cheka which was assigned the task of ‘winning over’ all those in the Pudozh district executive committee who had not introduced the decrees coming from Moscow.<sup>41</sup> The involvement of the Cheka worked and on 4 September the Pudozh district soviet executive committee decided to immediately begin the organisation of the *kombedy* and asked the provincial revolutionary executive committee to send it instructions and agitators.<sup>42</sup> On 30 September a Bolshevik agitator then arrived in Pudozh and addressed the district executive committee about the organisation of a Bolshevik party cell and managed to convince ten executive committee members to join the party. The same agitator also informed the Bureau of the party Central Committee on 2 October that within the nineteen member Pudozh district soviet executive committee there were now ten Bolsheviks, four Bolshevik sympathisers, two Left SRs and three non-party members.<sup>43</sup> The changing character of the Pudozh district executive committee appears to have facilitated the creation of a *kombed* in Berezhnodubrovskaiia parish; a *kombed* was organised there by 1

<sup>40</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 415-416.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 415.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* 416.

<sup>43</sup> *Perepiska Sekretariata*, Vol.4. 296.

October. On this date the parish *kombed* informed the provincial revolutionary executive committee that other *kombedy* had been organised within the parish and were working well. Moreover, a number of ‘*kulaks*’ had been sent to the front to dig trenches.<sup>44</sup>

The *kombedy* were also blocked at district level in Olonets district where the Left SRs were even more dominant than in Pudozh district. In August at the Fourth Olonets district congress of soviets a Left SR dominated district executive committee was elected which refused to send representatives to the Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee and blocked the implementation of the *kombedy* decree.<sup>45</sup> However, as stated at the beginning of this chapter, the political hindrances which stalled the establishment and functioning of Bolshevik institutions were aggravated by a lack of local resources. The Bolsheviks believed that speculation in bread was undermining attempts to alleviate the food crisis and the creation of the *kombedy* was seen, in part, as a practical remedy for the distribution of bread to the needy. However, in some parishes there was very little to distribute. On the 8 September a provincial Cheka commissar made a report on speculation in Siamozerskaia parish, situated near the Finnish border in Petrozavodsk district. The commissar made a note of the near critical food shortages prevalent in the border parish and believed that he did not discover any speculation in grain because there was very little to speculate with and local soviets had resisted the *kombedy*.<sup>46</sup>

According to the words of a few peasants there is hardly any speculation in grain because it has been exchanged for vital products from Finland, for example in Veshkelitsa, Siamozera, Korza, Ugmoila and other villages in Siamozerskaia parish. For approximately three weeks there was an entire lack of vital products: kerosene, tea, matches, cigarettes etc and this is why the peasants were forced to trade their last pounds [of grain] with Finland for these products. The reason for this trade is that not a single village has a *kombed*, everywhere there are soviets in which prominent *kulaks*, deacons, priests etc are at work and assist (*sposobstvovat*’) all this [trade]...the new harvest of potatoes is almost all the peasants have in surplus.

<sup>44</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor’ba*. 437.

<sup>45</sup> Memoirs of F.I. Egorov in Gardin, et al., *Vlast’ Sovetov*. 129-130. The number of delegates represented at the Fourth Olonets district congress of soviets were: 64 Left SRs, 25 Bolsheviks, 4 Menshevik Internationalists and 63 non-party members.

<sup>46</sup> Vavulinskaia, *Sovety Karelii*. 49-50.

Upon hearing the report the provincial revolutionary executive committee decided at a meeting on the 29 October to pass the matter onto the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik Party Committee to appoint party agitators to Siamozerskaia parish.<sup>47</sup>

A common problem in the organisation of the *kombedy* was also a lack of information. Some parishes did not know how to go about creating these bodies and requested informed personnel to set them up. On 8 September the peasants of a village in Konchezerskaia parish, Petrozavodsk district, appealed to the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik Party Committee for help in the forming of a *kombed*. The villagers explained that they had no instructions or guidance on how to form one and asked for organisers to be sent to their village to show them what to do.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, on 11 September, the Olonets district Bolshevik party committee wrote to the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik Party Committee about the forming of *kombedy* and food supply detachments. A lack of money was underlined as a key problem hindering the establishment of these institutions but the committee also asked for literature and instructions.<sup>49</sup>

### **The registration of the 1918 harvest**

The creation of the food supply detachments and *kombedy* in late spring/early summer was of course timely; the harvest period was approaching and at the very least local leaders hoped that the shortages would ease because of the increased availability of grain produced by the fresh crop. On 22 July the Olonets provincial commissariat for food I.F. Petrov endeavoured to ensure that his province would make the most out of its own harvest by introducing the decree, to be implemented by all district, parish and rural executive committees, for the registration of all grain products in the forthcoming harvest. The decree stipulated the creation of registration-control commissions (*uchetno-kontrol'nye*

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<sup>47</sup> NARK, f.P-2, op.1, d.14, l.104.

<sup>48</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 417-418.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* 418; 420.

*komissii*) in all rural settlements (*sel'skie obshchestva*). The commissions were to contain no less than three members from the local soviet and elected from the ranks of the Bolshevik party.<sup>50</sup> Also, as their name suggests, the commissions were designed to give the Bolsheviks mastery over the harvest and it is significant that membership of the commissions was restricted to Bolshevik party members of local soviets; the Bolsheviks were aware of the potential resistance their food supply policies would meet in the district and parish soviets.

For whatever reason the history of the registration-control commissions, until now, has received no coverage in the regional studies of the civil war.<sup>51</sup> Broadly speaking these commissions were established to make sure that an accurate account of the harvest was made which in turn would assist the provincial centre to calculate how much grain to distribute and in what quantities in the coming months. As well as making an account of the grain harvested other produce such as potatoes and turnips were to be registered along with livestock numbers. All citizens were obliged to meet the requests of the registration-control commissions while those who did not were liable to have their property confiscated and to be deprived of their rations. Realising their lack of control over the districts and parishes, the Bolsheviks buttressed their policies with threats and force; the decree also made it compulsory for an armed guard to be attached to each commission. The cultivation of the entire harvest was set to be completed by the 1 November 1918 after which surpluses were to be strictly controlled by the local soviets and handed over for storage to cooperatives, if they existed, or to public storehouses. All district and parish soviets were requested to acknowledge their acceptance of this decree by the 15 August, soviets not submitting to the decree would be excluded from the general plan of supply.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 392.

<sup>51</sup> Lih does not mention registration-control commissions but does discuss harvest registration. *Bread and Authority*. 180-183.

<sup>52</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 392-393.

Important to the success of the harvest registration was the *kombedy* which would be involved in helping carry it out. As a result, on the 8 September the Olonets provincial commissar for food tried to push through their creation by using the food crisis to his advantage. I.F. Petrov threatened that he would cease the distribution of rationed products to districts and parishes which, within the space of 25 days, had not created a *kombed*.<sup>53</sup> Because of their lack of control in the districts and the potential for resistance to harvest registration local Bolsheviks therefore relied on threats to implement their decrees. Petrov also announced on 8 September that all district and parish executive committee members who did not carry out the registration of the harvest would have their names published in the newspapers for sabotage or inaction. Furthermore, the local population were asked by the provincial food commissariat to hand over information about the harvest to parish soviets. Anyone failing to do so voluntarily would have their harvest registration carried out regardless and without the benefit of this information. Finally, anyone giving false information about the size of the harvest for 1918 would have their produce requisitioned and they would be sent to prison for no less than three months.<sup>54</sup>

Increased organisation, force and threats were therefore pivotal features of the Olonets provincial food commissariat's efforts to ease the region's food problems. No matter how successful the harvest proved to be the region would still rely on food imports but they would at least have a short term solution if all went well. In the meantime the food commissariat would do its utmost to make an accurate analysis of the crop in the districts and parishes so distribution could be centralised and made easier in the future. Such a drive suggests that a registration of foodstuffs in the region had not been undertaken recently and as a result the soviets wanted to reinforce what they knew about the availability of food stuffs and the population in different parts of Olonets province. On the surface the role of the registration-control commissions was quite simple: to make grain distribution easier in

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<sup>53</sup> Mashezerskii, *Ustanovlenie*. 187; NARK f.R-106, op.1, d.12, l.26.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

the future by way of an accurate account of what was produced during the harvest season. However, the registration-control commissions' task was more profound than this. The introduction of these commissions pointed to the Bolsheviks' future planning; an accurate harvest registration would help Petrozavodsk acquire a greater knowledge of the periphery which could be used to hold greater control over food supply and the population in the future.

The need to register the harvest in Karelia was made yet more urgent because the People's Commissariat for Food in the summer of 1918 announced that it would not transport grain to the grain deficit provinces unless it was satisfied that these provinces had done everything possible to gather their own grain supplies.<sup>55</sup> However despite the organisational and administrative instructions issued by the provincial commissariat for food to register the harvest, the process of registration did not run smoothly. Firstly, as stated above, it appears that the *kombedy* were heavily involved in the harvest registration but their assistance depended on their creation in the countryside which was often belated.<sup>56</sup> For instance, not until 25 September did a gathering of communists in Boiarskaia parish, Pudozh district, decide to organise *kombedy* in the villages and to appoint one member of the party and two from the parish soviet to register the harvest. They would be joined by two Red Army men and the gathering decided to also use the *kombedy*.<sup>57</sup> Because the *kombedy* were resisted in a number of districts and parishes this therefore must have had an adverse effect on their ability to help in the registration of the harvest. 29 *kombedy* were established in all of Boiarskaia parish's settlements (*seleniia*) but not until 1 October.<sup>58</sup> In short, although directives were issued from Petrozavodsk there was no guarantee that these directives would be implemented or carried out in a way Bolshevik

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<sup>55</sup> Lih, *Bread and Authority*. 181.

<sup>56</sup> The involvement of the *kombedy* in harvest registration has been confirmed by other studies. Ibid; Landis, *Bandits and Partisans*. 13.

<sup>57</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 423.

<sup>58</sup> NARK, f.R-106, op.1, d.12, l.142.

leaders assumed they would be; implementation at local level determined the success of the Bolsheviks' policies issued from above and at this stage of the civil war in Karelia both political and material stumbling blocks hindered the party's attempts to ease the food crisis.

On 29 August the provincial commissariat for food asked the provincial revolutionary executive committee to instruct all district and parish executive committees to issue 'open passes' (*otkrytye listy*) to individuals sent by the provincial food board to make an account of the harvest so that these representatives could collect horses for free from the village communities. Village authorities were also asked, without hindrance or delay, to issue these 'open passes' to registration officials sent to them.<sup>59</sup> However, the inward flow of state officials into the countryside to register the harvest gave rise to a number of frictions; some parishes and rural settlements resisted and dug their heels in. Ivan Petrov announced at the Second Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference in December 1918 that the localities in the districts hindered the registration of the harvest and refrained from carrying it out.<sup>60</sup>

### **Resistance: the case of Avdeevskaia parish**

A case in point was Avdeevskaia parish, Pudozh district, which resisted the registration of the harvest, primarily because of political differences with the district and provincial authorities. Up to the registration of the harvest and despite several attempts by the district soviet, the Avdeevskaia parish *zemstvo* had refused to organise a soviet from as far back as March 1918.<sup>61</sup> At a session of the Pudozh district soviet on 10 July 1918 two soviet representatives who had visited Avdeevskaia parish reported that the parish *zemstvo* secretary, P.I. Moshnikov had spoken out against the soviets and the Pudozh district soviet resolved to 'take the appropriate measures' if he continued to agitate against them.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.66, l.110.

<sup>60</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.2, l.15.

<sup>61</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 7 June 1918.

<sup>62</sup> NARK, f.R-577, op.1, d.13, l.33.

A month later the situation in the parish remained the same. On 24 August the provincial *Izvestiia* reported that the parish *zemstvo* continued to function and a soviet still did not exist in Avdeevskaia parish. P.I. Moshnikov, having arrived in January 1918, was credited with the proposal not to recognise the soviet (presumably he was a SR of some sort). The newspaper report, written by someone more supportive of the soviets, concluded: 'it is necessary to straighten out this counter-revolutionary, this wolf in sheep's clothing.'<sup>63</sup> Moshnikov was indeed 'straightened out' a few days later following a session of the Pudozh district soviet executive committee on 29 August when the committee ordered the district military commissar to arrest Moshnikov along with a member of the Avdeevskaia parish land department for counter-revolutionary agitation.<sup>64</sup> However, even with Moshnikov out of the picture Avdeevskaia parish still refused to submit to the rule of the soviets and their requests to register the harvest. Therefore, in tune with the provincial decree from 22 July mentioned above, the Pudozh district soviet resolved on 6 September to break off all dealings with Avdeevskaia parish and exclude it from the general supply plans. All state employees such as medical, militia and teaching personnel were also recalled. All departments attached to the soviet, the provincial revolutionary executive committee and the provincial Cheka were informed and asked to take the appropriate measures to implement the district soviet's decision.<sup>65</sup>

The withholding of food was therefore a weapon in itself that could be used by the Bolsheviks to break the will of those who did not submit to the authority of the soviets. In fact the parish was effectively denied all state support: welfare, education and police, which would make it difficult for Avdeevskaia parish to survive. These blockade tactics were necessary in order to push through unpopular Bolshevik policies in areas where the party lacked political support. In the case of Avdeevskaia parish these tactics worked; a

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<sup>63</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 24 August 1918.

<sup>64</sup> NARK, f.R-577, op.1, d.13, l.35.

<sup>65</sup> NARK, f.R-249, op.5, d.10, l.3.

parish gathering on the 15 September 1918, attended by district and provincial soviet representatives, saw the majority of attendees accept the decision to acknowledge the soviets.<sup>66</sup> However, Avdeevskaia parish's resistance to the soviets and unwillingness to register the harvest was not an isolated case. In short, hindrances to the Bolsheviks' policies posed by local parish politics persisted and were felt for a considerable time after these issues had been settled in the national and provincial centres. For instance, on 29 August the executive committee of the Pudozh district soviet decided to arrest the chairman and secretary of the Vershininskaia parish soviet which had turned against the soviets, refused to recognise them and called for the convening of the Constituent Assembly, thus suggesting the continued influence of the SRs.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, a member of a *kombed* in Rugozerskaia parish, Povenets district, was shot by peasants during the harvest for threshing their grain.<sup>68</sup> Danilovksaia parish in Povenets district also refused to register the harvest.<sup>69</sup>

Resistance to harvest registration similarly took place at district level. At a provincial conference of district Chekas (16-18 September 1918) the chairman of the Olonets district Cheka stated that the Left SR-dominated Olonets district executive committee refused to register the harvest and claimed that it had clashed with the organisers sent to the district to implement it.<sup>70</sup>

### **Harvest registration fails**

The resistance experienced by the Bolsheviks to the registration-control commissions and from the soviets in general made attempts to gather a comprehensive account of the harvest an arduous task. As stated in the 22 July decree, armed support attached to the

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<sup>66</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 568, fn. 67.

<sup>67</sup> NARK, f.R-577, op.1, d.13, l.35.

<sup>68</sup> Memoirs of F.E. Pottov, in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 199-200.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* 199.

<sup>70</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.17, l.83.

commissions was compulsory and some time in late September a food supply detachment of fifty-five members arrived in Petrozavodsk from Petrograd to help with the registration of the harvest.<sup>71</sup> On the 25 September the Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee put the food detachment at the disposal of the provincial food board and proposed to the detachment's commander, a certain Nikolaev, to also produce an account of the harvest.<sup>72</sup> Although the provincial commissariat for food now had more manpower behind it to undertake an account of the harvest the food supply detachment's arrival created unforeseen problems in the form of interference by Nikolaev in the running of the provincial commissariat for food. The Olonets provincial commissar for food, Ivan Petrov, was clearly angered by Nikolaev's intrusion and protested to the provincial revolutionary executive committee on 7 October.<sup>73</sup>

Comrade Nikolaev appears at the office of the food board on a daily basis, interfering in all the work of the provincial commissariat for food and producing chaos and disorder there, as a result of which, it is absolutely impossible to systematically carry out the urgent tasks of the provincial commissariat for food.

Moreover, Nikolaev has the pretension (*pretenziia*) to impede the fulfilment of my orders.

For the satisfactory running of the provincial commissariat for food such a situation cannot be tolerated any longer and henceforth I will no longer be held responsible until the provincial commissariat for food and I am personally protected from the interference of comrade Nikolaev, therefore I ask the provincial revolutionary executive committee and the communist party to take measures so that Nikolaev will no longer hinder the work of the provincial commissariat for food, otherwise I will be forced to resign.

The intrusion of non-local administrators in the provincial food commissariat was evidently met with hostility. Local Bolsheviks needed material and personnel support to implement their policies but as Robert Service observed in his study of the party during the revolution and civil war local officials requested assistance on the one hand and pushed it away with the other.<sup>74</sup> Up until September, as shown above, the Karelian region had

<sup>71</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 394; Bogdanova, *Na Khoziaistvennom Fronte*. 157-158.

<sup>72</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.23, l.562.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* l.577

<sup>74</sup> Service, *The Bolshevik Party*. 77.

received relatively little support in terms of food supply; deliveries were delayed, arrived in small quantities and had in fact ceased in August. As a result, the region was often forced to endure its problems, make do with its own resources and undertake its own initiatives. Clashes, even between Bolshevik party members, became inevitable when this level of autonomy was invaded. In the above case Nikolaev had arrived from Petrograd with little knowledge of the Karelian region and its local leaders and flexed his authority above the heads of those who hitherto were in charge. According to I.F. Petrov Nikolaev's interference only brought confusion and disorganisation to the food commissariat. Petrov in fact handed in his resignation on 18 October, the Nikolaev problem proving to be the final straw in a reign which saw Petrov unable to ease Olonets province's food supply problems. Stating the complete break down in his health as the reason for his resignation, Petrov was replaced by S.K. Pukhov on 11 November 1918.<sup>75</sup>

Therefore the Bolshevik party was attempting to gain control over the districts and food supply, but its efforts were hamstrung on a number of levels. As articulated above political obstacles needed to be eradicated; the Bolsheviks required a stronger influence in the districts and a singular vision if their policies were going to be a success. In Karelia during the summer and early autumn of 1918 the party aspired for this leverage but in reality it did not exist in a number of parishes. Reports from Olonets and Petrozavodsk districts at the First Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference in early August showed that the party was weak in the countryside. Some representatives spoke of the 'many *kulaks*' or 'counter-revolutionaries' who existed in their parishes and who supported the Constituent Assembly or produced anti-Bolshevik propaganda. Others spoke of the poor education of the local population and the need for Bolshevik cells and agitators to

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<sup>75</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.23, l.645. Between 1919-1920 Petrov worked for the Central Military Food Bureau and on a number of occasions was sent to other parts of the country to procure grain. For example, in October 1919 he was in Saratov while a year later he was sent to Rostov on Don to become the chairman of the Don Workers' Food Bureau. In December 1920 he was fatally injured in a battle with peasants in a village within the Don region. Bogdanova, *Na Khoziaistvennom Fronte*. 154, fn.1.

explain the party's programmes.<sup>76</sup> Having highlighted these problems the conference delegates resolved to organise more party cells and improve communication and coordination between all local party organisations, cells and groups and the Petrozavodsk County party committee. To help them do this the Northern Regional Party Committee allocated 50,000 roubles to the Petrozavodsk County party committee following the recent Northern Regional Party Conference at the end of July.<sup>77</sup>

By the middle of September it was apparent that the registration of the harvest had been a failure but political considerations only partly explain why it failed. The Fifth Olonets Provincial Congress of Soviets (25-31 January 1919) noted that the peasants had concealed grain in every possible way.<sup>78</sup> In other words the registration process had fallen short of its expectations because the peasantry were wary about the role of the registration-control commissions.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, Bolshevik party delegates at the Second Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference (10-13 December 1918) discovered that communications with the districts were problematic and undermined harvest registration. The answering of telegrams was frequently delayed, which meant in turn that telegrams sent from Petrozavodsk which informed Petrograd and Moscow about local conditions and the harvest results were also received belatedly. Therefore future supply orders could not be calculated accurately.<sup>80</sup> Pukhov remarked at the Second Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference that his commissariat was under pressure from the Northern Regional Commissariat for Food concerning the yet to be presented figures for the recent registration of the harvest.<sup>81</sup> An increased effort to relay reliable harvest results to the regional capital therefore prompted the Fifth Olonets Provincial Congress of Soviets which

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<sup>76</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 500-501; NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.2, l.2-3.

<sup>77</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 505-506.

<sup>78</sup> NARK, f.R-98, op.1, d.64, l.153.

<sup>79</sup> On peasant negativity towards the compiling of grain inventories see Badcock, *Politics and the People*. 230-231.

<sup>80</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 15 December 1918.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

met in January 1919 to ask all local food organs to carry out a re-registration of the harvest, targeting citizens suspected of having concealed grain.<sup>82</sup>

The lack of reliable Bolshevik party workers in the Karelian districts underscores why these delays had occurred. At the Second Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference in mid-December the new provincial commissar for food Pukhov blamed non-party workers for frequently delaying replies to inquiries made by the provincial food commissariat: 'I am not accusing comrade workers in the localities because they are also probably not in a position to attend to all their administrative offices, but I want to say that this latent sabotage and reluctance of the clerical employees to work puts us in a critical situation.'<sup>83</sup> Because of the weakness of the Bolshevik party in the Karelian districts the soviets were forced to cast the net wider for employees which meant the recruitment of individuals who were either incapable of carrying out their administrative responsibilities or, as this case also perhaps suggests, were unsupportive of the Bolsheviks' policies and wilfully sabotaged the Bolsheviks' attempts to implement central policy.

However, the ability of the Bolsheviks to maximise their knowledge of the harvest and compile an accurate account of what the Karelian districts produced was undermined by more than political and personnel difficulties. On 31 July the Olonets provincial commissariat for food resolved to send one of its members, M. Polozov, to Moscow to convey how critical the food situation in Karelia was and to ask for the immediate dispatch of rye seeds, without which half the area suitable for sowing in the province would remain unsown.<sup>84</sup> Therefore, while plans began in earnest to register the forthcoming harvest the region did not even have enough seeds to sow the land in the first place. The serious problem posed by a deficiency in seed and belated sowing was described in a report from

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<sup>82</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 555.

<sup>83</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 15 December 1918.

<sup>84</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 388.

Kuzarandskaia parish, Petrozavodsk district from 20 August. The parish land department reported that the spring and summer of 1918 had been cold, with predominating northern winds and drought which had damaged the quality and quantity of the harvest. Moreover rye seed for sowing had not arrived on time and the period for planting had passed. Older seed was subsequently used but it covered only part of the land and did not stretch to cover all plots. Although sowing continued belatedly it was considered impossible to expect positive results because of the delay.<sup>85</sup>

Evidently the harvest and its registration had been affected by uncontrollable natural conditions. On 28 January 1919 the Fifth Olonets Provincial Congress of Soviets (25-31 January) noted that: ‘the registration of grain produced lamentable results in connection with the natural disasters around the province, the expected crop was not gathered in.’<sup>86</sup> Because of the harsh and changeable climate at the time crops were susceptible to weather damage during growth; I.F. Petrov noted in early August, at the First Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference, that up to 100 dessiantinas (approximately 2700 acres) of sown land in Olonets province had been beaten down by hail.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, on 18 September Petrov informed Aleksandr Tsiurupa in Moscow that he was sending him samples of the winter and spring crop from Povenets and Pudozh districts which had been damaged by frost. He asked for help and explained that the majority of the grain crop in Olonets province had been damaged by frost and consequently a lot of it had not been gathered in.<sup>88</sup> A military report from the time underlined the effect climatic conditions had on the harvest in north Karelia: ‘To the north of Povenets all the corn shoots were killed by frost; the population took almost nothing from their own fields except very small potatoes and they are already suffering from starvation.’<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, September 25 1918.

<sup>86</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 555.

<sup>87</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.2, l.15.

<sup>88</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 402-403.

<sup>89</sup> RVGA, f.1, op.2, d.97, l.84.

### **The formation of Karelia's workers' food supply detachments**

By August 1918 the responsibility for Karelia's food supply shortages widened as a number of food supply detachments from the region were formed and dispatched to the grain surplus provinces of Soviet Russia for the first time (see Table 2). On 3 August the central Bolshevik government appealed to all workers' organisations to form their own detachments, from the working population and poor peasants, to purchase grain at fixed prices from the countryside. They could retain half of the grain collected for their sponsoring organisation with the remaining half kept by the provincial agencies of the People's Commissariat for Food. However, any monetary or armed support was to be financed locally. In essence it was a switch to heavily taxed independent purchases.<sup>90</sup> The workers' detachments were co-ordinated through a new organisation called the Military Food Bureau, which was a subsection of the All-Russian Central Soviet of Trade Unions and existed alongside the People's Commissariat for Food's Food Army.<sup>91</sup> On 6 August Sovnarkom reinforced the food supply detachment's decree and declared that individuals who refused to bring grain to collection points or cooperatives would be arrested, imprisoned for no less than ten years, have their property confiscated and would be banished from their own peasant societies indefinitely. Refusal to hand over grain would be met with force and anyone offering armed resistance would be liable to be shot on the spot.<sup>92</sup>

The first workers' food supply detachment to be formed in the Karelian region was in Petrozavodsk and emerged from the Aleksandrovsk factory's Bolshevik party organisation (*kollektiv*) on 23 August 1918. The numbers of this detachment were added to three days later at a general gathering of factory workers. Following Bolshevik party

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<sup>90</sup> Lih, *Bread and Authority*. 167.

<sup>91</sup> M. Borrero, *Hungry Moscow. Scarcity and Urban Society in the Russian Civil War, 1917-1921*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2003. 25-26. For the decree and the instructions given for the forming of the workers' detachments see *Dekrety Sovetskoi Vlasti. 11 Iiuliia-9 Noiabria 1918 g.* Vol.3. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoi Literatury, 1964. 142-143.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* 178-180.

agitation a further 68 workers voluntarily signed up to the Aleksandrovsk factory's food supply detachment.<sup>93</sup> Over a period of two weeks this detachment, alongside a few others, was dispatched from Petrozavodsk to Moscow and then onwards to a grain producing province.

**Table 2 – Dispatch of food supply detachments from Petrozavodsk, 24 August-9 September 1918<sup>94</sup>**

| <b>Place of origin &amp; date of dispatch from Petrozavodsk</b>                               | <b>Destination province</b> | <b>Number of members</b> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Povenets district, 24 August 1918                                                             | Simbirsk                    | 18 (14)*                 |
| Vytegra district, 24 August 1918                                                              | Kursk                       | 71                       |
| Aleksandrovsk munitions factory & the Union of publishers (Petrozavodsk), 30 August 1918      | Kursk                       | 79 + 10                  |
| Petrozavodsk town food board, 31 August 1918                                                  | Kursk                       | 57                       |
| Murmansk district committee of posts & telegraphs, 6 September 1918                           | Kursk                       | 75                       |
| Extra detachment from the Murmansk district committee of posts & telegraphs, 9 September 1918 | Kursk                       | 10                       |
|                                                                                               | <b>Total</b>                | <b>320 (316)</b>         |

As the table shows, apart from the detachment formed in Povenets district which was sent to Simbirsk province (Alatyr' district), all of the above detachments were sent to Kursk. The Kursk detachments were dispatched together with a member of the provincial commissariat for food, A.F. Martynov, who was assigned to help co-ordinate and look after the interests of the detachments.<sup>95</sup>

As the first few food supply detachments departed the region and registered in Moscow debates surrounding the formation of more detachments took place in Olonets

<sup>93</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 398.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 399-400; Shumilov, *Bor'ba*. 148-149; NARK, f.R-98, op.1, d.80, l.1-1ob; 3-9. \*For reasons unknown only 14 members of this detachment were sent to Simbirsk.

<sup>95</sup> On the experiences of Karelia's food supply detachments in Kursk in 1918 see the author's as yet unpublished conference paper: A.S. Wright, "Karelian Food Supply Detachments, 1918-1920". XXXVI Annual Conference of the Study Group on the Russian Revolution. Queen's University Belfast, 2-4 January 2010.

district. The chairman of the Left SR dominated Olonets district executive committee, M.F. Chubriev proposed to his committee on 3 September to begin forming food detachments and the motion was accepted.<sup>96</sup> What were the reasons for this switch in Left SR principles? Chubriev stated that it was because of the food crisis, which is an entirely reasonable point. The district had experienced a peasant uprising the previous June because of food shortages and the deficit became particularly acute in Karelia in August 1918 as the arrival of grain loads to Petrozavodsk completely stopped. Furthermore, Chubriev could simply have been paying lip service to the creation of the detachments, knowing full well that his district would struggle to introduce them because of the general problem of a lack funding (see below). Despite Chubriev's proposal being accepted by the district soviet executive committee the author has not found any further evidence about food supply detachments being formed in Olonets district. Alternatively, Chubriev was flexible in his ideological views. At some point, presumably before the end of the year, he joined the Bolshevik party and was still a member of the Olonets district executive committee up to December 1919.<sup>97</sup>

Because workers' food supply detachments could be sponsored independently political hindrances, such as the presence of the Left SRs in the soviets, were less obstructive if the means existed to create the detachments. However, despite the initial surge in August and early September to form workers' food supply detachments their growth was stunted because of the amount of money necessary to send the detachments to the grain producing provinces. On 9 September 1918 the Olonets provincial food board informed two delegates from Alekseevskaja parish, Olonets district, that the provincial food commissariat had received a telegram from Tsiurupa, on the 3 September, explaining how the detachments were to be funded. Tsiurupa explained that the means for travel expenses and daily allowances would not be issued by the People's Commissariat for Food, whose funds were limited, but by the provincial commissariat for food. Yet, the provinces

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<sup>96</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.131, 1.47.

<sup>97</sup> GARF, f.R-393, op.13, d.263, *passim*.

were hardly any better off and the Olonets provincial commissariat for food had its requests for additional funds turned down. As a result, it was forced to inform all district committees to temporarily stop forming food detachments until the question of more money from the centre had been clarified.<sup>98</sup>

A few days later, on 13 September, the Olonets provincial commissar for food, I.F. Petrov, sent a telegram to the People's Commissariat for Food stating that he did not have the means to sustain the food supply detachments and asked to be informed immediately whether or not their creation was to continue and who was to be accountable for them.<sup>99</sup> The following day, at a session of the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik Party Committee, its members also discussed the issue and concluded that it was pointless to form detachments because they could not support them.<sup>100</sup> Further evidence indicates that the problem of providing the practical means for the detachments to operate could also simply move further down the administrative chain. On 14 September the Olonets provincial commissariat for food instructed the Povenets district food commissariat to form a food detachment, and directed that its transportation to Moscow should be supported with provisions and money from the district soviet.<sup>101</sup> Therefore the forming of food supply detachments may well have appeared the ideal Bolshevik solution to supplying the consuming regions, like Karelia, but it is evident that the availability of local resources was underestimated and caused problems.

### **The Anarchists' food supply detachment**

As shown in Chapter 3, before July, it was only the Petrozavodsk town soviet which had advocated the introduction of food supply detachments because their creation was blocked by the Left SRs in the provincial soviet executive committee. However, the first of

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<sup>98</sup> NARK, f.R-98, op.1, d.80, l.23.

<sup>99</sup> RGAE, f.1943, op.3, d.203, l.49.

<sup>100</sup> RGASPI, f.67, op.1, d.69, l.36.

<sup>101</sup> NARK, f.R-98, op.1, d.80, l.25.

Karelia's food supply detachments emerged from the Petrozavodsk town soviet in July 1918 in the form of a group of Anarchists. Why were the Anarchists operating on behalf of the Bolshevik authorities? On a national level the relationship between the Bolsheviks and the Anarchists polarised after the October revolution as the latter criticised the Bolsheviks, by and large, for their centralisation policies and the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty. The Bolsheviks arrested a large number of Anarchists in Moscow on 11-12 April 1918 and again in the aftermath of the bombing of the headquarters of the Moscow Communist party committee, on 25 September 1918, which had involved the Anarchists.<sup>102</sup> However, as the civil war deepened the spectre of a White counter revolution compelled a number of Anarchists to set their ideological principles to one side and collaborate with the Bolshevik regime.<sup>103</sup>

A group of Anarchist-Communists appear to have supported the Bolsheviks in Petrozavodsk although their relationship with the Bolsheviks in Petrozavodsk is not entirely clear. The available evidence suggests that because of the relative weakness of the Bolsheviks in the soviets and a lack of resources the Anarchists were used as willing participants in the requisitioning of goods from local individuals. On the 10 July the Petrozavodsk town soviet resolved to allow the Anarchists to search the flat and take the belongings of a local individual suspected of having a quantity of silver and foodstuffs.<sup>104</sup> At this time it suited the Bolsheviks to use the Anarchists since the formers' proposal to introduce food supply detachments had been blocked by the Left SRs at the Fourth Olonets Provincial Congress of Soviets. Because of the Anarchists' minority standing as a political force in the Petrozavodsk the Bolsheviks could easily distance themselves from them in the

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<sup>102</sup> P. Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967. 180-189.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. 195-203; Spirin, *Klassy i Partii*. 170-171.

<sup>104</sup> It is apparent that the Anarchists were not entirely trusted by the Petrozavodsk town soviet. At the session of the town soviet on 10 July it warned the Anarchists that the foodstuffs taken should be transferred to the town food board and if property taken from the named local individual went missing then the Anarchists would be held accountable and the case transferred to an investigatory commission. Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 131.

future if required.<sup>105</sup> However, more importantly, recounting a short history of the Anarchists' operations as a food supply detachment within Karelia's borders suggests that the Bolsheviks' authority did not extend to the periphery of the region in the autumn of 1918. On 19 September, the Anarchists left Petrozavodsk with the goal of requisitioning concealed stores of grain and other valuables from local 'kulaks'. They returned four days later with an impressive cargo of grain, textiles, gold, silver and other goods worth a total of 2 million roubles.<sup>106</sup> Despite the result their mission did not run smoothly and reflected frictions and confusion within local soviets over the appearance of the Anarchists operating on behalf of Petrozavodsk.

Flying their black flag the Anarchists travelled along the river Svir' and arrived in Pid'ma village, Olonets district, from the direction of the Voznesen'e inlet, on 21 September. Upon arrival some of the armed detachment disembarked, declared themselves to be Anarchists and that they intended to visit the home of a known merchant. A few days previously however the merchant's house had been sealed off by the local soviet because he had allegedly failed to pay a one-off 32,000 rouble tax. News of the Anarchists' arrival quickly spread over the village and members of the local *kombed* and a member of the district executive committee, who happened to be in the village at that time, arrived on the scene. They vehemently protested the proposed actions of the Anarchists and declared that no one had the right to break the seal placed on the merchant's house and carry out searches without the authority of the soviet. The Anarchists were forced to return from where they came while the Pid'ma soviet contacted Vosnesen'e and Lodeinoe Pole to clarify the identity of the requisitioning detachment.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> For instance in April 1918 the Petrozavodsk town soviet consisted of only 2 Anarchist party members and after the Left SR uprising in July 1918 the Bolsheviks virtually monopolised the Olonets provincial soviet organisations, contesting the remaining Karelian district soviets up to November 1918 with the Left SRs. Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 123; Shumilov, *Bor'ba*. 106.

<sup>106</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 26 September 1918.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* 3 October 1918.

The reaction of the local government representatives in Pid'ma shows that communications with Olonets district and its parishes were poor. This can partly be explained by the fact that the political make up of Olonets district were different from Petrozavodsk at this time because its soviet executive committee was dominated by the Left SRs. It is therefore questionable whether or not the dispatch of the Anarchists from Petrozavodsk would have occurred with the knowledge or consent of the Olonets district soviet executive committee. Whatever the case the proposed actions of the Anarchists, which bypassed the local soviet, were not welcomed by the Olonets district soviet representative or members of the local *kombed*. In short, despite the introduction of a *kombed*, a Bolshevik inspired institution designed to give the party a foothold in the countryside, the soviet was still the highest governing body. Although this suggests that the introduction of the *kombed* was a failure in Pid'ma at this time, the *kombed*'s resistance to the Anarchists could quite simply have been a case of a *kombed* existing without any communist party members, which was common (see Chapter 6), poor communication as articulated above, or both. The next and last time the Anarchists' food supply detachment was dispatched around Olonets province (to Vytegra district), in October 1918, it was in response to an order from the Olonets provincial food commissar and the detachment carried with it a special order signed by the Bolshevik 'extraordinary commissar' in the region, S.P. Natseranus.<sup>108</sup>

### **The Cheka, the soviets and the Left SRs: the Timofeev affair**

The problems the Bolsheviks faced in not having complete control of the soviets were exemplified by the history of the Cheka in Karelia in 1918. Generally, local Chekas were required to report on their activities to their respective soviet and co-operate closely with all soviet institutions. However, the Chekas were also to be strictly subordinated to their next superior Cheka, which created an unclear system of authority and established the

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<sup>108</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 19 October 1918; f.R-28, op.1, d.23, l.589. For the details of this mission also see Wright, "Karelian food supply detachments."

potential for future frictions (see below and Chapter 6). Local soviets were authorised to take action against the Cheka in the event of abuses of authority while the Cheka were licensed do the same against erring soviets. The development of the Cheka in Karelia therefore took place against the background of these overlapping power structures and unclear messages from Moscow concerning which body was the overriding authority in local government; the Vecheka or the soviet executive committees.<sup>109</sup>

The Cheka's evolution in Karelia, therefore, particularly in the summer and autumn of 1918, was affected by the balance of forces in the hierarchy of the soviets. By mid-July 1918 the Left SR party in the Olonets provincial executive committee had been forced out of this body and a new provincial revolutionary executive committee was created whose members, with one exception, were all Bolsheviks. However, that was not the case at district level, for example in Olonets, where the unclear lines of authority between the Cheka and the soviets were clouded by the fact that the Olonets district executive committee was dominated by Left SRs. In spite of this the Olonets district Cheka did not find support from the Bolshevik provincial soviet revolutionary executive committee in Petrozavodsk. Indeed, for a short time, the Left SR Olonets district soviet executive committee, working with the Bolshevik provincial soviet revolutionary executive committee, which was equally opposed to the Cheka's independence, thwarted the local Cheka's efforts to exert more control over the district.

On 29 August Petrozavodsk received a telegram signed by Felix Dzerzhinsky, the head of the Vecheka, which was sent around Soviet held provinces, informing them that the Territorial Liaison department (*Inogorodnyi otdel*) of the Vecheka had received a massive amount of information concerning the frictions which existed between different

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<sup>109</sup> Clashes between soviets and Chekas became a national issue between 1918 and 1919. See: G. Leggett, *The Cheka. Lenin's Political Police*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986. 123-129; 131-138; 151-154; M. Melancon, "Revolutionary Culture in the Early Soviet Republic: Communist Executive Committees versus the Cheka, Fall 1918." *Jahrbucher Fur Geschichte Osteuropas*. Vol.57, No.1, 2009.

local organs of authority and local Chekas.<sup>110</sup> One such report may have come from Karelia and detailed the recent conflict between the Olonets district Cheka chairman and the district soviet executive committee which arose against the background of the acute food shortages throughout the whole of the Karelian region in August 1918. The relevance of these food shortages in the districts became apparent at a session of the Olonets district soviet executive committee on 3 September 1918. At this session the soviet's military commissars, F.M. Fedulov and P.I. Kunzhin, spoke out in protest against the recent actions of the district Cheka chairman, Timofeev. At the end of August Timofeev had, they declared, demanded rations from the store of the military commissariat but Fedulov refused because there was barely enough food to satisfy the needs of his own soldiers. Timofeev then asked for his name to be put down for rations for people attached to the military commissariat and stated that he would deliver a secret Sovnarkom decree supporting the move. However, Kunzhin explained that he never received any such order so when Timofeev confronted him Kunzhin explained that he had no grounds to supply him with any supplies from the military commissariat. Timofeev then lost his temper, threatened to arrest Kunzhin and began to shout at both him and Fedulov calling them saboteurs and scoundrels.<sup>111</sup>

Timofeev did not deny that he had verbally abused the district military commissars but suggested that the Cheka was the supreme authority in the district. He referred to a previous incident in the district when the commander of the Red Army's 3<sup>rd</sup> Gatchina regiment, which had arrived in Karelia in July 1918, requisitioned a number of horses and foodstuffs in Vidlitskaia parish without permission to do so. Timofeev believed in this situation the district executive committee was the higher authority but this had occurred before the establishment of the district Cheka. After the Cheka's creation he was adamant

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<sup>110</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.17, l.54. On the Territorial Liason department and its responsibilities see the contemporary report in *Izvestiia* on 28 August 1918 in Belov, et al., *Iz Istorii VChK*. 174-176 and Leggett, *The Cheka*. 85.

<sup>111</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.131, l.45.

that it should be independent and he believed that the district Cheka was subordinate only to the provincial Cheka and the Vecheka and was in no way obliged to submit any of its reports to any institution other than the higher Cheka authority. Suggesting his future intentions, Timofeev also proclaimed: ‘for the time being the executive committee is operating and will not be temporarily disbanded.’<sup>112</sup>

A Menshevik Internationalist member of the district soviet, M.D. Ermakov, immediately recognised the prevailing issue: ‘which of us now has authority, the executive committee or the Cheka?’<sup>113</sup> In his opinion the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and Sovnarkom were the highest authorities and the Cheka was but one of its executive organs: ‘At the current moment we have a Soviet constitution, affirmed at the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets, in which it clearly states that authority belongs to the executive committees...regarding questions of a local character, the soviets in the localities are sovereign.’<sup>114</sup> His belief that the district military commissars were perfectly correct to stand up to Timofeev was supported by a Left SR member of the district executive committee who believed that because the Cheka was elected by the soviet executive committee it was therefore responsible to the soviet.<sup>115</sup>

Therefore Left SRs and Menshevik Internationalists shared some common ground with the Bolsheviks in their opposition to the Cheka’s independence and wished to work through the elected executive committees and within the legal boundaries set by the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets. This united front against the Cheka between Left SRs and Bolsheviks became clearer following 4 September at the next district executive committee session. The committee resolved to support the decision of the district military commissars for the reasons stated by Ermakov above: they had received no orders to

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid. 1.46.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

suggest that Timofeev's demands for rations were legitimate. Moreover, the committee stated its alarm at Timofeev's statement that the district executive committee 'for the time being' would not be disbanded, thus suggesting that he did intend to disperse the executive committee at some point. As a result, the district executive committee turned to the provincial revolutionary executive committee and appealed for Timofeev's removal: 'such tricks by departmental individuals are destroying the revolution and disturbing the state apparatus...we consider Timofeev's future sojourn as a member of the executive committee and chairman of the Cheka intolerable.'<sup>116</sup>

In response the Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee decided to send two representatives, one from the revolutionary executive committee and one from the provincial Cheka, to Olonets to resolve the conflict.<sup>117</sup> 11 days later Petrozavodsk received a telegram from the Olonets district executive committee chairman, M.F. Chubriev, asking for Timofeev's removal from all his posts and for some clarification on the limits of his authority because he had been issued right of entry into the presidium of the district executive committee, he was interfering in its work and scolded its members with abusive language on a daily basis.<sup>118</sup> On 16 September the Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee assured the Olonets district executive committee that all mandates issued to Timofeev were now void, the Cheka was subordinated to the district executive committee and it had exclusive authority in the district.<sup>119</sup> However, on 16 September Timofeev was able to counter the Olonets district executive committee's wish to remove him from his position at the Olonets provincial conference of district Chekas (16-18 September 1918). Timofeev argued that the Olonets district executive committee was made up entirely of Left SRs and the surrounding soviets were dominated by '*kulaks*'. Because of this he explained, as mentioned above, the district executive committee was

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid. 1.47.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. 1.14.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. 1.25.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. 1.23.

sabotaging the decrees coming from the centre (the registration of the harvest and the *kombedy*) and wished to nullify the Cheka by turning it into a subdivision of the executive committee. Timofeev therefore appealed for the support of the conference and the provincial Cheka.<sup>120</sup>

The Chekists stuck by one another. At the Olonets provincial conference of district Chekas the delegates resolved unanimously that Timofeev had acted lawfully by demanding food for the Cheka from the district military commissariat because the People's Military Commissariat had taken on the responsibility to supply the Cheka and its detachments with foodstuffs. Moreover, because the Left SR district executive committee had not broken off with its central committee its activities were under the observation of the provincial Cheka. The conference also annulled the decision of the provincial executive committee to remove Timofeev from his responsibilities without a proper investigation into the affair. Finally, because the Olonets district executive committee was hindering the implementation of the *kombedy* and the registration of the harvest, the conference proposed to the provincial executive committee and the County Bolshevik party committee to consider disbanding the Olonets district executive committee and replacing it with a Bolshevik military revolutionary committee until the convocation of a district peasant congress.<sup>121</sup>

However, the saga did not end here as the Left SR district executive committee and the provincial executive committee refused to back down. On the 23 September M.F. Chubriev, sent a telegram to the chairman of the provincial revolutionary executive committee to ask why the decision to remove Timofeev from his position had been

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<sup>120</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.17, l.83. This conference was attended by 12 representatives from the province's district Chekas except Kargopol'. The delegates' party affiliations were: 9 Bolsheviks, 1 Bolshevik sympathiser, 1 Anarchist sympathiser and 1 Left SR who had broken from their central committee. NARK, f.R-411, op.1, d.1, l.9.

<sup>121</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.17, l.89-90.

annulled by the provincial Cheka conference and requested an urgent and full explanation regarding which body was the higher authority in the province.<sup>122</sup> It is clear that the provincial revolutionary executive committee stood their ground because on the 4 October 1918 they confirmed the appointment of a new Bolshevik chairman of the Olonets district Cheka, who had been proposed by Chubriev two days previously. This came at a time when Timofeev had been called to Petrograd by the Northern Regional party committee, presumably in connection with the whole affair.<sup>123</sup>

The Olonets district soviet executive committee therefore managed to curb the expansion of the Cheka's authority through the removal of an unruly Chekist but it had shown the limitations of Petrozavodsk's control over the Cheka in the districts well into 1918. The Timofeev incident underlined the unclear boundaries of the Cheka's authority and showed how this was reflected at a grass-roots level through individuals who believed they had the right to arbitrarily exercise power over the soviets and its institutions. The Timofeev case was also distinct because of the continued existence of the Left SRs in the districts and their collaboration with the Bolshevik provincial revolutionary executive committee to achieve a common goal: Timofeev's removal and the restriction of the Cheka's autonomy. The influence of the Left SRs had been eliminated in the capitals in the summer but not in Karelia where they continued to be a dominant political force in the districts and the Bolsheviks could not penetrate the Olonets district executive committee politically. Furthermore, what is striking about the Timofeev affair is that the Bolshevik provincial executive committee was willing to put differences with the Left SRs aside to tackle a common foe in the form of the Cheka.

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<sup>122</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.131, l.29.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. l.30-31. Timofeev was replaced as the Olonets district Cheka chairman by the Bolshevik commander of the Red Army's 3<sup>rd</sup> Gatchina regiment, 'an old' Bolshevik party worker. Ibid. l.31; Memoirs of F.I. Egorov in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 129.

### **The shortage of Bolshevik cadres in Olonets district**

Collaboration between the Bolshevik Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee and the Left SR Olonets district executive committee is best understood as a short-term measure of expediency not a local policy based on principle. This became clear in early to mid-November 1918 when the Olonets district executive committee was disbanded. However, the incident which provoked the dissolution was a local matter involving local Bolsheviks. The break up of the Left SR Olonets district executive committee was initiated by a few soldiers affiliated to the Bolshevik party, many of whom were not native to the district and had been sent there in July as part of the Red Army's 3<sup>rd</sup> Gatchina regiment. However, because of the numerical weakness of the Bolsheviks in the district the party faced the dilemma of reducing its presence in the Red Army and district Cheka by filling positions in the district executive committee with Bolshevik party members from these institutions. As a result, local Bolsheviks initially sought a compromise with the Left SRs; the communists proposed formalising a coalition arrangement suggesting that one of their party members should chair the district executive committee while its other members were to be selected from 'the most loyal [to the Bolsheviks] Left SRs and Internationalists.'<sup>124</sup> The Left SRs refused, however, and thereafter the Bolsheviks armed themselves and dispersed the Left SR Olonets district executive committee by force.<sup>125</sup>

On 15 November 1918 the provincial Olonets revolutionary executive committee informed Moscow and Petrograd that the Olonets district executive committee had been disbanded because it was dominated by the Left SRs who had not disassociated themselves from their Central Committee and hindered the introduction of decrees from Moscow. A new district revolutionary executive committee was formed which consisted of five Bolshevik members, one of whom was a Chekist. The committee had its first session on 18

<sup>124</sup> Memoirs of F.I. Egorov in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 130-131.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. 131-132.

November.<sup>126</sup> However, there were continued hints of coalition; out of the need for competent and experienced personnel a few Left SRs and Menshevik Internationalists were selected to work in the presidium of the Olonets district revolutionary executive committee on 25 January 1919. A Menshevik Internationalist who only joined the Bolshevik party in October 1918, M.D. Ermakov, became the chairman of the district presidium. His deputies were the Bolshevik F.M. Fedulov and the Left SR M.F. Chubriev.<sup>127</sup> Therefore local Bolsheviks, Left SRs and Menshevik Internationalists were willing to work together for the common good of the Soviet regime and practical considerations, such as the need for capable soviet administrators, took precedence over previous party differences. When referring to the involvement of non-Bolshevik party workers in Olonets district the Bolshevik F.I. Egorov remembered: ‘despite their political delusions they were people committed to Soviet rule.’<sup>128</sup>

### **The creation of the district Chekas**

The Timofeev affair describes the arbitrary nature of the district Chekas and their clashes with the soviet executive committees. It was at the First All-Russian Conference of Chekas in Moscow (11-14 June 1918) where the delegates resolved to establish a centralised and hierarchical network of Chekas attached to the soviets at each administrative level from Moscow down to the provinces and the districts.<sup>129</sup> It is doubtful if any other lower-level

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<sup>126</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.131, l.36-37; Ibid. 132. Its chairman was F.I. Egorov. The other four members were the military commissar F.M. Fedulov, I.V. Petrov and two members of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Gatchina regiment, Eshmont and P. Chigar'kov. The latter was a member of the Cheka and before the end of 1918 became chairman of the Olonets district Cheka.

<sup>127</sup> GARF, f.R-393, op.13, d.263, l.5. For a brief history of Ermakov's political life see GARF, f.R-393, op.13, d.268, l.16. The new presidium's secretaries were the Left SR Mishuev and Merkur'ev (party affiliation unknown).

<sup>128</sup> Memoirs of F.I. Egorov in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 132. Egorov noted that other Left SRs and Menshevik Internationalists later took up arms to help the Bolsheviks and a few also joined the Bolshevik party. Omitting any precise date of entry to the Bolshevik party Egorov stated the following became Bolsheviks: V.I. Vasil'ev (former party affiliation unknown); P.I. Kunzhin (former Left SR); S.I. Proskuriakov (former Left SR); I.A. Nikitin (former Menshevik Internationalist).

<sup>129</sup> Leggett, *The Cheka*. 37-40. The conference was attended by 66 delegates representing 43 provincial and district Chekas. Presumably, considering that the Olonets provincial Cheka had been created the previous April, it was represented at the conference. There is an instruction booklet stored in NARK which was issued at the conference for the organisation of the Cheka and its departments, which suggests that the Olonets provincial Cheka was represented. NARK, f.R-411, op.1, d.1, l.30-50ob.

Cheka from Karelia attended this conference as district Chekas appeared belatedly. The Olonets district Cheka was not formed until 15 August 1918, the Pudozh district Cheka until the 9 September and the Povenets district Cheka no later than mid-September.<sup>130</sup> Of course, this delay could be attributed to the lack of Bolshevik support for this institution in the districts but the evidence available confirms that it was primarily practical issues which hindered the creation of the district Chekas in Karelia.

At the Olonets provincial conference of district Chekas the representative of the Murmansk railroad Cheka outlined the difficulties of creating a railroad Cheka owing to a lack of premises, funds and workers. He explained that frictions had also occurred with other organisations such as the military commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> communist regiment who had seized the premises of the railroad Cheka for itself.<sup>131</sup> The representative of Povenets district also asked for funds and workers which he described as being in extremely short supply. Because of these shortages a makeshift solution was adopted; all work against counter-revolution was undertaken by the Red Army's Beloraiskii regiment, which since arriving in Karelia from Petrograd in July had carried out four executions. Another two executions had been carried out by a representative of the provincial Cheka and the Vecheka.<sup>132</sup>

The chairman of the Pudozh Cheka, O.M. Shishov, stated that his Cheka consisted of three members (2 Bolsheviks & 1 Left SR). He announced that in his district there was support for the Constituent Assembly and agitation against the soviets. To combat this Shishov asked for funds and workers to be sent for his Cheka.<sup>133</sup> He was supported by the

<sup>130</sup> GARF, f.R-393, op.13, d.268, l.4; NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.17, l.82. The exact date of when the Povenets district Cheka was formed is not clear but it was represented at the Olonets provincial congress of district Chekas (16-18 September 1918).

<sup>131</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.17, l.82.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. l.82-83.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. For some biographical details on Shishov see E.P. Laidinen, "Stanovlenie Organov Chk-GPU v Pudozhskom Uезде (1918-1922 gg.)" in *Istoriko-Kul'turnye Traditsii Malykh Gorodov Russkogo Severa. Materialy Regional'noi Nauchnoi Konferentsii*. Petrozavodsk: Karel'skii Nauchnyi Tsentr, 7-8 September 2006. 270-271.

chairman of the provincial Cheka, I.V. Elpedinskii, who believed that the bourgeoisie wished to penetrate the soviets and soviet executive committees and turn them into ‘*kulak*’ dominated soviets. He proposed to Shishov ‘to pay serious attention to the local executive committee’ in Pudozh and take all steps to combat the spread of ‘black hundred proclamations’ around the district. On the basis of all the district Cheka reports Elpedinskii resolved to forward a proposal to the Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee and the Petrozavodsk County party committee to supply a number of responsible workers from the party for work in the district Chekas.<sup>134</sup>

Like the introduction of the food supply detachments and the *kombedy* the creation of district Chekas was hindered by a lack of finance. At the conference of district Chekas in Petrozavodsk the delegates were informed that because of a shortage of money it was impossible for the provincial Cheka to subsidise the district Chekas.<sup>135</sup> To improve the finances of the provincial and district Chekas the conference therefore resolved to appeal to the Vecheka to increase the special costs (*ekstraordinarnye raskhody*) assigned to district Chekas and the provincial Cheka to 5000 roubles and 15,000 roubles a month respectively because Olonets province was a border province and ‘overflowing with Allied spies, Whites and counterrevolutionaries.’<sup>136</sup> Because of a lack of funds district Chekas were also encouraged to implement a decision made at the First All-Russian Conference of Chekas on 12 June ‘to borrow’ funds accumulated from confiscated and requisitioned sums of money and fines when it was not possible to receive advances from the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs or any other responsible organisation. In theory the borrowed money was to be paid back when advances were received.<sup>137</sup> Furthermore, the provincial Cheka planned to submit a request to the Vecheka for passes to be issued to

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<sup>134</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.17, l.83-84.

<sup>135</sup> NARK, f.R-411, op.1, d.1, l.16.

<sup>136</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.17, l.84.

<sup>137</sup> NARK, f.R-411, op.1, d.1, l.14-14ob.

members of the district Chekas which would allow them to travel for free along the railway line.<sup>138</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter underlines the lack of Bolshevik control in the districts in Karelia during 1918 and the continuing influence of the Left SRs. Although after July 1918 the Left SRs lost all effective power to the Bolsheviks in Petrozavodsk their presence in the Karelian districts remained strong. In the case of Olonets district they were the dominant political party in the soviet executive committee up to November 1918, a considerable time after they had lost all power in Petrozavodsk, Petrograd and Moscow. Why then did the Left SRs remain strong in Karelia? In short, it was because the Bolsheviks were weak. We know from the introduction that Karelia was a predominantly agricultural region with few industrial workers, which, in principle, meant that its social base was more supportive of the SRs than the Bolsheviks. Chapter 1 also showed that the SRs were numerically and influentially stronger in the Olonets provincial soviet until the beginning of 1918 and when this party split locally the majority of its members moved to the left. Also important in understanding the reason for the continued strength of the Left SRs, as we have seen in this chapter in the cases of Pudozh and Olonets districts, is that Bolshevik cadres in the districts remained few. Therefore the Bolsheviks, until they were numerically and/or influentially stronger, had no choice but to allow Left SRs to remain in the periphery because they needed people to run the soviets.

The significance of the continued presence of the Left SRs in Karelia was that Bolshevik policies could be resisted for longer. Central policies such as the introduction of the *kombedy*, the registration of the harvest, food supply detachments and the Cheka formed the basis for extending the Bolsheviks' authority into the periphery but it was local

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<sup>138</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.17, l.90.

conditions which determined the successful introduction of Bolshevik institutions and policies. The implementation of central policy was of course dependent on more than politics; equally if not more important was the availability of local resources to carry out the capital's directives. Because of the country's economic crisis the Bolsheviks in Petrozavodsk could introduce central policy but it was highly dependent on the provincial and district soviets' resources.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Consolidating Power (I): Failing to Control the Countryside, July-December 1918**

The previous chapters have shown how the Bolsheviks struggled to gain political control over the whole of Karelia. In Petrozavodsk the policies of the centre were introduced and by July 1918 the alliance with the Left SRs was no more; the Petrozavodsk town soviet executive committee and the Olonets provincial soviet revolutionary executive committee were under Bolshevik control. However, the Bolsheviks struggled to implement the capital's decrees outside of Petrozavodsk because of the party's lack of influence in the district and parish soviets and the lack of resources there for much of the remainder of the year.

The following two chapters aim to take the story further and argue that the path to Bolshevik control in Karelia from the summer of 1918 was altogether uneven, a “one step forward, two steps back” scenario. This chapter will focus for the most part on the obstacles the Bolshevik party faced in consolidating their position in the last few months of the year, or the “two steps back”. For instance, the Bolsheviks struggled to construct the Red Army in Karelia and struggled to win over the peasantry. It argues that although the Red Army detachments sent north from Petrograd to defend the Karelian region helped strengthen the Bolsheviks' influence in the districts, the local government did not have the infrastructure to support large troop numbers and struggled to provide for its troops. The recruitment of a local Red Army did not begin until the end of November 1918, only after the local harvest was gathered, and it was met hostilely by sections of the peasantry. The Bolsheviks struggled to consolidate their rule in Karelia because of the resentment shown towards them by the peasantry, which was fuelled by the provocative actions of the *kombedy*, the Bolsheviks' failure to improve the food supply situation and the lack of

reliable party cadres in government institutions. This meant that by December 1918 peasant unrest in Karelia was endemic and famine a real possibility.

### **Military training, mobilisation, barracks and supplies**

The creation of a new Red Army to defend the fledgling Soviet regime was an early Bolshevik priority and as shown in Chapter 3 the establishment of military commissariats took place in Karelia from late spring 1918. The need to establish a standing army in the north was also accentuated by the threat of the Allies at the beginning of July 1918. The sparsity of troops recruited locally and the reliance on reinforcements from Petrograd, a large part of whom had recently been disarmed by General Maynard's Syren Force, convinced leading Bolsheviks to dispatch a further four Red Army units to Karelia in July 1918 to defend the northern approaches to Petrograd. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Gatchina Regiment of approximately 500 men was directed to Olonets district along with the Starorusskii Battalion of 300 men.<sup>1</sup> The Oranienbaumskii Regiment, which had 278 men, was sent to Petrozavodsk.<sup>2</sup> Finally, the 6<sup>th</sup> Beloraiskii Battalion, comprising 600 Russian & Latvian recruits, was sent to Povenets.<sup>3</sup>

How much actual fighting these detachments took part in at this stage is difficult to know for certain because the Allies' main operations after their initial advance south were aimed at consolidating their position; the remnants of the White Finns to the west had to be expelled.<sup>4</sup> However, the available evidence suggests that these detachments served a dual purpose: a garrison force which was on hand to meet the threat of the Allies or internal

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<sup>1</sup> *Direktivy Komandovaniia*. Vol.1. 239. I have found no evidence to prove that the Starorusskii regiment made it to Karelia or was active there.

<sup>2</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 501; *Direktivy Komandovaniia*. Vol.1. 239.

<sup>3</sup> The troops were contracted to serve for a period of 6 months and 345 of the men who did not wish to rejoin were due to finish their term between 1 and 15 September. WO 157/1215, Syren Force Intelligence report, undated but probably between the end of August and the beginning of September 1918. A soviet report to the People's Commissariat for Military Affairs, from S.P. Natsarenus on 22 August 1918, stated that the 6<sup>th</sup> Beloraiskii Battalion numbered 650 men. *Direktivy Komandovaniia*. Vol.1. 238.

<sup>4</sup> In August 1918 the Allies formed two separate mobile columns of troops in Kandalaksha and Kem' to push the remaining White Finns in the region back towards the Finnish border. Baron, *The King of Karelia*. 68-69.

unrest; and a galvanising political force that would help the Bolsheviks' gain influence and control in the districts and parishes. In his memoirs the future chair of the Olonets district soviet revolutionary executive committee remembered that: 'The arrival of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Gatchina regiment in July 1918 breathed new Bolshevik life into Olonets.'<sup>5</sup> The founders of the party organisation in Olonets town were in fact from the Gatchina regiment.<sup>6</sup> From its arrival to the end of the year the communists in the Gatchina regiment also went round Olonets town and district undertaking political work and establishing party cells.<sup>7</sup> Chapter 4 has also already shown that the Red Army were used to disperse the Left SR dominated district executive committee in mid-November 1918 and that Bolshevik party members of the Gatchina regiment joined the new district revolutionary executive committee and the district Cheka.

The influence of the Beloraiskii Battalion in Povenets was comparable. A member of the Povenets district soviet executive committee remembered that the work of the district military soviet only really began in August when a Bolshevik commissar from the Beloraiskii Battalion and a former officer from Petrovsko-Iamskaia parish were appointed its military commissars.<sup>8</sup> The discussion of the *kombedy* in Chapter 4 also illustrated the relative importance of soldiers from the 166<sup>th</sup> Beloraiskii regiment in establishing *kombedy* in Povenets district. Furthermore, this regiment was instrumental in helping establish parish military commissariats.<sup>9</sup> A Bolshevik party representative at the Second Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference noted that the Beloraiskii troops were the most active component of the party in Povenets province.<sup>10</sup> Finally, mirroring events in Olonets town at roughly the same time, the communists of the 166<sup>th</sup> Beloraiskii regiment acted

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<sup>5</sup> Memoirs of F.I. Egorov in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 129.

<sup>6</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 526.

<sup>7</sup> Memoirs of F.I. Egorov in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 129.

<sup>8</sup> Memoirs of F.E. Pottov in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 189-190. The officer from Petrovsko-Iamskaia parish joined the Bolshevik party in September 1918.

<sup>9</sup> Memoirs of F.E. Pottov in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 201.

<sup>10</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 527.

together with the Povenets town Bolshevik party organisation to disperse the Povenets district soviet on 14 November 1918; some of the communists from the 166<sup>th</sup> Beloraiskii regiment then joined the newly established district soviet revolutionary executive committee.<sup>11</sup>

So the sending of Red Army units from Petrograd gave the Bolsheviks not only an increase in manpower to defend the Karelian districts but, equally as important, it gave them the manpower to establish Bolshevik institutions, support local Bolsheviks and increase the party's presence in the periphery. However, these positive achievements mask some of the underlying problems which faced local Bolsheviks in raising their own army. Compulsory military training, decreed by the All-Russian Central Executive Committee on 22 April 1918, did not begin in Karelia until June 1918.<sup>12</sup> Mikhail Shumilov, writing in the 1950s, stated that the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik party committee dispatched instructors to the districts to help implement the decree and the 'toiling masses' met the compulsory training decree 'with great enthusiasm.'<sup>13</sup> Other sources suggest that the implementation of military training was varied. On 15 October 1918 the head of military training in the Olonets provincial military commissariat, wrote to A.V. Dubrovskii to explain that the registration of the population subject to military training was incomplete in a few districts 'because of local conditions'. Out of the 26,406 people subject to military training at that time only 1384 were actually being trained.<sup>14</sup>

The mention of 'local conditions' was almost certainly a reference to the lack of communication with the periphery. The districts had enlisted former tsarist officers and non-commissioned officers as instructors, 25 in total were working for the Petrozavodsk

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<sup>11</sup> Memoirs of F.E. Pottoev in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 201-202; Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 535-537; 575, fn., 145.

<sup>12</sup> Shumilov, *Bor'ba*. 118. For the decree see *Dekrety*. Vol.2. 151-153.

<sup>13</sup> Shumilov, *Bor'ba*. 118. Shumilov refers to a report from the Olonets district Bolshevik party committee in autumn 1918 which informed the party Central Committee that military training was already complete.

<sup>14</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 291-292.

district military commissariat, but no figures had been received from any other district.<sup>15</sup> A report from 20 November in the provincial *Izvestiia* also suggests that the local population in Petrozavodsk did not meet the general military training decree ‘with great enthusiasm.’ The Petrozavodsk military commissariat reported that after a short period of time people stopped attending military training in the town.<sup>16</sup>

If training was problematic then gaining recruits in the first instance was equally difficult. The evidence available reinforces Evan Mawdsley’s assertion that mobilisation in the Northern provinces was hindered because of the geography and climate which meant large forces could not be raised locally and commitments to other fronts meant troop numbers in the north remained low.<sup>17</sup> In a report to the People’s Commissariat for Military Affairs on 22 August S.P. Natsarenus complained that despite repeated telegrams to be relieved he remained, up to that point, the sole commander of the front, of the military staff and the front quartermaster. The staff for a new Olonets division had arrived but it did not have any of its own units because it was newly formed and was made up of regiments temporarily assigned to it from other divisions. Natsarenus also informed Moscow that there was a lack of volunteers for the Red Army and the forming of new units was hampered because of the location of military headquarters at the front and the immediate rear. He believed the headquarters should be relocated because the proximity of the Allies dissuaded volunteers from enlisting and the local population sympathised with the enemy. Most importantly, Natsarenus recognised the need for ‘heroic measures’ in order to organise food shops (*prodmagaziny*) with supplies because current provisions were running out.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 26 November 1918.

<sup>17</sup> E. Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2000. 51-52; 156.

<sup>18</sup> *Direktivny Komandovaniia*. Vol.1. 237; 239-240.

Since the previous spring local Bolsheviks had relied on a combination of outside reinforcements, volunteers and partisan units. The party wanted to introduce a more centralised standing army but local conditions undermined the opportunity to carry this out immediately and effectively. At the First Olonets Provincial Bolshevik party Conference (6-7 August 1918) Arsenii Dubrovskii, the provincial military commissar, criticised the creation of partisan units whose actions he believed were impossible to coordinate because of their independent and local character. Dubrovskii, like leading Bolsheviks in the capital, believed the way forward for the Soviet regime was the creation of a single and centralised army in which the smallest military unit would be connected to the centre. He wished to carry out a general mobilisation of the ‘toiling masses’: only communists, the ‘town proletariat’ and the ‘village poor’ would be recruited. However, because of the food crisis and the priority of the harvest, recruits from the peasantry were exempt from mobilisation until after the crops had been gathered in.<sup>19</sup> Because the vast majority of Karelia’s population was rural this meant that a locally raised Red Army would remain small in number and the Bolsheviks would have to rely, for the most part, on those forces already sent to it from Petrograd. The first mass peasant mobilisation campaign in Karelia did not begin until 28 November 1918.<sup>20</sup>

According to some sources, in addition to the regiments sent from Petrograd, the number of volunteers who enlisted in the Red Army dramatically increased from the summer of 1918. A post-Soviet Russian source, which omits any direct references, states that a total of 7000 volunteers signed up to the Red Army in Olonets province during the summer of 1918.<sup>21</sup> This added to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Communist Regiment in Petrozavodsk which, in early August, numbered approximately 1000 members (in reality only 140 of this force were considered communists and 180 communist sympathisers).<sup>22</sup> Not all troops would

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<sup>19</sup> NARK, f.P-2, op.1, d.2, l.12-14.

<sup>20</sup> Shumilov, *Bor’ba*. 118.

<sup>21</sup> Korablev, et al., *Istoriia Karelii*. 393.

<sup>22</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor’ba*. 501.

have been combatants but these numbers still seem high even when taking into consideration the absorption of Red Guard units into the regular Red Army. Mikhail Shumilov states that there were approximately 1600 volunteers throughout Olonets province by the summer of 1918 while another historian of the Russian north during the civil war states that by 20 September 1918 the 6<sup>th</sup> Red Army alone had a total of 9879 troops, 2847 of whom were situated in the Petrozavodsk sector.<sup>23</sup> Allied intelligence estimated that in the middle of August 1918 the number of Red troops in the region stood at approximately 4500.<sup>24</sup> Another regional historian of the civil war in Karelia has also adopted this figure for the autumn of 1918.<sup>25</sup>

Of course, attempting to establish fixed numbers for the Red Army at any stage during the civil war is a difficult and ultimately inconclusive task because of the fluctuation in numbers as a result of casualties, transfers and desertion. The purpose here is to demonstrate firstly that the raising of a local Red Army was hindered up to the winter of 1918 because of local conditions and the priority of the harvest, and, secondly, that help from Petrograd in the supply of troops was vital to creating a sizeable force in Karelia capable of countering both external and internal threats to the Bolshevik regime. However, whatever figure is adopted for the number of volunteers entering the Red Army during the summer and autumn of 1918, the relatively large increase in troop numbers before the first peasant mobilisation campaign in November requires some explanation. The presence of Red Army units sent from Petrograd undoubtedly influenced recruitment. As articulated above, the regiments in Olonets and Povenets were a visible presence as they travelled round their respective districts, engaging in political work, establishing *kombedy*, party cells and military commissariats. Clearly local perceptions of the military strength of the two warring sides in the region, and a reluctance to commit to the weaker side, or fear of

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<sup>23</sup> Shumilov, *Bor'ba*. 113; Tarasov, *Bor'ba*. 154-155.

<sup>24</sup> WO 157/1215. Syren Force intelligence report, 14 August 1918.

<sup>25</sup> Mashezerskii, *Ustanovlenie*. 152.

the stronger side, had a direct impact on mobilisation. In other words local populations decided if the Allies or the Red Army were the stronger military force and made a decision to enlist based on this perceived strength. S.P. Natsarenus identified the relevance of this in his report above when he stressed the importance of moving recruitment bases further away from the front line because of the proximity of the Allies.

On the other hand, local perceptions of the strength of opposing military forces and opportunism only partly explain the rise in troop numbers in Karelia prior to the general mobilisation campaign. For example, following the October revolution hundreds of thousands of people abandoned the capitals for provincial towns during the civil war; between 1917 and 1920 the population of Petrograd decreased from 2.5 million to 722,000.<sup>26</sup> In all probability a number of those made for Petrozavodsk. On 21 September 1918 the provincial *Izvestiia* reported that the population of Petrozavodsk had risen sharply from approximately 16,000 to 45,000 inhabitants.<sup>27</sup> Local historians do not discuss the demographic changes in Karelia during the civil war and the archival sources do not reveal enough evidence to make any concrete assertion concerning where all these people came from. Nevertheless, the considerable rise in Petrozavodsk's population, caused by de-urbanisation in Petrograd undoubtedly offered a wider recruitment pool.

Although recruitment took a step forward in terms of quantity it was simultaneously hamstrung by the inability of the military commissariat to adequately maintain its soldiers through a lack of resources. In turn the prestige of the Red Army was undermined and discontent rose amongst its soldiers. At a general meeting of the Petrozavodsk garrison on 24 August the soldiers complained that they had not received important items such as tobacco or bedding from the day of the garrison's formation

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<sup>26</sup> D. Koenker, "Urbanization and Deurbanization in the Russian Revolution and Civil War," *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol.57, No.2, 1985. 424-425; 441.

<sup>27</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 21 September 1918.

despite the fact this supply order had been decreed by the capital. The men also discovered that none of the military units in Petrozavodsk and its environs had received any allowances (*dovol'stvie*).<sup>28</sup> They blamed the Olonets provincial military commissariat's department of supply 'which is consciously committing sabotage by not displaying up till now the maximum energy to deliver to Olonets province the necessary foodstuffs, the result of which is that we, the Red Army troops, are left with literally one rotten cabbage.'<sup>29</sup> The troops' complaint indicated that food shortages were made worse by a lack of capable personnel within the military commissariat. Indeed, the department of supply attached to the provincial military commissariat wrote to Dubrovskii on 22 August stating its need for specialist employees for the forming of sub-divisions within the department of supply because the employees sent to them had no military background or were entirely unsuitable for office work.<sup>30</sup>

Mobilisation was also hindered by the lack of infrastructure in the region to garrison large troop numbers. The influx of people, presumably some of whom came from Petrograd, was added to by people who had evacuated zones occupied by the Allies (see Chapter 4). From 14 August to 18 October 4028 refugees were also reported to have reached Masel'ga station and many may also have found their way to Petrozavodsk.<sup>31</sup> The result was a housing crisis. On 18 September a meeting of the town soviet took place where the details of the crisis were outlined by the chairman of the accommodation commission and the head of the housing department. They both foresaw that the crisis would only get worse in the forthcoming winter because Red Army men at that time were sleeping outside under the open sky. To try and solve the crisis the town soviet agreed to immediately begin constructing housing, register all homes of the bourgeoisie, clarify the

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<sup>28</sup> This term could mean material or financial allowances.

<sup>29</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 3 September 1918.

<sup>30</sup> NARK, f.R-573, op.1, d.37, l.137.

<sup>31</sup> NARK, f.P-6159, op.1, d.92, l.168-178; 180.

statistical data for the number of people living in the town and rid Petrozavodsk of all the ‘unnecessary bourgeois and idling elements.’<sup>32</sup>

The lack of barracks for soldiers was a problem echoed in other towns within Karelia and the approach of winter made construction work imperative. On 14 September the local military soviet ordered the building of barracks for 100-120 men at Segezha station, proposed the extension of the barracks at Medvezh’ia Gora to house 540 men and to immediately adapt all suitable structures at Nadvoitsy and Onda stations for 400 and 100 men respectively.<sup>33</sup> The lack of housing also frustrated the provincial military commissar’s attempts to carry out his orders to billet and train Red Army reserves. On 26 October M.F. Tarasov asked the Petrozavodsk town soviet to supply the provincial military commissariat with premises adequate for 700 to 1000 Red Army men who would be trained in Petrozavodsk before being sent to the front. In response the chairman of the soviet’s accommodation commission announced that because of the housing crisis the Red troops could occupy all large buildings whose living space had not already been requisitioned and occupied by workers (*ne v uplotnennom vide*). A commission was then set up to review all the large buildings in the town.<sup>34</sup>

The double-edged nature of Red Army recruitment in Karelia, whereby attempts to raise numbers were hindered by a lack of resources, was again visible following the Armistice in November 1918. The opportunity arose to mobilise returning prisoners of war but it placed further strain on local resources. At the end of December the Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee resolved to set up special commissions to oversee the passing of former prisoners of war through the districts on their way home to

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<sup>32</sup> *Izvesttia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 21 September 1918. The Petrozavodsk town soviet decided to evict all unemployed inhabitants living in the town and confiscate their property on 22 October 1918. N.A. Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 139.

<sup>33</sup> RGVA, f.1470, op.1, d.178, l.2ob.

<sup>34</sup> NARK, f.R-573, op.1, d.37, l.267.

places occupied by the Allies. The executive committee also resolved to appeal to all local communist parties to influence returning soldiers ‘in the spirit of socialism.’<sup>35</sup> However, the return of released prisoners of war further burdened the infrastructure and resources of an already pressurised local government. From 25 November hundreds of hungry, poorly clothed and shod Russian prisoners of war from Germany and Austria began to arrive in Petrozavodsk, many suffering from the cold and frostbitten toes.<sup>36</sup>

In part response to the inability of the state to support its Red Army a number of Red Army units across Karelia partook in what appears to have been authorised but heavy-handed requisitioning raids, which contributed to the growth of general rural unrest that expressed itself at the end of the year in a number of parishes across the region (see below). A case in point was an incident involving a small Red Army detachment in Pudozh district in early October 1918 which had been issued a mandate from the special military commissar of Pudozh and Kargopol’ districts, carried out searches of the local ‘prosperous’ population and assaulted some of the civilians who resisted. Clothing, military equipment and foodstuffs were taken and almost everyone searched was arrested, imprisoned in the cellar of a house and forced to pay a fine for their release based on a sliding scale from 50 to 3000 roubles. Some of the requisitioned and confiscated items were taken away by the Red Army and the remainder given to the chairman of the *kombedy* to distribute amongst the poor. Of the collected monies a sum of 2500 roubles was taken for the costs of the Red Army detachment before the same procedure was repeated in the neighbouring Vershininskaia parish on 11 October.<sup>37</sup> A total of 58,650 roubles were gathered from the two parishes, part of which was to be given back to the parish party committees.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> NARK, f.P-2, op.1, d.15, l.91.

<sup>36</sup> *Olonetskaia Kommuna*, 11 January 1919. By this date up to 1000 released prisoners of war had passed through Petrozavodsk.

<sup>37</sup> NARK, f.R-29, op.1, d.81, l.141-142.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* l.143ob. On 21 November the Red Army detachment commander and the special military commissar for Pudozh and Kargopol’ districts, were reprimanded by the Olonets provincial military commissariat for the

### The continuation of the food crisis

The largest burden on local Bolsheviks was connected to the problems in the Red Army: the region's food supply crisis. Because of the non-arrival of grain to Olonets province in August and the lack of grain in the stores of the provincial and Petrozavodsk town commissariats for food local Bolsheviks resorted to their own efforts to alleviate the crisis. The Olonets provincial food commissariat decided on 2 September to permit all citizens of Petrozavodsk and other district towns to go into the countryside and purchase foodstuffs at a fixed price for personal use from the peasantry. This included grain purchases no higher than the monthly ration (fifteen *funts* for every member per family). The urban population received permission forms (*ustanovlennye blanki razreshenii*) from the provincial commissariat for food or the district commissariats for food from the 14 September, without which the buying of foodstuffs in the countryside was prohibited. Furthermore, the conveyance of foodstuffs to the towns was to be carried out unimpeded and protected from requisitioning.<sup>39</sup>

How successful this devolved but regulated venture was is unknown. It appears that the provincial food authorities temporarily passed responsibility for alleviating the food crisis onto the individual, albeit with the support and approval of the provincial government. In other words urban dwellers were responsible for gathering foodstuffs in the countryside but at fixed prices and armed with nothing but official paperwork to convince peasants to comply with the order. Naturally, without something else to offer the villages or the threat of armed force there was little incentive for peasants to sell foodstuffs who, because of price regulations, could not freely market their grain to make a profit. Town dwellers were simply being asked to do the same as the *kombedy* or the food supply detachments; they were not going to trade but seek out and take foodstuffs at fixed prices.

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repressive measures during the searches. Both were warned that any future similar act would result in them being committed to the court of the revolutionary tribunal. NARK, f.R-573, op.1, d.26, l.58.

<sup>39</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.23, l.529; *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 15 September 1918.

Still, local Bolsheviks had little option but to invent new ways of trying to solve the food shortages as they strived to gain more control over food supply. For example on 22 September local Bolsheviks complained to the People's Commissariat for Food about the food supply orders passed to the Trading union (*Optosoiuz*) which was responsible for making sure orders assigned to Olonets province were fulfilled. Because of the inaccurate size of the supply orders and their belated arrival the provincial food commissariat sent a telegram to the People's Commissariat for Food stating that the provincial food authorities would henceforth carry out its own food supply orders independently and requested that the Trading union be denied the right to fulfil supply orders for Olonets province.<sup>40</sup>

Other measures were taken by local Bolsheviks to try and ease the crisis but, were hindered by familiar obstacles. Because of the shortage of experienced workers in the food supply departments and the delay of grain supply orders arriving from the producing provinces the provincial commissariat for food passed on some of the responsibility for supply to local cooperatives. At the Fifth Olonets Provincial Congress of Soviets (25-31 January 1919) S.K. Pukhov explained that these cooperatives had the responsibility for obtaining and distributing food products. However, the provincial food commissariat's faith in the cooperatives was undermined because local soviets refused them the right to purchase food products or because the people sent by the cooperatives to make the purchases were completely inexperienced and did not know how to undertake the task.<sup>41</sup>

Although local Bolsheviks tried to make the most of what foodstuffs remained in Olonets province to ease the food crisis they still realised that the whole population could not survive without local leaders' co-ordination with the central authorities. They therefore persevered in appealing to Moscow for support. On 23 September the Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee resolved to petition Petrograd and Moscow for help in

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<sup>40</sup> RGAE, f.1943, op.3, d.101, l.299.

<sup>41</sup> *Olonetskaia Kommuna*, 29 January 1919.

easing the food crisis and to send provincial representatives to the centre to explain the local situation to the central authorities in person.<sup>42</sup> This seems to have had an immediate effect; on 26 September one of these representatives informed the Petrozavodsk town soviet that it was due to receive 26,000 *puds* of grain. However, local Bolsheviks remained sceptical of the centre's ability to keep its word and so the town soviet resolved to send a telegram to Moscow to stress that all orders for the province be supplied in full and on time.<sup>43</sup> Because of their past experiences with the central authorities Petrozavodsk was more conscientious in making sure supplies reached the town. Likewise, local Bolsheviks had learned their lesson from the previous spring and summer when grain loads destined for Petrozavodsk were appropriated or transhipped at railway stations en route. For example, the Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee sent another telegram to Moscow on 4 October asking for the urgent dispatch of grain but under armed escort. An Olonets provincial representative would meet the load at Zvanka station for its onward transfer to Petrozavodsk.<sup>44</sup>

Despite local efforts to supply the Karelian districts and a slight improvement in Bolshevik organisation to make sure grain loads being assigned to the region arrived, many parishes remained on the brink of starvation. A telegram from the Povenets district military commissar informed the provincial revolutionary executive committee on 14 October that the people of Lazarevo village in Bogoiavlenskaia parish were leaving for the Murmansk region because they believed it to be better supplied.<sup>45</sup> At the end of the year Petrozavodsk informed Moscow and Petrograd that episodes of people moving to areas occupied by the Allies had increased because of the lack of food under the soviets.<sup>46</sup> Povenets district was

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<sup>42</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.23, l.557.

<sup>43</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 4 October 1918.

<sup>44</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.23, l.566.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* l.585.

<sup>46</sup> NARK, f.R-98, op.1, d.64, l.78. At the Second Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference in December a representative from Povenets district noted that because of the food shortages one peasant society near the front line had defected to the area occupied by the Allies. NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.8, l.23.

particularly affected by starvation in mid-October and because of this disease in the area spread. On 19 October Petrozavodsk received a telegram from Povenets which stated that the members of the Petrovsko-Iamskaia and Porosozerskaia parish soviets were ill and bedridden. The district executive committee begged for grain and asked the provincial authorities to petition Petrograd and Moscow on their behalf to dispatch ten carriage loads of grain, under armed escort, within a week.<sup>47</sup> The effect of food shortages was also felt in Pudozh district. The Olonets provincial *Izvestiia* reported on 1 November that an unprecedented epidemic had taken hold in Kenozero village, Trikhnovskaia parish; 23 people were already dead, the village had no doctors and the hospital in the neighbouring Vershininskaia parish had no medicines.<sup>48</sup>

Amidst the chaos local Bolsheviks tried to introduce some kind of order and pinpointed some of the failings which could be improved in the food commissariat. Following I.F. Petrov's resignation S.K. Pukhov refused to take up his new post as provincial commissar for food because of the poor running of the food board; almost all food stores were manned by people working on their own, who were illiterate and who did not compile any accounts. Therefore the food board's bookkeeping was incomplete and even had outstanding paper work for 1917. On 7 December Pukhov demanded the appointment of an auditing committee (*Revizionnaia Komissiia*) to fully investigate the finances of the storehouses and premises of the food board. Until this was done Pukhov categorically refused to take up his position as provincial commissar for food.<sup>49</sup>

At the very least Pukhov was taking a stand to try and eradicate the food commissariat's failings. However, identifying problems was far easier than fixing them. The Bolsheviks did not have enough capable individuals to go around which brought

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<sup>47</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.23, l.590.

<sup>48</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 1 November 1918.

<sup>49</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.23, l.700.

disorganisation to the food commissariat and its departments and failed to alleviate or made worse the shortages in the region. Local Bolsheviks had a number of ongoing projects but did not have the personnel locally or enough central support to be able to effectively staff institutions such as the *kombedy*, the food supply detachments, registration control commissions, the Red Army and the Cheka, not to mention the running of soviets and party committees. At the First Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference in August Pukhov's predecessor, I.F. Petrov, noted the food commissariat's lack of workers because the most able had been sent around the province 'for the organisation of the village poor'. As a result, there were no employees in the commissariat for food who sympathised with the Bolshevik party.<sup>50</sup> Personnel problems remained an issue of concern at the Second Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference where a party representative expressed his concern about the selection of workers in local food supply committees: 'We need to think more about the selection [of workers], while remembering the important role of food supply agents at the current time...'<sup>51</sup> The disorganisation of the food board and the need for a more capable staff was illustrated further by the initial findings of the auditing committee requested by Pukhov. It found that because of the late arrival of monetary accounts from the districts and parishes, which were also considered to be poorly organised, the combined debt to the provincial commissariat for food was approaching one million roubles.<sup>52</sup>

Despite Pukhov's complaints he did take up his position as the provincial commissar for food. Nevertheless, shortages continued and he experienced similar problems to his predecessor: the late and inadequate arrival of supplies and an inability to supply all the Karelian districts effectively. Out of a planned 674 carriage loads of grain designated to Olonets province for October, November and December 1918 only 161

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<sup>50</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.2, l.15.

<sup>51</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 17 December 1918.

<sup>52</sup> *Olonetskaia Kommuna*, 18 January 1919.

arrived, or 24% of the planned order.<sup>53</sup> On 11 December a military report for the Petrograd district noted that Povenets district's population was feeding itself almost exclusively on straw and moss. Ruzozerskaia and Porozozerskaia parishes were particularly bad which was made worse by Spanish flu and a typhus epidemic. The report noted that the majority of those who fell ill were dying.<sup>54</sup> Similar problems were noted in Olonets district. A session of the second Vidlitskaia parish congress of soviets on 17 December learned that the local population in a few villages were mixing flour and baked bread with straw, sawdust and other surrogates which in turn endangered the civilians' health.<sup>55</sup> The Bolshevik authorities therefore struggled to gain control of food supply and as a result the local population suffered. The food crisis provoked peasant revolts before the end of the year, but the shortages were only one longer term cause of this unrest; the intrusion of the *kombedy* also contributed to discontent in the countryside.

### **The *kombedy*: employees, tax and mills**

Despite consolidating its position in the provincial and district soviets before the end of the year the party struggled to exert its influence over the peasantry. As a lever of control the *kombedy* were unable to improve food distribution, lacked any formal revenue and were compelled to rely ever more on force. The belated appearance of the *kombedy* in parts of the countryside, a lack of dedicated Bolshevik personnel within them and poor communication with the districts were also constant problems facing the *kombedy* and local party workers. On 2 October a Bolshevik organiser sent to Pudozh informed the Bureau of the party Central Committee that there were few *kombedy* in this district. Indeed

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<sup>53</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 406. September to October was particularly disappointing in terms of grain loads received from other provinces: 370 carriage loads of rye grain and 49 of flour were expected from Kursk province but only 92 carriage loads of oats arrived; 80 carriage loads of rye grain and 19 of flour were expected from Viatka but not a single load arrived; and 80 carriage loads of rye grain and 48 of flour were expected from Tambov but only 20 loads of rye and 13 of flour were received. November told a similar story: 10 carriage loads of wheat flour and 1 of groats (*krupy*) due to arrive from Voronezh did not arrive and a further 20 carriage loads of wheat flour expected from Samara in November also did not arrive. RGAE, f.1943, op.1, d.290, l.23.

<sup>54</sup> RGVA, f.9, op.4, d.23, l.21.

<sup>55</sup> NARK, f.P-13, op.1, d.10, l.32-33.

he proclaimed that there was ample work for a few Bolshevik organisers in the region but he was compelled to work alone to establish more *kombedy*.<sup>56</sup> Communications with the countryside were also problematic. On 4 October 1918 the Pudozh district food board asked all parish soviet executive committees to report when *kombedy* had been created, where and how many existed. However, by 17 October some parishes had still not replied.<sup>57</sup>

The evidence available for Karelia suggests that some *kombedy* members were a mixture of former soldiers who had served in the war, individuals who had returned to their home villages from working in Petrograd and local peasant activists.<sup>58</sup> Statistics drawn from questionnaires filled out by the delegates at the First Congress of *Kombedy* of the Northern Region in November also suggest that the majority of *kombedy* members in Karelia were settled inhabitants. The questionnaires revealed that from a total of 718 delegates questioned from Olonets province, 86% were local individuals and 75% were married.<sup>59</sup> 72% of the delegates also answered that they were peasants who worked the land (*khlebopashets-krest'ianin*) and only 13% recorded their profession as being that of 'workers'. The wealth of the congress delegates also indicates that members of the *kombedy* were settled peasants; 19% had a house and some land while the majority, 75%, had a house, land and livestock.<sup>60</sup> Further statistics from the congress in Petrograd point out that the Bolshevik party was only ever loosely in control of the *kombedy*; not one *kombedy* delegate questioned from Olonets province had been a Bolshevik party member

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<sup>56</sup> *Perepiska*. Vol.4. 296.

<sup>57</sup> NARK, f.R-106, op.1, d.12, l.107.

<sup>58</sup> On the members of the *kombedy* in the parishes and villages see the memoirs of: I.V Mednikov from Vidlitskaia parish in Olonets district; M.V. Larionov from Spasopreobrazhenskaia parish in Petrozavodsk district; P.I. Varshukov from Tolvuiskaia parish in Petrozavodsk district; N.G. Kupriianov from Sennogubaskaia parish in Petrozavodsk district; S.I. Nesterov from Miandusel'gaskaia parish in Povenets district; and T.M. Bunev from Vodlozerskaia parish in Pudozh district in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 143-147; 163; 175-177; 182; 209; 213.

<sup>59</sup> *Komitety Bednoty Severnoi Oblasti*. 425. Of course, it has not been possible to dissect these figures for the Karelian districts alone so are an approximate guide. Figures below, in footnote 61, suggest that discrepancies are small.

<sup>60</sup> *Komitety Bednoty Severnoi Oblasti*. 426.

before the October revolution.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, out of a total of 299 delegates questioned from the Karelian districts at the congress only 7% were communists.<sup>62</sup> Finally, a significant minority of *kombedy* members in Olonets province had experience of serving in parish soviets (30%).<sup>63</sup>

Evidence from the Karelian districts emphasises the need for caution when generalising about Bolshevik institutions such as the *kombedy* because local populations had different experiences. Some *kombedy* served a useful purpose. For example, a village *kombed* in Olonets district decided to construct a blacksmith's workshop, a sawmill and repair the local grain mill. Furthermore, the same *kombed* provided two *puds* of grain for the families of two peasants sent to form model regiments of the village poor at the end of November 1918 (see below) and distributed the remaining 13 *puds* which it had gathered around 179 other families.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, despite the differences found from region to region, many features of the *kombedy* were ultimately the same; in the absence of many responsible and dedicated Bolshevik cadres a number of *kombedy* members abused their positions, clashed with the soviets and the peasantry and became hated figures in the countryside. Because of this the *kombedy* were phased out following the Sixth All-Russian Congress of Soviets (see below and Chapter 7).<sup>65</sup>

An example of why the *kombedy* acquired a negative reputation surfaced in Karelia at the end of October when the new head of the Olonets provincial Cheka, Oskar Kanter,

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 424.

<sup>62</sup> G.N. Bogdanova, "Organizatsii i Deiatel'nost' Komitetov Bednoty v Karelii." *Voprosy Istorii Karelii*, No.22, 1959. 25. From a total of 718 delegates representing the whole of Olonets province 13% were communists. *Komitety Bednoty Severnoi Oblasti*. 422.

<sup>63</sup> *Komitety Bednoty Severnoi Oblasti*. 429.

<sup>64</sup> Memoirs of F.I. Egorov in Gardin, et al, *Vlast' Sovetov*. 133. Aaron Retish has also indicated that the local population's encounters with the *kombedy* varied from village to village and some *kombedy* genuinely attempted to improve conditions in their villages. *Russia's Peasants*. 197-198.

<sup>65</sup> For more information on the *kombedy* in other provinces, which also emphasises the institution's arbitrary and often antagonistic methods see the recent regional studies of the civil war and more specialised works on the revolution and civil war: Figes, *Peasant Russia*. 188-199; Raleigh, *Civil War*. 317-320; Retish, *Russia's Peasants*. 192-201; Landis, *Bandits and Partisans*. 13-14; Malle, *War Communism*. 368-369; Lih, *Bread and Authority*. 176.

expressed his concerns about the composition of the *kombedy*. On 30 October 1918 he informed the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik party committee that the *kombed* in Ialguba village, Petrozavodsk district, was unreliable because relatives of *kombed* members were favoured. For instance, one citizen of Ialguba had a large amount of goods requisitioned only for the bulk of it to be distributed to the wives of the *kombed* members.<sup>66</sup> Kanter believed that the reason for the inefficiency of the Ialguba *kombed* was poor Bolshevik party organisation; the party had no suitable premises to hold meetings, a problem, incidentally, that the village *kombed* did nothing to remedy. Kanter therefore called for an investigation into the *kombed* of Ialguba village.<sup>67</sup>

The scope for *kombed* members to act irresponsibly was broadened because of the institution's financial constraints. Broadly speaking, very few *kombedy* received financial aid from higher authorities and instead relied on financing themselves by taxing local enterprises or simply had no formal revenue at all. The introduction of a national 10 billion rouble Revolutionary tax (*Chrezvychainyi nalog*) marked a shift in the financial fortunes of the *kombedy* but at the same time aggravated its relationship with the peasant population. Sanctioned by the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, on the 30 October 1918, the tax's primary goal was to raise funds for the Red Army but it also aimed to continue the class struggle by focusing on the urban and rural bourgeoisie while exempting the poor. As a result, the tax had not only financial but political significance.<sup>68</sup> The decree opened up the door for the *kombedy* to obtain money from the population because the *kombedy* took part in the creation of parish, village and peasant settlement tax commissions, introduced

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<sup>66</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 441.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> N.G. Sokolov, "Nalogovaia Politika v Dereвне v Pervye Gody Sovetskoi Vlasti (1917-1920 gg.) *Istoricheskie zapiski*, Vol.113, 1986. 86. Olonets province was required to contribute 15 million roubles to the total sum. *Olonetskaia Kommuna*, 1 March 1919. This was the lowest of all the provinces assigned a quota to fulfil. For the set target of all the provinces see V.M. Antonov-Saratovskii, *Sovety v Epokhu Voennogo Kommunizma (1918-1921)*. *Sbornik Dokumentov*. Vol.1. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Kommunisticheskoi Akademii, 1928. 76.

local tax levies and were officially in charge of tax collection.<sup>69</sup> Because of the ambiguity surrounding the definition of what constituted a ‘poor peasant’ or a ‘*kulak*’ the grounds for imposing arbitrary taxes on the population by highhanded *kombedy* members widened and the relationship between the *kombedy* and the peasantry became increasingly strained. This was exacerbated by the use or threat of force exercised by the *kombedy* when it undertook its duties. For example, a local peasant remembered that a Red Guard detachment helped the Spasopreobrazhenskaia parish *kombedy* gather the Revolutionary tax.<sup>70</sup>

In Karelia the *kombedy* began collecting taxes even prior to the introduction of the Revolutionary tax. On 11 October a Bolshevik sympathiser cell in Nekkul’skaia parish, Olonets district, entrusted a village *kombed* with the collection of 4010 roubles from seventeen individuals believed to be more prosperous; the money would be used to support the *kombed* up to the 1 January, 1919.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, on 20 October the Vodlozerskaia parish soviet executive committee in Pudozh district entrusted the *kombedy* with the collection of an income-tax from the propertied classes in accordance with local directives only a few days earlier. However, this executive committee also called a general parish meeting to explain the purpose of the tax.<sup>72</sup>

Regardless of the introduction of the Revolutionary tax, difficulties arose in the paying of *kombedy* members which naturally undermined the effectiveness of the institution. On the 5 November, the chairman of the Kolodozerskaia parish *kombed* in Pudozh district informed the district food board that his *kombed* needed financial help to pay its members.<sup>73</sup> On the 21 November the provincial commissar for food, S.K. Pukhov, wrote to the Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee stating that the

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<sup>69</sup> Sokolov, “Nalogovaia Politika”. 86-87; Figes, *Peasant Russia*. 196. This tax, which apportioned varying targets to separate provinces in terms of population, is also discussed by Retish, *Russia’s Peasants*. 198-200.

<sup>70</sup> Memoirs of M.V. Larionov in Gardin, et al., *Vlast’ Sovetov*. 161.

<sup>71</sup> Mashezerskii, *Bor’ba*. 426-427.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* 445.

<sup>73</sup> NARK, f.R-106, op.1, d.12, l.243.

provincial food board received daily demands for the issue of a salary to *kombedy* members.<sup>74</sup> The following day the provincial revolutionary executive committee discussed this payment question. The provincial food board believed that work in the *kombedy* should be paid because it was a time consuming job and dragged its members away from their own agricultural work. At the same time because there had been no instructions from Moscow or elsewhere concerning this finance problem and there was no means to rectify it with the local budget the provincial food board was forced to refuse the issue of a salary to *kombedy* members. The issue was then referred to the Northern Regional Bolshevik Party Committee in Petrograd for clarification on how to pay *kombedy* members.<sup>75</sup>

Trying to combine work in the *kombedy* with its members' own work therefore proved difficult. The Sviatozerskaia parish *kombed* in Petrozavodsk district appealed to the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik party committee on the 21 November for extra manpower to locate and requisition grain; help was needed because the parish *kombed* only had two people for the task but they had preoccupations with their own work outside of the *kombed*.<sup>76</sup> On the 23 November the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik party committee received further evidence of the difficulties in combining *kombedy* work with members' other work. The Murmansk railroad Bolshevik party committee asked for an organiser of a *kombed* to be released from his duties because he was an important employee of the Murmansk railroad Cheka.<sup>77</sup>

The introduction of an order from the capital putting tax collection at the disposal of the *kombedy* meant they could use this legislation as a lever to gain influence and authority in the countryside; this was the ideal. However, the *kombedy* only ever had, at best, marginal control because they were crippled by the basic practical necessities

<sup>74</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.23, l.670.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. l.669. The final outcome of this issue is unknown.

<sup>76</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 442.

<sup>77</sup> NARK, f.P-2, op.1, d.15, l.44.

required to make its influence felt in the countryside. This was also apparent in the efforts of the *kombedy* to gain control over food supply. As part of being responsible for registering, requisitioning and distributing food products around Olonets province Karelia's *kombedy* were given control of all grain mills in September 1918. Of course the timing of the decision was significant because it came at the same time as the harvest. On 17 September the Olonets provincial commissariat for food issued a circular in the Olonets provincial *Izvestiia* to all district, town and parish executive committees and *kombedy* stating that all mills would be confiscated without compensation and transferred to the authority of the *kombedy*. If a *kombedy* had not been formed then the mills were to be placed provisionally under the charge of the local cooperative.<sup>78</sup>

The transfer of grain mills to the *kombedy* was designed to give the Bolsheviks more control in food supply distribution which would be facilitated by efforts to improve communications and knowledge between the countryside and the district and provincial centres. In practical terms the *kombedy* were responsible for the supervision of grinding grain into flour in the mills and were required to report monthly to the district and town executive committees regarding the amount of grain ground over the previous month in each mill. In turn the district and town soviet executive committees were required to pass the information onto the Olonets provincial commissariat for food. The *kombedy* were also required to elect three members from amongst themselves and form a food board. This board would then be placed in charge of administering individual mills. However, like the Bolsheviks' other food supply policies, noted in Chapter 4, the party were compelled to couple the introduction of their orders with the threat of force; anyone obstructing the transfer of mills to the *kombedy* would be brought before the revolutionary tribunal and have all their property confiscated.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 434-435.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

With other Bolshevik orders issued from the capital or Petrozavodsk, local conditions meant that the decree was interpreted according to the needs and assessment of local individuals. On 2 October 1918, at a general gathering of village *kombedy* members from Sviatozerskaia parish in Petrozavodsk district, the vast majority of representatives decided that the mills in the parish should remain the property of their current owners but the *kombedy* would have close control over them. The mill owners and managers of the mills were responsible for receiving the grain, grinding it and then handing it back to whoever had brought it. However, the grain would only be accepted upon the presentation of a ticket received from the village *kombedy* which stated the weight and quality of the grain to be ground. The mill owners were held responsible for any repairs the mills required but from the money received from grinding the grain, which was set at 30 kopecks per *pud*, the mill owners would receive 20 kopecks. The *kombedy* would keep the remaining 10 kopecks.<sup>80</sup> The improvised implementation of this directive most probably made more sense to the village peasants; the task of grinding grain remained with individuals who could do the job and mill owners were responsible for any costly repairs that may be required. On the other hand the task of the *kombedy* was primarily supervisory which freed its members from becoming over burdened working for an institution that struggled to pay its members.

Resistance to the strict nationalisation of mills was not isolated. On 25 October *kombedy* representatives in Kizhskaia parish, Petrozavodsk district, adopted a similar position to the peasants of Sviatozerskaia; they refused to take mills away from their owners but chose to place them under the strict administrative control of the *kombedy*.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, some villages did accept the need to nationalise the mills, for example in Boiarskaia parish, Pudozh district. However, other problems specific to that region surfaced to undermine the *kombedy*. On the 12 November 1918 the Pudozh district food

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 437-438.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 440.

board received a telegram from Boiarskaia parish stating that the parish had one mill, which was working at full speed under the control of a village *kombed* which also supplied the mill with fuel. It appears that this region was relatively well supplied in grain at the time because the telegram stated that the parish mill could not cope with serving the whole population. Instead Boairskaia parish had to rely on a large part of its ground grain coming from two neighbouring parishes: Krasnovskaia and Bogdanovskaia (the latter was in Kargopol' district). The parish executive committee therefore proposed the construction of two new mills, only then would the parish be able to satisfactorily supply the local population.<sup>82</sup>

### **Sowing discontent and the militarization of the *kombedy***

The *kombed* project was undermined by a number of practical obstacles which centred on a lack of human and material resources in the periphery and the bulk of evidence available from the Karelian districts indicates that the *kombedy* were institutions which the peasantry resented. A citizen of Siamozerskaia parish, Petrozavodsk district, wrote to the Petrozavodsk district soviet on the 1 January 1919 complaining that in his absence, at the end of the previous November, a chest belonging to him had been forced open by the order of the chairman of the Priezha village *kombed*. The contents of the chest, mainly clothes, linen and general household items, were then distributed between the members of the *kombedy* and some of the villagers. This happened despite his wife producing a sealed certificate from the Petrozavodsk district soviet which stated that the chest and its contents should not to be confiscated; the *kombed* took the certificate but it was never returned. The owner of the chest protested that the chairman of the *kombed* had committed an illegal act and that the loss had deprived himself and his family of their clothes and linen.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> NARK, f.R-106, op.1, d.12, l.262.

<sup>83</sup> NARK, f.R-639, op.1, d.165, l.10.

The commissar for post and telegraphs of Porosozerskaia parish, Povenets district, also had reason to complain about a local *kombed*. On 20 November the provincial revolutionary committee learned at one of its sessions that the *kombed* had requisitioned the last supplies of bread from drivers delivering the post. Because of this communications had come to a halt. The Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee therefore decided to order all district soviets to prohibit any similar occurrences happening in the future and to make sure drivers received the fixed food supply ration. The committee could not assign new drivers because of the lack of forage for the draught animals.<sup>84</sup>

Further evidence suggests that once established the *kombedy* became more militarised in order to fulfil their obligations. In Povenets district, no later than 26 September 1918, a village *kombed* in Miandusel'gaskaia parish asked the Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee to send it weapons, ammunition and an instructor to form an armed militia. The *kombed* members pointed out that in the village 'the life of the poor is becoming impossible because of the *kulaks*, speculators, saboteurs and counter-revolutionaries agitating amongst the poor against the authority of the Soviets.'<sup>85</sup> In response Petr Anokhin forwarded the request onto the Olonets provincial military commissar, Dubrovskii, to see if he could meet the request; Dubrovskii then sent thirteen rifles and a corresponding number of cartridges to the *kombed*.<sup>86</sup>

Finally, the militarised character of the *kombedy* was evident at the First Congress of *Kombedy* of the Northern Region in November 1918; nearly 30% of the questioned delegates from Olonets province at the congress were in military service.<sup>87</sup> This was significant for the immediate future as the militarization of *kombedy* went hand-in-hand with the institution's effective dissolution as many of its most active members were

<sup>84</sup> NARK, f.R-323, op.1, d.24, l.6.

<sup>85</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 443.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* 444.

<sup>87</sup> *Komitety Bednoty Severnoi Oblasti*. 428.

compelled to join the ranks of the Red Army. The Northern Regional Congress of *Kombedy* resolved on 5 November to create special model regiments of the village poor. Every *kombed* was ordered to appoint two ‘reliable’ peasants before sending them to the military commissariat in Petrograd by 23 November. The decision to form these regiments all over the country was approved at the subsequent Sixth All-Russian Congress of Soviets (6-9 November 1918) on the proposal of this regional congress.<sup>88</sup> The regiments’ formation was discussed at a session of the Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee on 15 November which resolved to send copies of the telegram received from Petrograd, which ordered the creation of these regiments, to all district soviets, the military commissariat and the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik party committee. The order placed emphasis on the need to create these regiments hastily.<sup>89</sup> On 20 November, the Petrozavodsk town Bolshevik party committee decided to send a total of 25 individuals around Olonets province to organise the model regiments and to reorganise the parish soviets.<sup>90</sup>

It was at the Sixth All-Russian Congress of Soviets on 9 November that the Bolshevik leadership decided to hold re-elections to parish and village soviets and merge the *kombedy* with them.<sup>91</sup> In essence it signalled the failure of the *kombedy* in the countryside but it also reflected the Bolsheviks’ wish to salvage what they could from the project. Leading Bolsheviks wished to increase the size of the Red Army and sought to use the *kombedy* to achieve this aim by appointing its best employees before the merger with local soviets began in earnest.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, the move to create model regiments of the village poor reflected the capitals’ objective to further centralise state control. As noted

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<sup>88</sup> NARK, f.P-2, op.1, d.14, l.84; *Komitety Bednoty Severnoi Oblasti* . 351-352; 399-400.

<sup>89</sup> NARK, f.R-323, op.1, d.25, l.28.

<sup>90</sup> RGASPI, f.67, op.1, d.69, l.60. The reorganisation of the parish soviets was another resolution made at the First All-Russian Congress of *Kombedy*. *Komitety Bednoty Severnoi Oblasti*. 400-402. For more on this reorganisation see Chapter 7.

<sup>91</sup> *Dekrety*. Vol. 3. 540-541.

<sup>92</sup> Lenin had called for a Red Army of three million men on 3 October 1918. V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed., Vol.37. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoi Literatury, 1963.

above, model regiments of the village poor were not to remain in the Karelian districts to fight against the Allies but were required to travel to Petrograd before being dispatched elsewhere.

The success of the order to establish model regiments of the village poor depended on the ability of the periphery to implement it but the regiments' formation was hindered by now familiar problems of early Soviet state building. On 22 November the provincial military commissariat wrote to the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik Party Committee about the appointment of three commissariat members for agitation work around the province and the formation of the model regiments: 'The three mentioned comrades hold responsible posts and if they are appointed to work routinely in the commissariat then the fixed mobilisation between the 20 and 28 of November, will come to a complete halt.'<sup>93</sup> As a result the military commissariat asked the party committee to take on the responsibility for forming the model peasant regiments themselves.<sup>94</sup>

Ia.K. Berztys, a leading member of the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik Party Committee also complained to the Northern Regional Party Committee that although his committee had sent agitators around the province for propaganda purposes many of the *kombedy* 'no doubt containing *kulaks*' viewed these new regiments as enemies, as former penal regiments (*byvshie arestanskije polki*), with a malevolent element within them which affected recruitment. Berztys however recognised that it was the task of the agitators sent around the districts to disperse such opinions.<sup>95</sup> On the other hand the dispatch of agitators was held back by financial difficulties. On 22 November the Olonets provincial soviet revolutionary executive committee concluded that it did not have the means to support the agitators appointed around the province for the organisation of model regiments of the

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<sup>93</sup> NARK, f.P-2, op.1, d.15, l.31.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> RGASPI, f.67, op.1, d.69, l.67.

village poor. As a result the committee decided to cut down the number of agitators to lessen the overall costs of their appointment throughout the province.<sup>96</sup>

The concluding period of the *kombedy* project which began in November 1918 therefore reflected the problems which plagued the institution from the start; its intrusion in the countryside was generally resisted and it was undermined by a lack of human and material resources. It did not give the Bolsheviks' control over the parishes but instead contributed to a sequence of peasant rebellions in Karelia before the end of the year.

### **Peasant unrest**

Given the pressures upon them caused by the food shortages, army mobilisation, requisitioning and the intrusion of the *kombedy* the people of Karelia rose up in open revolt against the Bolshevik regime. In Olonets district the local population remained burdened, after their previous short lived rebellion in June, by tax levies and food shortages. A military report for Olonets district in December 1918 described the food supply situation there as 'mournful' because bread products were only being released in insignificant amounts. The town population was struggling to survive on small rations of oat and rye flour, some potatoes and a small amount of meat while those in the parishes were living almost exclusively on potatoes and dairy products.<sup>97</sup> F.I. Egorov, the Bolshevik chairman of the Olonets district revolutionary executive committee, recalled that a number of parishes had been affected by the year's poor harvest and many peasants were attempting to make bread with a mixture of flour and sawdust. Egorov also noted: 'the supply norms were the absolute minimum, the receipt of food and the issuing of rations was often delayed...the food board was regularly besieged with crowds of starving people.'<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> NARK, f.P-2, op.1, d.15, l.57.

<sup>97</sup> NARK, f.R-573, op.1, d.155, l.42.

<sup>98</sup> Memoirs of F.I. Egorov in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 135.

Because of a lack of support from elsewhere the Olonets district revolutionary executive committee tried to alleviate the problem by organising an independent scheme for the purchase of livestock; a register of herds was carried out and a prohibition placed on the private sale of livestock.<sup>99</sup> How successful this was is unknown but nevertheless new reasons for discontent amongst the population materialised in the form of opposition to Red Army mobilisation and requisitions of supplies, including clothing, at the onset of winter.<sup>100</sup> The combination of taxes, mobilisation, food shortages and requisitioning provoked the outbreak of a peasant rebellion in Vedlozerskaia parish on 16 December 1918.

Originating in Savinovskoe peasant society a small group of local individuals instigated the uprising and managed to rouse the entire parish against the local military commissariat and the soviet. The latter, consisting of communists and communist sympathisers was routed and a soviet militia man was killed.<sup>101</sup> The unrest also spread to a number of other peasant societies within the parish and a rebellion broke out in Rypushkal'skaia parish during the same month.<sup>102</sup> In order to quell the uprising the Bolsheviks used both hard and more conciliatory tactics; the district revolutionary executive committee carried out agitation work in the border parishes while a Red Guard detachment of around 100 men was dispatched from Olonets town to suppress it by force.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid. 135-136.

<sup>100</sup> NARK, f.R-573, op.1, d.155, l.42. On 25 October the Olonets provincial executive committee resolved to elect a commission to implement the recent decree which it had received from the Northern Regional government to requisition warm items for the Red Army. *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 24 October 1918. NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.19, l.382. The commission met on 13 November and resolved to entrust the requisitioning in the towns to town soviets and its departments, and in the parishes to the *kombedy* and the parish executive committees but under the supervision of the district soviet executive committees. NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.66, l.197.

<sup>101</sup> Iarov, *Krest'ianin Kak Politik*. 168.

<sup>102</sup> Korablev, et al., *Istorii Karelii*. 393.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.; Memoirs of F.I. Egorov in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 136-137; NARK f.R-29, op.1, d.175, l.1. The suppression of the rebellion is also mentioned in Chapter 5.

A numerically larger peasant rebellion took place in early December, this time across the Zaonezh'e peninsula.<sup>104</sup> The poor food supply situation again prompted discontent. On the 2 November 1918 the provincial commissar for food, I.F. Petrov, reported in the local *Izvestiia* that supplying vital products to the region was extremely difficult and there was little hope that the situation would improve in the future.<sup>105</sup> A member of the Povenets district executive committee also believed the rebellion was motivated by opposition to the *kombedy*.<sup>106</sup> However the introduction of the military draft proved to be the final straw. A Bolshevik agitator, A.P Sidorov, reported the details of the uprisings to the provincial executive committee based on a trip around the parishes of the peninsula. According to his report he arrived in Shungskaia parish on the evening of the 4 December and found out that disturbances had been taking place there for the past four days, the reasons for which were largely caused by army mobilisation. 'Unfeasible demands' were set by mobilised soldiers which included provision for their families, bread and other allowances for their families and themselves, good footwear, weapons, uniforms and transportation by carts or by boat to Povenets town.<sup>107</sup>

The mobilised men refused to move and began to threaten the local authorities. The soldiers then called a meeting which resulted in the disbandment and disarming of the local *kombedy*; a few members of the *kombedy* were then beaten up, their flats searched and various accusations and slanders cast against them. The rebels also threatened to burn down the building of the military commissariat. At the height of the revolt an agitator from Petrograd arrived but was denied the opportunity to speak. However, the telegraph line, which had been cut on 30 November, was fixed on the 1 December which allowed contact to be made with Povenets town and the Petrograd official requested the dispatch of an

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<sup>104</sup> The parishes of the Zaonezh'e peninsula were all part of Petrozavodsk district with the exception of Shungskaia parish which was part of Povenets district.

<sup>105</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 2 November 1918.

<sup>106</sup> Memoirs of F.E. Pottoev in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 202.

<sup>107</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.82, l.39.

armed detachment. 70 troops with two machine guns were sent.<sup>108</sup> Upon their arrival the uprising in Shungskaia parish was suppressed and its ringleaders placed under arrest.<sup>109</sup>

Yet this did not put an end to the civil unrest in the region as the mood of rebellion spread south to Tolvuiskaia parish. On 5 December Sidorov arrived in the parish and took part in a village soviet meeting where he attempted to explain the significance of mobilisation and find out why the disturbance had occurred. The following day Red Army and local communist party representatives clarified that the uprising had occurred simultaneously with the revolt in Shungskaia and was instigated by a few members of the parish soviet executive committee and 'the prosperous class'. The army and party representatives decided to arrest the instigators. On 7 December Sidorov was again on the move upon receiving information that a rebellion had also taken place in Velikogubskaia parish.<sup>110</sup> Upon arrival here Sidorov made contact with the local military commissar and the chairman of the local executive committee to find out what had occurred. He attended and spoke at a peasant congress on 8 December and was joined by a representative of the Bolshevik party from Petrograd. However, Sidorov struggled to keep the gathered crowds at bay who called for him to be dragged to the nearest hole in the ice. The peasants then threw various slanders at the local soviet and the military commissar who was accused of taking bribes. The gathering then became more heated and the peasants decided to disarm the military commissariat and fight against the governing authorities.<sup>111</sup>

At this point the military commissar refused to hand over his weapon and four Red Army men arrived. The crowds, feeling intimidated, left the congress. However, the following day one of the peasants travelled around the countryside gathering signatures in support of the resolution to disarm the military commissariat. The authorities likewise did

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<sup>108</sup> Memoirs of F.E. Pottoev in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 202.

<sup>109</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.82, l.39-39ob.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. l.39ob-40.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. l.40-40ob.

not remain idle; Sidorov, awaiting political and armed reinforcements from Petrozavodsk, continued to gauge the mood of the peninsula's peasantry by attending another heated village gathering. By the time he returned to Velikogubskaja shortly thereafter the reinforcements from Petrozavodsk had arrived. Sidorov then proposed the convening of a joint meeting of the representatives of all governing organisations in the area, including the Cheka, in order to draw up a list of 'saboteurs' and 'speculators' to be passed over to members of an investigatory commission.<sup>112</sup> Discontent on the Zaonezh'e peninsula continued to simmer as Sidorov continued his rounds, attending further heated peasant gatherings from the 19 to 23 December. In his report Sidorov described the general mood of the populace to be fickle with anger vented at local military commissars and members of the *kombedy*.<sup>113</sup> In conclusion he believed that all the uprisings in the peninsula were linked and that special messengers, paid by the peasants, had been sent around the parishes to coordinate the rebellions which were sparked by grain shortages and the army draft.<sup>114</sup>

Thus the rebellions on the Zaonezh'e peninsula in December 1918 were the result of a combination of factors. The recurring food shortages proved to be the base for general discontent in the region which was sparked into open revolt by the Bolsheviks' first attempt in Karelia to mobilise a local Red Army. The introduction of army mobilisation proved too much for certain sectors of the population to cope with and some peasants refused to fight for a regime which offered little to them in return. The revolts reflected the Bolsheviks failure to engage with the local population through the overly coercive and under resourced *kombedy* or local military commissariats, the very institutions which were entrusted with implementing the Bolsheviks' economic, military and political policies. In turn these institutions became the focal point of the peasants' anger. Military commissars and officials were killed in another peasant uprising in Porosozerskaia parish (Povenets

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid. 1.40ob-41.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. 1.41-41ob.

<sup>114</sup> The solution in his opinion, which he proposed to the Olonets provincial executive committee, was to support local parish soviets by strengthening agitation in the region. Ibid.

district) between December 1918 and January 1919.<sup>115</sup> The actions of the local Cheka also provided a reason for the local population of the Zanoezh'e peninsula to lose patience with the Bolshevik regime. One of the peasants arrested for being involved in the December rebellion stated under interrogation in March 1920<sup>116</sup> that he became dissatisfied with the Soviet government because in the autumn of 1918 the provincial and Povenets district Chekas fined his brother 2000 roubles for speculation and confiscated all the articles he had been trading with. Because this was not part of the 10 billion rouble Revolutionary tax, introduced in late October, both brothers were still liable to payout a further 3000 roubles.<sup>117</sup>

### **The Second Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference (10-13 December 1918)**

The use of some loyal Red Army units and a few party men meant that the Bolsheviks were ultimately strong enough to suppress the unrest in December. Nevertheless, the outbreak of the rebellions in the first instance reflected the Bolsheviks' lack of control over the Karelian parishes. At approximately the same time as the spate of peasant uprisings in Karelia the Second Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference took place.<sup>118</sup> This conference is important because it highlighted the Bolshevik party's progress in Karelia, the problems that it faced, its future objectives, the importance of local factors and its

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<sup>115</sup> For more detail on the Porosozerskaia rebellion see Memoirs of F.E. Pottov in Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 202-204. The rebellions in December 1918 occurred against the backdrop of general peasant unrest throughout the country over the previous six months, by and large because of the food detachments, the *kombedy* and army mobilisation. T.V. Osipova, "Peasant Rebellions: Origin, Scope, Dynamics and Consequences", in Brovkin, *The Bolsheviks in Russian Society*. 158-160.

<sup>116</sup> This particular individual remained at large until the next uprising in the peninsula during the spring of 1919. He was not captured and interrogated until after the region was reoccupied by the Reds in 1920.

<sup>117</sup> NARK, f.R-639, op.1, d.299, l.285-285ob. The author of the testimony does however admit that he did not pay the Revolutionary tax because he was considered to be a member of the proletariat. Nevertheless his horse was taken from him and mobilised for the Red Army.

<sup>118</sup> A total of 77 party delegates attended the Second Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference. These delegates represented 37 party organisations and approximately 4500 party members. Balagurov and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period*. 352. At the end of the conference the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik Party Committee was dissolved and replaced with an Olonets Provincial Party Committee. The following party members were elected: Gurko, P.F. Anokhin, A. Volkov, P.V. Kulagin, I. Iakovlev, I.A. Danilov, A.F. Kopnin, V.P. Matrosov, Vuorio, Laplandskii, Ia.K. Berztyts and Ia.F. Igoshkin. The probationary members were I.I. Sivkov, A.V. Dubrovskii and Sukhanov. Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 533; Balagurov and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period*. 351.

relations with the capital cities of Petrograd and Moscow. It short, it reflected the modest improvements that the regime had made since the last party conference in August but highlighted some significant problems which remained and undermined the Bolsheviks' influence across the region.

The proceedings of the party conference suggest that only limited material help was assigned to Karelia by higher Bolshevik authorities because of the need to prioritise resources. Elena Stasova, the secretary of the Northern Regional Bolshevik Party Committee, who was present at the conference, turned down the Petrozavodsk County Party Committee's request for cadres of researchers and teachers (*nauchnye sily*) from Petrograd because they were needed there. Instead Stasova stated that the local party committee would have to resort to 'self-education' (*samoobrazovanie*).<sup>119</sup> In other words the Karelian districts were compelled to fall back on their own limited resources. A representative from Pudozh town remarked at the conference that his party organisation had established a party club and canteen and organised meetings and lectures but all party work taking place outside of the town was undertaken through local means.<sup>120</sup> Furthermore, because the Petrozavodsk County Party Committee's hopes for fresh recruits from Petrograd were in vain, it resolved to bolster local military, food supply and economy departments and administrative personnel with members from local party cells.<sup>121</sup>

To repeat, the party conference portrayed a picture of small improvements but against the background of continuing setbacks to the Bolsheviks' influence and control of the Karelian region. The conference acknowledged the large growth in the number of party cells and collectives across Olonets province but regretted the hindrances placed on the development of the party because of a lack of material resources and agitators and the

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<sup>119</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op1, d.8, l.14.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. l.22.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. l.24.

inefficiency of communication between the local and party centres.<sup>122</sup> For instance, the party recognised its weakness in Olonets and Povenets districts; the representative from Olonets district pointed out the existence of continuing sympathies towards the SRs while the Povenets representative commented on the weakness of the party in his district outside of the troops from the Beloraisskii regiment.<sup>123</sup> Further evidence also suggests the party was concerned over the reliability of its new members. Previously, on 19 September, the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik Party Committee chairman pointed out to his party that ‘alien elements’ were filtering into their ranks and therefore, besides being recommended by two senior party members, the entrance of new party candidates should be subject to discussion before a confirmation hearing at a general meeting of the respective party organisation.<sup>124</sup> To help increase the party’s influence the conference resolved to improve the education and organisation of party members while making sure they paid the correct contributions.<sup>125</sup> The conference also underlined the need for ‘the strictest discipline’ of its members and a party auditing commission was elected.<sup>126</sup> In December, following a purge of party members in Olonets province, 90 members left the party.<sup>127</sup>

The lack of Bolshevik party influence in the districts and the still decentralised nature of Bolshevik power were underlined further at the party conference when party delegates stated a preference for a degree of regional self-government. The Olonets provincial commissar for internal affairs, I.A. Danilov, explained that the localities frequently disagreed with orders issued from Moscow and Petrograd but stated his belief in a regional system of government because Soviet Russia was too big to centralise all government administration. With the acquisition of further territory during the civil war Moscow would only overload itself with more requests and correspondence with the

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 526-527.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. 510.

<sup>125</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op1, d.8, l.23.

<sup>126</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 14 & 17 December 1918.

<sup>127</sup> Balagurov and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period*. 352.

provinces. These statements mirrored wider opinion amongst most, but not all, of the provinces within the Northern Region and followed the Third Northern Regional Bolshevik Party Conference (1-4 December 1918).<sup>128</sup> Elena Stasova defended a Regional government system:<sup>129</sup>

The idea of regional self-government came from below. When people's commissars were transferred to Moscow, Petrograd was besieged with requests from the localities. At present Moscow is putting spokes in our wheels and accuses us of separatism, but we continue to defend the suitability of a Northern region, based on the voice of the working people.

What Stasova meant by accusations of separatism is touched upon elsewhere but the signs suggest that friction existed between Petrograd and Moscow over matters of centralisation and regional control.<sup>130</sup> This is further confirmed by Rabinowitch's evidence that Zinoviev, Stasova and other leading Petrograd Bolsheviks all believed governing authority needed to be shared between Petrograd and Moscow after the latter became the new capital.<sup>131</sup> Regardless of relations between the two capitals the Second Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference echoed the resolutions of the Third Northern Regional Bolshevik Party Conference to support the preservation of a Northern Region.<sup>132</sup>

Although Stasova was against centralisation to Moscow she nevertheless sought to centralise the party apparatus within the Northern Region in order to increase Petrograd's control over the Northern provinces. However hindering this, Stasova proclaimed, was the nature of the party's history: 'In general we need to recognise that the long years working underground left a deep imprint on the party and it is not possible to immediately give up

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<sup>128</sup> 25 of the 121 delegates who attended were from Olonets province. For some additional information on the conference more generally see V.P. Khmelevskii, 'Tret'ia Partiinaia Konferentsiia Severnoi Oblasti (1-4 Dekarbria 1918 g.) in L.A. Stoptsova, ed., *Iz Istorii KPSS i Leningradskoi Partiinoi Organizatsii. Sbornik Statei*. Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Leningradskogo Universiteta, 1968. 75-83.

<sup>129</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 14 December 1918.

<sup>130</sup> Khmelevskii, *Severnyi*. 199-200; 202-205.

<sup>131</sup> Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power*. 260.

<sup>132</sup> For some more information on regionalism within the Northern Region the reader should see: Goldin, et al., *Russkii Sever*. 154-159.

these old practices and guidelines.<sup>133</sup> Even so, Stasova repeated the goals of the Northern Regional Party Conference; the party must be reorganised, beginning with the strict centralisation of the functions of every party cell, organisation and committee: 'Henceforth there will be no occurrences, for example, of agitators from Smolny being sent to a district without the knowledge of the provincial committee.'<sup>134</sup> However, strict centralisation throughout the regional, provincial, district and parish administrative chain depended on the ability to implement change at a local level; centralisation was conditional, based on the centre's ability to offer material, personnel or financial support. A Bolshevik party representative complained about the decision to abolish the free distribution of central party newspapers because, he said, small cells could not afford to pay for them. As a result, party work would remain the task of a narrow group of members.<sup>135</sup> Improving the financial means of the party at all levels, by being economical in the use of existing funds and overseeing the correct payment of party dues by every member, became a key party objective. To help local Bolsheviks achieve a level of financial efficiency the conference resolved to establish a finance-control apparatus.<sup>136</sup>

The success of party work locally was therefore dependent on the resources which were available in the provinces and districts. The conference resolved that its immediate objectives were to increase party agitation amongst the peasantry but, as a leading local party representative, Ia.K. Igoshkin, pointed out, agitation would inevitably fail if the peasantry was not supplied with food and other vital products.<sup>137</sup> Furthermore he noted the important link between the quality of Red Army recruits and food supply:<sup>138</sup>

All the strength of the party's struggle must be directed towards the creation of new communist cells and the development of already existing communist cells in the

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<sup>133</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 14 December 1918.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 13 December 1918.

<sup>138</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 530.

Red Army... In addition we need to develop the most intensive work amongst the masses from which new forces for our army will be drawn, that is from among the poor and middle peasantry. The party is compelled to apply all its strengths towards the settlement of the food supply problem, while understanding that “a healthy spirit is only possible in a healthy body.”

To be sure, some form of centralisation was required if the local Bolsheviks' most pressing problem, that of food supply shortages, could be solved. At the very least information flows between national, regional and provincial centres required improvement. The hunger problem was a national one but Moscow's attempts to improve the situation often had little positive effect in the Karelian districts. On 10 December Sovnarkom decided to allow all workers' and trade organisations the right, with permission of their local soviet, to buy up and import products that were not part of the food monopoly such as potatoes, milk, vegetables, poultry and fruit.<sup>139</sup> I.F. Pukhov informed the Second Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference that he hoped the formation of provincial and district purchasing commissions would help soften the province's food distribution problems.<sup>140</sup> However, people from other provinces turned to Karelia to demand the right to purchase such non-monopolised products, which the region had very little of in the first instance; what was available was required for local needs.<sup>141</sup> As a result the Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee was forced to dispatch a telegram of complaint to Petrograd to stop sending these purchasing commissions north because of the severe food situation in Olonets province and because there was not enough food even for its own population.<sup>142</sup>

There was a lack of understanding in the centre about how severe the food shortages were in Olonets province. Further evidence of this was furnished by a party representative's recent trip to Moscow. The Second Olonets Provincial Party Conference

<sup>139</sup> *Dekrety Sovetskoi Vlasti. 10 Noiabria 1918 g.-31 Marta 1919 g.* Vol. 4. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoi Literatury, 1968. 201-202.

<sup>140</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 15 December 1918.

<sup>141</sup> NARK, R-98, op.1, d.64, l.78.

<sup>142</sup> GARF, f.R-393, op.13, d.249, l.2ob-3.

found out that on V.T. Gur'ev's trip he was asked by a member of the central food commissariat how many districts of Olonets province were occupied by the English.<sup>143</sup> This was a significant concern for the Bolsheviks in Petrozavodsk because no districts of the province were occupied by the Allies at this time. Were supply loads therefore arriving in smaller and infrequent amounts because there was an assumption in the capital that only parts of Olonets province required supplies? Another party representative also expressed his astonishment at this revelation and repeated the provincial commissar for food's statement that the centre had little idea of the province's food supply requirements.<sup>144</sup> Consequently, the Olonets provincial soviet revolutionary executive committee tried to improve its food supply situation by seeking provincial representation in Moscow. On 13 January the provincial commissariat for food decided to allow one of its members, M. Polozov, to go to the capital to ask Lenin for a representative from Olonets province, with full voting rights, to be brought into the People's Commissariat for Food.<sup>145</sup>

Despite Moscow's and Petrograd's wishes for centralisation local Bolsheviks wanted the best of both worlds. In other words they desired material help from the central authorities to alleviate the food, finance and personnel shortages but at the same time wanted to avoid excessive central intrusion and retain a form of self-government in order to use these resources according to local knowledge and conditions in the periphery. At the party conference Pukhov complained that the central military and food commissariats recently ordered the Olonets provincial commissariat for food to deliver 1200 *puds* of meat and 10,000 *puds* of hay to the department of supply attached to the provincial military commissariat. Local Bolsheviks also received orders from the capital to allow local timber and factory workers the right to purchase meat (which was not part of the 10 December order above) and to create a purchasing commission attached to the department of supply

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<sup>143</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 15 December 1918.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.* 17 December 1918.

<sup>145</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.42, l.1.

which would run parallel to the purchasing commission attached to the provincial commissariat for food.<sup>146</sup>

As we shall see in Chapter 8 the centre's increased control over Petrozavodsk, in the aftermath of the Eight Bolshevik Party Congress, expressed itself when Petrograd flexed its authority over Petrozavodsk following a military crisis in the spring of 1919. Furthermore, despite local Bolsheviks' concern over the increasing encroachment on local decision making Karelia's food supply problems bound Petrozavodsk to the centre. As a grain deficit region, irrespective of local initiatives, local Bolsheviks realised, as shown above, that better communication and understanding between Petrozavodsk and Petrograd and/or Moscow were of greater importance to easing the food crisis and Karelia's problems more generally.

## **Conclusion**

The road to Bolshevik control was uneven; in the last few months of 1918 the party's control or potential for increased control was continually hamstrung by a lack of resources and the party struggled to increase its influence in the countryside. Because of the lack of a local Red Army Karelia was defended by a makeshift force of various regiments sent from Petrograd. These regiments were important in establishing a few party cells in the districts, disseminating Bolshevik propaganda, assisting the formation and work of the *kombedy* and providing members for local soviets, military commissariats and the Cheka. However, the mobilisation and maintenance of a local Red Army was near impossible because of the priority of the harvest season and the inability of the local soviets to maintain it. Food shortages continued to plague local Bolsheviks. They made every effort to make sure that some small quantities did make it to them and learned from their past experiences; they now continued to complain and lobby the capital for supplies and requested armed escorts

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<sup>146</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 15 December 1918.

for their designated loads which would be met at key stations en route to make sure they were not transhipped elsewhere. They also sought to gain more control over domestic imports by increasing their influence in the central supply organs. A nucleus of dedicated party workers in Petrozavodsk constantly worked to try and solve the region's administrative and material problems. In a letter to a fellow party member on 18 December, Elena Stasova recognised the problems of food supply in Olonets province but commended the local party workers she met at the recent provincial party conference:<sup>147</sup>

I left the conference with the most gratifying feeling because, in the first place, it is evident that in Olonets province there are very good workers in the centre who strain every nerve to make sure soviet and party work is up to scratch. True, there are a lot of shortcomings, but it is little wonder because life puts more and more demands on soviet and party workers, makes our goals more complex, but does not give us any more people [to tackle these challenges].

However, in spite of the efforts of individuals in Petrozavodsk, by the end of the year the Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee remained weakened by chronic food shortages; part of the population of Povenets district faced famine, some peasants were dying of starvation and disease while others went over to Allied held territory. The prestige of the local regime was undermined by its inability to ease these shortages, made worse by the intrusion of the *kombedy* in the countryside. The end result against the background of Karelia's first general mobilisation campaign was wide-scale peasant revolt. In short, the Bolsheviks appeared to be little better off than the previous summer when they faced similar economic, social and military problems.

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<sup>147</sup> *Perepiska*. Vol.5. 266.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Consolidating Power (II): The Role of the Cheka, August-December 1918**

This chapter will focus on the last four to five months of 1918 and show that despite continuing chaos there were signs that the Bolsheviks were laying further foundations to tighten their control over the Karelian districts. One sign came in the form of the declaration of the Red Terror by the Bolshevik government on 5 September 1918. From this point onwards repression became an official instrument of governance that the Bolsheviks could use to consolidate and expand their influence. A study of Karelia suggests that the intensity of the Red Terror outside the capital depended on local conditions and so the unruly period of the Cheka, in the few months after the declaration of the terror decree, was extreme in some instances but short in duration. However, the Cheka in Karelia was notably undisciplined and so the Bolsheviks took “one step forward” by reforming it. In early October 1918 a new provincial Cheka was elected and a more unruly Cheka chairman was replaced with a more disciplined appointment, Oskar K. Kanter. This reform of the Cheka proved an essential prerequisite for the consolidation of Bolshevik rule and its origins go back to the summer of 1918. From this time it is possible to trace the malpractice which individual Chekists were involved in and how this was gradually stamped out under Kanter’s chairmanship of the provincial Cheka.

#### **The introduction of the Red Terror**

On 5 September 1918 Sovnarkom issued its declaration of the Red Terror which came in the wake of the assassination of Mikhail Uritskii, the head of the Petrograd Cheka, and the attempt on Lenin’s life on 30 August. It gave increased responsibility to the Vecheka and its subordinate branches to protect the Soviet regime by arresting and executing class enemies and all individuals involved in counter-revolutionary organisations, plots or rebellions. In short, the right to apply summary justice was given to the Cheka.<sup>1</sup> Largely

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<sup>1</sup> Leggett, *The Cheka*. 105-110. For the Red Terror announcement see Belov, et al., *Iz Istorii VChK*. 182-183. The attempt on Lenin’s life was reported in *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta* on 1 and 2 September.

because of the influential position of the Left SRs in the local Left SR-Bolshevik alliance the role of the Cheka was limited in Karelia and even after the removal of the Left SRs from the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee in July there was no dramatic change of policy. The sources suggest that the Red Terror in Petrozavodsk did not explode into a fury of violence, rather, local Bolsheviks pursued terror as a form of governance and control but it was applied ‘moderately.’ Without going into the intricacies of what constitutes terror it is enough to state that the term ‘moderate’ is used here not to trivialise the horrific nature of the Red Terror but to stress that the evidence for Karelia indicates that in approximately the last quarter of 1918 the number of executions carried out by the Cheka remained relatively low.<sup>2</sup> A selected number of executions took place against individuals defined by the Bolsheviks as the enemies of the new Soviet state, i.e. former police officials, former tsarist army officers, priests and rebels who took up arms. However the threat of executions, investigations, arrests and fines and the subsequent intimidation caused by this through publication in the local press were the more common features of the state’s repressive system in Karelia at this time.

Shortly before the Red Terror became official Petrozavodsk received a telegram from G.I. Petrovskii, the People’s Commissar for Internal Affairs, circulated to all soviets on 3 September, about the introduction of revolutionary terror on a nationwide scale. Petrovskii called for an intensification of the terror: all Right SRs were to be arrested; hostages were to be taken from amongst the bourgeoisie and former tsarist officers; and mass shootings were to be applied at the least sign of resistance from the White Guards. Regarding the latter point the telegram stressed: ‘Local provincial executive committees

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Reports were also printed on the Bolshevik leader’s condition (noting his pulse rate, breathing and temperature) on 3 & 5 September.

<sup>2</sup> For the author’s previous attempt to explain the terror during the Russian civil war see A.S. Wright, “Guns and Guillotines: State Terror in the Russian and French Revolutions.” *Revolutionary Russia*, Vol.20, No.2, 2007. 173-195.

must display special initiative in this respect.<sup>3</sup> Therefore the terror had been introduced and encouraged centrally but the decree was clearly reliant on the interpretation and implementation of local Bolsheviks. On 4 September the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik Party Committee discussed the implementation of the Red Terror and proposed to the provincial revolutionary executive committee to: 1) execute all those arrested and guilty of counter-revolutionary activity; 2) impose a 500,000 rouble levy (*kontributsiia*) on the bourgeoisie and make its payment compulsory and attached to the threat of execution if it was not paid within a week;<sup>4</sup> 3) introduce corresponding class based rations; 4) mobilise the bourgeoisie for community service; 5) discharge all Right SRs from their working posts.<sup>5</sup> Subsequently, on 9 September, the provincial revolutionary executive committee also resolved to distribute Petrovskii's telegram to all district and parish soviets for their information and the Red Terror's implementation.<sup>6</sup> At the same time the revolutionary executive committee assigned the provincial Bolshevik party committee specific rights over the detention of prisoners: all arrested White Guards and hostages could only be released upon the decision of the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik party committee.<sup>7</sup>

On 5 September the Petrozavodsk town soviet also decided to implement the Red Terror decree. It unanimously agreed to introduce Petrovskii's order, to arrest all Right SRs in Petrozavodsk, arrest several representatives of the bourgeoisie and a number of officers and hold them as hostages.<sup>8</sup> Shortly thereafter a list was composed and 18 so called bourgeois individuals and officers were arrested. Amongst those imprisoned were people who belonged to groups targeted as the Bolshevik revolution's main enemies: the

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<sup>3</sup> For the content of the telegram see NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.66, l.117. Also available in Leggett, *The Cheka*. 108-109.

<sup>4</sup> The Petrozavodsk town soviet resolved at a session on 15 October 1918 to simply arrest those members of the bourgeoisie who evaded the tax. The arrested individuals would be detained until payment was made. Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 137.

<sup>5</sup> RGASPI, f.67, op.1, d.69, l.30.

<sup>6</sup> NARK, f.P-2, op.1, d.14, l.29. The provincial conference of district Chekas also resolved on 17 September to inform all the Chekas in the province to immediately carry out everything mentioned in Petrovskii's telegram. NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.17, l.85.

<sup>7</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.66, l.116.

<sup>8</sup> Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 135.

chairman of the centre SRs G.I. Prokhorov; two Right SRs; a former member of the town *duma* who had previously been affiliated to the Kadets; a priest; and three officers.<sup>9</sup> On 7 September the Petrozavodsk town soviet decided that only 20 hostages should be detained at any one time and only for a period of two weeks, after which time a second group of people would be identified for arrest upon the release of the first group.<sup>10</sup> On the same day, the Cheka announced to the citizens of Petrozavodsk in the provincial *Izvestiia* that they had taken hostages and the first attempt by anyone to take action against the soviets or soviet workers would result in the execution of all the hostages.<sup>11</sup>

Shortly after this announcement further threats were issued by the Cheka and published in the press to act as a deterrent. On 17 September the provincial Cheka announced that there had been an attempt to take the life of the Bolshevik ‘extraordinary commissar’ in the region, S.P. Natsarenus. The newspaper announcement reported that any repeat attempt against Natsarenus or any other soviet worker would result in the immediate execution of all hostages in prison at that time.<sup>12</sup>

There is little evidence to suggest that immediately prior to or following the declaration of the Red Terror ‘unreserved mass shootings’ took place in Karelia as Petrovskii had encouraged in the face of White resistance. The actual targets of the Cheka were leading figures within the Left SRs. At the start of October Ivan Balashov, the head of the local Left SR party and still a member of the Petrozavodsk town soviet, was arrested and held for two weeks without any charges being brought against him.<sup>13</sup> The Left SR

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 136.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Some of the 18 individuals originally detained were released a few weeks later. See *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 1 October 1918.

<sup>11</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 7 September 1918.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 17 September 1918.

<sup>13</sup> A.F. Kopnin, the provincial commissar for justice, explained to remaining Left SRs in the town who had made a complaint that Balashov had been accused of extortion and his case transferred to the Vecheka in Moscow. However, this left the Left SRs bewildered because they had previously been told by the Cheka that Balashov was under arrest for ‘counter-revolution.’ As a result, the Petrozavodsk town soviet resolved to ask the provincial Cheka to produce a concrete accusation against Balashov. *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 17 October 1918.

party tried to drum up some support at the Aleksandrovsk munitions factory on the eve of the anniversary of the October revolution but events in Petrograd, at roughly the same time, gave local Bolsheviks the perfect opportunity to further undermine all remaining Left SRs in Petrozavodsk. Following the failed rebellion on 14 October by sailors of the Second Baltic Fleet Detachment, who were sympathetic and strongly influenced by the Left SRs, the Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee, on 29 November, approved the decision taken by the provincial Cheka to close down the local Left SR party committee.<sup>14</sup> On 27 November the provincial Cheka had searched the Left SRs' party headquarters, removed its literature and all other items and then sealed off the premises. In the newspaper report which detailed the search the Left SRs were demonised by the Bolsheviks, thus mirroring the Petrograd Bolsheviks' stance following the Baltic Fleet sailors' rising. The report described the local Left SRs as 'turning white' and 'political minors'.<sup>15</sup>

The primary reason for the relative moderation of the provincial Cheka was the different trajectory of the White movement in the north than for example, in the south where a host of former tsarist army officers had flocked to form the 'Volunteer Army' in early 1918.<sup>16</sup> In Petrozavodsk, after the skirmishes with the White Finns in the spring of 1918, the Bolsheviks did not have to worry about being attacked by a White Army because such a force did not yet exist in any sizeable form. It was not until after the Armistice in November 1918 that the Allies and the Russian White Army issued a general mobilisation order in the zones occupied by them.<sup>17</sup> In his memoirs General Maynard recalled that in October 1918:<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 541.

<sup>15</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 1 December 1918. For information on the attempted rebellion by the sailors from the Second Baltic Fleet Detachment see Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power*. 349-355.

<sup>16</sup> The Volunteer Army combined with the Don Cossacks and other anti-Bolshevik forces towards the end of 1918 to become the White Army led by General Anton Denikin. On the formation and fortunes of the White Army in south Russia see Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia, 1918*.

<sup>17</sup> Maynard, *The Murmansk Venture*. 143-145.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 125.

I had failed to secure more than a handful of Russian recruits; and though mobilization was spoken of, the population was small, and most the men of military age were required for work on the railway and at the various posts. Thus, before a Russian army of any material assistance to me could be built up, it would be necessary to extend the area from which recruits could be drawn.

The Allied forces therefore did include a small contingent of mobilised Russian troops by autumn 1918 and, of course, it was the Allies who posed the greatest military threat to the Bolsheviks, but they did not make any major advance south of Soroka until mid-February 1919 when they defeated the Red Army at Segezha.

Therefore the civil war front in Karelia as it existed at the time of the introduction of the Red Terror was not particularly threatening and this may explain why executions appear to have remained few. However, the proximity of the Allies and the potential for the growth of a White Army in Murmansk did prompt mass arrests in Petrozavodsk. According to Allied intelligence reports, by the end of August 1918 many arrests among officers and educated classes had been made in the town.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, at the Cheka conference of the Northern Region in Petrograd in October 1918 a member of the Olonets provincial cheka, N.N. Dorofeev, also stated that upon its creation the provincial Cheka's attention was immediately drawn towards former officers, a number of whom were arrested but released upon further investigation.<sup>20</sup> Admittedly shootings did take place: on 13 September three military officers and a policeman were shot by the provincial Cheka.<sup>21</sup> But in general the Olonets provincial Cheka arrested and detained suspects rather than carry out a mass of executions. The head of the Murmansk railroad Cheka explained at the Cheka conference of the Northern Region in October that his Cheka had arrested 260 officers although 'many were released'. A total of nine individuals were executed.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> WO 157/1215, Syren Force Intelligence report, 26 August 1918.

<sup>20</sup> Vinogradov, *Vchk Upolnomochena Soobshchit'*. 255. I.V. Matveev mentions in his memoirs that a number of the officers travelled through Olonets province to link up with the Allies in Murmansk. Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 74-75.

<sup>21</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 14 September 1918.

<sup>22</sup> Vinogradov, *Vchk Upolnomochena Soobshchit'*. 255.

However, if the Cheka was relatively moderate in carrying out executions it was not immune from the spy psychosis inherent in any security force. The presence of the Allies in particular fuelled the suspicions of the Cheka and the hunt for spies formed a significant part of the institution's investigatory work. On 15 October, at the opening day of the conference of the Northern Region Chekas, the Murmansk railroad Cheka chairman remarked that his Cheka had uncovered 'a few spy organisations.'<sup>23</sup> One such 'spy organisation' involved two members of the Murmansk railroad military soviet, A.A. Khoroshevskii and I.F. Pruss and the head of defence for the Murmansk railroad, a Captain Orlov. The Cheka arrested all three men on 7 October for alleged 'criminal dealings with the Anglo-French.'<sup>24</sup> The arrested individuals were accused of passing important military secrets to the Allies and therefore assisting their southern advance. Suggesting an element of cooperation within the Cheka hierarchy, members of the Vecheka from Petrograd arrived especially to investigate the case and assist the members of the Murmansk railroad and provincial Chekas.<sup>25</sup> How the investigation turned out is not known but Pruss and Orlov were deemed suspicious enough to be escorted to Moscow on 12 October while Khoroshevskii was released.<sup>26</sup>

Little more is known of the affair but Allied intelligence suggests that Captain Orlov was innocent and he was not working for them. Indeed, as the Allies understood it, Orlov had been arrested for communicating with the Germans.<sup>27</sup> The arrest of Orlov was also met with protests at a meeting of some of the staff (*kollektiv sluzhashchikh*) who worked under him for the defence of the Murmansk railroad. At a gathering on 11 October these employees expressed their surprise and disappointment at Orlov's arrest. They

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 8 October 1918. Khoroshevskii had previously been arrested in March 1918 in connection with the arrest of the former tsarist officer Ia.P. Skachkov. Orlov arrived in the region in early May 1918 at the head of a detachment for railway defence which was subordinated to the executive committee of the Murmansk railroad. Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 242; 224.

<sup>25</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 11 October 1918.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 16 October 1918.

<sup>27</sup> WO 157/1215, Syren Force Intelligence report, 21 October 1918.

believed it ‘improbable’ that he was involved in any kind of counter-revolutionary activity because he was in regular contact with the administrative personnel for the defence of the railway line and all his orders, it appeared to them, were based solely on strengthening Soviet authority in the region. At some point in the recent past Orlov had himself been responsible for rooting out espionage in the region and anyone suspected of espionage was arrested on Orlov’s orders and handed over to the provincial Cheka. Orlov’s work record convinced the gathering that his arrest was ‘malicious fabrication by someone who thought ill of Orlov.’ Consequently the employees for the defence of the Murmansk railroad appealed to the investigatory commission responsible for Orlov’s case to free Orlov.<sup>28</sup>

At the Second Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference the Orlov case arose once more, this time casting doubt over Orlov’s innocence; a party representative announced that Orlov along with a few others was sympathetic towards the English.<sup>29</sup> It would seem he was arrested because of his status as a former tsarist officer, in charge of military units and combating espionage, which raised suspicions on the part of the Cheka and contributed to his arrest and subsequent transfer to Moscow. Orlov had also been involved in communications with the Allies when that was Soviet policy. He had communicated with the English Admiral Kemp in Murmansk at the end of June or early July concerning negotiations between S.P. Natsarenius and the Allies.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Orlov was outspoken, he had previously been arrested but bailed in mid-August for angrily protesting the arrest of one of his colleagues at the town commissariat of defence in Petrozavodsk. Witnesses recalled that Orlov abused members of the Petrozavodsk town soviet while drunk, threatened them with his revolver and reminded those present that he was an officer and would arrest and disarm everyone. This previous altercation was significant and although he was issued bail his case was forwarded to eight different higher

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<sup>28</sup> NARK, f.P-6159, op.1, d.92, l.61-61ob.

<sup>29</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.8, l.10

<sup>30</sup> Kedrov, *Bez.* 139-140.

governing institutions in Olonets province, Moscow and Petrograd.<sup>31</sup> In other words Orlov's arrest in October appears to have been an action taken against possible betrayal, encouraged by the presence of the Allies and his previous behaviour. Orlov's fate is unknown and his name is absent in local sources from this point which suggests he did not return from Moscow.

### **The attack on religion and terror in Olonets district**

As well as seeing enemies among anyone who had contacts with the Allies, however legitimate, the Cheka strongly believed the Orthodox Church to be a centre of opposition to the regime and showed little moderation when dealing with it. The conflict with the Aleksandr-Svirskii monastery mentioned in Chapter 2 flared up again in autumn 1918 when the provincial revolutionary soviet executive committee decided to seize the monastery's wealth, discredit the Orthodox Church and close down the 'Union for the Defence of Religion and the Church' which was affiliated to the monastery.<sup>32</sup> On 29 October the provincial *Izvestiia* reported that the federation of Anarchists from Petrozavodsk accompanied by representatives of the provincial Cheka, the district Cheka and the chairman of the local *kombed* had made an inspection of the monastery on 22 October. Over the next two days a Red Army unit under the control of the provincial Cheka confiscated the monastery's valuables and property and arrested a number of clergymen on 23 October.<sup>33</sup> However, during the searches and confiscations the Chekists and Red Army men humiliated the monks by insulting their religious beliefs: they refused to remove their caps; barked out orders; got drunk on the monastery's wine; and even opened up a shrine containing the remains of St. Aleksandr. According to a member of the

<sup>31</sup> NARK, f.R-573, op.1, d.37, l.219.

<sup>32</sup> Vdovitsyna, "Aleksandro-Svirskii Monastyr'" in *Urok Istorii Daet Arckhiv*. 104-106.

<sup>33</sup> In total 40 *puds* worth of silver was found concealed in the monastery's walls along with money and gold decorations which were transferred to the provincial Cheka to be inventoried. *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 29 October 1918. Nine *puds* and ten *funts* worth of scrap silver which was not of historical value was also melted down on the orders of the Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee and handed over to the People's Bank. Various other items were given to the local *kombed* to distribute amongst the local poor. Vdovitsyna, "Aleksandro-Svirskii Monastyr'." 99; 105.

All-Russian Synod the Red Army men then invented a story, which was later published in the newspapers, that inside the shrine was a wax doll.<sup>34</sup> Atrocities followed: five of the clergymen arrested previously on 23 October were shot on the night of the 11/12 November by the Olonets district Cheka, including the monastery's father superior, Archimandrite Evgenii.<sup>35</sup>

Understanding this act is troublesome because the history of the Olonets district Cheka before and after these executions shows that, like the provincial Cheka, executions were limited and arrests and fines were more common. However, it appears to have been a shock measure that bypassed the Left SR dominated district executive committee which had refused to send representatives to the Olonets provincial soviet revolutionary executive committee and resisted the introduction of the *kombedy* and harvest registration (see Chapter 4). According to the provincial Cheka's report the executions carried out by the Olonets district Cheka occurred with the sanction of the provincial Cheka and the provincial soviet revolutionary executive committee.<sup>36</sup> The shootings were therefore an extreme but intentional act perpetrated by the district Cheka with pressure and support from the provincial Cheka and provincial revolutionary executive committee to gain control in a longer standing feud with the monastery in a district where the Left SRs still dominated and where the Olonets district soviet executive committee was keen to curb the actions of the Cheka (see the Timofeev affair in Chapter 4).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 101. A later report written by the provincial Cheka to the provincial revolutionary executive committee differed; according to this report an ordinary skeleton had been revealed in the shrine of St. Aleksandr. Vdovitsyna, "Aleksandro-Svirskii Monastyr'" in *Urok Istorii Daet Arckhiv*. 105. A commission set up on 19 December 1918 by the presidium of the Soviet of Commissars of the Northern Region to investigate what had been found in St. Aleksandr Svirskii's shrine concluded that a partially decomposed corpse was revealed. Smith, "Bones of Contention". 156-157.

<sup>35</sup> Vdovitsyna, "Aleksandro-Svirskii Monastyr'" in *Urok Istorii Daet Arckhiv*. 99-100.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 105.

<sup>37</sup> The relative docility of the Olonets district Cheka, this incident apart, is reflected in its unpublished records. These records state that from 15 August to 15 December 1918 the Cheka resolved 150 different cases and were combating counter-revolution and speculation by carrying out executions (on only three occasions, totalling 9 individuals), making arrests and imposing fines. From 22 October to 22 December the Cheka had collected fines worth a total of 45,446 roubles which were transferred to its own account and helped it to maintain a small Red Army detachment of 28 men. GARF, f.R-393, op.13, d.268, l.4; 8; Korablev, et al., *Istoriia Karelii*. 371.

### **Chekist malpractice and the need for reform**

The Cheka in Karelia did not resort to wide scale executions in the last quarter of 1918 but it was corrupt, unruly and disorganised and change was required to resolve these deficiencies. In Chapter 4 we saw how the unclear boundaries of the Cheka's authority in Olonets district (the Timofeev affair) led to clashes with the soviets and its institutions. A similar style conflict between the Cheka and the soviets overlapped the Timofeev affair and involved the chairman of the Olonets provincial Cheka I.V. Elpedinskii. On 9 August 1918 Elpedinskii and another Chekist went to Vidlitskaia parish in Olonets district, got drunk, carried out searches in the local ironworks factory and then assaulted some local officials and stole their money.<sup>38</sup> The Elpedinskii case is important because it underlined the unclear lines of the Cheka's authority in relation to the soviets. This became apparent at the provincial conference of district Chekas when Elpedinskii's fellow Chekists believed they had the right to overrule the soviets and the party in order to keep the provincial Cheka chairman in his position, which they indeed managed to do for a short time.

On 17 August the Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee decided to act against the unruly Elpedinskii and recommended that a new chairman, I.I. Terukov, a native of Petrozavodsk, be appointed the chair of the Olonets provincial Cheka. However, by supporting Terukov's nomination to the chairmanship of the provincial Cheka, the executive committee brought itself into conflict with the Cheka which did not support the move. The executive committee's support for Terukov also complicated matters because his appointment was only a recommendation and Elpedinskii still officially remained chairman. The provincial Cheka at its session of 20 August discussed the 'dual authority in

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<sup>38</sup> NARK, f.P-2, op.1, d.9, l.2. Born in 1887 Ivan Elpedinskii served in the Baltic fleet between 1908 and 1909 before being discharged for health reasons. He became a member of the Bolshevik party in 1911 and worked in Vladimir province for a few years before becoming a telegrapher at Soroka station, Kem' district, in 1915 and then a worker at Suna station, Petrozavodsk district, in January 1918. While at Suna station he helped organise a Bolshevik party cell. Shortly after he became a member of the Olonets province executive committee and was appointed the commissar for post and telegraphs for Murmansk County. E.P. Laidinen, "Chekist O.K. Kanter: Epizody Biografii". *Voprosy Istorii Evropeiskogo Severa*, 2007. 191.

the Cheka' and decided 'to take all matters into our own hands and not to permit outside interference' but 'to work under the supervision of the provincial executive committee.' In other words the provincial Cheka agreed that the executive committee could check up on it but not tell it what to do. Elpedinskii remained the chairman of the provincial Cheka while Terukov was appointed the head of the provincial Cheka's department for combating counter-revolution.<sup>39</sup>

However, when Elpedinskii's deeds in Vidlitskaia parish came to light at a session of the Petrozavodsk Country Bolshevik Party Committee on 29 August it condemned his actions. The party committee's reaction was uncompromising: Elpedinskii's behaviour was described as 'disgraceful' and it was proposed to dismiss him from all his elected positions and exclude him from the party.<sup>40</sup> Clearly, this mirrored the stance taken by the provincial revolutionary executive committee but also represented further Bolshevik party resistance towards the Cheka because not all members of the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik Party Committee presidium sat on the provincial revolutionary executive committee in the summer of 1918.<sup>41</sup> On 30 August the provincial revolutionary executive committee restated its decision to remove Elpedinskii from all elected posts, including that as chairman of the provincial Cheka.<sup>42</sup> Ivan Terukov was then appointed temporary head of the provincial Cheka which, on 11 September, was made permanent.<sup>43</sup> However, having heard a statement from Elpedinskii himself, the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik Party Committee backtracked from its original decision when it met on 14 September because it believed that the statement cast a different light on the incident. What exactly was within Elpedinskii's statement is not known but his appeal to review his case was accepted out of

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<sup>39</sup> Laidinen, "O.K. Kanter". 192. Provincial Chekas were supposed to be divided up into five different departments. They were the departments for: combating counter-revolution, combating speculation, combating misuse of authority, territorial liaison and railway security. Leggett, *The Cheka*. 39-40.

<sup>40</sup> RGASPI, f.67, op.1, d.69, l.27.

<sup>41</sup> For the members of the Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee and the Petrozavodsk Country Bolshevik party (and presidium) in the summer of 1918 see Chapter 3, fn.82; Chapter 4, fn.10.

<sup>42</sup> Laidinen, "O.K. Kanter". 191.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 192.

respect for his previous work within local government<sup>44</sup> and ‘the current difficult time for the revolution’, presumably reference to the threat of the Allies and the recent declaration of the Red Terror on 5 September. As a result, the party committee decided to only temporarily exclude Elpedinskii and up to the conclusion of the investigation into the affair allow him to continue to work in soviet institutions.<sup>45</sup>

Elpedinskii’s position as chairman of the provincial Cheka was supported by his fellow Chekists at the first Olonets provincial conference of district Chekas. On 17 September Cheka delegates stressed that the charges against him were ‘groundless’, it was ‘the wish of the bourgeoisie to wrest him from the ranks of the proletariat’, ‘an artful ruse by counter-revolutionaries’ and that the County Bolshevik Party Committee had made a mistake and acted too hastily in supporting these accusations. The conference decided unanimously to sanction Elpedinskii’s rehabilitation, asked him to continue his work in the provincial Cheka and to work in soviet institutions.<sup>46</sup> Terukov’s chairmanship of the provincial Cheka lasted less than two weeks and Elpedinskii was reinstated. Terukov remained in the provincial Cheka and was appointed the Cheka’s head of staff for employees on 24 September.<sup>47</sup> Elpedinskii had therefore won the backing of his fellow Chekists and eventually the local party committee to remain provincial chairman of the Cheka, in contrast to the wishes of the provincial revolutionary executive committee. But re-elections to the Olonets provincial Cheka in early October (see below) meant that his victory was short lived and he was replaced.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> At the First Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference, the Bolshevik commissar for post and telegraphs Ia.F. Igoshkin commended Elpedinskii. The Union for Post and Telegraphs initially refused to recognise the transition of power to the Soviets and had formed a strike committee. Igoshkin explained that Elpedinskii ‘purged’ the union and helped increase the number of communist sympathisers amongst the post and telegraph workers. At the Second Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference Igoshkin also commented that Elpedinskii had played an integral role in establishing a party cell in Suna, Petrozavodsk district. Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor’ba*. 502; 527.

<sup>45</sup> RGASPI, f.67, op.1, d.69, l.36; NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.17, l.44.

<sup>46</sup> NARK, f.R-411, op.1, d.1, l.15-15ob.

<sup>47</sup> He was dismissed from all organs of security in September 1919 on the decision of the party court. He later moved to Kronstadt. Laidinen, “O.K. Kanter”. 192.

<sup>48</sup> Some time after the re-elections Elpedinskii left for Moscow and was appointed head of communications for the Sixth Red Army. RGASPI, f.67, op.1, d.69, l.66.

The Elpedinskii affair is not only a good example of why the Olonets provincial Cheka was reformed through re-elections in October 1918 but it highlights an important point in the development of local power relations after the exit of the Left SRs from the provincial executive committee. Against those local Bolsheviks in the Cheka who supported this institution's autonomy, other Bolsheviks struggled to preserve the authority of the soviet executive committees which to them were, in one historian's words: 'the pinnacle of revolutionary power.'<sup>49</sup> The Vecheka's over-lordship was not welcomed by local Bolsheviks who opposed the autonomy of the Cheka which had been encouraged by unclear statements from Moscow. Dzerzhinsky's circular telegram from 29 August announced that the Chekas should be in 'close contact...with all local organs of soviet authority' but at the same time:<sup>50</sup>

the Chekas are unquestionably autonomous in their own work and must carry out implicitly all orders issued by the Vecheka, the highest organ to which they are subordinated. The Chekas are only accountable to the soviets, but in no circumstances are the soviets or any of its departments to countermand or suspend the orders of the Chekas issued from the Vecheka.

As Leggett has pointed out, this telegram seemed to undermine the authority of the executive committees.<sup>51</sup> In short local Chekas needed only to concern themselves with their own institution's ruling body and their interpretation of its orders. As indicated at the Olonets provincial conference of district Chekas statements like Dzerzhinsky's struck a chord with local Chekists who supported their own comrades and overruled the opposition of the provincial executive committee and the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik party committee. For local Chekists the Chekas were, as Dzerzhinsky underlined above, 'autonomous in their own work'.

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<sup>49</sup> Melancon, "Revolutionary Culture". 11.

<sup>50</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.17, l.54. This statement is also available in Leggett, *The Cheka*. 124. It was decided by the provincial conference of district Chekas on 17 September to publish this decree in the localities of Olonets province as a guide for soviet organs. NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.17, l.85.

<sup>51</sup> Leggett, *The Cheka*. 125.

## Reforming the Cheka

It was clear from the point of view of the local soviets that something had to be done to curb the autonomy of the Cheka and the encouragement this body received from above. The introduction of the Red Terror decree, discussed above, further encouraged local Chekas to make arrests, so much so that the provincial and Murmansk railroad Chekas came into conflict with one another.<sup>52</sup> On 19 September a board (*kollegiia*) member of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, V.A. Tikhomirnov, sent a circular telegram to all provinces and districts which reflected the debates which were going on in the capital surrounding the Cheka and the soviets. He stated that: 'The Vecheka insists upon the independent existence of the local Chekas' but 'we [The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs] consider it necessary to incorporate them as government subdivisions.'<sup>53</sup> Leaders of the provincial soviet in Petrozavodsk were also keen to put a stop to the arbitrary nature of the cheka and resolved on 20 September to relay Tikhomirov's telegram by informing the districts that the Chekas were divisions or sub-divisions attached to the soviets and subordinated to them, i.e. the provincial Cheka to the provincial executive committee and the district Chekas to the district executive committees.<sup>54</sup>

The following month, on 5 October, Petrozavodsk received another circular telegram from Tikhomirnov which blamed the soviets for the arbitrary nature of the Red Terror:<sup>55</sup>

... a considerable majority of soviets have not taken the appropriate decisive measures in securing the rear of our armies from all possible provocative statements and counter-revolutionary conspiracies and a few other soviets, not infrequently, have directed the red terror not against the eminent bourgeoisie and

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<sup>52</sup> On 19 September the Murmansk railroad Cheka wrote to the Petrozavodsk town soviet, copying in the provincial Cheka and the provincial soviet revolutionary executive committee and stated that a significant number of employees from the Murmansk railroad had been arrested by the provincial Cheka. The Murmansk railroad Cheka stressed that these arrests had occurred without its sanction and hindered the efficiency of work along the railway line. NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.17, l.45.

<sup>53</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.66, l.133.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. l.132.

<sup>55</sup> NARK, f.R-411, op.1, d.1, l.28-28ob.

old authorities but against the petty bourgeoisie and the philistinism of the intelligentsia (*intelligentsia obyvatel'shchiny*).

The telegram failed to take into account the contradictory statements that were coming from the capital concerning the independence of the Chekas but asked all provincial executive committees to clarify for the local soviets the type of hostage to be taken and that the 'petty bourgeoisie' could be released if the soviets forced them to work in labour companies (*trudovye roty*).<sup>56</sup> The Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee recognised the 'tactless activity' of its provincial Cheka at this time and at one of its sessions on 8 October decided to reorganise the institution and carry out new elections to the provincial Cheka. The resolution passed by the committee stressed that new Cheka members should only be elected from experienced party workers and that Chekas were subordinate to the revolutionary executive committee and were to act in close communication with the department of soviet administration and the department of justice.<sup>57</sup>

This re-organisation of the provincial Cheka saw the Latvian Oskar Kristianovich Kanter appointed Olonets province's new Cheka chairman. Born into a peasant family in Riga on 10 April 1885, Kanter finished four years of schooling at the Riga town gymnasium and in 1903 joined the Bolshevik party. In 1908 he was arrested and sentenced to four years penal servitude before being exiled to Karelia from 1914-1917. From September 1917 to February 1918 Kanter served as the secretary of a local regional council (*uprava*) in Petrograd province and in April 1918 was sent from the former capital to Olonets province to help organise local party organs and soviets.<sup>58</sup> Kanter's appointment marked a significant turning point in the history of the provincial Cheka. As we shall see below and in Chapter 8, following his appointment the provincial Cheka progressively

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> NARK, f.P-2, op.1, d.14, l.66.

<sup>58</sup> Laidinen, "O.K. Kanter". 194.

operated less chaotically. He was the ideal person for his new position: he was young; a long standing member of the Bolshevik party; educated; an experienced revolutionary and organiser; and familiar with the region. It is testimony to his success as chairman of the Olonets provincial Cheka that he held the post for over two years (until 10 December 1920) and was elected to the joint presidium of the Karelian Labour Commune and Olonets provincial executive committee in August 1920.<sup>59</sup>

Kanter's task was a difficult one; he faced a number of problems in running the provincial Cheka and it would take time to stamp his authority on the institution. Principally he had to: restore order to a hitherto unruly organisation while continuing its investigations; find reliable cadres to work in the Cheka; eliminate individual Chekist malpractice; and build a better relationship between different state agencies. However his work was hindered from the outset because of the chaotic state in which he found the Cheka. For one thing, the provincial revolutionary executive refused to hand over its records to the newly elected staff.<sup>60</sup> This would suggest that the Cheka's former members had something to hide. One such incident which may have influenced this decision involved two Chekists who were accused by the provincial Cheka of abusing their position at a session on 1 October 1918. They arrived drunk at Petrozavodsk prison and without permission took a prisoner who had been arrested as a former gendarme into their vehicle to the outskirts of the town to shoot him. However, while en route the prisoner jumped from the moving vehicle and vanished without a trace. By April 1919 he had still not been found.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid. For the rest of his impressive and eventful career see: Ibid 205-208.

<sup>60</sup> NARK, f.P-2, op.1, d.14, l.67.

<sup>61</sup> NARK, f.P-2, op.1, d.9, l.10; f.P-4, op.1, d.17, l.13. One of the guilty Chekists was excluded from the party indefinitely and deprived of the right to work in the soviets. The other was fully rehabilitated and allowed to continue working in soviet institutions because of his previous work in the party and soviets.

Despite the re-election of the provincial Cheka disorganisation and abuses of authority within this body continued but, fairly quickly after Kanter's appointment, the Cheka was operating in a relatively more structured manner and members began to be disciplined for their crimes. Between the 31 October and 4 November a member of the provincial Cheka, Vasilii Bogdanov, along with three provincial Cheka employees carried out a general search of the merchants situated in the village of Ladva, Petrozavodsk district, and used torture in order to locate their valuables. Furthermore, on the way back to Petrozavodsk some of the requisitioned goods were taken to the flat of one of Bogdanov's collaborators and therefore did not find its way to the provincial Cheka. However, by chance the commissar for the defence of the town came across the individuals at the moment they were sharing out the requisitioned goods and all four were arrested. Initially the provincial Cheka wished to execute the individuals but after a session of the provincial executive committee the sentences were reduced to imprisonment and compulsory labour on the basis that the individuals were young (Bogdanov was 19 years old) and under extreme strain due to their work in the Cheka. Bogdanov received seven years and on 18 December, at a session of the Olonets provincial Bolshevik party committee, he was excluded from the party along with his associates.<sup>62</sup>

Such malpractices by individual Chekists can be attributed to the fact that because of its responsibilities the Cheka was different than other Soviet agencies. It was an internal security/political police force which operated under an officially declared Red Terror and was trusted to investigate and root out counter-revolution. Because the lines of the Chekas' authority in relation to the soviets was far from clear, it is perhaps not surprising that the Cheka attracted careerists or criminal elements. The cheka lacked both members who would not tarnish the name of the soviets through malpractice and administratively capable individuals. This inevitably placed an increased burden on tried and tested administrators

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<sup>62</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 22 & 25 December 1918; Laidinen, "O.K. Kanter". 198-199.

and generated competition between institutions for them. On 25 November Kanter complained to the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik party committee, which two days previously had appointed the bookkeeper of the provincial Cheka as secretary of the revolutionary tribunal. Kanter explained that the bookkeeper's departure would have a considerable effect on the Cheka's accounts and that he was irreplaceable.<sup>63</sup>

Because of the lack of reliable personnel it was common for individuals to take up more than one responsible post and to sit on several committees. For example, during the civil war Oskar Kanter was a member and secretary of the Olonets provincial executive committee, chairman of the provincial Cheka, a member of the provincial military revolutionary committee and the Red Army committee of assistance.<sup>64</sup> He was not the only Chekist taking up a number of positions within the provincial authorities. Kanter wrote to the agitation-propaganda department attached to the local Bolshevik party committee on 24 December to complain about the overwork of one of the Cheka department's members, K.A. Luzgin, who had recently been appointed to the agitation-propaganda department. He explained that Luzgin worked for ten hours a day as an investigator within the Cheka's department for combating counter-revolution and malfeasance (*prestuplenie po dolzhnosti*) while in his free time worked in another commission attached to the revolutionary tribunal. As a result, Kanter asked the agitation-propaganda department to free Luzgin from his duties for the general benefit of the Cheka.<sup>65</sup>

A lack of capable administrators was also reflected in the severe lack of organisation, including the most basic of clerical tasks, within the provincial Cheka. A report compiled by an auditing committee at the end of March 1919 into the provincial Cheka's department for the struggle with counter-revolution and malfeasance found that no

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<sup>63</sup> NARK, f.P-2, op.1, d.15, l.52.

<sup>64</sup> Laidinen, "O.K. Kanter". 194; NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.33, l.102.

<sup>65</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.17, l.49.

record of those arrested had been made, there was no record of a weapons registration, lists of the local bourgeoisie and former officers or even the addresses of employees and workers working in soviet institutions for 1918 or 1919.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, journal entries for the activities of the department either did not exist or were in complete disorder. For example, the list of those arrested only contained the name of the individual but detailed nothing about when they were due for release or how long they had been imprisoned for. In order to find this out one had to actually travel to the prison and question the official in charge. Paperwork was left untied, unstamped with the Cheka's seal and some remained unsigned by the person responsible. To add to the confusion many orders were also left undated and some distributed under various individuals' signatures from the office secretary to the filing clerk. Over 100 important orders and documents, such as the minutes of the session from the 11 September which resolved to execute four individuals on 13 September (see above), could not be found by the auditing commission.<sup>67</sup>

Because entry into the Cheka was prohibited for those in society who were targeted by the revolution such as members of the intelligentsia, merchants and bureaucrats (precisely those who were likely to have a higher level of education), the provincial Cheka came to rely on workers and Bolshevik party members or sympathisers which increased the illiteracy rates of its cadres.<sup>68</sup> Inevitably the Cheka attracted some careerists and criminal elements although, beginning with the appointment of Kanter, the provincial executive committee and the local Bolshevik party committee were beginning to pay more attention to the quality of the cheka's members. At a session of the Second Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference on 12 December a party member warned against

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<sup>66</sup> The auditing commission was made up of one representative each from the Vecheka, the provincial Bolshevik party committee and the provincial Cheka.

<sup>67</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.17, l.12-14

<sup>68</sup> Laidinen, "O.K. Kanter". 197.

the influx of ‘improper elements’ into the party while another proposed the ‘shadowing’ (*slezhka*) of Chekas for ‘ethical behaviour considerations.’<sup>69</sup>

There were also bloody incidents in the districts after the reorganisation of the Cheka. For instance in Olonets district after the dismissal of the Left SRs from the district executive committee in mid-November 1918, the suppression of a peasant rebellion in December was notably bloodier. Some of the rebels managed to escape to Finland but two were shot on the spot while others were caught and arrested.<sup>70</sup> However, proper procedures were followed. On the 10 January the chairman of the Olonets district Cheka, Pavel Chigar’kov, informed the Olonets provincial executive committee that attempts were made on the lives of local officials by the rebels and asked for permission to carry out executions. In response the executive committee appealed to the provincial Cheka: ‘to urgently send a few reliable members to Olonets town having given them wide plenary powers to investigate this affair. If it is necessary take the most drastic measures.’<sup>71</sup> Such measures were taken; at one of its sessions on 16 January 1919 the Olonets district Cheka decided to execute a further six leaders involved in the rebellion. Furthermore, the eleven remaining leaders who had escaped were declared outlaws and if discovered the population was given an open invitation to shoot them.<sup>72</sup>

In mid-January 1919 the Olonets district Cheka was also disciplining its members for malpractice and acted with an element of responsibility. On 16 January the case of a Cheka commissar from Olonets district, V. Matsnev, was discussed at a district Cheka session. Matsnev had been under arrest for a short time for illegally confiscating timepieces during the search of the Nikiforovskii monastery. The Cheka resolved that the short spell of imprisonment was a satisfactory punishment, the case was discontinued and

<sup>69</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 14 December 1918.

<sup>70</sup> Korablev, et al., *Istoriia Karelii*. 393; NARK, f.R-29, op.1, d.175, l.1; NARK, f.P-13, op.2, d.7, l.3.

<sup>71</sup> GARF, f.R-393, op.13, d.249, l.7-8.

<sup>72</sup> NARK, f.P-13, op.2, d.7, l.3; *Olonetskaia Kommuna*, 22 January 1919.

the gathering resolved to return the timepieces to the monastery.<sup>73</sup> When the Pudozh Cheka faced a short lived military mutiny at the end of 1918, it too acted in conjunction with the higher authorities. On 10 December the chairman of the Pudozh Cheka, O.M. Shishov, withheld cigarettes to be distributed to mobilised Red Army troops and incited a short-lived mutiny: Shishov was briefly detained and the following day two Red Army men were killed and one injured for attempting to run away. Restoring order, a further 22 Red Army men were arrested; 12 were soon released but 10 were sent to the provincial Cheka.<sup>74</sup> Later when the Pudozh district Cheka acted without authority it received a rebuke from the provincial Cheka for the execution of four prisoners in early January without provincial approval.<sup>75</sup>

### **An end to political terror**

Disciplining and changing the structure of the Cheka in Karelia was complemented at the end of 1918 by Lenin's announcement of a political amnesty, firstly for factions of the Menshevik party and then later for the SR party. The majority of local Bolsheviks reacted positively to this move but it was not the first time the local Bolsheviks hailed the arrival of former political adversaries to the ranks of the party. In September 1918 15 members of the Left Menshevik Internationalists, including their leader L.V. Nikol'skii, joined the Bolshevik party who welcomed the move. Under the title 'A moral victory' the Olonets provincial *Izvestiia* reported on 24 September that the victory of the Bolshevik forces at Kazan had been complemented by a victory for the ideas of communism in Petrozavodsk; the Left Menshevik Internationalists disbanded and placed all their funds at the disposal of the Bolsheviks. The acquisition of 15 members of the Left Menshevik Internationalist party was regarded as a moment of triumph and the newspaper report described Nikol'skii as 'one of our most outstanding public figures'.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>73</sup> NARK, f.P-13, op.2, d.7, l.4ob.

<sup>74</sup> NARK, f.R-29, op.1, d.81, l.65-66; 70-71ob.

<sup>75</sup> Laidinen, "O.K. Kanter". 203; GARF, f.R-393, op.13, d.249, l.573-573ob.

<sup>76</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 24 September 1918.

During discussions at the Second Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference (10-13 December 1918), local Bolshevik leaders welcomed new capable political administrators to compensate for the shortage of Bolshevik party cadres. Yet, there was no consensus between local Bolsheviks over the entrance of former political opponents into the party. In response to protests against the new soft-line approach towards the Mensheviks and SRs and calls for the continuation of the Red Terror another party member, A.F. Kopnin, stated his belief that the Mensheviks' and SRs' entry into Bolshevik institutions should be accepted but strictly regulated. He also supported the conciliatory move towards other socialist parties because of the need for more workers throughout the region and because the departure of communists to the front would leave the localities considerably weakened. The Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee chairman, Petr Anokhin, also supported the Leninist stance:<sup>77</sup>

...when the stray Marxist-Mensheviks seek to make contact with us we should not be vindictive because in the past they were our brothers. Nor will we cast off the petty bourgeois ranks of the peasantry who have been inspired by the ideas of communism. To be afraid of them means not to believe in our own moral strength which is becoming stronger all the time.

After Anokhin's speech Elena Stasova supported Lenin's olive branch to the other socialist parties and rejected the continuation of terror politics. The conference passed this resolution with three votes against it and six abstentions.<sup>78</sup> The policy seemed to work. A report from Lizhma station at the December party conference noted that a small number of Left SRs, who had dominated this locality up to August 1918, entered the local Bolshevik party organisation alongside a few Mensheviks.<sup>79</sup> However, conciliation was always kept within strict limits. At the end of the year the Bolsheviks had flexed their authority in the provincial press when they came into conflict with a group of journalists in December over

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 13 December 1918. On Anokhin's support of this change in tactics towards other socialist parties also see NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.8, l.7.

<sup>78</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 13 December 1918.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 14 December 1918; NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.8, l.16.

the balance of views being reported in the local *Izvestiia* concerning the Soviet regime.<sup>80</sup> Five days later the Bolsheviks merged *Izvestiia* with two other local newspapers and renamed it *Olonetskaia Kommuna*. Its three man editorial board were all Bolshevik party members.<sup>81</sup>

## Conclusion

The above chapter has shown the inroads the Bolsheviks made into consolidating their regime and the role played by the reorganisation of the provincial Cheka. The Red Terror, which was perpetrated moderately in Karelia in terms of the number of executions carried out, gave local Bolsheviks a lever of control to strengthen the party's position while the election of a new provincial Cheka chaired by Oskar Kanter, despite continued sporadic malpractice, meant a relatively better organised and orderly Cheka was evolving by the beginning of 1919. As we have seen in the previous chapter, at the end of 1918 the Second Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference took place and pointed to some of the key principles which they believed would help strengthen the party's position. Chief amongst these were the need for stricter discipline amongst members. The above chapter has suggested that stricter discipline was to some extent already under way with the election of a new provincial Cheka and from this point clashes with the soviets, which had been a prominent feature of the Cheka's activities until this time, began to disappear. Furthermore, a general political amnesty to the Bolsheviks' former political opponents was receptive in Petrozavodsk and served to bolster the administrative capabilities of the local Soviet regime.

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<sup>80</sup> On the 8 December the journalists spoke out against their own suppression and resolved: 'The organisation of soviet journalists reserves their integral right to relentless diversified criticism of local state institutions, while meanwhile not failing to record in the press the positives of local state work.' *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*. 10 December 1918.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* 24 December 1918. The editorial board consisted of Ia.K. Berztys, L.G. Gershanovich and I.A. Danilov.

Nevertheless, as the preceding chapters have shown, by the beginning of 1919, although the Bolshevik party had reformed the provincial Cheka and reinforced its political position in Petrozavodsk, it still struggled to exert control over the districts because of the incessant food shortages and a lack of reliable cadres to run government institutions. The intrusion of the *kombedy* and the Red Army in the countryside had also contributed to the outbreak of peasant rebellion at the end of 1918 and a decline in the prestige of the Soviet regime. The Bolsheviks needed to improve the food supply situation and build stronger links to the countryside but as we will see in the next chapter this was easier said than done. By the spring and summer of 1919 the party faced its most intense military crisis when the Allies and White Finns attacked simultaneously and peasant rebellion once again erupted in the Zaonezh'e peninsula.

## Chapter 6

### Consolidating Power (II): The Role of the Cheka, August-December 1918

This chapter will focus on the last four to five months of 1918 and show that despite continuing chaos there were signs that the Bolsheviks were laying further foundations to tighten their control over the Karelian districts. One sign came in the form of the declaration of the Red Terror by the Bolshevik government on 5 September 1918. From this point onwards repression became an official instrument of governance that the Bolsheviks could use to consolidate and expand their influence. A study of Karelia suggests that the intensity of the Red Terror outside the capital depended on local conditions and so the unruly period of the Cheka, in the few months after the declaration of the terror decree, was extreme in some instances but short in duration. However, the Cheka in Karelia was notably undisciplined and so the Bolsheviks took “one step forward” by reforming it. In early October 1918 a new provincial Cheka was elected and a more unruly Cheka chairman was replaced with a more disciplined appointment, Oskar K. Kanter. This reform of the Cheka proved an essential prerequisite for the consolidation of Bolshevik rule and its origins go back to the summer of 1918. From this time it is possible to trace the malpractice which individual Chekists were involved in and how this was gradually stamped out under Kanter’s chairmanship of the provincial Cheka.

#### **The introduction of the Red Terror**

On 5 September 1918 Sovnarkom issued its declaration of the Red Terror which came in the wake of the assassination of Mikhail Uritskii, the head of the Petrograd Cheka, and the attempt on Lenin’s life on 30 August. It gave increased responsibility to the Vecheka and its subordinate branches to protect the Soviet regime by arresting and executing class enemies and all individuals involved in counter-revolutionary organisations, plots or rebellions. In short, the right to apply summary justice was given to the Cheka.<sup>1</sup> Largely

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<sup>1</sup> Leggett, *The Cheka*. 105-110. For the Red Terror announcement see Belov, et al., *Iz Istorii VChK*. 182-183. The attempt on Lenin’s life was reported in *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta* on 1 and 2 September.

because of the influential position of the Left SRs in the local Left SR-Bolshevik alliance the role of the Cheka was limited in Karelia and even after the removal of the Left SRs from the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee in July there was no dramatic change of policy. The sources suggest that the Red Terror in Petrozavodsk did not explode into a fury of violence, rather, local Bolsheviks pursued terror as a form of governance and control but it was applied ‘moderately.’ Without going into the intricacies of what constitutes terror it is enough to state that the term ‘moderate’ is used here not to trivialise the horrific nature of the Red Terror but to stress that the evidence for Karelia indicates that in approximately the last quarter of 1918 the number of executions carried out by the Cheka remained relatively low.<sup>2</sup> A selected number of executions took place against individuals defined by the Bolsheviks as the enemies of the new Soviet state, i.e. former police officials, former tsarist army officers, priests and rebels who took up arms. However the threat of executions, investigations, arrests and fines and the subsequent intimidation caused by this through publication in the local press were the more common features of the state’s repressive system in Karelia at this time.

Shortly before the Red Terror became official Petrozavodsk received a telegram from G.I. Petrovskii, the People’s Commissar for Internal Affairs, circulated to all soviets on 3 September, about the introduction of revolutionary terror on a nationwide scale. Petrovskii called for an intensification of the terror: all Right SRs were to be arrested; hostages were to be taken from amongst the bourgeoisie and former tsarist officers; and mass shootings were to be applied at the least sign of resistance from the White Guards. Regarding the latter point the telegram stressed: ‘Local provincial executive committees

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Reports were also printed on the Bolshevik leader’s condition (noting his pulse rate, breathing and temperature) on 3 & 5 September.

<sup>2</sup> For the author’s previous attempt to explain the terror during the Russian civil war see A.S. Wright, “Guns and Guillotines: State Terror in the Russian and French Revolutions.” *Revolutionary Russia*, Vol.20, No.2, 2007. 173-195.

must display special initiative in this respect.<sup>3</sup> Therefore the terror had been introduced and encouraged centrally but the decree was clearly reliant on the interpretation and implementation of local Bolsheviks. On 4 September the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik Party Committee discussed the implementation of the Red Terror and proposed to the provincial revolutionary executive committee to: 1) execute all those arrested and guilty of counter-revolutionary activity; 2) impose a 500,000 rouble levy (*kontributsiia*) on the bourgeoisie and make its payment compulsory and attached to the threat of execution if it was not paid within a week;<sup>4</sup> 3) introduce corresponding class based rations; 4) mobilise the bourgeoisie for community service; 5) discharge all Right SRs from their working posts.<sup>5</sup> Subsequently, on 9 September, the provincial revolutionary executive committee also resolved to distribute Petrovskii's telegram to all district and parish soviets for their information and the Red Terror's implementation.<sup>6</sup> At the same time the revolutionary executive committee assigned the provincial Bolshevik party committee specific rights over the detention of prisoners: all arrested White Guards and hostages could only be released upon the decision of the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik party committee.<sup>7</sup>

On 5 September the Petrozavodsk town soviet also decided to implement the Red Terror decree. It unanimously agreed to introduce Petrovskii's order, to arrest all Right SRs in Petrozavodsk, arrest several representatives of the bourgeoisie and a number of officers and hold them as hostages.<sup>8</sup> Shortly thereafter a list was composed and 18 so called bourgeois individuals and officers were arrested. Amongst those imprisoned were people who belonged to groups targeted as the Bolshevik revolution's main enemies: the

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<sup>3</sup> For the content of the telegram see NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.66, l.117. Also available in Leggett, *The Cheka*. 108-109.

<sup>4</sup> The Petrozavodsk town soviet resolved at a session on 15 October 1918 to simply arrest those members of the bourgeoisie who evaded the tax. The arrested individuals would be detained until payment was made. Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 137.

<sup>5</sup> RGASPI, f.67, op.1, d.69, l.30.

<sup>6</sup> NARK, f.P-2, op.1, d.14, l.29. The provincial conference of district Chekas also resolved on 17 September to inform all the Chekas in the province to immediately carry out everything mentioned in Petrovskii's telegram. NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.17, l.85.

<sup>7</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.66, l.116.

<sup>8</sup> Korablev, et al., *Petrozavodsk*. 135.

chairman of the centre SRs G.I. Prokhorov; two Right SRs; a former member of the town *duma* who had previously been affiliated to the Kadets; a priest; and three officers.<sup>9</sup> On 7 September the Petrozavodsk town soviet decided that only 20 hostages should be detained at any one time and only for a period of two weeks, after which time a second group of people would be identified for arrest upon the release of the first group.<sup>10</sup> On the same day, the Cheka announced to the citizens of Petrozavodsk in the provincial *Izvestiia* that they had taken hostages and the first attempt by anyone to take action against the soviets or soviet workers would result in the execution of all the hostages.<sup>11</sup>

Shortly after this announcement further threats were issued by the Cheka and published in the press to act as a deterrent. On 17 September the provincial Cheka announced that there had been an attempt to take the life of the Bolshevik ‘extraordinary commissar’ in the region, S.P. Natsarenus. The newspaper announcement reported that any repeat attempt against Natsarenus or any other soviet worker would result in the immediate execution of all hostages in prison at that time.<sup>12</sup>

There is little evidence to suggest that immediately prior to or following the declaration of the Red Terror ‘unreserved mass shootings’ took place in Karelia as Petrovskii had encouraged in the face of White resistance. The actual targets of the Cheka were leading figures within the Left SRs. At the start of October Ivan Balashov, the head of the local Left SR party and still a member of the Petrozavodsk town soviet, was arrested and held for two weeks without any charges being brought against him.<sup>13</sup> The Left SR

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 136.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Some of the 18 individuals originally detained were released a few weeks later. See *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 1 October 1918.

<sup>11</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 7 September 1918.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 17 September 1918.

<sup>13</sup> A.F. Kopnin, the provincial commissar for justice, explained to remaining Left SRs in the town who had made a complaint that Balashov had been accused of extortion and his case transferred to the Vecheka in Moscow. However, this left the Left SRs bewildered because they had previously been told by the Cheka that Balashov was under arrest for ‘counter-revolution.’ As a result, the Petrozavodsk town soviet resolved to ask the provincial Cheka to produce a concrete accusation against Balashov. *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 17 October 1918.

party tried to drum up some support at the Aleksandrovsk munitions factory on the eve of the anniversary of the October revolution but events in Petrograd, at roughly the same time, gave local Bolsheviks the perfect opportunity to further undermine all remaining Left SRs in Petrozavodsk. Following the failed rebellion on 14 October by sailors of the Second Baltic Fleet Detachment, who were sympathetic and strongly influenced by the Left SRs, the Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee, on 29 November, approved the decision taken by the provincial Cheka to close down the local Left SR party committee.<sup>14</sup> On 27 November the provincial Cheka had searched the Left SRs' party headquarters, removed its literature and all other items and then sealed off the premises. In the newspaper report which detailed the search the Left SRs were demonised by the Bolsheviks, thus mirroring the Petrograd Bolsheviks' stance following the Baltic Fleet sailors' rising. The report described the local Left SRs as 'turning white' and 'political minors'.<sup>15</sup>

The primary reason for the relative moderation of the provincial Cheka was the different trajectory of the White movement in the north than for example, in the south where a host of former tsarist army officers had flocked to form the 'Volunteer Army' in early 1918.<sup>16</sup> In Petrozavodsk, after the skirmishes with the White Finns in the spring of 1918, the Bolsheviks did not have to worry about being attacked by a White Army because such a force did not yet exist in any sizeable form. It was not until after the Armistice in November 1918 that the Allies and the Russian White Army issued a general mobilisation order in the zones occupied by them.<sup>17</sup> In his memoirs General Maynard recalled that in October 1918:<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 541.

<sup>15</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 1 December 1918. For information on the attempted rebellion by the sailors from the Second Baltic Fleet Detachment see Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power*. 349-355.

<sup>16</sup> The Volunteer Army combined with the Don Cossacks and other anti-Bolshevik forces towards the end of 1918 to become the White Army led by General Anton Denikin. On the formation and fortunes of the White Army in south Russia see Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia, 1918*.

<sup>17</sup> Maynard, *The Murmansk Venture*. 143-145.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 125.

I had failed to secure more than a handful of Russian recruits; and though mobilization was spoken of, the population was small, and most the men of military age were required for work on the railway and at the various posts. Thus, before a Russian army of any material assistance to me could be built up, it would be necessary to extend the area from which recruits could be drawn.

The Allied forces therefore did include a small contingent of mobilised Russian troops by autumn 1918 and, of course, it was the Allies who posed the greatest military threat to the Bolsheviks, but they did not make any major advance south of Soroka until mid-February 1919 when they defeated the Red Army at Segezha.

Therefore the civil war front in Karelia as it existed at the time of the introduction of the Red Terror was not particularly threatening and this may explain why executions appear to have remained few. However, the proximity of the Allies and the potential for the growth of a White Army in Murmansk did prompt mass arrests in Petrozavodsk. According to Allied intelligence reports, by the end of August 1918 many arrests among officers and educated classes had been made in the town.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, at the Cheka conference of the Northern Region in Petrograd in October 1918 a member of the Olonets provincial cheka, N.N. Dorofeev, also stated that upon its creation the provincial Cheka's attention was immediately drawn towards former officers, a number of whom were arrested but released upon further investigation.<sup>20</sup> Admittedly shootings did take place: on 13 September three military officers and a policeman were shot by the provincial Cheka.<sup>21</sup> But in general the Olonets provincial Cheka arrested and detained suspects rather than carry out a mass of executions. The head of the Murmansk railroad Cheka explained at the Cheka conference of the Northern Region in October that his Cheka had arrested 260 officers although 'many were released'. A total of nine individuals were executed.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> WO 157/1215, Syren Force Intelligence report, 26 August 1918.

<sup>20</sup> Vinogradov, *Vchk Upolnomochena Soobshchit'*. 255. I.V. Matveev mentions in his memoirs that a number of the officers travelled through Olonets province to link up with the Allies in Murmansk. Gardin, et al., *Vlast' Sovetov*. 74-75.

<sup>21</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 14 September 1918.

<sup>22</sup> Vinogradov, *Vchk Upolnomochena Soobshchit'*. 255.

However, if the Cheka was relatively moderate in carrying out executions it was not immune from the spy psychosis inherent in any security force. The presence of the Allies in particular fuelled the suspicions of the Cheka and the hunt for spies formed a significant part of the institution's investigatory work. On 15 October, at the opening day of the conference of the Northern Region Chekas, the Murmansk railroad Cheka chairman remarked that his Cheka had uncovered 'a few spy organisations.'<sup>23</sup> One such 'spy organisation' involved two members of the Murmansk railroad military soviet, A.A. Khoroshevskii and I.F. Pruss and the head of defence for the Murmansk railroad, a Captain Orlov. The Cheka arrested all three men on 7 October for alleged 'criminal dealings with the Anglo-French.'<sup>24</sup> The arrested individuals were accused of passing important military secrets to the Allies and therefore assisting their southern advance. Suggesting an element of cooperation within the Cheka hierarchy, members of the Vecheka from Petrograd arrived especially to investigate the case and assist the members of the Murmansk railroad and provincial Chekas.<sup>25</sup> How the investigation turned out is not known but Pruss and Orlov were deemed suspicious enough to be escorted to Moscow on 12 October while Khoroshevskii was released.<sup>26</sup>

Little more is known of the affair but Allied intelligence suggests that Captain Orlov was innocent and he was not working for them. Indeed, as the Allies understood it, Orlov had been arrested for communicating with the Germans.<sup>27</sup> The arrest of Orlov was also met with protests at a meeting of some of the staff (*kollektiv sluzhashchikh*) who worked under him for the defence of the Murmansk railroad. At a gathering on 11 October these employees expressed their surprise and disappointment at Orlov's arrest. They

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 8 October 1918. Khoroshevskii had previously been arrested in March 1918 in connection with the arrest of the former tsarist officer Ia.P. Skachkov. Orlov arrived in the region in early May 1918 at the head of a detachment for railway defence which was subordinated to the executive committee of the Murmansk railroad. Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 242; 224.

<sup>25</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 11 October 1918.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 16 October 1918.

<sup>27</sup> WO 157/1215, Syren Force Intelligence report, 21 October 1918.

believed it ‘improbable’ that he was involved in any kind of counter-revolutionary activity because he was in regular contact with the administrative personnel for the defence of the railway line and all his orders, it appeared to them, were based solely on strengthening Soviet authority in the region. At some point in the recent past Orlov had himself been responsible for rooting out espionage in the region and anyone suspected of espionage was arrested on Orlov’s orders and handed over to the provincial Cheka. Orlov’s work record convinced the gathering that his arrest was ‘malicious fabrication by someone who thought ill of Orlov.’ Consequently the employees for the defence of the Murmansk railroad appealed to the investigatory commission responsible for Orlov’s case to free Orlov.<sup>28</sup>

At the Second Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference the Orlov case arose once more, this time casting doubt over Orlov’s innocence; a party representative announced that Orlov along with a few others was sympathetic towards the English.<sup>29</sup> It would seem he was arrested because of his status as a former tsarist officer, in charge of military units and combating espionage, which raised suspicions on the part of the Cheka and contributed to his arrest and subsequent transfer to Moscow. Orlov had also been involved in communications with the Allies when that was Soviet policy. He had communicated with the English Admiral Kemp in Murmansk at the end of June or early July concerning negotiations between S.P. Natsarenius and the Allies.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Orlov was outspoken, he had previously been arrested but bailed in mid-August for angrily protesting the arrest of one of his colleagues at the town commissariat of defence in Petrozavodsk. Witnesses recalled that Orlov abused members of the Petrozavodsk town soviet while drunk, threatened them with his revolver and reminded those present that he was an officer and would arrest and disarm everyone. This previous altercation was significant and although he was issued bail his case was forwarded to eight different higher

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<sup>28</sup> NARK, f.P-6159, op.1, d.92, l.61-61ob.

<sup>29</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.8, l.10

<sup>30</sup> Kedrov, *Bez.* 139-140.

governing institutions in Olonets province, Moscow and Petrograd.<sup>31</sup> In other words Orlov's arrest in October appears to have been an action taken against possible betrayal, encouraged by the presence of the Allies and his previous behaviour. Orlov's fate is unknown and his name is absent in local sources from this point which suggests he did not return from Moscow.

### **The attack on religion and terror in Olonets district**

As well as seeing enemies among anyone who had contacts with the Allies, however legitimate, the Cheka strongly believed the Orthodox Church to be a centre of opposition to the regime and showed little moderation when dealing with it. The conflict with the Aleksandr-Svirskii monastery mentioned in Chapter 2 flared up again in autumn 1918 when the provincial revolutionary soviet executive committee decided to seize the monastery's wealth, discredit the Orthodox Church and close down the 'Union for the Defence of Religion and the Church' which was affiliated to the monastery.<sup>32</sup> On 29 October the provincial *Izvestiia* reported that the federation of Anarchists from Petrozavodsk accompanied by representatives of the provincial Cheka, the district Cheka and the chairman of the local *kombed* had made an inspection of the monastery on 22 October. Over the next two days a Red Army unit under the control of the provincial Cheka confiscated the monastery's valuables and property and arrested a number of clergymen on 23 October.<sup>33</sup> However, during the searches and confiscations the Chekists and Red Army men humiliated the monks by insulting their religious beliefs: they refused to remove their caps; barked out orders; got drunk on the monastery's wine; and even opened up a shrine containing the remains of St. Aleksandr. According to a member of the

<sup>31</sup> NARK, f.R-573, op.1, d.37, l.219.

<sup>32</sup> Vdovitsyna, "Aleksandro-Svirskii Monastyr'" in *Urok Istorii Daet Arckhiv*. 104-106.

<sup>33</sup> In total 40 *puds* worth of silver was found concealed in the monastery's walls along with money and gold decorations which were transferred to the provincial Cheka to be inventoried. *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 29 October 1918. Nine *puds* and ten *funts* worth of scrap silver which was not of historical value was also melted down on the orders of the Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee and handed over to the People's Bank. Various other items were given to the local *kombed* to distribute amongst the local poor. Vdovitsyna, "Aleksandro-Svirskii Monastyr'." 99; 105.

All-Russian Synod the Red Army men then invented a story, which was later published in the newspapers, that inside the shrine was a wax doll.<sup>34</sup> Atrocities followed: five of the clergymen arrested previously on 23 October were shot on the night of the 11/12 November by the Olonets district Cheka, including the monastery's father superior, Archimandrite Evgenii.<sup>35</sup>

Understanding this act is troublesome because the history of the Olonets district Cheka before and after these executions shows that, like the provincial Cheka, executions were limited and arrests and fines were more common. However, it appears to have been a shock measure that bypassed the Left SR dominated district executive committee which had refused to send representatives to the Olonets provincial soviet revolutionary executive committee and resisted the introduction of the *kombedy* and harvest registration (see Chapter 4). According to the provincial Cheka's report the executions carried out by the Olonets district Cheka occurred with the sanction of the provincial Cheka and the provincial soviet revolutionary executive committee.<sup>36</sup> The shootings were therefore an extreme but intentional act perpetrated by the district Cheka with pressure and support from the provincial Cheka and provincial revolutionary executive committee to gain control in a longer standing feud with the monastery in a district where the Left SRs still dominated and where the Olonets district soviet executive committee was keen to curb the actions of the Cheka (see the Timofeev affair in Chapter 4).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 101. A later report written by the provincial Cheka to the provincial revolutionary executive committee differed; according to this report an ordinary skeleton had been revealed in the shrine of St. Aleksandr. Vdovitsyna, "Aleksandro-Svirskii Monastyr'" in *Urok Istorii Daet Arckhiv*. 105. A commission set up on 19 December 1918 by the presidium of the Soviet of Commissars of the Northern Region to investigate what had been found in St. Aleksandr Svirskii's shrine concluded that a partially decomposed corpse was revealed. Smith, "Bones of Contention". 156-157.

<sup>35</sup> Vdovitsyna, "Aleksandro-Svirskii Monastyr'" in *Urok Istorii Daet Arckhiv*. 99-100.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 105.

<sup>37</sup> The relative docility of the Olonets district Cheka, this incident apart, is reflected in its unpublished records. These records state that from 15 August to 15 December 1918 the Cheka resolved 150 different cases and were combating counter-revolution and speculation by carrying out executions (on only three occasions, totalling 9 individuals), making arrests and imposing fines. From 22 October to 22 December the Cheka had collected fines worth a total of 45,446 roubles which were transferred to its own account and helped it to maintain a small Red Army detachment of 28 men. GARF, f.R-393, op.13, d.268, l.4; 8; Korablev, et al., *Istoriia Karelii*. 371.

### **Chekist malpractice and the need for reform**

The Cheka in Karelia did not resort to wide scale executions in the last quarter of 1918 but it was corrupt, unruly and disorganised and change was required to resolve these deficiencies. In Chapter 4 we saw how the unclear boundaries of the Cheka's authority in Olonets district (the Timofeev affair) led to clashes with the soviets and its institutions. A similar style conflict between the Cheka and the soviets overlapped the Timofeev affair and involved the chairman of the Olonets provincial Cheka I.V. Elpedinskii. On 9 August 1918 Elpedinskii and another Chekist went to Vidlitskaia parish in Olonets district, got drunk, carried out searches in the local ironworks factory and then assaulted some local officials and stole their money.<sup>38</sup> The Elpedinskii case is important because it underlined the unclear lines of the Cheka's authority in relation to the soviets. This became apparent at the provincial conference of district Chekas when Elpedinskii's fellow Chekists believed they had the right to overrule the soviets and the party in order to keep the provincial Cheka chairman in his position, which they indeed managed to do for a short time.

On 17 August the Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee decided to act against the unruly Elpedinskii and recommended that a new chairman, I.I. Terukov, a native of Petrozavodsk, be appointed the chair of the Olonets provincial Cheka. However, by supporting Terukov's nomination to the chairmanship of the provincial Cheka, the executive committee brought itself into conflict with the Cheka which did not support the move. The executive committee's support for Terukov also complicated matters because his appointment was only a recommendation and Elpedinskii still officially remained chairman. The provincial Cheka at its session of 20 August discussed the 'dual authority in

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<sup>38</sup> NARK, f.P-2, op.1, d.9, l.2. Born in 1887 Ivan Elpedinskii served in the Baltic fleet between 1908 and 1909 before being discharged for health reasons. He became a member of the Bolshevik party in 1911 and worked in Vladimir province for a few years before becoming a telegrapher at Soroka station, Kem' district, in 1915 and then a worker at Suna station, Petrozavodsk district, in January 1918. While at Suna station he helped organise a Bolshevik party cell. Shortly after he became a member of the Olonets province executive committee and was appointed the commissar for post and telegraphs for Murmansk County. E.P. Laidinen, "Chekist O.K. Kanter: Epizody Biografii". *Voprosy Istorii Evropeiskogo Severa*, 2007. 191.

the Cheka' and decided 'to take all matters into our own hands and not to permit outside interference' but 'to work under the supervision of the provincial executive committee.' In other words the provincial Cheka agreed that the executive committee could check up on it but not tell it what to do. Elpedinskii remained the chairman of the provincial Cheka while Terukov was appointed the head of the provincial Cheka's department for combating counter-revolution.<sup>39</sup>

However, when Elpedinskii's deeds in Vidlitskaia parish came to light at a session of the Petrozavodsk Country Bolshevik Party Committee on 29 August it condemned his actions. The party committee's reaction was uncompromising: Elpedinskii's behaviour was described as 'disgraceful' and it was proposed to dismiss him from all his elected positions and exclude him from the party.<sup>40</sup> Clearly, this mirrored the stance taken by the provincial revolutionary executive committee but also represented further Bolshevik party resistance towards the Cheka because not all members of the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik Party Committee presidium sat on the provincial revolutionary executive committee in the summer of 1918.<sup>41</sup> On 30 August the provincial revolutionary executive committee restated its decision to remove Elpedinskii from all elected posts, including that as chairman of the provincial Cheka.<sup>42</sup> Ivan Terukov was then appointed temporary head of the provincial Cheka which, on 11 September, was made permanent.<sup>43</sup> However, having heard a statement from Elpedinskii himself, the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik Party Committee backtracked from its original decision when it met on 14 September because it believed that the statement cast a different light on the incident. What exactly was within Elpedinskii's statement is not known but his appeal to review his case was accepted out of

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<sup>39</sup> Laidinen, "O.K. Kanter". 192. Provincial Chekas were supposed to be divided up into five different departments. They were the departments for: combating counter-revolution, combating speculation, combating misuse of authority, territorial liaison and railway security. Leggett, *The Cheka*. 39-40.

<sup>40</sup> RGASPI, f.67, op.1, d.69, l.27.

<sup>41</sup> For the members of the Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee and the Petrozavodsk Country Bolshevik party (and presidium) in the summer of 1918 see Chapter 3, fn.82; Chapter 4, fn.10.

<sup>42</sup> Laidinen, "O.K. Kanter". 191.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 192.

respect for his previous work within local government<sup>44</sup> and ‘the current difficult time for the revolution’, presumably reference to the threat of the Allies and the recent declaration of the Red Terror on 5 September. As a result, the party committee decided to only temporarily exclude Elpedinskii and up to the conclusion of the investigation into the affair allow him to continue to work in soviet institutions.<sup>45</sup>

Elpedinskii’s position as chairman of the provincial Cheka was supported by his fellow Chekists at the first Olonets provincial conference of district Chekas. On 17 September Cheka delegates stressed that the charges against him were ‘groundless’, it was ‘the wish of the bourgeoisie to wrest him from the ranks of the proletariat’, ‘an artful ruse by counter-revolutionaries’ and that the County Bolshevik Party Committee had made a mistake and acted too hastily in supporting these accusations. The conference decided unanimously to sanction Elpedinskii’s rehabilitation, asked him to continue his work in the provincial Cheka and to work in soviet institutions.<sup>46</sup> Terukov’s chairmanship of the provincial Cheka lasted less than two weeks and Elpedinskii was reinstated. Terukov remained in the provincial Cheka and was appointed the Cheka’s head of staff for employees on 24 September.<sup>47</sup> Elpedinskii had therefore won the backing of his fellow Chekists and eventually the local party committee to remain provincial chairman of the Cheka, in contrast to the wishes of the provincial revolutionary executive committee. But re-elections to the Olonets provincial Cheka in early October (see below) meant that his victory was short lived and he was replaced.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> At the First Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference, the Bolshevik commissar for post and telegraphs Ia.F. Igoshkin commended Elpedinskii. The Union for Post and Telegraphs initially refused to recognise the transition of power to the Soviets and had formed a strike committee. Igoshkin explained that Elpedinskii ‘purged’ the union and helped increase the number of communist sympathisers amongst the post and telegraph workers. At the Second Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference Igoshkin also commented that Elpedinskii had played an integral role in establishing a party cell in Suna, Petrozavodsk district. Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor’ba*. 502; 527.

<sup>45</sup> RGASPI, f.67, op.1, d.69, l.36; NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.17, l.44.

<sup>46</sup> NARK, f.R-411, op.1, d.1, l.15-15ob.

<sup>47</sup> He was dismissed from all organs of security in September 1919 on the decision of the party court. He later moved to Kronstadt. Laidinen, “O.K. Kanter”. 192.

<sup>48</sup> Some time after the re-elections Elpedinskii left for Moscow and was appointed head of communications for the Sixth Red Army. RGASPI, f.67, op.1, d.69, l.66.

The Elpedinskii affair is not only a good example of why the Olonets provincial Cheka was reformed through re-elections in October 1918 but it highlights an important point in the development of local power relations after the exit of the Left SRs from the provincial executive committee. Against those local Bolsheviks in the Cheka who supported this institution's autonomy, other Bolsheviks struggled to preserve the authority of the soviet executive committees which to them were, in one historian's words: 'the pinnacle of revolutionary power.'<sup>49</sup> The Vecheka's over-lordship was not welcomed by local Bolsheviks who opposed the autonomy of the Cheka which had been encouraged by unclear statements from Moscow. Dzerzhinsky's circular telegram from 29 August announced that the Chekas should be in 'close contact...with all local organs of soviet authority' but at the same time:<sup>50</sup>

the Chekas are unquestionably autonomous in their own work and must carry out implicitly all orders issued by the Vecheka, the highest organ to which they are subordinated. The Chekas are only accountable to the soviets, but in no circumstances are the soviets or any of its departments to countermand or suspend the orders of the Chekas issued from the Vecheka.

As Leggett has pointed out, this telegram seemed to undermine the authority of the executive committees.<sup>51</sup> In short local Chekas needed only to concern themselves with their own institution's ruling body and their interpretation of its orders. As indicated at the Olonets provincial conference of district Chekas statements like Dzerzhinsky's struck a chord with local Chekists who supported their own comrades and overruled the opposition of the provincial executive committee and the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik party committee. For local Chekists the Chekas were, as Dzerzhinsky underlined above, 'autonomous in their own work'.

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<sup>49</sup> Melancon, "Revolutionary Culture". 11.

<sup>50</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.17, l.54. This statement is also available in Leggett, *The Cheka*. 124. It was decided by the provincial conference of district Chekas on 17 September to publish this decree in the localities of Olonets province as a guide for soviet organs. NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.17, l.85.

<sup>51</sup> Leggett, *The Cheka*. 125.

## Reforming the Cheka

It was clear from the point of view of the local soviets that something had to be done to curb the autonomy of the Cheka and the encouragement this body received from above. The introduction of the Red Terror decree, discussed above, further encouraged local Chekas to make arrests, so much so that the provincial and Murmansk railroad Chekas came into conflict with one another.<sup>52</sup> On 19 September a board (*kollegiia*) member of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, V.A. Tikhomirnov, sent a circular telegram to all provinces and districts which reflected the debates which were going on in the capital surrounding the Cheka and the soviets. He stated that: 'The Vecheka insists upon the independent existence of the local Chekas' but 'we [The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs] consider it necessary to incorporate them as government subdivisions.'<sup>53</sup> Leaders of the provincial soviet in Petrozavodsk were also keen to put a stop to the arbitrary nature of the cheka and resolved on 20 September to relay Tikhomirov's telegram by informing the districts that the Chekas were divisions or sub-divisions attached to the soviets and subordinated to them, i.e. the provincial Cheka to the provincial executive committee and the district Chekas to the district executive committees.<sup>54</sup>

The following month, on 5 October, Petrozavodsk received another circular telegram from Tikhomirnov which blamed the soviets for the arbitrary nature of the Red Terror:<sup>55</sup>

... a considerable majority of soviets have not taken the appropriate decisive measures in securing the rear of our armies from all possible provocative statements and counter-revolutionary conspiracies and a few other soviets, not infrequently, have directed the red terror not against the eminent bourgeoisie and

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<sup>52</sup> On 19 September the Murmansk railroad Cheka wrote to the Petrozavodsk town soviet, copying in the provincial Cheka and the provincial soviet revolutionary executive committee and stated that a significant number of employees from the Murmansk railroad had been arrested by the provincial Cheka. The Murmansk railroad Cheka stressed that these arrests had occurred without its sanction and hindered the efficiency of work along the railway line. NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.17, l.45.

<sup>53</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.66, l.133.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. l.132.

<sup>55</sup> NARK, f.R-411, op.1, d.1, l.28-28ob.

old authorities but against the petty bourgeoisie and the philistinism of the intelligentsia (*intelligentsia obyvatel'shchiny*).

The telegram failed to take into account the contradictory statements that were coming from the capital concerning the independence of the Chekas but asked all provincial executive committees to clarify for the local soviets the type of hostage to be taken and that the 'petty bourgeoisie' could be released if the soviets forced them to work in labour companies (*trudovye roty*).<sup>56</sup> The Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee recognised the 'tactless activity' of its provincial Cheka at this time and at one of its sessions on 8 October decided to reorganise the institution and carry out new elections to the provincial Cheka. The resolution passed by the committee stressed that new Cheka members should only be elected from experienced party workers and that Chekas were subordinate to the revolutionary executive committee and were to act in close communication with the department of soviet administration and the department of justice.<sup>57</sup>

This re-organisation of the provincial Cheka saw the Latvian Oskar Kristianovich Kanter appointed Olonets province's new Cheka chairman. Born into a peasant family in Riga on 10 April 1885, Kanter finished four years of schooling at the Riga town gymnasium and in 1903 joined the Bolshevik party. In 1908 he was arrested and sentenced to four years penal servitude before being exiled to Karelia from 1914-1917. From September 1917 to February 1918 Kanter served as the secretary of a local regional council (*uprava*) in Petrograd province and in April 1918 was sent from the former capital to Olonets province to help organise local party organs and soviets.<sup>58</sup> Kanter's appointment marked a significant turning point in the history of the provincial Cheka. As we shall see below and in Chapter 8, following his appointment the provincial Cheka progressively

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> NARK, f.P-2, op.1, d.14, l.66.

<sup>58</sup> Laidinen, "O.K. Kanter". 194.

operated less chaotically. He was the ideal person for his new position: he was young; a long standing member of the Bolshevik party; educated; an experienced revolutionary and organiser; and familiar with the region. It is testimony to his success as chairman of the Olonets provincial Cheka that he held the post for over two years (until 10 December 1920) and was elected to the joint presidium of the Karelian Labour Commune and Olonets provincial executive committee in August 1920.<sup>59</sup>

Kanter's task was a difficult one; he faced a number of problems in running the provincial Cheka and it would take time to stamp his authority on the institution. Principally he had to: restore order to a hitherto unruly organisation while continuing its investigations; find reliable cadres to work in the Cheka; eliminate individual Chekist malpractice; and build a better relationship between different state agencies. However his work was hindered from the outset because of the chaotic state in which he found the Cheka. For one thing, the provincial revolutionary executive refused to hand over its records to the newly elected staff.<sup>60</sup> This would suggest that the Cheka's former members had something to hide. One such incident which may have influenced this decision involved two Chekists who were accused by the provincial Cheka of abusing their position at a session on 1 October 1918. They arrived drunk at Petrozavodsk prison and without permission took a prisoner who had been arrested as a former gendarme into their vehicle to the outskirts of the town to shoot him. However, while en route the prisoner jumped from the moving vehicle and vanished without a trace. By April 1919 he had still not been found.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid. For the rest of his impressive and eventful career see: Ibid 205-208.

<sup>60</sup> NARK, f.P-2, op.1, d.14, l.67.

<sup>61</sup> NARK, f.P-2, op.1, d.9, l.10; f.P-4, op.1, d.17, l.13. One of the guilty Chekists was excluded from the party indefinitely and deprived of the right to work in the soviets. The other was fully rehabilitated and allowed to continue working in soviet institutions because of his previous work in the party and soviets.

Despite the re-election of the provincial Cheka disorganisation and abuses of authority within this body continued but, fairly quickly after Kanter's appointment, the Cheka was operating in a relatively more structured manner and members began to be disciplined for their crimes. Between the 31 October and 4 November a member of the provincial Cheka, Vasilii Bogdanov, along with three provincial Cheka employees carried out a general search of the merchants situated in the village of Ladva, Petrozavodsk district, and used torture in order to locate their valuables. Furthermore, on the way back to Petrozavodsk some of the requisitioned goods were taken to the flat of one of Bogdanov's collaborators and therefore did not find its way to the provincial Cheka. However, by chance the commissar for the defence of the town came across the individuals at the moment they were sharing out the requisitioned goods and all four were arrested. Initially the provincial Cheka wished to execute the individuals but after a session of the provincial executive committee the sentences were reduced to imprisonment and compulsory labour on the basis that the individuals were young (Bogdanov was 19 years old) and under extreme strain due to their work in the Cheka. Bogdanov received seven years and on 18 December, at a session of the Olonets provincial Bolshevik party committee, he was excluded from the party along with his associates.<sup>62</sup>

Such malpractices by individual Chekists can be attributed to the fact that because of its responsibilities the Cheka was different than other Soviet agencies. It was an internal security/political police force which operated under an officially declared Red Terror and was trusted to investigate and root out counter-revolution. Because the lines of the Chekas' authority in relation to the soviets was far from clear, it is perhaps not surprising that the Cheka attracted careerists or criminal elements. The cheka lacked both members who would not tarnish the name of the soviets through malpractice and administratively capable individuals. This inevitably placed an increased burden on tried and tested administrators

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<sup>62</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 22 & 25 December 1918; Laidinen, "O.K. Kanter". 198-199.

and generated competition between institutions for them. On 25 November Kanter complained to the Petrozavodsk County Bolshevik party committee, which two days previously had appointed the bookkeeper of the provincial Cheka as secretary of the revolutionary tribunal. Kanter explained that the bookkeeper's departure would have a considerable effect on the Cheka's accounts and that he was irreplaceable.<sup>63</sup>

Because of the lack of reliable personnel it was common for individuals to take up more than one responsible post and to sit on several committees. For example, during the civil war Oskar Kanter was a member and secretary of the Olonets provincial executive committee, chairman of the provincial Cheka, a member of the provincial military revolutionary committee and the Red Army committee of assistance.<sup>64</sup> He was not the only Chekist taking up a number of positions within the provincial authorities. Kanter wrote to the agitation-propaganda department attached to the local Bolshevik party committee on 24 December to complain about the overwork of one of the Cheka department's members, K.A. Luzgin, who had recently been appointed to the agitation-propaganda department. He explained that Luzgin worked for ten hours a day as an investigator within the Cheka's department for combating counter-revolution and malfeasance (*prestuplenie po dolzhnosti*) while in his free time worked in another commission attached to the revolutionary tribunal. As a result, Kanter asked the agitation-propaganda department to free Luzgin from his duties for the general benefit of the Cheka.<sup>65</sup>

A lack of capable administrators was also reflected in the severe lack of organisation, including the most basic of clerical tasks, within the provincial Cheka. A report compiled by an auditing committee at the end of March 1919 into the provincial Cheka's department for the struggle with counter-revolution and malfeasance found that no

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<sup>63</sup> NARK, f.P-2, op.1, d.15, l.52.

<sup>64</sup> Laidinen, "O.K. Kanter". 194; NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.33, l.102.

<sup>65</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.17, l.49.

record of those arrested had been made, there was no record of a weapons registration, lists of the local bourgeoisie and former officers or even the addresses of employees and workers working in soviet institutions for 1918 or 1919.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, journal entries for the activities of the department either did not exist or were in complete disorder. For example, the list of those arrested only contained the name of the individual but detailed nothing about when they were due for release or how long they had been imprisoned for. In order to find this out one had to actually travel to the prison and question the official in charge. Paperwork was left untied, unstamped with the Cheka's seal and some remained unsigned by the person responsible. To add to the confusion many orders were also left undated and some distributed under various individuals' signatures from the office secretary to the filing clerk. Over 100 important orders and documents, such as the minutes of the session from the 11 September which resolved to execute four individuals on 13 September (see above), could not be found by the auditing commission.<sup>67</sup>

Because entry into the Cheka was prohibited for those in society who were targeted by the revolution such as members of the intelligentsia, merchants and bureaucrats (precisely those who were likely to have a higher level of education), the provincial Cheka came to rely on workers and Bolshevik party members or sympathisers which increased the illiteracy rates of its cadres.<sup>68</sup> Inevitably the Cheka attracted some careerists and criminal elements although, beginning with the appointment of Kanter, the provincial executive committee and the local Bolshevik party committee were beginning to pay more attention to the quality of the cheka's members. At a session of the Second Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference on 12 December a party member warned against

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<sup>66</sup> The auditing commission was made up of one representative each from the Vecheka, the provincial Bolshevik party committee and the provincial Cheka.

<sup>67</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.17, l.12-14

<sup>68</sup> Laidinen, "O.K. Kanter". 197.

the influx of ‘improper elements’ into the party while another proposed the ‘shadowing’ (*slezhka*) of Chekas for ‘ethical behaviour considerations.’<sup>69</sup>

There were also bloody incidents in the districts after the reorganisation of the Cheka. For instance in Olonets district after the dismissal of the Left SRs from the district executive committee in mid-November 1918, the suppression of a peasant rebellion in December was notably bloodier. Some of the rebels managed to escape to Finland but two were shot on the spot while others were caught and arrested.<sup>70</sup> However, proper procedures were followed. On the 10 January the chairman of the Olonets district Cheka, Pavel Chigar’kov, informed the Olonets provincial executive committee that attempts were made on the lives of local officials by the rebels and asked for permission to carry out executions. In response the executive committee appealed to the provincial Cheka: ‘to urgently send a few reliable members to Olonets town having given them wide plenary powers to investigate this affair. If it is necessary take the most drastic measures.’<sup>71</sup> Such measures were taken; at one of its sessions on 16 January 1919 the Olonets district Cheka decided to execute a further six leaders involved in the rebellion. Furthermore, the eleven remaining leaders who had escaped were declared outlaws and if discovered the population was given an open invitation to shoot them.<sup>72</sup>

In mid-January 1919 the Olonets district Cheka was also disciplining its members for malpractice and acted with an element of responsibility. On 16 January the case of a Cheka commissar from Olonets district, V. Matsnev, was discussed at a district Cheka session. Matsnev had been under arrest for a short time for illegally confiscating timepieces during the search of the Nikiforovskii monastery. The Cheka resolved that the short spell of imprisonment was a satisfactory punishment, the case was discontinued and

<sup>69</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 14 December 1918.

<sup>70</sup> Korablev, et al., *Istoriia Karelii*. 393; NARK, f.R-29, op.1, d.175, l.1; NARK, f.P-13, op.2, d.7, l.3.

<sup>71</sup> GARF, f.R-393, op.13, d.249, l.7-8.

<sup>72</sup> NARK, f.P-13, op.2, d.7, l.3; *Olonetskaia Kommuna*, 22 January 1919.

the gathering resolved to return the timepieces to the monastery.<sup>73</sup> When the Pudozh Cheka faced a short lived military mutiny at the end of 1918, it too acted in conjunction with the higher authorities. On 10 December the chairman of the Pudozh Cheka, O.M. Shishov, withheld cigarettes to be distributed to mobilised Red Army troops and incited a short-lived mutiny: Shishov was briefly detained and the following day two Red Army men were killed and one injured for attempting to run away. Restoring order, a further 22 Red Army men were arrested; 12 were soon released but 10 were sent to the provincial Cheka.<sup>74</sup> Later when the Pudozh district Cheka acted without authority it received a rebuke from the provincial Cheka for the execution of four prisoners in early January without provincial approval.<sup>75</sup>

### **An end to political terror**

Disciplining and changing the structure of the Cheka in Karelia was complemented at the end of 1918 by Lenin's announcement of a political amnesty, firstly for factions of the Menshevik party and then later for the SR party. The majority of local Bolsheviks reacted positively to this move but it was not the first time the local Bolsheviks hailed the arrival of former political adversaries to the ranks of the party. In September 1918 15 members of the Left Menshevik Internationalists, including their leader L.V. Nikol'skii, joined the Bolshevik party who welcomed the move. Under the title 'A moral victory' the Olonets provincial *Izvestiia* reported on 24 September that the victory of the Bolshevik forces at Kazan had been complemented by a victory for the ideas of communism in Petrozavodsk; the Left Menshevik Internationalists disbanded and placed all their funds at the disposal of the Bolsheviks. The acquisition of 15 members of the Left Menshevik Internationalist party was regarded as a moment of triumph and the newspaper report described Nikol'skii as 'one of our most outstanding public figures'.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>73</sup> NARK, f.P-13, op.2, d.7, l.4ob.

<sup>74</sup> NARK, f.R-29, op.1, d.81, l.65-66; 70-71ob.

<sup>75</sup> Laidinen, "O.K. Kanter". 203; GARF, f.R-393, op.13, d.249, l.573-573ob.

<sup>76</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 24 September 1918.

During discussions at the Second Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference (10-13 December 1918), local Bolshevik leaders welcomed new capable political administrators to compensate for the shortage of Bolshevik party cadres. Yet, there was no consensus between local Bolsheviks over the entrance of former political opponents into the party. In response to protests against the new soft-line approach towards the Mensheviks and SRs and calls for the continuation of the Red Terror another party member, A.F. Kopnin, stated his belief that the Mensheviks' and SRs' entry into Bolshevik institutions should be accepted but strictly regulated. He also supported the conciliatory move towards other socialist parties because of the need for more workers throughout the region and because the departure of communists to the front would leave the localities considerably weakened. The Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee chairman, Petr Anokhin, also supported the Leninist stance:<sup>77</sup>

...when the stray Marxist-Mensheviks seek to make contact with us we should not be vindictive because in the past they were our brothers. Nor will we cast off the petty bourgeois ranks of the peasantry who have been inspired by the ideas of communism. To be afraid of them means not to believe in our own moral strength which is becoming stronger all the time.

After Anokhin's speech Elena Stasova supported Lenin's olive branch to the other socialist parties and rejected the continuation of terror politics. The conference passed this resolution with three votes against it and six abstentions.<sup>78</sup> The policy seemed to work. A report from Lizhma station at the December party conference noted that a small number of Left SRs, who had dominated this locality up to August 1918, entered the local Bolshevik party organisation alongside a few Mensheviks.<sup>79</sup> However, conciliation was always kept within strict limits. At the end of the year the Bolsheviks had flexed their authority in the provincial press when they came into conflict with a group of journalists in December over

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 13 December 1918. On Anokhin's support of this change in tactics towards other socialist parties also see NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.8, l.7.

<sup>78</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 13 December 1918.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 14 December 1918; NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.8, l.16.

the balance of views being reported in the local *Izvestiia* concerning the Soviet regime.<sup>80</sup> Five days later the Bolsheviks merged *Izvestiia* with two other local newspapers and renamed it *Olonetskaia Kommuna*. Its three man editorial board were all Bolshevik party members.<sup>81</sup>

## Conclusion

The above chapter has shown the inroads the Bolsheviks made into consolidating their regime and the role played by the reorganisation of the provincial Cheka. The Red Terror, which was perpetrated moderately in Karelia in terms of the number of executions carried out, gave local Bolsheviks a lever of control to strengthen the party's position while the election of a new provincial Cheka chaired by Oskar Kanter, despite continued sporadic malpractice, meant a relatively better organised and orderly Cheka was evolving by the beginning of 1919. As we have seen in the previous chapter, at the end of 1918 the Second Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference took place and pointed to some of the key principles which they believed would help strengthen the party's position. Chief amongst these were the need for stricter discipline amongst members. The above chapter has suggested that stricter discipline was to some extent already under way with the election of a new provincial Cheka and from this point clashes with the soviets, which had been a prominent feature of the Cheka's activities until this time, began to disappear. Furthermore, a general political amnesty to the Bolsheviks' former political opponents was receptive in Petrozavodsk and served to bolster the administrative capabilities of the local Soviet regime.

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<sup>80</sup> On the 8 December the journalists spoke out against their own suppression and resolved: 'The organisation of soviet journalists reserves their integral right to relentless diversified criticism of local state institutions, while meanwhile not failing to record in the press the positives of local state work.' *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*. 10 December 1918.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* 24 December 1918. The editorial board consisted of Ia.K. Berztys, L.G. Gershanovich and I.A. Danilov.

Nevertheless, as the preceding chapters have shown, by the beginning of 1919, although the Bolshevik party had reformed the provincial Cheka and reinforced its political position in Petrozavodsk, it still struggled to exert control over the districts because of the incessant food shortages and a lack of reliable cadres to run government institutions. The intrusion of the *kombedy* and the Red Army in the countryside had also contributed to the outbreak of peasant rebellion at the end of 1918 and a decline in the prestige of the Soviet regime. The Bolsheviks needed to improve the food supply situation and build stronger links to the countryside but as we will see in the next chapter this was easier said than done. By the spring and summer of 1919 the party faced its most intense military crisis when the Allies and White Finns attacked simultaneously and peasant rebellion once again erupted in the Zaonezh'e peninsula.

## Chapter 7

### The Hindrance of War, January-July 1919

This chapter develops the “one step forward, two steps back” theme of the Bolsheviks’ consolidation of power in Karelia, a process which in the first half of 1919 was greatly complicated by the worsening situation at the front which intensified the familiar obstacle of acute food shortages. The previous chapter noted the positive steps made by the local Bolsheviks by means of reforming the provincial Cheka but this chapter will argue that these were put in jeopardy by the worsening military situation. The Bolsheviks’ limited progress manifested itself first in a successful mobilisation campaign, launched at the end of 1918, which, despite setbacks, provided local Bolsheviks with a Red Army to defend the region by the middle of the following year. Secondly, the Olonets provincial soviet accepted the Bolshevik leadership’s decision to merge the *kombedy*. On the other hand food problems remained intractable. In February 1919 the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee appointed the soviet’s fourth provincial commissar for food in the space of a year but like his predecessors he struggled to improve food shortages in the region. The situation became so bad that migration to the south of Soviet Russia took place for a short time in the spring and coupled with the military draft food shortages formed the basis for another peasant rebellion in the Zaonezh’e peninsula in May 1919 in the face of the Allied-White advance.

#### **The military threat, spring/summer 1919**

To contextualise the conditions under which local Bolsheviks worked in the spring and summer of 1919 it is worthwhile to briefly summarise the course of the conflict which reached its peak at this time. In April Maynard’s Syren Force, in support of White Russian troops, began an advance south which continued until the Allies’ withdrawal in the autumn of 1919.<sup>1</sup> On the night of the 21 April the first echelon of approximately 2000 White Finns

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<sup>1</sup> For more detail see C. Kinvig, *Churchill’s Crusade. The British Invasion of Russia, 1918-1920*. London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006. 172-178; 255-266.

also crossed the border and from May to June occupied large parts of Olonets district (Olonets town was captured on 23 April) and pushed towards Petrozavodsk.<sup>2</sup> In response the Petrograd Bolshevik party committee decided on 29 April to send 1000 communists to each of the Karelian and Olonets fronts.<sup>3</sup> To add to the military crisis Boris Pozern, the head of the Petrograd Military County, had caused confusion and disruption in Petrozavodsk by dismissing the Olonets provincial military commissar Arsenii Dubrovskii on 15 April, replacing him with his own candidate P.V. Iakobson (see Chapter 8).

On 30 April a new Olonets provincial military-revolutionary executive committee was elected which met the military challenge by endeavouring to mobilise every resource available.<sup>4</sup> A draft of communist party members had been undertaken in February 1919 and their mobilisation was accelerated to meet the growing military threat.<sup>5</sup> On the 23 April the Bolshevik party Central Committee issued a decree instructing all party organisations to form special task force detachments (*chasti osobogo naznacheniia*). Initially established in Moscow and Petrograd these special task forces were created to provide all communists with military training and to act as crack fighting units.<sup>6</sup> A few days later the Olonets provincial Bolshevik party committee agreed to implement the

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<sup>2</sup> For more detail on the campaign against the White Finns who were in retreat by late June 1919 see: Rupasov and Chistikov, *Sovetsko-Finliandskaia Granitsa*. 40-41; Tarasov, *Bor'ba*. 216-226; Siukiiainen, *Karel'skii Vopros*. 88-100. For some personal reminiscences of the events see Mashezerskii, *Za Sovetskuiu Kareliiu*. 209-227; 237-279; 291-305; 312-314.

<sup>3</sup> G.S. Pukhov, "Stroitel'stvo Krasnoi Armii v Petrograde i Okruge", *Krasnaia Letopis'*, Vol.33, No.6, 1929. 97. The Karelian front included part of the south-western part of Karelia which bordered Finland while the Olonets front was situated closer to central Karelia and therefore faced the attack that was coming from the Allies and Whites down the Murmansk railway line.

<sup>4</sup> A previous military-revolutionary executive committee was formed on 21 February following the advance of the Allies and their capture of Segezha. This committee was made up of P.F. Anokhin, O.K. Kanter, V.M. Parfenov, F.I. Galashev and N.N. Dorofeev. Because of the preoccupation of some of its members in other posts the new military-revolutionary committee consisted of P.F. Anokhin, O.K. Kanter, I.A. Danilov, Ia.F. Igoshkin. One representative each from the provincial military commissariat, the Petrozavodsk town soviet and the staff of the 1<sup>st</sup> brigade, 19<sup>th</sup> rifle division also entered the new commission. Balagurov and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period*. 63-64; 586, fn.12.

<sup>5</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.33, l.30.

<sup>6</sup> Tarasov, *Bor'ba*. 240-241; M. von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship. The Red Army and the Soviet Socialist State, 1917-1930*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990. 71. Party members were generally recruited to act as shock troops and increase the fighting capabilities of military units because of their support for the regime. von Hagen, *Soldiers*. 38-40; 40, fn.59.

Central Committee's decree.<sup>7</sup> However, the mobilisation of communists to the Red Army revealed the instability of the party's cells in the periphery and the weak commitment of some party members. Reporting to the Third Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference (1-5 September 1919), a year after the event, a delegate from Pudozh noted that district party collectives sprang up rapidly after the first cells were established in Pudozh in October 1918. However he believed their membership to be 'very very questionable.'<sup>8</sup> At the time of the White advance many so called communist party members in one particular parish left to join the Whites.<sup>9</sup>

In spite of this setback the mobilisation of the region was given further impetus when a group of White Russians also re-entered Russian territory from Estonia in early May 1919 and made rapid progress towards Petrograd which was briefly declared the most important military front.<sup>10</sup> Against the background of this new military threat a state of siege was declared in the city of Petrograd and the northern provinces of Petrograd, Olonets and Cherepovets on 2 May 1919.<sup>11</sup> On 6 May the Bolshevik party Central Committee appealed to the surrounding provinces to dispatch mobilised communists to the Petrograd front.<sup>12</sup> However, the request caused a degree of confusion for local Bolsheviks in Petrozavodsk. To be sure, the military threat was also severe in Karelia and the Bolsheviks there needed to retain as many men as possible to protect Petrozavodsk, a key junction on the road to Petrograd. On 13 May the Olonets provincial Bolshevik party

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<sup>7</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.33, l.89; Balagurov and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period*. 53.

<sup>8</sup> The Chekist I.I. Terukov and an authorised representative of the Olonets provincial Bolshevik party committee were sent to Pudozh town in February 1919 to investigate the suspect high number of members in the district party organisation and the occurrences of drunkenness and illegal requisitioning. A re-registration of members took place and numbers dropped from 180 to 45. Balagurov and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period*. 364-365.

<sup>9</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.30, l.10.

<sup>10</sup> Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*. 196.

<sup>11</sup> *Dekrety Sovetskoi Vlasti. 1 Aprelia-31 Iiulia 1919 g.* Vol.5. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoi Literatury, 1971. 145-147.

<sup>12</sup> *Perepiska Sekretariata TsK RKP(b) s Mestnymi Partiinymi Organizatsiiami (Aprel'-Mai 1919g.)*. Vol.7. Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoi Literatury: Moscow, 1972. 84.

secretary, Ia.F. Igoshkin, appealed to the Central Committee to leave all mobilised communists in Olonets province:<sup>13</sup>

In view of the acute military situation in Olonets province all party members and sympathisers have been mobilised. Apparently the Central Committee, while issuing an order to dispatch everyone mobilised to Petrograd, had in mind a partial mobilisation. The dispatch of everyone including communists to Petrograd is tantamount to the exposure of the Olonets front which is a threat to Petrograd. We require an explanation.

A telegram followed the next day from Elena Stasova, the Central Committee's secretary, which clarified the issue: 'While issuing the order, the Central Committee was speaking about the Petrograd front, including in this the approaches, which is Olonets [province]. The front line provinces are keeping their own mobilised soldiers, assigning them to their own standing military units.'<sup>14</sup> Despite this Karelia did provide troops for Petrograd. On 23 May an unknown number were sent by the Petrozavodsk military commissariat to Petrograd and a further 105 troops were dispatched on 7 June.<sup>15</sup>

On 14 June Igoshkin informed the party Central Committee that local authorities were doing everything they could to defend Petrozavodsk and everyone available was armed or mobilised to dig trenches, including women. A Red Army information bulletin for 20 June to 1 July also confirmed the increased efforts to mobilise everyone available: 'In the six parishes [of Petrozavodsk district] and in the town of Petrozavodsk even those citizens who are exempt from military service through illness have been called up to perform trench work.'<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, despite efforts to channel all local resources for the defence of the region, Igoshkin believed he needed reinforcements of around 3000 men to hold off the threat from the Petrozavodsk (the White Finns) and Murmansk (Allies and

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<sup>13</sup> Balagurov and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period.* 56.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.197, l.21; 9.

<sup>16</sup> RGVA, f.6, op.10, d.30, l.96.

Whites) fronts. But, if help was not forthcoming, Igoshkin conceded that the region would do as best it could with its current forces.<sup>17</sup>

Large numbers of troops were rarely sent north to Karelia because of commitments to the strategically more important southern and eastern fronts. Only when the threat widened and endangered Petrograd were troops sent north but, that said, when Petrograd came under threat in May, local Bolsheviks were still required to send troops south at a time when Petrozavodsk itself was under severe threat. Nevertheless, despite the state of siege the White Finns were on the retreat by July 1919 and by September the Allies were on the verge of evacuating the whole region. To protect the Allies' withdrawal Maynard's troops and the Whites pushed as far south as possible. Between July and September they secured the Zanoezh'e peninsula and reached approximately eight miles south of Kiappesel'ga station, but in the face of increased Bolshevik resistance.<sup>18</sup> Skirmishes with the Whites continued after the Allies left in early October but by November the front stabilised until February the following year.<sup>19</sup> The Bolsheviks in Karelia, despite intense pressure and the loss of hundreds of men in battle from April to September, had survived the most serious military threat to their Soviet regime.<sup>20</sup>

### **Mobilisation in the Karelian districts, 1919**

As the civil war intensified nationally Bolshevik leaders sought to increase the size of the Red Army and mobilise every individual available. In Karelia this was hindered by resistance in the parishes, made worse by the development of the civil war fighting. As

<sup>17</sup> Balagurov and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period.* 85-87.

<sup>18</sup> See 'Syren Force' General Staff War Diary, entries for July, August & September. WO 95/5424. *passim*; Maynard, *The Murmansk Venture.* 304-306.

<sup>19</sup> Tarasov, *Bor'ba.* 232-233; Balagurov and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period.* 120-123; Morozov, *Onezhskaia Flotiliia.* 84; 90-97.

<sup>20</sup> For the number of Red Army casualties see: Balagurov and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period.* 73-74; 'Syren Force' General Staff War Diary, entries for 11 and 12 April, 4 June, 29 July, 3, 5, 16, 17, 22, 30 August, 10, 11, 14, 16, 17 September 1919. WO 95/5424; Maynard, *The Murmansk Venture.* 218; 228; 276; 285-286; telegrams from Maynard to War Office, 18 April, 1919. WO 33/966/142, No.1629; 4 May, 1919. WO 33/966/175, No.1778.

mentioned in Chapters 4 and 5, a mass mobilisation campaign did not take place in Karelia until the end of November 1918 because of the priority of the harvest. Local conditions such as the sparseness of the population were also reflected in recruitment numbers, which were small. The priority of other more important fronts also meant that following the dispatch of men north during the late spring and summer of 1918 local Bolsheviks were left to make use of the current forces under their command and raise their own troops until the Allied and White Finnish attacks in spring 1919. A local Soviet historian states that by February 1919 8029 people in Olonets province had been called up to the Red Army.<sup>21</sup> Other archival figures presented in Table 3 give a slightly lower figure because they are based on particular age groups but give a better representation of how many men joined up from the Karelian districts and how many were deemed suitable for service. By 1 June 1919 6737 individuals were called up for service, the majority of whom were workers and peasants (4644) born 1896-1897 and former non-commissioned officers (2014) born 1890-1897.<sup>22</sup>

**Table 3 – Troops mobilised in Olonets province, 28 November 1918-1 June 1919<sup>23</sup>**

| <b>District</b> | <b>Workers &amp; Peasants (born 1896-1897)</b> | <b>Former non-commissioned officers (born 1890-1897)</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Petrozavodsk    | 475                                            | 147                                                      | 622          |
| Olonets         | 354                                            | 86                                                       | 440          |
| Povenets        | 164                                            | 39                                                       | 203          |
| Pudozh          | 333                                            | 127                                                      | 460          |
| Lodeinoe Pole   | 449                                            | 193                                                      | 642          |
| Vytegra         | 708                                            | 217                                                      | 925          |
| Kargopol'       | 680                                            | 353                                                      | 1033         |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>3163</b>                                    | <b>1162</b>                                              | <b>4325</b>  |

<sup>21</sup> Shumilov, *Bor'ba*. 118. In August 1918 the separate regiments and detachments in the region were brought together into an Olonets group division which was disbanded in November 1918 and came under the control of the 7<sup>th</sup> Red Army. Mashezerskii, *Ustanovlenie*. 152.

<sup>22</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.197, l.28-33; 36-37; 46-47.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* l.36-37; 46-47.

The reasons for the discrepancies in the number of men called up compared to those that actually entered the Red Army are shown in Table 4. The most striking figure is that of rejection on the basis of poor health, but what this was based on and how it differed from those deemed ill or crippled is unknown. According to information which was based on the call up throughout the country up to 9 July 1919 the percentage of those rejected in the Petrograd Military County on health grounds was 23.3% while the national average was 23.7%.<sup>24</sup> Based on the information below, for the age groups in Table 3 and from 28 November to 1 June, 26% of the soldiers called up in Olonets province were rejected due to the condition of their health.

**Table 4 - Reasons for non-entry into the Red Army in Olonets province, 28 November 1918-1 June 1919<sup>25</sup>**

|                                         | <b>Good reason – ill or crippled</b> | <b>Without valid reason</b> | <b>Granted a postponement</b> | <b>Freed from the draft</b> | <b>Unfit for military service</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| <b>Peasant-worker recruits</b>          | 180                                  | 113                         | 94                            | 150                         | 944                               | 1481         |
| <b>Former non-commissioned officers</b> | 40                                   | 171                         | 210                           | 254                         | 177                               | 852          |
| <b>Total</b>                            | 220                                  | 284                         | 304                           | 404                         | 1121                              | 2333         |

The more traditional form of recruitment, based on year of birth, ran parallel to a different kind of mobilisation from April-June 1919 which allowed local authorities across Soviet territory to choose who would be called up to the army.<sup>26</sup> On 25 April 1919 the All-Russian Central Executive Committee introduced a decree which aimed to mobilise between 10 and 20 men from every parish. If a parish population numbered up to 1000

<sup>24</sup> RGVA, f.6, op.10, d.24, l.204. This page contains a useful table which includes figures on the size of the Red Army in all the military districts according to data collected up to 9 July 1919.

<sup>25</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.197, l.36-37; 46-47.

<sup>26</sup> Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation*. 47.

people then the parish was obliged to mobilise 10 soldiers, if it numbered 1000-3000 people then the parish was obliged to mobilise 15 soldiers and if a parish had a population of more than 3000 then it was required to mobilise 20 soldiers. The parishes were also asked, if they had the means available, to supply recruits with uniforms, footwear and arms before forwarding them to the district military commissariats.<sup>27</sup> On 8 May a special Bolshevik party Central Committee representative, P.L. Pakhomov, informed Moscow that: 'In Olonets province...only one type of mobilisation is being carried out: 20 members from every parish.'<sup>28</sup>

As the civil war intensified a series of further drafts were introduced by the Soviet state. For instance on 22 May the Olonets provincial soviet of trade unions published an order to mobilise 10% of its members who had not already been enlisted.<sup>29</sup> Another draft on 1 June conditionally called up forestry, waterway and railroad workers as well as employees of the soviets, cooperatives, artels and food supply organs. Vacated positions were to be filled by people too old for the draft and women.<sup>30</sup> At the same time the more traditional method of conscription by year of birth continued; on 12 June the Petrozavodsk district military commissariat published an order calling up men born in 1900 to the Red Army.<sup>31</sup> Recently returned prisoners of war, born 1889-1898, were also called up in June.<sup>32</sup>

Historians who have discussed the parish mobilisation campaign which differed from the more traditional call up by year of birth all agree that it was a failure. Most explain this failure by underlining the unfairness of the mobilisations and that peasants preferred the call up by year of birth because it affected everyone equally. In addition the parish mobilisation campaign coincided with the spring sowing season so many peasants

<sup>27</sup> NARK, f.P-10, op.3, d.39, l.37. For the centre's decree on this mobilisation see *Dekrety*. Vol.5. 107-108.

<sup>28</sup> Balagurov and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period*. 55.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 57-58.

<sup>30</sup> *Olonetskaia Kommuna*, 1 June 1919.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 12 June 1919.

<sup>32</sup> RGVA, f.6, op.10, d.30, l.96; l.140.

were preoccupied with work in their fields.<sup>33</sup> The available evidence suggests that parish mobilisations were also unpopular in Karelia. A Bolshevik agitator situated in Pudozh reported in mid-June that mobilisation based on the volunteer principle of 10-20 recruits was unsuccessful.<sup>34</sup> A Red Army information bulletin for June stated that parish mobilisation in the whole of Olonets province was unsatisfactory and a few parishes completely refused.<sup>35</sup> One reason was the need to sow the fields and during May desertion also increased (see Chapter 8). Later, in August, when threshing was taking place, the peasants' priorities at home resurfaced and mobilisation suffered because of this.<sup>36</sup>

However, evidence for the Karelian districts highlights that in May parish mobilisations also brought poor results because of the development of the civil war in the region. The intensification of the civil war in the spring of 1919 hindered the parish mobilisations, particularly in Petrozavodsk district. A military report from 21 May observed that in the Petrozavodsk sector: 'There is a mass refusal from the parishes to mobilise.'<sup>37</sup> A telegram from the Tipinitskaia parish soviet executive committee informed Petrozavodsk on 12 June that the parish mobilisation of 10 to 20 men had not produced any volunteers and that the people there were unsupportive of the Soviet regime and awaited the arrival of better times under the Whites.<sup>38</sup> Of course, the development of the civil war and local conditions could affect all kinds of mobilisation, not solely the parish draft campaign. A Red Army information report for the period 20 June to 1 July reported that the mobilisation of men born in 1900 from Pudozh district was going well.<sup>39</sup> However in

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<sup>33</sup> O. Figes, "The Red Army and Mass Mobilisation During the Russian Civil War, 1918-1920", *Past and Present*, No.129, 1990. 185; von Hagen, *Soldiers*. 68; M.A. Molodtsygin, *Krasnaia Armia: Rozhdenie i Stanovlenie, 1917-1920 gg.* Moscow: Institut Rossiiskoi Istorii RAN, 1997. 134-135; Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation*. 47-48; Retish, *Russia's Peasants*. 207-208; Landis, *Bandits and Partisans*. 21-22.

<sup>34</sup> NARK, f.P-10, op.3, d.40, l.59.

<sup>35</sup> RGVA, f.6, op.10, d.30, l.140.

<sup>36</sup> A military report from 7 August reported that the pace of mobilisation in Pudozh district was unsatisfactory because of the peasants' need to carry out work in the fields. RGVA, f.6, op.10, d.30, l.273.

<sup>37</sup> RGVA, f.9, op.8, d.144, l.207. Further reports also stressed the resistance of some of the parishes to mobilise. See NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.197, l.11.

<sup>38</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.197, l.14.

<sup>39</sup> RGVA, f.6, op.10, d.30, l.140.

November the mobilisation of men in Pudozh district, born in 1880 and 1881, was resisted in some of the distant parishes because in the neighbouring Kargopol' district the recruitment limit was set at 30 years of age.<sup>40</sup> The importance of local conditions *vis-à-vis* the peasants' response to the draft was evident again when the peasants of the Zaonezh'e peninsula rebelled again in May 1919 which is discussed below.

Numerically the military threat was more severe in the spring/summer of 1919 than it had been in 1918 but because of their ability to enact a local mobilisation campaign and raise a Red Army the Bolsheviks now controlled a force which was easier to coordinate centrally than the independently raised partisans that the regime largely depended on to defend it the previous year. Furthermore, the Bolsheviks now had a recognisable apparatus to mobilise the troops and the provincial and district military commissariats formed the previous spring and summer were deeper embedded Soviet institutions. Partisan detachments did not disappear, one was created from a group of peasants from Povenets district in early June, but it was principally the Red Army which defended the Karelian districts at this time.<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, despite the numerous military defeats, the Bolsheviks did have some capable military personnel and these few dependable and energetic individuals within the Red Army helped hold the mass of poorly fed and ill-equipped troops together.<sup>42</sup> A prime example in Karelia was Ivan Spiridonov.<sup>43</sup> He was an almost constant figure at the military

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<sup>40</sup> NARK, f.R-573, op.1, d.492, l.53.

<sup>41</sup> At some stage the Povenets partisans were absorbed into the 2<sup>nd</sup> brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> rifle division of the 7<sup>th</sup> Red Army. On 9 January 1920 seven members of this partisan detachment were presented with the Order of the Red Banner for their heroism on the Murmansk front. Balagurov and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period.* 83-84.

<sup>42</sup> I support Roger Reese's generalisation here. See R.R. Reese, *The Soviet Military Experience. A History of the Soviet Army, 1917-1991.* London: Routledge, 2000. 20.

<sup>43</sup> A worker from Petrograd he served at the front during the First World War and returned to the capital in the summer of 1917 where he organised and commanded a Red Guard detachment. In February 1918 he was sent to Gdov to help defend the region from the attacking Germans. A.M. Linevskii, 'Ivan Dmitrievich Spiridonov: Georoi Grazhdanskoi Voiny v Karelii', in *Nauchnaia Konferentsiia po Istorii i Literature Sovetskoi Karelii, Poviashchennaia 100-Letiiu so Dnia Rozhdeniia V.I. Lenina i 50-Letiiu Karel'skoi ASSR.* Petrozavodsk: Petrozavodskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet im O.V. Kuusinenena, Institut Iazyka, Literatury i Istorii Karel'skogo Filiala AN SSR, 1970. 20; Tarasov, *Bor'ba.* 175.

front in Karelia who managed to keep his railway guard detachment together despite its deprivations.<sup>44</sup> In December 1918 his railway detachment of Petrograd Red Guards was replaced by a 530 strong Finnish Red Guard detachment and by the beginning of 1919 both of these detachments were reformed into regular regiments of the Red Army.<sup>45</sup> The Finnish detachment became the 164<sup>th</sup> Red Finnish regiment while Spiridonov's detachment received reinforcements and was reformed into the 41<sup>st</sup> Urosozero rifle regiment of railroad defence. The Urosozero regiment became something of a patchwork unit of various nationalities: Russians, Finns, Latvians, Estonians, Belorussians, Ukrainians and Chinese all served in the Urosozero regiment.<sup>46</sup> It is testament to Spiridonov's command that he was able to keep such an assorted regiment together. Furthermore, he remained an active participant at the front even after being shot at the battle for Segezha in 1919.<sup>47</sup> By April 1919 at the latest Spiridonov was back at the front and issuing orders to his men for the defence of Masel'ga.<sup>48</sup> As the Whites and the Allies pushed further south and the pressure on the Bolshevik forces increased in the spring and summer of 1919 the demands on the Urosozero regiment intensified. A Red Army information bulletin for June 1919 reported that because of a prolonged period at the front Spiridonov's men were tired and in need of a rest.<sup>49</sup> In spite of this the regiment's resilience was rewarded. On 26 July 1919 Spiridonov's regiment was awarded the Order of the Red Banner in recognition of the regiment's battles against the Allies and the White Russians.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 290; NARK, f.P-6159, op.1, d.92, l.107.

<sup>45</sup> Mashezerskii, *Ustanovlenie*. 152. This is not to be confused with the Red Finns who were situated further north under the nominal control of the Allies.

<sup>46</sup> Tarasov, *Bor'ba*. 175-176.

<sup>47</sup> The Allies suspected he was dead. Telegram from General Maynard to War Office, 2 March 1919. WO 33/966/56, No. 1240.

<sup>48</sup> Balagurov and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period*. 50.

<sup>49</sup> RGVA, f.9, op.4, d.1, l.215; f.6, op.10, d.30, l.123.

<sup>50</sup> Tarasov, *Bor'ba*. 214. The regiment's troops received watches and silver cigar cases.

### **Addressing the food crisis: the end of the *kombedy*, the introduction of the *razverstka* and the Fifth Olonets Provincial Congress of Soviets**

Chapter 5 showed that the *kombedy* were intrusive institutions which contributed to peasant unrest and had little positive impact on Karelia's food supply shortages. As a result of similar circumstances in other parts of Soviet held territory, leading Bolsheviks at the Sixth All-Russian Congress of Soviets (6-9 November 1918) announced the decision to merge the *kombedy* with parish soviets. However, Bolshevik leaders would not admit directly that the *kombedy* project was a failure. Indeed the purpose and importance of the *kombedy* in the class struggle was underlined. During a speech at a meeting of *kombedy* delegates from the central provinces on the 8 November Lenin pronounced their success: 'we decided to split the village...And that is exactly what is taking place. The split in the village only served to bring about more clearly who are the poor peasants, who are the middle peasants not employing the labour of others, and who are the parasites and kulaks.'<sup>51</sup>

Local Bolsheviks in Karelia relayed Lenin's stance. V.T. Gur'ev, the Bolshevik chairman of the Povenets district soviet, defended the *kombedy* in the Olonets provincial *Izvestiia*. At the time he suggested that the withdrawal of the *kombedy* may lead to assumptions that the Bolsheviks were wrong to introduce this institution into the countryside but, answering his own question, he refuted the notion.<sup>52</sup>

We were right, a thousand times right. We needed the *kombedy*, like we needed food, as a means for our own subsistence. The *kombedy* did us an indispensable service. They helped us divide the village, they drove away the bourgeoisie, speculators and marauders to the trenches and, on the whole, they were destroyed.

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<sup>51</sup> Lenin, *Polnoe*. Vol.37. 179.

<sup>52</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 17 December 1918.

Although Lenin made no direct admission that the *kombedy* were unsuccessful he did admit to the party's failings in the countryside more generally. Referring to the Bolsheviks' attempts to spread their influence to rural areas the Bolshevik leader stated at the Sixth All-Russian Congress of Soviets: 'work here is even more difficult than in industry and even more mistakes are being made by our local committees and soviets. But they learn from mistakes. We are not afraid of making mistakes when they are made by ordinary people who take a conscientious attitude to socialist construction...' <sup>53</sup> Again Gur'ev echoed the Bolshevik leader's remarks but openly admitted the failings of the *kombedy*: <sup>54</sup>

We, comrades, do not need to close our eyes to our own deficiencies, it is necessary to expose [*kleimit*'] them in order to be cleansed [*ochistit'sia*] of them. It must be realised that the work of many of the *kombedy* was corrupt [and] many *kombedy* alienated themselves from the middle peasant... Comrades we must understand this circumstance, take stock and undertake a withdrawal.

In other words the party realised that the *kombedy* project had failed but at the same time it highlighted the Bolsheviks' need for a change of tactics. Something could also be salvaged from the demise of the *kombedy*; as shown in Chapter 5, the reorganisation of the *kombedy* served the purpose of increasing Red Army recruits through the organisation of special model regiments. Furthermore, the merger of the *kombedy* with rural soviets opened up the opportunity to undertake a short political agitation campaign in the countryside and the chance to oversee the election of new and potentially more supportive local soviets. On 20 November the Petrozavodsk town Bolshevik party committee chose 25 members to go round Olonets province to organise model regiments of the village poor and to carry out the elections of the local soviets (see Chapter 5, p.180). Party members from the district towns and Petrograd also took part in the selection of individuals for the model regiments and oversaw the local elections. <sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Lenin, *Polnoe*. Vol.37. 144.

<sup>54</sup> *Izvestiia Olonetskogo Gubernskogo Soveta*, 17 December 1918.

<sup>55</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 538-539; 541-542; 545-546.

The *kombedy* failed to alleviate the food crisis in the Karelian districts but a lack of food was a problem which plagued local Bolsheviks throughout the civil war regardless of the ‘solutions’ adopted. The Fifth Olonets Provincial Congress of Soviets (25-31 January 1919) revealed an already familiar story of chronic shortages in the Karelian districts.<sup>56</sup> A congress delegate from Olonets district remarked that some of the population were mixing grain with sawdust and Tulmozerskaia parish had no money to purchase food products from the provincial commissariat for food. A member of the Povenets district soviet executive committee described his district as ‘a bare wasteland’ and remarked that the population there were enduring ‘enormous hardships.’ Because of the presence of the Allies further north fishing access was blocked off and some of the population were eating sawdust and tree bark. Furthermore, there was a mass exodus of families from Danilovskaia parish in search of food and over the past two years 57% of the districts’ cattle had been slaughtered. In short, the local peasant economy was disintegrating.<sup>57</sup>

To address the issue of hunger in the grain deficit regions and to supply the Red Army a significant change in central government food supply policy took place in January 1919 when a surplus-appropriation system, the *razverstka*, was officially introduced as an alternative to the grain monopoly of the Food Supply Dictatorship. Under this system, whose origins under the Soviet regime are traceable from the summer of 1918, local soviet officials in the grain producing regions were handed a food supply quota to fulfil under threat of punishment if it was not carried out.<sup>58</sup> Gradually, more than cereal products became part of the *razverstka* but the system itself differed from previous food supply

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<sup>56</sup> A total of 165 delegates attended the congress with full voting rights. 82 of these delegates were Bolsheviks, 62 were Bolshevik ‘sympathisers’. The remainder were non-party delegates. Ibid. 576, fn.150.

<sup>57</sup> *Olonetskaia Kommuna*, 29 January 1919.

<sup>58</sup> For information on the grain quotas assigned to each of the grain producing provinces during the 1918-19 procurement campaign see Figes, *Peasant Russia*. 250.

campaigns in 1918 because quotas were now set and passed down from above instead of being passed up from below according to local surplus estimates.<sup>59</sup>

A wish for tighter centralisation and control over food supply between the capital and the grain producing provinces lay partly behind the switch to the *razverstka*. Without a form of centralised and co-ordinated action between centre and periphery, without the support of the capital, food shortages in a deficit region such as Karelia were insurmountable. Until now little analysis of what the *razverstka* meant for the grain deficit regions has been made.<sup>60</sup> The system which evolved was complex. Through its own agents the provincial commissariat for food carried out grain and fodder purchases in other provinces but supply orders were allocated by the centre, which were rarely, if ever, fulfilled in their entirety (see below and Chapters 4 and 8). Therefore, although a number of food supply detachments left the Karelian districts during the civil war to secure grain, individual agents representing the province were also active in the food producing regions endeavouring to dispatch foodstuffs to Olonets province. Local representation in grain producing provinces by agents from the grain deficit regions was not a unique feature of 1919 but overlapped from the latter part of 1918. For example, a number of agents working on behalf of Olonets province were sent to Petrograd, Moscow, Tambov and Viatka between the 14 and 30 October to purchase various goods.<sup>61</sup>

Although the centre allocated food supply orders to Olonets province, it appears that local leaders still provided their own calculations for the amount of grain required.

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<sup>59</sup> On this decree issued on 11 January see *Dekrety*. Vol.4. 292-294. For further discussion of the *razverstka* see Iu.K. Strizhkov, "Iz Istorii Vvedeniia Prodovol'stvennoi Razverstki." *Istoricheskie Zapiski*, Vol.71, 1962. 25-42; Malle, *War Communism*. 399-410; Lih, *Bread and Authority*. 167-187.

<sup>60</sup> Recent discussions of early Soviet food supply policy and the rural economy in the regions have focussed on the Volga, Tambov and Viatka. See: Figs, *Peasant Russia*. 248-308; D. Dugarm, 'Local Politics and the Struggle for Grain in Tambov, 1918-1921' in D.J. Raleigh, ed., *Provincial Landscapes. Local Dimensions of Soviet Power, 1917-1953*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001. 59-81; Raleigh, *Civil War*. 292-310; Retish, *Russia's Peasants*. 164-175.

<sup>61</sup> The purpose of their missions was the purchase of various goods including galoshes, tobacco and cigarettes from Moscow, textiles and matches from Petrograd, the October grain loads from Tambov and eggs and rye from Viatka. NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.23, l.660.

However, influenced by their experience of delayed food supply orders in the past or the arrival of insufficient quantities, local food supply officials erred on the side of caution and produced high estimates. At the Fifth Olonets Provincial Congress of Soviets in January 1919 S.K. Pukhov, the provincial commissar for food reported that at a recent food supply conference in Moscow the Olonets provincial food commissariat and the provincial land department had presented their own information to the conference delegates about the amount of seed required for spring sowing. However, Pukhov admitted at the Olonets provincial congress that if they only received 75% of the amount of seed suggested then this would still be enough because the information presented at the Moscow conference by the provincial commissariat for food was exaggerated.<sup>62</sup> Later in the year the head of the provincial agricultural department noted that Olonets province asked for 800,000 *puds* of spring seed but was assigned an order of 350,000 *puds* of which only 176,308 *puds*, or roughly 50%, were delivered.<sup>63</sup>

Pukhov also tried to put a positive slant on the food crisis at the provincial congress: ‘at the current time the centre has already paid attention to Olonets and things have got better.’ By way of example he read out a telegram which stated that 7 million *puds* of grain were lying at collection points in Samara province waiting to be dispatched to Olonets province.<sup>64</sup> The grain lying in Samara could therefore be the answer to Olonets province’s problems. How much of this grain was actually allotted to Olonets province must have been trifling because the food crisis continued for the remainder of the year (see below and Chapter 8). Furthermore Pukhov admitted that it was impossible to get these loads moving out of Samara province because of the general disorder in railroad transportation and a shortage of rolling stock.<sup>65</sup> The irony, pointed out by another delegate, was that hundreds

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<sup>62</sup> *Olonetskaia Kommuna*, 29 January 1919. It is difficult to know why this admission was published in the provincial press. Perhaps, Pukhov had little hope of receiving the amount of seed suggested but wanted to inform the congress that he had at least tried to do something to get more grain seed for Olonets province.

<sup>63</sup> Balagurov and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period*. 261.

<sup>64</sup> *Olonetskaia Kommuna*, 29 January 1919.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

of railroad carriages were being used by the Murmansk railroad workers as living accommodation.<sup>66</sup>

As part of the proposed solution to the food supply problem Pukhov appealed to the congress delegates to nominate 30 ‘experienced workers’ from amongst themselves to be sent to Moscow and from there to the provincial food supply commissariats of the grain producing provinces which were assigned grain orders for Olonets province.<sup>67</sup> Where and when these delegates were sent is unknown but the sending of so many local representatives to join food supply organs in other provinces was clearly considered a more effective means of improving the dispatch of food supplies to the periphery and was intensified by the new *razverstka* system. According to V.T. Gur’ev, speaking at the Sixth Olonets Provincial Congress of Soviets (26 September-1 October 1919), from the autumn of 1918 50 provincial representatives were sent via Moscow to join the local food supply organs of the grain producing provinces.<sup>68</sup>

Descriptions of the food situation around the Karelian districts during the civil war went hand in hand with words such as ‘catastrophic’, ‘desperate’ and ‘critical’ but at the Fifth Olonets Provincial Congress of Soviets Pukhov defended his position. He believed that without more grain deliveries and central assistance there was little he could do: ‘Overall, comrades, the Provincial Commissariat for Food has done everything it can to obtain a little more grain for Olonets province and it is not our fault if for whatever reason we are not successful in receiving sufficient quantities.’<sup>69</sup> However, other party delegates criticised the food commissariat’s work which displayed the importance of local

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 30 January 1919. A historian of the railways during the civil war has also noted grain loads stuck in the grain producing provinces or jammed on the line en route. Moreover, almost 4000 empty carriages were lying in Moscow in early February 1919 when the grain surplus regions had few carriages. R.T. Argenbright, ‘The Russian railroad system and the founding of the Communist state: 1917-1922.’ PhD dissertation, University of California, 1990. 230-231.

<sup>67</sup> *Olonetskaia Kommuna*, 30 January, 1919.

<sup>68</sup> Balagurov and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period*. 278.

<sup>69</sup> *Olonetskaia Kommuna*, 29 January 1919.

circumstances. Pukhov received a complaint from Povenets district which queried the unusually high ration of grain sent to Tolvuiskaia parish in Petrozavodsk district (a parish that took part in the recent December *Zaonezh'e* uprisings) while in Povenets district there was widespread malnourishment. In response the provincial commissar for food replied that his commissariat distributed all foodstuffs available evenly and fairly according to requirement. Nevertheless, he explained that certain 'technical conditions', such as the difficulties of shipment or a lack of transportation, meant food loads were not distributed immediately to all districts.<sup>70</sup>

In spite of these criticisms the congress recognised that solving the food crisis was not possible through local efforts alone and decided to implement a number of measures and directives to try and ease the shortages. A 16 point resolution was adopted which reflected local Bolsheviks' additional organisational efforts and adoption of new tactics, some based on central decrees, to try and bring greater efficiency to the regime's food supply apparatus. For instance, for the first time during the civil war the transport of significant numbers of grain loads from the east to the Karelian districts was possible along the country's waterways. The previous year's navigational period was disrupted because of conditions elsewhere in the country; the Czech Legion was positioned along large sections of the Volga while the Whites held Samara until October 1918. Therefore to compensate for any further disruption or delay on the railroads the congress prioritised the need to organise water transportation and prepare workers' artels to load barges and navigate them along the Mariinsk canal and river system.<sup>71</sup> At the same time the congress delegates resolved to enter discussions with Moscow and the Murmansk, Archangel and Northern railroad organisations about the urgent supply of grain loads by rail to Olonets province from the food producing provinces.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 30 January 1919.

<sup>71</sup> Originally constructed in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and now called the Volga-Baltic waterway, the Mariinsk canal system is 368 kilometres long (229 miles) and runs between Cherepovets and Lake Onega.

<sup>72</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 555-556.

The congress evidently considered transportation deficiencies a crucial area for improvement. As a result the delegates also decided to appeal to Sovnarkom to temporarily put a stop to passenger movements along the railway line to let food loads pass with as little disruption as possible and to appeal to the capital to create a worker-peasant inspectorate from local soviet representatives to review the work of the Murmansk, Archangel and Northern railway lines.<sup>73</sup> However, the Fifth Olonets Provincial Congress of Soviets also took its lead from the capital. As seen in Chapter 5, on 10 December 1918 Sovnarkom decided to allow all workers' and trade organisations the right, with the permission of their local soviet, to purchase and import non-cereal products. The congress delegates confirmed the introduction of a monopoly on vital products which were not part of the grain monopoly.<sup>74</sup> They also supported the capital's creation of a workers' inspectorate to audit the Soviet regime's food supply organs and requested the newly elected provincial executive committee<sup>75</sup> to assign a worker-peasant inspectorate to carry out a review and oversee all the province's food supply organs.<sup>76</sup>

Finally the congress resolved to organise provincial offices (*kontora*) in both Moscow and Petrograd to assist in the distribution of food stuffs around the district food commissariats and to improve coordination between the centre and the provincial food authorities.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, the congress delegates entrusted the new provincial soviet executive committee to assign the best workers to the province's food supply organs and to organise the accounts of the provincial and local food organs' bookkeeping more effectively.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 556-557. According to Mary McAuley in March 1919 the Petrograd Soviet halted passenger movements on the railways for one month in order to improve the trafficking of goods. The result was an increase in grain deliveries. McAuley, *Bread and Justice*. 297.

<sup>74</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 555.

<sup>75</sup> Unfortunately I have no information to confirm all the changes of personnel that took place in the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee. However, Petr Anokhin remained the committee's chairman.

<sup>76</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 556.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 555-557; Balagurov and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period*. 278.

<sup>78</sup> Mashezerskii and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 556-557.

The resolutions taken at the Fifth Olonets Provincial Congress of Soviets concerning the food supply situation clearly marked a new drive to improve the food supply crisis. Local leaders sought an increase in coordination between centre and periphery through the sending of delegates to work in the food supply organs in the capital and grain surplus provinces. The congress also aimed to prioritise transportation and exploit the waterways while improving administrative organisation in local food supply organs by supporting the creation of inspectorates and audits. Despite this, in the immediate aftermath of the congress the food supply crisis in the Karelian districts remained critical and the results of the new *razverstka* system would need to wait until the new harvest season. In the meantime local leaders concentrated on trying to improve the administrative efficiency of soviet employees. Some time in early 1919 the Northern Regional government in Petrograd tried to weed out incapable personnel by making soviet institution workers culpable for both misdemeanours and carelessness. On 3 February the Olonets district executive committee agreed to transmit to all government institutions and soviets the Northern Regional Soviet's recent order which stated that individuals, including party members, would be sent to the revolutionary tribunal not only for malfeasance in office but for negligence in their work, poor accountability (*plokhaia otchetnost'*), ignorance of their own work related responsibilities and procrastination.<sup>79</sup>

However, projected improvements in administrative competency could not significantly improve the food supply shortages by themselves and the Karelian districts could not survive without grain imports from other provinces. This was also true for non-cereal products, some of which were part of the new food monopoly introduced by Sovnarkom in December 1918 (see above). Purchases of non-cereal products could be made in richer food producing provinces but the decree was of little use within the less productive Karelian districts. A report on the food situation in Olonets province sent from

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<sup>79</sup> GARF, f.R-393, op.13, 263, 1.9.

Petrozavodsk and written on 11 February 1919, informed Moscow that livestock numbers were very limited and there was an acute need for domestic meat imports; cattle numbers were low in Olonets province at the time of the report and almost all were retained exclusively for fertilising the land. The report also described poultry production in the province as weak and the majority of eggs came from other provinces. Finally, because of the poor quality of land and the climatic disasters of 1918, the potato harvest produced a very poor yield. Market gardening efforts (*ogorodnichestvo*) were also underdeveloped which meant there was a shortage of vegetables.<sup>80</sup>

### **Food supply, migration and the ebb and flow of war**

Before any stabilisation could occur war intervened to disrupt the implementation of the resolutions on food supply which were approved at the Fifth Olonets Provincial Congress of Soviets. Indeed when the military situation intensified in the spring it only exacerbated the already difficult food supply situation. Pukhov did not remain Olonets provincial commissar for food for long following the Fifth Olonets Provincial Congress of Soviets. Overall, he lasted little more than three months in his post until like his predecessor, I.F. Petrov, his health broke down and he was relieved of his duties. Pukhov remained on the Olonets provincial food board but was replaced as provincial commissar for food by V.T. Gur'ev on 21 February 1919. This decision was confirmed by the People's Commissariat for Food the following day.<sup>81</sup> Gur'ev was the fourth Olonets provincial commissar for food in little over twelve months and he faced similar problems to his predecessors. A military report from 10 March noted that Olonets province was experiencing 'colossal shortages', people in Povenets district were dying of hunger and with the introduction of food surrogates into the populations diet, such as straw, there was a mass outbreak in stomach illnesses.<sup>82</sup> Petrozavodsk district was also suffering and because of a lack of grain

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<sup>80</sup> RGAE, f.1943, op.1, d.290, l.22-23ob.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 1.9-10.

<sup>82</sup> RGVA, f.9, op.18, d.144, l.83.

deliveries the majority of its inhabitants were consuming all the remaining grain seed that was required for planting. The chairman of the Petrozavodsk district soviet executive committee believed the district population was ‘doomed to extinction.’<sup>83</sup>

Pudozh district was in a similar position to Povenets and Petrozavodsk at approximately the same time but the situation there was complicated further by the Red Army’s mobilisation of horses and the fact that Pudozh was particularly detached from the railway line and Petrozavodsk. On 11 March 1919 the Pudozh district executive committee resolved to ask the Petrograd County military commissariat directly to free its horses from mobilisation and remove its carting obligations because the district had no other means of transport and its horses were required to gather wood and transport food supplies from Petrozavodsk.<sup>84</sup> The people of Pudozh were further unsettled because the forthcoming spring thaw would turn sleigh routes to mud and effectively cut the area off from the centre.<sup>85</sup> As a consequence rumours reached the district centre that the rural population was about to come to Pudozh town and take any remaining supplies by force. At an emergency session of the district executive committee on 22 March the committee braced itself and ordered the district military commissariat to place armed units in the town and in the building of the executive committee. The committee also ordered the head of the district militia to organise night patrols in the town. Finally, the executive committee sought to distribute as many agitators as possible around the parishes to try and ease the local unrest by explaining the reasons for the current food shortages.<sup>86</sup>

Even before the fighting got underway, therefore, Gur’ev faced an almost insurmountable task to feed the whole of the Karelian region and to keep local unrest at bay without central help and more domestic food imports. The situation by now had

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<sup>83</sup> GARF, f.R-393, op.13, d.264, l.22ob.

<sup>84</sup> NARK, f.P-10, op.3, d.39, l.13-13ob.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. l.17.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. l.21-21ob.

become so bad that from January 1919 evacuations were considered. It is not clear if this project was purely a local initiative or was adopted against the background of the de-Cossackisation campaign in the Don, part of which involved the resettlement there of non-natives and was declared official policy by the Bolshevik party on 24 January 1919.<sup>87</sup> Whatever the case the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee commissioned the provincial department of agriculture to organise this resettlement program and to communicate with the centre and the grain producing provinces which would take the migrants. In turn the department of agriculture asked the People's Commissariat for Agriculture for help in the resettlement program and to indicate resettlement points for Olonets' population. Moreover, the local department of agriculture sent a number of anxious telegrams to the grain producing provinces only some of which responded that they were willing to accept some of the migrants from Olonets province. However these other provinces requested only a certain number of settlers and under the condition that they be able-bodied and fit for agricultural work. The problem for the Olonets provincial department of agriculture was that it could not meet the demand of those who wished to migrate; between January and April 1919 up to 5000 people from Olonets province applied to be resettled.<sup>88</sup>

Sovnarkom issued a decree on 24 April 1919 which introduced a more systematic character to the resettlements and commissioned the People's Commissar for Agriculture, with a budget of 10 million roubles, to organise the movement of starving workers and peasants from the north to the southern grain producing provinces and the Don Region.<sup>89</sup>

Olonets province received finances, regulations and instructions from the centre and

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<sup>87</sup> On de-Cossackisation see Holquist, *Making War*. 166-205.

<sup>88</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.42, l.18. The Olonets district executive committee learned at one of its sessions on 6 March that requests were coming in from the parishes asking for instructions on evacuations in view of the ensuing hunger there. GARF, f.R-393, op.13, d.263, l.37ob. Similar enthusiasm to be resettled also occurred in Viatka province. See A. Retish, *Russia's Peasants*. 251-252.

<sup>89</sup> *Dekrety Sovetskoi Vlasti*, Vol.5. 97-98.

despite some delays by July 1919 sent more than 1000 people to the Don Region.<sup>90</sup> However, resettling the populations from the north was more than a potential solution to easing the food crisis there. Instead the objective of the resettlement programme was two-fold: as Peter Holquist has shown, the colonisation of non-natives in the Don Region was also part of the wider de-Cossackisation programme.<sup>91</sup> A Petrograd Bolshevik party representative in Petrozavodsk, speaking to members of the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee on 7 May, believed that the workers from the north migrating south would act as a 'revolutionising element' amongst the local population there.<sup>92</sup> The resettlement programme was however only temporary and its success limited. It may have lessened the food supply burden slightly in some of the Karelian districts but the demand to be resettled was much higher than the food producing provinces were willing to accept. By May, just as some of the first settlers were arriving in the Don, the Red Army began a gradual retreat before the White armies of General Denikin. The potential to send further groups of migrants south therefore came to halt.<sup>93</sup>

Any small gain from resettling the population to the south was more than undermined by a resettlement campaign introduced by the Whites which caused an influx of migrants from the north. On the 31 March 1919 the White leader, General Miller, in Archangel gave the order to allow all inhabitants in the northern region (Archangel and Murmansk) the right, up to 20 April, to declare their sympathies for the Soviet regime and make an application to move south beyond the borders of the Allied and White administration. Movements south would commence on 10 April.<sup>94</sup> Hardships were at least equally as bad for the Whites further north as they were for the Reds in the south. From March to early April the Allies and Whites managed to diffuse potential wide scale civilian

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<sup>90</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.42, l.18.

<sup>91</sup> Holquist, *Making War*. 185; 193.

<sup>92</sup> NARK, P-4, op.1, d.33, l.97.

<sup>93</sup> P. Holquist, *Making War*. 193.

<sup>94</sup> GARF, f.R-29, op.1, d.2, l.146.

unrest and military disorder in the territory under their control.<sup>95</sup> The food supply situation was little better; on 2 April the British food supply controller for the Murmansk region noted that he was bombarded by people on a daily basis asking for more flour.<sup>96</sup> Approximately 8500 applications were made by the population under Allied-White control, which delayed the implementation of the decree, but the first 205 Soviet ‘sympathisers’ were escorted south and arrived in Petrozavodsk on 9 May.<sup>97</sup> Naturally local Bolsheviks were in a panic as to what to do with this new burden. As well as the further strain on the food crisis there was nowhere to house the arriving refugees. Shortly before the arrival of the first of the refugees, the head of the Petrozavodsk town soviet’s housing department, informed his soviet executive committee that the housing crisis was critical.<sup>98</sup>

On 9 May the Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee proposed to Petr Anokhin to discuss the movement of these refugees with Zinoviev; the following day he sent a telegram to Moscow, copying in Zinoviev.<sup>99</sup> A few days later, on 15 May, a telegram from M.M Litvinov, the People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs, informed Anokhin that Moscow was sending a protest to the British government.<sup>100</sup> However, the response from the capital was not so much concerned with the further strain that would be placed on the food and housing crisis in Petrozavodsk but with the entry of potential spies or opponents of the Soviet regime. Of the 205 Bolshevik ‘sympathisers’ who arrived in Petrozavodsk five were arrested as ‘White Guard spies.’<sup>101</sup> On 13 May the Defence Soviet<sup>102</sup> commissioned the Vecheka to establish strict control over the entry of refugees into Soviet territory so that anyone suspected of sympathising with the Whites would be

<sup>95</sup> Maynard, *The Murmansk Venture*. 198-215.

<sup>96</sup> Letter from F.Lambert to Mr.Hoare, 2 April, 1919. FO 175/9/1285.

<sup>97</sup> General Staff War Diary, entry for 26 April, 1919. WO 95/5424; *Olonetskaia Kommuna*, 12 & 27 May 1919. On the large number of applications see GARF, f.R-29, op.1, d.33 & d.34.

<sup>98</sup> GARF, f.R-393, op.13, d.265, l.103.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* d.249, l.285ob; NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.32, l.26.

<sup>100</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.32, l.100.

<sup>101</sup> *Olonetskaia Kommuna*, 27 May 1919.

<sup>102</sup> The Workers’ and Peasants’ Defence Soviet was Lenin’s inner cabinet formed in November 1918. Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*. 187.

caught. The remainder were to be sent to work under agreement with the People's Commissariat of the Economy and the People's Commissariat for Agriculture.<sup>103</sup> Sometime shortly thereafter the Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee ordered the provincial Cheka and the railroad Cheka to implement Moscow's order and if required set up a filtration camp (*zagradytel'nyi punkt*) nearer the front.<sup>104</sup>

While the Karelian districts struggled to survive the spring of 1919, Gur'ev endeavoured to secure as much grain as possible from the grain producing provinces. However, this was only partially successful because the food producing provinces struggled to meet the quotas assigned to them as part of the *razverstka* system and grain supplies only filtered through to Karelia in small amounts. This often led to a conflict of interests and clashes between the grain producing and the grain deficit provinces, with Moscow acting as mediator. On 7 April Gur'ev asked Moscow to order Simbirsk province to fulfil its order to Olonets province in full otherwise the population of his province would starve to death. According to the report of an Olonets provincial representative, Simbirsk only promised to carry out 15% of its orders for Olonets province.<sup>105</sup> By 8 May Simbirsk province declared that no more than 10% of Olonets province's orders would be fulfilled.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.32, l.101.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. l.97. I have no further evidence to suggest that anymore migrants reached Petrozavodsk and it remains unclear if anymore were in fact evicted from the Murmansk region, perhaps because of the military advances of the Allies and Whites at this time. Of course as seen above the resettlement of civilians from Olonets province to the Don came to a halt because of Denikin's advance. Moreover, without further information, it is difficult to compare the number of applications for resettlements on both sides and make concrete conclusions about the levels of support for the respective regimes amongst the local population. The Whites' migration campaign was different and it was based on an openly stated wish to get rid of 'Soviet sympathisers'. The Bolsheviks' migration campaign on the other hand stated the need to ease the food crisis while colonising the Don region. The applications to leave Bolshevik held territory did reflect the provincial and district authorities' inability to supply all the local population with food and so the large number of applications could, therefore, be attributed to a lack of support or confidence in the local Soviet apparatus.

<sup>105</sup> RGAE, f.1943, op.7, d.1773, l.13.

<sup>106</sup> NARK, f.R-98, op.1, d.252, l.222.

Why was Simbirsk being so uncooperative? Firstly, it was a general problem of the *razverstka* system that the designated quotas of the grain producing provinces were too high. During the 1918-19 procurement campaign Simbirsk fulfilled only 39.1% of its designated grain quota.<sup>107</sup> Olonets province was not necessarily being singled out or sold short. Rather Simbirsk could not complete its supply orders in full because of its inability to meet the state's overestimated surplus target. Secondly, the development of the civil war in Simbirsk and the surrounding region was significant. Encouraged by Admiral Kolchak's advance westwards which began at the end of December 1918, mass numbers of people (up to 150,000) were rebelling against the Bolsheviks on the Volga by March 1919 because of a combination of economic and political grievances.<sup>108</sup> Subsequently the peasants stopped bringing grain to collection points.<sup>109</sup> The rebellions were suppressed in April but local authorities must surely have been keen to improve their relations with the local population by retaining grain for their own purposes.

The response of some of the other food producing provinces was no better: they also refused or could not complete orders in full. On 12 April Gur'ev informed Moscow that Voronezh and Viatka provinces had only completed 5% and 14% respectively of their orders to Olonets province for the months of January and February.<sup>110</sup> Like Simbirsk province, Viatka and Voronezh fulfilled relatively small percentages of their set quota, 24.7% and 31.4% respectively. Out of a total of 12 grain producing provinces assigned a set quota during the 1918-19 procurement campaign Viatka produced the worst overall

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<sup>107</sup>For the designated quotas given to twelve of the grain surplus provinces based on the 1918 harvest and the amount actually collected see the table in M.I. Davydov, *Bor'ba za Khleb. Provol'stvennaia Politika Kommunisticheskoi Partii i Sovetskogo Gosudarstva v Gody Grazhdanskoi Voiny (1917-1920)*. Moscow: "Mysl", 1971. 153. For the grain quotas apportioned to the grain surplus provinces based on the 1919 harvest see Davydov, *Bor'ba za Khleb*. 154.

<sup>108</sup> On the unrest see: Figes, *Peasant Russia*. 324-333; V.N. Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War. Political Parties and Social Movements in Russia, 1918-1922*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. 98-100. For a synopsis of Kolchak's advance see Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*. 308-314.

<sup>109</sup> Davydov, *Bor'ba za Khleb*. 148-149.

<sup>110</sup> RGAE, f.1943, op.7, d.1773, l.7.

percentage. Voronezh had the fourth worst percentage return.<sup>111</sup> Local conditions again offer an explanation for the poor fulfilment of the *razverstka*. For example, railroad workers went on strike at Voronezh junction in early April over non-payment of wages.<sup>112</sup>

In Viatka province the advance of Admiral Kolchak's White armies, which entered eastern Viatka during the spring of 1919, naturally put increased pressure on local soviets there when peasants began to rebel against requisitioning. Viatka subsequently became a short-term military priority; if the province fell it offered Kolchak a greater opportunity to link up with the British-led Allied forces on the Archangel front.<sup>113</sup> Grain within Viatka was therefore at a premium until the Whites were pushed back, internal unrest was pacified and Red Army recruits were provisioned. In other words the grain supply requirements of Olonets province from Viatka province were put to one side; at the end of April Moscow received a complaint from Petrozavodsk that Viatka province categorically refused to carry out its previous orders and also the order for April. Consequently, local Bolsheviks in Petrozavodsk asked Moscow to place the burden of Viatka's orders on another province.<sup>114</sup>

The receipt of small percentages of the grain orders allocated to Olonets province was a major concern for local leaders but justified by the central authorities because it was part of a general problem. In other words the Karelian districts were not alone in receiving small percentages of the overall grain orders. A report from the department of supply of the People's Commissariat for Food to the All-Russian Central Executive Committee on 15 May confirmed this. For the months of January, February and March Olonets province received only 8%, 7% and 29% of its orders respectively, or 15% of the total for these three months. However, the department of supply deemed this to be satisfactory because

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<sup>111</sup> Viatka was set a grain quota for the 1918 harvest of 30,000 *puds*, 7,544 *puds* were collected. Voronezh was set a quota of 15,000 *puds* and 4,869 *puds* were collected. Davydov, *Bor'ba za Khleb*. 153.

<sup>112</sup> Argenbright, "The Russian railroad system." 271. The German reader should also consult S. Karsch, *Die Bolschewistische Machtergreifung im Gouvernement Voronez (1917-1919)*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2006.

<sup>113</sup> Retish, *Russia's Peasants*. 204-205; Brovkin, *Front Lines*. 98.

<sup>114</sup> NARK, f.R-98, op.1, d.252, l.87.

part of the region was occupied by the Allies and the percentages were the same for these three months as that received by the provinces of Novgorod and Petrograd, more than Vitebsk and Smolensk but less than Kaluga, Kostroma and Vladimir.<sup>115</sup>

Local Bolshevik leaders in Karelia were therefore competing with other grain deficit regions for the capital's support and the allocation of as much grain as possible from the grain surplus provinces. To repeat, the percentages received were so small because the planned orders to be extracted from the grain producing provinces during the 1918-19 delivery campaign, based on surplus estimates, were overambitious. None of the grain surplus provinces met their target and the average percentage of grain collected from all these provinces was only 38.4% of the total target quota.<sup>116</sup> Therefore the percentages that reached Olonets province appear particularly scant but when considered against how much actual grain was successfully collected then it is slightly less striking than at first glance. It is therefore worth remembering that the percentage completion rates of the grain orders must be considered alongside the total amount of grain allotted to Olonets province. When compared to a few other grain deficit provinces Olonets received more grain overall (see Table 5); in the months of January, February and March the provincial food commissariat was due to receive 220,000, 220,000 and 400,000 *puds* of grain respectively.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> RGAE, f.1943, op.7, d.1773, l.41. Only with the production of further studies will it be possible to know in any detail what was going on within all of these provinces and if their experiences were either the same or dissimilar to the Karelian districts.

<sup>116</sup> Davydov, *Bor'ba za Khleb*. 154.

<sup>117</sup> RGAE, f.1943, op.7, l.1773, l.41. Conflicting figures exist for the amount of grain allocated and received by Olonets province from January to September 1919. These figures were produced by the provincial commissar for food, V.T. Gur'ev at the Sixth Olonets Provincial Congress of Soviets on 27 September 1919 and published in the *Olonetskaia Kommuna* on 30 September 1919. See Balagurov and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period*. 278-279. The figures he produced were all higher than those which I have found in the archives and which are referred to here and in Chapter 8. They do however follow the same pattern in terms of the fluctuation in the size of grain orders issued and received during the months in question in comparison to the archive figures I have accessed. Naturally the conflicting data brings into question the validity of the sources but I have chosen to use my archive sources solely for the reason that Gur'ev, as provincial commissar for food, may have had a vested interest in inflating the figures at the provincial congress of soviets.

**Table 5 - A comparison of grain received (in *puds*) by deficit provinces in January, February and March 1919<sup>118</sup>**

| <b>Province</b>  | <b>January</b> | <b>February</b> | <b>March</b> |
|------------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| <b>Olonets</b>   | 34,000         | 31,000          | 99,000       |
| <b>Novgorod</b>  | 21,807         | 7,020           | 12,894       |
| <b>Petrograd</b> | 11,159         | 103,000         | 11,254       |
| <b>Vitebsk</b>   | 33,000         | 4,997           | 14,957       |
| <b>Smolensk</b>  | No Data        | 3,023           | 33,842       |

However, any improvement in the food shortages in Karelia by spring 1919 was not much better than the previous year. People were starving and dying of hunger and disease in some of the outlying Karelian parishes in 1919 as they were in 1918, district and provincial authorities faced peasant unrest (see below) and fewer than the expected total number of grain loads arrived in the region. For the Karelian districts the *razverstka* system and the allocation of fixed grain supply orders appears a more methodical system but this was not synonymous with an immediate improvement in food supplies. Instead, as we shall also see in Chapter 8, deliveries to the Karelian districts still ebbed and flowed in 1919 as they had done the previous year according to the development of the civil war elsewhere. Furthermore, food shortages were generally worse before the harvest but improved somewhat after the harvest.

### **Rebellion on the Zaonezh'e peninsula, spring 1919**

When the Zaonezh'e peninsula rose up once more in May 1919 it was against the background of the ever present food shortages throughout the Karelian region and the

<sup>118</sup> RGAE, f.1943, op.7, l.1773, l.41. Of course it is difficult to know what conditions were like in these other provinces in comparison to what is known of the Karelian districts and so the table is only representative as far as all the provinces in it were grain deficit regions.

action of the Allies and the Whites. A report from the Petrozavodsk district militia on the political situation in the region for the month of April 1919 noted that the contentment of the populace, in the majority of circumstances, was dependent on food supply.<sup>119</sup> Of course, food shortages were felt across the Karelian districts at this time but specific local factors in Petrozavodsk district accentuated the feeling of unrest there. On 9 May the Petrozavodsk district executive committee highlighted that the food stores of the district were empty and the perceived inactivity of the district authorities was alienating the population. The population were also demoralised because the distributed grain ration, per person a month, had been considerably less in Petrozavodsk district over the past few months than it was in some of the adjacent parishes of Povenets district.<sup>120</sup>

The state-peasant relationship in Petrozavodsk district was also put under further strain by the activities of the Red Army. A relatively successful local mobilisation campaign had provided troops for the Red Army but provisioning them in turn became a major stumbling block for the Bolsheviks and contributed to peasant unrest as military units were compelled to provide for themselves and use what local resources were available. On 22 March the military commissar of the 1<sup>st</sup> brigade, 19<sup>th</sup> rifle division was informed by one of his battalion commissars that his troops lacked clothing, boots and a satisfactory amount of food, there was an uneven distribution of bread rations between regiments and troops had not received their salary for almost half a month. Because of these deficiencies the battalion commissar informed the brigade commissar that a few military units were carrying out illegal confiscations of hay, milk and meat from the local population and did not pay for the use of peasants' horses or carts.<sup>121</sup> The Petrozavodsk district military commissariat in general was ill-disciplined. On 7 April six employees of

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<sup>119</sup> GARF, f.R-393, op.13, d.264, l.34.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, d.249, l.288-289.

<sup>121</sup> NARK, f.R-573, op.1, d.361, l.45-45ob. At the Third Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference in September 1919 the provincial military commissar P.V. Iakobson also noted the over excessive demands made by the army across the province for the use of the peasantry's carts. NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.26, l.22.

the commissariat got drunk on vodka and things took a turn for the worse when two men, one of whom was the district military commissar, went to the military commissariat. The military commissar then raped a 16 year old girl who worked as a courier for the commissariat while his companion took a horse for a joy ride.<sup>122</sup>

Problems which continued to discredit the military authorities continued until the eve of the rebellion. On the 9 May the district executive committee learned that because of a lack of credit the commander of the 40<sup>th</sup> railroad regiment had refused to pay 7,957 roubles owed to local citizens of Tividiiskaia parish (a parish in the Zaonezh'e peninsula) for the use of their carts.<sup>123</sup> Shortly after the beginning of the rebellion on the peninsula the chairman of the Tividiiskaia parish soviet executive committee also informed the Petrozavodsk district executive committee on 11 June, that Red Army men had been stealing the local peasantry's property.<sup>124</sup>

Together with the food shortages and injustices faced by the local peasantry it was the military draft which finally sparked the uprising. Everyone called up to the Red Army from Shungkaia parish was due to register in Kiappesel'ga on the 17, 18 and 19 May. By then much of Karelia was under martial law as the Allies and Whites reached the northern borders of Petrozavodsk district at this time, capturing Povenets and the important railway station town of Medvezh'ia Gora on 17 and 21 May respectively.<sup>125</sup> Many of those called up to the Red Army therefore did not appear at the assembly point in Kiappesel'ga because rumours had spread that the Bolsheviks' authority in the region was about to end and the Whites were gaining the upper hand. As a result, some of the mobilised men scattered

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<sup>122</sup> NARK, f.R-639, op.1, d.161, l.17; GARF, f.R-1005, op.2, d.12, l.5-5ob. The military commissar was dismissed from his position shortly after and sent to the Olonets provincial revolutionary tribunal. I have not been able to find out what his punishment was.

<sup>123</sup> GARF, f.R393, op.13, d.249, l.289.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, d.264, l.48-49.

<sup>125</sup> General Staff War Diary, Syren Force, entries for 17 and 21 May 1919. WO 95/5424.

themselves in the surrounding forests while others continued to agitate among the populace in support of the Whites.<sup>126</sup>

When news of the peasantry's resistance became known to the Povenets district military commissariat the response was uncompromising: a Red Army detachment was dispatched to Shungskaia parish on 21 May to bring the drafted men to Kiappesel'ga; and the detachment's commander announced that all those who remained at large would have their families taken hostage and their property confiscated and sold. If this had no effect then the commander proclaimed he would burn villages to the ground. Consequently the deserters gathered together and decided not to take action but wait until the troubles had calmed down while hiding on the islands of one of the lakes surrounding the parish. On the evening of the 21 May the mobilised peasants boarded boats and moved out onto the water where, by chance, they came across a boat of fellow Shungskaia parish peasants who had deserted from the front. Together they decided to return home and disarm the Red Army detachment; they did so, killing two Red Army men in the process, including the detachment commander.<sup>127</sup>

The following day, 22 May, an emergency session of the Povenets district executive committee took place where the delegates present proposed to offer concessions to the peasantry. The committee resolved to distribute allowances to families of Red Army men and a stipend to the employees of the soviet institutions in the parish. A representative from the district soviet executive committee and the Shungskaia parish soviet executive committee were sent to the parish to put the decision into practice. At the same session the committee also resolved to commission the district food commissariat to release grain seed to Shungskaia parish.<sup>128</sup> However, the concessions came too late to stop the rebellion. The

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<sup>126</sup> NARK, f.R-639, op.1, d.299, l.8.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. l.8-8ob.

<sup>128</sup> GARF, f.R-393, op.13, d.267, l.31-31ob. Because Povenets had been captured on 17 May the emergency session took place in the village of Ilemsel'ga in Kondopozhskiaia parish, Petrozavodsk district.

same day a stormy meeting of all the citizens of Shungskaiia parish took place in the nearby village of Shun'gskii Bor. A summons was issued to gather all available weapons to arm a partisan detachment, a military commander was then elected and a four man delegation formed, which would make contact with the Whites and ask for reinforcements, weapons and food.<sup>129</sup> This delegation found the White partisan commander Captain Dedov and his men the following day.<sup>130</sup> In the meantime the other rebels, now amounting to about 60 individuals, disarmed and arrested all local communists and set up courts. A number of communist and communist sympathisers were beaten up, a total of 14 were executed.<sup>131</sup>

According to the report on the Shungskaiia uprising made by the secret-operational department (*sekretno-operativnyi otdel*) of the revolutionary tribunal, 42 White soldiers arrived in the parish centre of Shun'ga by boat on 23 May. The troops were not from Dedov's forces but arrived under the command of a drunken Colonel Krugliakov, a partisan leader aligned with the Allies. Krugliakov immediately set up a court-martial made up of three representatives of the White detachment and three of the villagers of Shun'ga. Floggings with ramrods were meted out to anyone who the Whites believed were sympathetic to the Bolsheviks and four individuals, including a 75 year old man who had two communist sons, were executed.<sup>132</sup> Following this Krugliakov's men took control of the entire administrative and operational organisation of the revolt, further reinforcements arrived from Povenets and the local rebels joined the ranks of his troops which now amounted to approximately 200 well armed men.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> NARK, f.R-639, op.1, d.299, l.8ob.

<sup>130</sup> 237<sup>th</sup> Brigade War Diary, Syren Force, entry for 23 May, 1919. WO 95/5427. According to this report 200 rifles were sent, 1 officer and 20 men.

<sup>131</sup> A.Iu. Osipov, "Finliandia i Grazhdanskaia Voina v Karelii." PhD dissertation, Petrozavodsk State University, 2006. 133.

<sup>132</sup> NARK, f.R-639, op.1, d.299, l.8ob.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

The Reds were initially driven back by the Shungaskaia parish partisans at Shung'skii Bor. However once they had regrouped the Reds, with artillery support from the boats of the Onega flotilla, managed to push the partisans out of Shun'gskii Bor. At the same time a section of the attacking forces was recalled to Petrozavodsk to defend the town against the advance of the White Finns but reinforcements arrived from Vytegra district on 3 June. A two pronged attacking movement then forced the Whites and rebel fighters from Shungaskaia on 5 June almost without loss to the Reds. However at this point in the fighting the Whites with the help of the Allied flotilla on Lake Onega repulsed the next Red attack, inflicting considerable casualties on the attackers who withdrew to Tolvuaia and then concentrated at Kuzaranda.<sup>134</sup> Some of the Shungaskaia peasant rebels then managed to escape to Povenets with the Whites.<sup>135</sup>

Like the previous rebellion on the Zaonezh'e peninsula in December 1918 other uprisings also flared up at the same time in the surrounding region, most notably in Tolvuiskaia and Tivdiiskaia parishes.<sup>136</sup> Some of the causes of the peninsula rebellion mirrored those of the unrest of the previous year, for example food shortages and the military draft. However the peasant rebellions in the spring of 1919 also took on a different form than the previous year because the military situation was different and determined how the rebellion developed. Most significant was the proximity of the front and peasants' perceptions of who was going to win the civil war. There was little point joining the side which at the time appeared to be facing defeat or a regime which struggled to provide for its soldiers and whose Red Army had perpetrated a number of injustices on the local population. However, when the Whites arrived, it quickly became apparent that they were equally heavy handed and the villagers' resistance towards the Red Army mobilisation was in vain because they were quickly mobilised into the ranks of the White forces. As a matter

<sup>134</sup> A.A. Sergeev, "Sobytiia v Zaonezh'e" in Mashezerskii, *Za Sovetskuiu Kareliiu*. 47-48.

<sup>135</sup> Osipov, "Finliandia i Grazhdanskaia Voina v Karelii". 134.

<sup>136</sup> For more information on these rebellions see Ibid. 134-135; A.A. Sergeev, "Sobytiia v Zaonezh'e" in Mashezerskii, *Za Sovetskuiu Kareliiu*. 44-46; NARK, f.R-639, op.1, d.298, l.303.

of fact General Maynard informed the War Office on 24 May that he favoured the advance of his Russian troops into the rebellious areas north-east of Petrozavodsk as it would facilitate good prospects for recruitment.<sup>137</sup> As a result, with the arrival of the Whites, the peasantry simply traded one intrusive and coercive regime for another.

It was not the case that the Bolsheviks did not know of the potential for unrest on the peninsula or the significance of the advance of the Whites. On 9 May the Petrozavodsk district soviet executive committee asked the Olonets provincial military commissariat, provincial food board and provincial party committee to pay serious attention to the hunger situation in their district. The district committee also sought to increase the issue of oats in the Zaonezh'e parishes according to the development of the military situation.<sup>138</sup> But the attempts to pacify the peasant communities came too late and in reality there was little grain to distribute in the first place. Once the rebellion began the Bolsheviks adopted more hard line tactics; on the 27 May the Petrozavodsk district military commissar informed the provincial military commissar that 150 Red Army men were in Tolvuia and a number of arrests had been made.<sup>139</sup> Furthermore, on the 2 June White Russian troops leaving Povenets by boat reported to the Allied command that they were forced to turn back after they encountered Bolshevik steamboats shelling villages.<sup>140</sup> Into July the Red Army continued to terrorise the population of Petrozavodsk district. A military report dated 31 July noted: 'The Red Army men are running riot (*beschinstvovat*) around the district, instilling fear in the peasantry they plunder potatoes and steal livestock.'<sup>141</sup>

The Zaonezh'e rebellion was ultimately a sign of the Bolsheviks' precarious hold on the region. They could not control the food crisis and therefore could not feed the

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<sup>137</sup> Telegram from General Maynard to War Office, 24 May 1919. WO 33/966/214, No.1982.

<sup>138</sup> GARF, f.R-393, op.13, d.249, l.289-290.

<sup>139</sup> NARK, f.R-575, op.1, d.236, l.30.

<sup>140</sup> General Staff War Diary, Syren Force, entry for 2 June 1919. WO 95/5424.

<sup>141</sup> RGVA, f.6, op.10. d.30, l.266.

peasantry to stop it from rebelling and they could not effectively control the Red Army and stop it from looting. They tried to meet the challenge of the rebels with force and concessions but could not pacify the Zaonezh'e parishes because the unrest became embroiled in the civil war fighting with the Allies and White Army which at that time had the upper hand. On 3 June White troops under Captain Dedov landed at Shun'ga where they inflicted a heavy defeat on the Reds.<sup>142</sup> The Red Army also failed to retake Tivdiiskaia parish the following month; General Maynard informed the War Office on 14 July that the Allies and Whites had defeated 500 Red Army troops under Ivan Spiridonov trying to capture the parish centre Tivdiia.<sup>143</sup>

## Conclusion

By mid-1919 the Bolsheviks in Karelia had a locally raised Red Army and the *kombedy*, institutions which had been a major cause of peasant unrest in the past, were effectively disbanded. Local Bolsheviks were also adapting to a new, more methodical food supply system in the form of the *razverstka*. But for every potentially positive step forward the Bolsheviks made, their attempts to gain more control over the problems they faced were held back by the vicissitudes of the civil war in Karelia and elsewhere. The implementation of the resolutions on food supply at the Fifth Olonets Provincial Congress of Soviets had scarcely had the chance to improve the shortages before the military threats made the situation even worse and peasant rebellion once again raged in the Zaonezh'e peninsula and became caught up in the Allied-White advance from spring 1919. By this time the civil war was reaching its peak in Karelia. The White Finns were on the retreat by July 1919 but the Allied-White advance lasted until September 1919 and inflicted numerous defeats on the defending Red forces. Yet, the Bolshevik regime in Karelia survived and the key reasons for this will be discussed in the final chapter.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., entry for 4 June 1919. 70 Red Army troops were either killed or wounded

<sup>143</sup> Telegram from General Maynard to War Office, 14 July 1919. WO 33/967a/131, No.2633. On 21 July the War Office was informed that the Bolsheviks lost 40 killed and 57 wounded. Telegram from General Maynard to War Office, 21 July 1919. WO 33/967a/143, No.2710.

## Chapter 8

### The Fine Lines of Victory, January-November 1919

The last three chapters have shown that, although it was a case of “one step forward and two steps back”, a process complicated by the Allied-White advance of spring-summer 1919, the Bolsheviks had introduced important measures to gain tighter control over the Soviet regime: a new Olonets provincial Cheka and Cheka chairman was elected; the Red Terror was introduced; former political rivals were absorbed into the Bolshevik party; a local Red Army was raised; the *kombedy* were merged with parish soviets and new organisational efforts were made to try and improve the food supply crisis. However, at the same time the Bolsheviks were regularly hamstrung by a lack of resources and a wide scale peasant rebellion broke out in the Zaonezh’e peninsula. But, ultimately, the Bolsheviks survived.

This chapter will suggest reasons for their survival and their ability to consolidate their position. It will begin by exploring an issue touched on in Chapter 5, the demise of the Northern Commune and the increase in centralisation from Moscow after the Eighth Bolshevik Party Congress in March 1919, although this did not take place without problems; the dismissal of the Olonets provincial soviet’s military commissar in particular caused much upset and protest in Petrozavodsk. Second the implementation of the *razverstka* food supply system meant that grain supply orders were organised more systematically. Ultimately a lack of grain in Karelia persisted for the duration of the civil war, but nevertheless, there were small signs before the end of 1919 that some improvement even in the food supply situation had been made. Thirdly, the improvements seen in the discipline and order of the Cheka at the end of 1918 and early 1919 were built upon. In 1919 the provincial Cheka became a relatively more reliable and responsible tool of governance. Despite sporadic incidents of indiscipline within its ranks, by the time of the military crisis in spring/summer 1919 the institutional conflict with the soviets of the

previous year had disappeared. Finally, the Bolshevik party managed to gain enough control over desertion and retain enough men by showing its increased intent, by decree and practically, to support the welfare of their soldiers and soldiers' families. This allowed the local Bolsheviks and the Red Army to fend off the military threats to the regime and build a stronger soldier-state relationship than it had done before this time. By the autumn of 1919 the Bolsheviks had defeated the White Finns and the Allies had evacuated North Russia. Soviet Karelia was, to a large extent, secured.

### **Centralisation: the Fedulov case and the Dubrovskii affair**

Chapter 5 touched upon the desire of local Bolsheviks in Olonets province to remain within the Northern Commune and the frictions that were apparent between Petrograd and the capital regarding Moscow's desire to centralise power which would undermine Petrograd's authority. Not all provinces wished to remain in the Northern Commune and in January 1919 Vologda and North-Dvina provinces had their request to leave the Commune accepted by the presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee. It signalled the beginning of the end for the Northern Regional government and party committee. At the Third Congress of Soviets of the Northern Region on 24 February 1919 the delegates present resolved to dissolve the Northern Commune and hand direct control of its provinces to Moscow. The Northern Regional party committee decided to continue to operate up to the Eighth Bolshevik Party Congress (18-23 March 1919)<sup>1</sup> and on 24 March it was dissolved by the party Central Committee.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> P.F. Anokhin, Ia.K. Berzys and I.A. Danilov represented Olonets province at the congress. *Vos'moi S'ezd RKP (b), Mart 1919 Goda. Protokoly*. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoi Literatury, 1959. 457-458; 460. For a brief overview of the congress see R.H. McNeal, ed., *Resolutions and decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Vol.2. The Early Soviet Period: 1917-1929*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974. 50-54.

<sup>2</sup> Khmelevskii, *Severnyi*. 203-206. Together with other Bolsheviks Elena Stasova had again expressed her wish on 14 February, at a session of the bureau of the Northern Regional party committee, to retain the regional committee believing that the Central Committee would encumber itself with all the new party committees that would come under its guidance if the regional party administration was liquidated.

A drive for centralisation was one of the key principles adopted at the Eighth Bolshevik Party Congress: ‘The party is in the position when strict centralism and the sternest discipline are absolutely necessary. All decisions of a higher authority are absolutely compulsory for those below it. Every decision must firstly be carried out and only then is it permissible to appeal to the corresponding party organ.’<sup>3</sup> The congress also recognised the centralisation of the military apparatus and formally approved ‘regular’ army recruitment, formations and discipline and the use of former tsarist officers, supervised by commissars. These resolutions were passed despite initial protests from the ‘military opposition’ within the party who were opposed to Trotsky’s reliance on more conventional military principles, particularly the employment of officers who had served under the Tsar. However the ‘military opposition’ were successful in reinforcing the role of the military commissars, who oversaw the work of the military commanders, and advocating the need to pay more attention to communist opinion in the army.<sup>4</sup>

Prior to the congress Trotsky, who would not attend it because of the military threat on the eastern front, hoped to stave off criticism about the command structure of the Red Army by assuring his adversaries that the threat of ‘Bonapartism’ would be avoided because of the presence of the party in the Red Army and throughout the Soviet regime.<sup>5</sup> Concerns regarding the emergence of a military dictator are important to mention here because they had direct repercussions in Karelia when in April, as we shall see below, the Olonets provincial military commissar A.V. Dubrovskii was dismissed by the head of the Petrograd Military County, B.P. Pozern.<sup>6</sup> Pozern was subsequently accused of ‘Bonapartism’ by local Bolsheviks in Petrozavodsk.

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<sup>3</sup> *Vos'moi S'ezd RKP (b)*. 426.

<sup>4</sup> On military policy at the Eighth Party Congress see Benvenuti, *The Red Army*. 92-128.

<sup>5</sup> Benvenuti, *The Red Army*. 93; 96-97.

<sup>6</sup> Boris Pozern (1882-1939) joined the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in 1902. From 1917-1918 he was commissar for the Northern front and from 1918-1919 Staff Commissar of the Petrograd Military County. He was a member of the Revolutionary Military Soviets of the Seventh Red Army (August 1918-5 May 1919), the Western front (5 June-1 August 1919), the Eastern front (11 August 1919-15 January 1920) and the Fifth Red Army (3 February-5 December 1920). *Direktivy Glavnogo Komandovaniia Krasnoi Armii*

In Karelia local incidents in the military commissariats brought out clearly the changes in policy inaugurated at the Eighth Party Congress. Before the congress attempts at centralisation were not well received. In mid-January 1919 Petrograd ordered the Olonets district military commissariat to temporarily remove F.M. Fedulov, the district military commissar, from his post for getting drunk with a number of Red Army troops. The Olonets district executive committee was angered by Petrograd's intrusion because the affair had already been discussed and dealt with by the local authorities. Experienced military personnel were a valuable asset and for this reason soviets or party committees often stood by them through bouts of indiscipline because of the shortage of capable personnel; Fedulov was reproached but pardoned by the local party for his actions because of his previous work in the district soviet. The Olonets district executive committee therefore asked the provincial and Northern Regional Bolshevik party committees to resolve the Fedulov case, stressing that he was an irreplaceable worker.<sup>7</sup>

The Olonets provincial executive committee also stood by Fedulov at one of its sessions on 24 January and recognised his value as a district military commissar and a member of the district party organisation, the provincial executive committee and the provincial military commissariat.<sup>8</sup> Fedulov did not remain without his post for long; on 25 January 1919 Fedulov was re-elected as the Olonets district's joint military commissar and one of two deputy chairmen in the Olonets district executive committee's presidium.<sup>9</sup> In this instance the periphery prevailed in its support for their local military commissar but in a not too dissimilar incident shortly after the Eighth Party Congress, the centre's will triumphed over the periphery and reflected the party's shift towards increased centralisation and control over the regions.

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(1917-1920). *Sbornik Dokumentov*. Moscow: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo Ministerstva Oborony SSSR, 1969. 828; Lenin, *Polnoe*. Vol.50. 553.

<sup>7</sup> GARF f.R-393, op.13, d.263, l.1; 8-8ob.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. d.249, l.27ob-28.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. d.263, l.5.

On 15 April A.F. Kopnin of the Olonets provincial executive committee received a note by direct wire on behalf of Boris Pozern, the military commissar for the Northern military County. It stated that because of the weakness of Arsenii Dubrovskii, the Olonets provincial military commissar, he should be replaced with a more active worker. A provisional replacement, P.V. Iakobson from Petrograd province was being sent to Petrozavodsk. If the provincial soviet had its own candidate then it was to inform Pozern. Iakobson arrived in Petrozavodsk on 23 April with an official letter stating that he was to be shown full assistance in his post and Dubrovskii was to be given another position.<sup>10</sup> The Olonets provincial Bolshevik party committee and the provincial executive committee agreed to accept Iakobson as the province's provisional military commissar on 25 April.<sup>11</sup> Local Bolsheviks tried to replace him with their own candidate on 16 May 1919 and proposed to inform Zinoviev of this by direct wire and to submit a report to the party Central Committee.<sup>12</sup> However, for whatever reason, the local Bolsheviks' candidate did not take up his post and Iakobson kept his job at least until the Third Olonets Provincial Party Conference in September 1919.

As noted in Chapter 7 Dubrovskii's dismissal came on the eve of an attack by the White Finns, the first troops of which crossed the Russian-Finnish border on the night of the 21 April 1919. Pozern was informed by Dubrovskii on 24 April that Vidlitskaia, Tulmozskaia, Rypushkal'skaia parishes and part of Nekkul'skaia parish (all Olonets district) were occupied by the White Finns and Olonets town had been evacuated.<sup>13</sup> In a telegram to Moscow on 3 May the Bolsheviks in Petrozavodsk (the presidiums of the party and the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee) emphasised the significance of the military threat: if the White Finns occupied Lodeinoe Pole, Povenets and Petrozavodsk

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<sup>10</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.30, l.105.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. l.114ob.

<sup>12</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.33, l.103. The name of the Olonets provincial Bolshevik party's candidate was Kirilov.

<sup>13</sup> Balagurov and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period.* 53.

districts would be cut off from the rest of the country and the seizure of the river Svir' would disrupt water transportation. The local Bolsheviks also explained that at the first sign of the White Finnish advance they announced a full mobilisation of party members and communist sympathisers in Petrozavodsk town and all the districts. Moreover: 'At this moment Comrade Dubrovskii rose to the occasion, displaying a presence of mind and great resourcefulness.'<sup>14</sup>

The presidiums of the Olonets provincial party committee and soviet executive committee believed a change of military commissar at such a serious time for the region was unwise because Iakobson would need time to become acquainted with local conditions. Furthermore they were angered by Pozern's attitude who, without any basis, had accused Dubrovskii of being weak whereas in their mind Dubrovskii had worked energetically in Olonets province from the moment the Red Army was formed. In response to Pozern's accusation Petr Anokhin requested a full explanation. Pozern replied, but to Dubrovskii, copying in the provincial soviet executive committee on 24 April. Pozern stated that he had not been informed of events in Olonets or given detailed reports about the situation in other districts: 'You and everyone were caught napping; you will be committed to the revolutionary tribunal. Immediately pass your position to Iakobson. Inform me when this is done.'<sup>15</sup> This 'coarse attack' in response to Petr Anokhin's request to explain the charge levied against Dubrovskii 'filled the provincial executive committee and the provincial party committee with deep indignation.'<sup>16</sup> Speaking on behalf of the provincial executive committee and the provincial party committee Anokhin informed Pozern that they were in disagreement with the Petrograd County military commissar's order and that they could not comply unless detailed facts were provided about the accusation cast against Dubrovskii.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.30, l.105-105ob.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. l.105ob; 114ob.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. l.105ob.

<sup>17</sup> For Anokhin's telegram to Pozern see Ibid. l.113-114.

In short, local Bolsheviks believed that if Pozern wanted to remove Dubrovskii then this could have been possible without discrediting him and his services to the revolution. Moreover, because of the vagueness of Pozern's accusation, the local Bolsheviks believed they had the right to be given more detailed facts but as yet had not received any. Pozern had also cast an accusation that Dubrovskii and others in Olonets province had been 'napping' and not informed him of the situation in good time. Conversely the local Bolsheviks believed they had passed on information regarding the movement of the White Finns as soon as they had received it from the districts. Therefore if any one was 'napping' then it was not the provincial military commissar who did not direct the operations at the front but the field staff. However, local Bolsheviks tried to dismiss apportioning any blame upon the field staff and did not believe that the men at the front were slow to react. Indeed they believed the field staff had done everything within their own power to save the situation but were helpless due to a lack of reinforcements. The White Finns had outflanked the military units in Olonets district and the Reds' telegraph communications had been broken. Such an attacking movement had been foreseen by the Bolsheviks in Petrozavodsk who had in fact informed the centre and Pozern to prepare for such an attack. Yet, when A.F. Kopnin visited the Petrograd County military commissariat in the beginning of March 1919 and made a report on the military situation in Olonets province he received the answer 'It is no business of ours.'<sup>18</sup>

Therefore local Bolsheviks believed that the responsibility for the defence of the region lay with the centre for failing to provide reinforcements for the men in the field, despite advanced warnings from Petrozavodsk but, as it turned out, Dubrovskii was cast as the scapegoat for the defeats by the White Finns. Reflecting the official party line which was resolved at the Eighth Party Congress, the Bolsheviks in Petrozavodsk agreed to carry out Pozern's decision to replace Dubrovskii because it was a military order whose

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<sup>18</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.30, l.106.

fulfilment was obligatory. However, at the same time they exercised their right to protest and did so before the party Central Committee, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Revolutionary Military Soviet of the Republic against Pozern's actions which, they believed, smacked of Bonapartism. Pozern's coarse attitude towards the provincial authorities and his dismissal of Dubrovskii at a critical time for the region had undermined the soviets and as a result they requested that Pozern be committed to the court of the military revolutionary tribunal and the discredited Dubrovskii be rehabilitated.<sup>19</sup> Finally, the Olonets provincial party committee proposed to the party Central Committee to pay serious attention to the Pozern case while at the same time treat its cadres of 'ideologically minded party workers' such as Dubrovskii more carefully because they worked tirelessly and carried the main burden of party and soviet work.<sup>20</sup>

It remains unknown exactly why Dubrovskii was dismissed by Pozern as early as 15 April, that is, before the White Finns crossed the border, because the Bolsheviks had not suffered any recent serious set back. They had lost the railroad town of Urosozero on 11 April<sup>21</sup> but still held Medvezh'ia Gora, the most important point south of Segezha. A few further advances on the flanks of the railway were also successfully carried out by the White Russians, supported by the Allies in mid-April but these occurred after Pozern's telegram ordering Dubrovskii's removal for being weak.<sup>22</sup> However, when Pozern's second telegram was received on 24 April and accused Dubrovskii and others of 'napping' it is clear he was making reference to the rapid advance of the White Finns.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid. I.114ob-115. Although Pozern held a number of important military posts during the civil war (see above, footnote 6) Lenin personally questioned his ability on at least two occasions following the Dubrovskii affair. On one of these occasions in mid-September 1919 he expressed his concern regarding Pozern's appointment as one of the men in charge of the Siberian front, describing him as 'an old woman'. Lenin, *Polnoe*. Vol.50. 334-335; Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*. 151.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. I.106-106ob.

<sup>21</sup> Syren Force General Staff War Diary, entries for 11 & 12 April, 1919. WO 95/5424.

<sup>22</sup> On the Allied and White Russian advances see: Syren Force General Staff War Diary, entry for 16 April, 1919. WO 95/5424; Maynard, *The Murmansk Venture*. 218; telegram from Maynard to War Office, 18 April, 1919. WO 33/966/142, No.1629.

As described in Chapter 7, the attack of the Finns from April to May also coincided with an advance of the Allies and White Russian troops on the Murmansk front which stretched the Bolsheviks' troops to the limit, but it came unexpectedly. Returning from a trip of the Murmansk front Petr Anokhin reported to the Olonets provincial executive committee on 18 April that he did not think the front would change because the enemy did not have enough men available to them.<sup>23</sup> He was mistaken; the Allies did have the troops available owing to some recently arrived reinforcements which, along with the advance of the White Finns, facilitated the Allied and White Russian drive towards Masel'ga, Medvezh'ia Gora and Povenets during May.<sup>24</sup> Anokhin was therefore ill-informed and underestimated the ability of the Allies and White Russians to advance. Although referring to a different theatre of operations Pozern may therefore have been close to the mark when questioning the ability of local Bolsheviks in Petrozavodsk to recognise the military dangers that faced them. However, in his report to the provincial executive committee on 18 April Anokhin acknowledged that the Red Army units on the Murmansk front were poorly disciplined, few in number, lacked uniforms and had poor commanders. Anokhin also stressed that these deficiencies required serious attention and he had communicated with Pozern about them but as yet received no reply.<sup>25</sup>

In hindsight it appears that the conflict between Petrozavodsk and Petrograd reflected the recent resolutions at the Eighth Party Congress and the reservations held by the 'military opposition'. The evidence available for the Dubrovskii affair suggests that local Bolsheviks in Petrozavodsk were amongst some of the Bolsheviks present at the congress who expressed their concerns about military commanders gaining too much power and acting arbitrarily. Admittedly Pozern was not a former tsarist officer but he was

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<sup>23</sup> GARF, f.393, op.13, d.249, l.255-255ob.

<sup>24</sup> On 8 April two volunteer companies of armed American railway engineers, numbering roughly 600 men, arrived under General Maynard's command and on 17 April two British infantry companies numbering roughly 500 men arrived in Murmansk. Syren Force General Staff War Diary, entries for 8 & 17 April, 1919. WO 95/5424.

<sup>25</sup> GARF, f.R-393, op.13, d.249, l.255ob-256.

flexing his authority as head of the Petrograd Military County without due consideration for the opinions of local communists and local military commissars. We also know from the work of other historians that Pozern was a Bolshevik who defended the centre's viewpoint, that the army take on a more 'regular' and 'professional' form, and he was part of the majority who voted for the military resolutions adopted by the party at the congress.<sup>26</sup> The increased drive for centralisation and the resolutions on the Red Army therefore did not take place without teething troubles and controversy still existed surrounding the debates of the Eighth Party Congress at a local level.

In the end however local Bolsheviks were forced to fall in line with the decisions of the centre in spite of their protest and loyalty to Dubrovskii. Reflecting the shift towards stricter centralisation the Red Army forces in Karelia did not benefit directly from its victory over the White Finns at Vidlitsa towards the end of June; the captured Finnish supplies were handed over to Petrograd.<sup>27</sup> A telegram to Petrograd from Lenin on 30 June read: 'The situation concerning cartridges in the south is desperate. In connection with this, having received three million cartridges and other supplies from Vidlitsa, you must economise the cartridges from all your forces, and your other military supplies.'<sup>28</sup> Ultimately it was the prioritisation of fronts that mattered and increased centralisation made it easier to allocate scarce resources to the most important areas and thus helped the Bolsheviks win the civil war. Karelia however was rarely a military priority. By way of further example, in their telegram to Moscow on 3 May, mentioned above, the provincial executive committee and party presidium complained that Dubrovskii's fellow provincial military commissar, M.F. Tarasov, was ordered to go to the eastern front at the time of the

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<sup>26</sup> Benvenuti, *The Red Army*. 105; 109.

<sup>27</sup> A large amount of war booty was captured which included artillery weapons, thousands of missiles, millions of rifle cartridges, 12 machine guns with boxes of ammunition, 2000 rifles, food stores and other military equipment. See Morozov, *Onezhskaia Flotiliia*. 96-97. On the Vidlitsa operation see: 92-93; 103-105; and the reminiscences in Mashezerskii, *Za Sovetskuiu Kareliiu*. 255-265; 273-279; 301-305.

<sup>28</sup> Lenin, *Polnoe*. Vol.50. 358.

affair leaving Dubrovskii to deal with the increased military threat by himself.<sup>29</sup> Only when the White Finns attacked and occupied large parts of Olonets district did the centre react. As stated in Chapter 7, on 29 April the Petrograd party committee decided to send 1000 communists each to the Karelian and Olonets fronts.

### **Food supply, May-October 1919**

The Eighth Party Congress was also significant because it underlined the party's wish to try and diffuse the hostility of the countryside to the party's policies. The congress resolved to conciliate the 'middle' peasantry: peasants who did not exploit the labour of others for personal profit. Previously Lenin had acknowledged the importance of recognising the 'middle' peasant in July and August 1918 and offering concessions to them but it was at the Eighth Congress that he clarified his stance.<sup>30</sup> The Bolshevik leader spoke about the party's work in the countryside on 23 March and formed the resolution which was passed at the congress that stressed the party's inexperience in government, the need to moderate its application of force in the countryside and support the middle peasant economically. He acknowledged the importance of knowledge of local conditions in helping the party achieve the distinction of who were the middle peasantry and recognised the difficulties of implementing policies locally. Lenin acknowledged that deeds were more important than words but at the same time defended the introduction of decrees, even if they could not be put into practice fully or immediately, for their propaganda value in teaching the practical steps to be taken by supporters of the regime. In short, Lenin's resolution set forth a new path for the party which emphasised conciliation and the need to balance it alongside coercion.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.30, l.114ob.

<sup>30</sup> For a brief summary of Lenin's position towards the middle peasant in July and August 1918 see Lih, *Bread and Authority*. 146-147; Malle, *War Communism*. 369-370.

<sup>31</sup> Lenin, *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*. 5<sup>th</sup> edition. Vol.38. Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoi Literatury, 1963. 187-205. On Lenin's resolution see 207-210.

Centralisation was of course important for the allocation of food stuffs to the Red Army and the grain deficit problems. The Bolshevik regime had sought to achieve this when it introduced the Food Supply Dictatorship in May 1918 and again with the official introduction of the *razverstka* food supply system in January 1919. According to official statistics the procurement of cereal products did increase by more than twofold between the 1917-1918 and 1918-1919 campaigns.<sup>32</sup> However, any positive changes in the receipt of food supplies to Karelia in 1919 appear slight; the region's food supplies ebbed and flowed according to the time of year and, more significantly because of its grain deficit status, according to the conditions and development of the civil war on its borders and elsewhere. Petr Anokhin sent a telegram to Moscow on 2 June stressing that he had received no reply from Moscow concerning the dispatch of foodstuffs to Olonets province and people were taking part in agitation against the soviets. In order to counterbalance this Anokhin requested grain. He also stressed that Red Army soldiers' families were suffering from starvation, grain loads were again being detained and delayed by other provinces and planned orders set by the centre existed on paper only.<sup>33</sup> By referring to detained grain supplies Anokhin may well have been thinking of a recent incident when the Cherepovets provincial commissar for food refused to release ten carriage loads of oats which had arrived by boat from Rybinsk. The problem was that the oats were wrongly addressed to him by a Moscow official; the oats' correct destination was supposed to be Olonets province.<sup>34</sup>

Because of the military threat of the Allies and White Finns the distribution of food supplies was disrupted by the need to evacuate the provincial commissariat for food from Petrozavodsk; it was evacuated to Vytegra on the 15 June.<sup>35</sup> The military situation also

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<sup>32</sup> See Malle, *War Communism*. 407.

<sup>33</sup> RGAE, f.1943, op.7, d.1773, l.73-73ob.

<sup>34</sup> RGAE, f.1943, op.1, d.290, l.180-181.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. l.124. The Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee did not decide to move the provincial food commissariat back to Petrozavodsk until 2 October 1919, when the Allies or White Finns were no longer a threat. NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.29, l.60

brought about a new complication as military authorities clashed with civilian authorities. For instance, the military head (*rukovoditel'*) of Shuiskaia parish, Povenets district, along with the local railroad commissar requisitioned all the foodstuffs in the Shuiskaia storehouse. The local authorities in Povenets and the provincial commissar for food protested on 22 June and demanded that the Shuiskaia parish military head immediately release the requisitioned foodstuffs so that it could be distributed to the population in the front line. If not he would be held responsible for any uprisings in these areas.<sup>36</sup>

June 1919 was in fact another critical month for the Bolshevik leadership and the Red Army in general. No sooner had Admiral Kolchak's advance in the east been stopped than attention switched to the southern front where a now overextended Red Army had suffered internal unrest and military setbacks in the Don and the Ukraine. The limitations of the Bolsheviks' resources provided a favourable opportunity for General Denikin's White armies to advance successfully northwards between May and July 1919. Then in August, Don Cossack cavalry troops made raids deep behind Soviet lines, briefly entering Tambov and capturing Voronezh for a short time before returning south in mid-September.<sup>37</sup> For the Karelian districts, this intensification of the civil war in the spring and summer of 1919 resulted in a pause in grain deliveries. For the month of June Olonets province was allotted a total of 170,000 *puds* of grain from Kazan' and Simbirsk.<sup>38</sup> However, Moscow received a telegram from Petrozavodsk on 29 June to say that Olonets province had not received a single load of grain since the beginning of the month and the last supplies had been distributed around the province.<sup>39</sup>

The food situation in the Karelian districts did not improve significantly in July. Moscow informed the Olonets provincial food commissariat on 7 July that within the next

<sup>36</sup> NARK, f.R-98, op.1, d.101, l.37-37ob. The outcome of this incident remains unknown.

<sup>37</sup> For more detail see Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*. 166-177.

<sup>38</sup> RGAE, f.1943, op.7, d.1773, l.86.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. l.111-111ob.

few days 15,000 *puds* of grain would be sent to it from Vologda.<sup>40</sup> However, on 11 July the provincial commissariat for food complained to Moscow that not a single pound of grain had arrived in the province for a whole month and the situation was desperate; various local state institutions were demanding an issue of grain and crowds of people were besieging the parish and district commissariats for food. The provincial commissariat for food subsequently asked for the immediate dispatch of the loads from Vologda and the completion of their supply orders for June and July.<sup>41</sup> The total July order fell short of a now lower target but improved on what Olonets province had received in June. Of the 50,000 *puds* of grain apportioned to it 15,000 *puds* or 30% of the order was fulfilled. However, the August supply plan was worse; Olonets province received only 7,000 *puds* of grain (from Kazan' and Samara) or 14% of the allocated 50,000 *puds* for that month.<sup>42</sup>

Like the previous year the Karelian districts were also short of planting seed. On 6 August the Pudozh district food board informed the provincial food commissariat that the district's fields were not being sown to their potential because of the small amount of seed available.<sup>43</sup> This shortage was in part due to the large amount of spring seed consumed by the population because of the incessant shortages.<sup>44</sup> To add to the provincial food commissariat's difficulties the receipt of orders from the grain producing provinces remained sporadic and short of delivery targets. Olonets province was even fobbed off with an order of 35,000 *puds* of grain and 2,000 *puds* of groats in September from Perm, which had been freed from the Whites on 1 July. However, there was no prospect of receiving any grain from this newly conquered province because of the shortages in Perm itself and the fact that an apparatus for procuring grain had not yet been established there. The

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 1.140.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 1.150.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 1.235; 1.175. For the month of August Olonets province was also allocated 5,000 *puds* of groats (*krupy*) from Samara province and 3,000 *puds* of groats from Ufa province for the public catering (*obshchestvennoe pitanie*) of children and the sick. It is not known how much of this order was fulfilled. Ibid. 1.175.

<sup>43</sup> NARK, f.R-106, op.1, d.30, 1.136-136ob.

<sup>44</sup> RGAE, f.1943, op.7, d.1773, 1.272.

branch of the Olonets provincial food commissariat situated in Moscow therefore asked the department of distribution attached to the People's Commissariat for Food to only give it grain orders from better supplied provinces, and to transport the loads by water instead of rail, which it considered easier. Specifically the provincial food commissariat asked for Olonets province's October supply plan to be fulfilled from Samara and Saratov provinces and Pokrovsk district.<sup>45</sup>

Again, the intensification of the civil war outside its borders had a knock on effect on the supply and distribution of food to the Karelian districts. Between September and October 1919 Denikin made a decisive move towards Moscow; Kursk was taken on 20 September and on 14 October the Whites captured Orel'. General Iudenich's North-Western White Army simultaneously advanced towards Petrograd in October and the Bolshevik regime faced one of the most serious threats to its existence since the start of the civil war.<sup>46</sup> The resources available to the Soviet regime were directed to the military fronts while the Bolsheviks simultaneously faced a breakdown in the transport system, a shortage of fuel and the onset of winter.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, supplies to Karelia were disrupted; Moscow informed the Olonets provincial food commissariat on 13 October that its supply order for that month would be lower than the 30% of the order received for the September allocation. Moscow explained that it was impossible to increase the October supply plan because of the general poor food supply situation and poorer procurement results.<sup>48</sup>

Local authorities therefore, as in 1918, were compelled to do the best with what food resources they could mobilise by themselves to supplement the grain loads that did make it through to them. In mid-August 1919 the Olonets district union of cooperatives

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 1.235. Pokrovsk district, part of Saratov province, resolved to secede from Saratov province in June 1918 and set up its own 'republic.' It remained detached for the duration of the civil war. Raleigh, *Civil War*. 76; 105.

<sup>46</sup> Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*. 194-202.

<sup>47</sup> Davydov, *Bor'ba za Khleb*. 159-160.

<sup>48</sup> RGAE, f.1943, op.7, d.1773, l.236.

organised an 'efficiency department' (*proizvoditel'nyi otdel*) for the purchase of local products which, despite a shortage of material resources and literate personnel, managed to gather a significant amount of fruit, vegetable and meat products by October which amounted to over 1 million roubles.<sup>49</sup> Local efforts in the fishing industry were less effective. On 23 September 1919 the first Olonets provincial congress of fisherman took place where the delegates agreed to try and raise the productivity of the fishing industry. Prior to the conference the industry failed to fulfil its potential because of a lack of fishing materials and the fact that fish were usually caught for individual needs only. A number of basic problems within the industry, such as the lack of storage for boats and caught fish, also proved inhibitive and had still not been solved by early 1920.<sup>50</sup>

Clearly Karelia needed central help and this arrived in the form of approximately 200,000 *puds* of vegetable seeds, delivered to Olonets province from Moscow sometime in 1919. In short, these deliveries were successful because the growing of vegetables provided a supplement to the grain harvest. At the end of September 1919 the head of the provincial agricultural department stated that market gardening had developed significantly that year, in part because brochures and posters had encouraged peasants to grow vegetables. However, even without these propaganda efforts, the general food shortages meant that the peasantry willingly became involved in this sector of the economy.<sup>51</sup> A report by the head of the agronomic sub-department of the Petrozavodsk district agricultural department on 20 September 1919 also noted the relative success of market gardening from the spring of that year in producing vegetables in the villages which were also sold in the towns. To develop the sector further he noted the need for more seed.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Balagurov and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period*. 269-270.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* 270-271.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* 260-262.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* 259-260.

The above account of Karelia's food supply problems is not comprehensive but the evidence available suggests that the improvement in food supply in 1919 was mixed when compared to the previous year. On the one hand, local agricultural conditions meant that the food situation in the Karelian districts depended to a great extent on the ability of the provincial food commissariat to secure as many domestic imports from the grain surplus provinces as possible. The food situation in Karelia was therefore dependent on central support and the local conditions and development of the civil war elsewhere. As 1919 drew to a close the threat of the Whites subsided and the grain quotas assigned to Olonets province began to rise again slightly. Grain loads were also assigned from provinces further east, thus reflecting the Bolsheviks' conquests against the Whites.<sup>53</sup>

Karelia's reliance on domestic imports meant that in 1919 food supply was more methodical; set orders were established for each month to be dispatched from the grain surplus provinces to Olonets province. Furthermore, fewer incidents of grain loads being seized by other soviets en route to Petrozavodsk were recorded by local leaders. On 27 September, at the Sixth Olonets Provincial Congress of Soviets, V.T. Gur'ev noted that up to 20 carriages for Olonets provincial food commissariat had been detained on the Murmansk railroad.<sup>54</sup> Compare this with 1918 when I.F. Petrov noted at the First Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference in August that 130 carriages had failed to reach Petrozavodsk (see Chapter 4). Therefore the delivery of supplies to the Karelian districts was still a huge problem in 1919 but food procurement and distribution was administratively better organised than it had been before. Caution must also be applied in comparing the Bolsheviks' level of efficiency in food procurement with pre or post-

<sup>53</sup> Ekaterinburg was taken by the Red Army on 15 July and the important rail junction of Cheliabinsk on 24/25 July. Kolchak's HQ Omsk was captured with relative ease on 14 November. Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*. 148-155; Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*. 474-483; 543-550. Although the fulfilment percentages are not known, for the month of November Moscow allotted the Olonets provincial food commissariat a total of 61,500 *puds* of cereals from Ekaterinburg and Kazan provinces and Pokrovsk district. In December Olonets province was allotted the same total amount from solely Ekaterinburg and Cheliabinsk provinces. RGAE, f.1943, op.7, d.1773, l.246; l.261. In December 1919 a food supply agent from Olonets province was also situated in Penza trying to secure the collection of potatoes and grain. NARK, f.R-98, op.1, d.238, l.66.

<sup>54</sup> Balagurov and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period*. 279.

revolution levels. Although the receipt of grain did not match local leaders' expectations and only small amounts filtered through to the Karelian districts, these supplies along with local resources were, ultimately, enough for the Karelian districts and the local Bolsheviks to survive.

### **Creating order in the Cheka**

The first moves towards strengthening the provincial Cheka in 1919 can be traced to the re-election of this institution in October 1918 and the election of Oskar Kanter at its head. The process of gaining more control over the activities of the provincial Cheka and its members was gradual and greatly accelerated by the abolition of the district Chekas in February 1919. For instance, the Olonets district Cheka transferred its cases to the provincial Cheka on 8 February and dismissed its staff on the 15 February with two weeks advance pay.<sup>55</sup> Despite the structural reorganisation malpractice and disorganisation within the provincial Cheka's ranks continued, but there were definite signs that it was becoming better organised and acting more responsibly. Again one of the chief architects of this development was Kanter and it was under his tenure as chairman that an audit of the Cheka took place in March 1919 which revealed many of the institutions deficiencies (see Chapter 6).

Kanter also strove to restore public order and reduce the potential for malfeasance amongst soviet employees by decreasing the availability of alcohol. On 3 March he sent a telegram to the provincial Bolshevik party committee to demand, for a second time, a review of a case which related to the destruction of a quantity of beer available in the Oloniia timber factory in Petrozavodsk. The issue had been discussed at a session of the Petrozavodsk town soviet two days previous where the soviet resolved to retain the beer,

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<sup>55</sup> NARK, f.P-13, op.2, d.7, l.5-6ob. On 20 January 1919 district Chekas were abolished by the All-Russian Central Executive Committee. All records, funds and prisoners were to be passed to the provincial Chekas within twenty days of the decree's publication (24 January). Leggett, *The Cheka*. 137. For the decree see Belov, et al., *Iz Istorii VChK*. 243-244.

contrary to Kanter's wishes who believed it should be disposed of. Kanter asked the party 'to commission the provincial executive committee without the knowledge of the town soviet to carry out the instructions of the party because otherwise the excessive consumption of beer will not stop.'<sup>56</sup> Efforts to curb the use of alcohol would also potentially ease the burden on the prison in Petrozavodsk which in March 1919 was overcrowded. The provincial commissar for justice, A.F. Kopnin, appealed to the provincial Cheka who in turn informed the provincial executive committee on 13 April to release 14 prisoners early, nine of whom were detained for either being drunk or distilling alcohol.<sup>57</sup>

Although Cheka malpractice continued into 1919 there was a clear improvement from the previous year; conflict with the soviet executive committee had disappeared, Chekist malpractice was punished and a more orderly provincial Cheka was developing. In March a provincial Cheka commissar was dismissed by Kanter for speculation.<sup>58</sup> Kanter's diligence was also evident on 24 March when the Olonets provincial executive committee heard a complaint from the chairman of the Petrozavodsk Consumer Society (*Obshchestva Potrebitelei*) who had 1900 feet of leather confiscated by the provincial Cheka. Kanter defended the move and stated that if the Society could produce the correct documentation proving that the leather had been purchased legally from an agent of the provincial food board then it would be returned. Failing that it would remain in the hands of the provincial Cheka. In response the chair of the Consumer Society remarked he had many goods without accounts for them, not one leather item had been registered but they did have a permit to prove that they had permission to transport the leather from the dock. Kanter believed this did not necessarily prove that the leather had been bought legally. As a result, the provincial executive committee resolved to only return the leather if the Consumer

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<sup>56</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.17, l.10.

<sup>57</sup> GARF, f.R-393, op.13, d.249, l.211ob; 242ob-243.

<sup>58</sup> Laidinen, "O.K. Kanter". 199.

Society could produce a cover note from the food board and the permit for the right to transport the leather, indicating the quality and the amount.<sup>59</sup>

By the spring and summer of 1919 the improved organisation and efficiency of the provincial Cheka was also evident against the background of the desperate military situation faced by the Bolsheviks. The provincial Cheka helped with preparations for an orderly retreat. On 29 April the provincial executive committee ordered the provincial Cheka to destroy all spirits and vodka situated in the provincial wine store in the event of an immediate threat to Petrozavodsk from the White Finns.<sup>60</sup> In May many prisoners were refused bail upon the decision of the provincial Cheka and in the middle of the same month the Cheka refused to release 20 hostages. At the end of May, with the agreement of the provincial Cheka, the Vecheka ordered the most prominent hostages and counter-revolutionaries to be sent to them in Moscow.<sup>61</sup> At this time the provincial Cheka also decided to evacuate to Vytegra and on 26 May began to move its paperwork and furniture. On 3 June the decision was taken to evacuate only female personnel with males remaining at their posts to help load up all items for departure on 5 June.<sup>62</sup>

The spring and summer of 1919 was militarily the most serious period for the Bolsheviks in Karelia and the Cheka's activities intensified with the arrival of a wave of refugees from the Murmansk region (see Chapter 7). Oskar Kanter also headed a cavalry division sent to Shungskaaia parish in May 1919 to engage the Whites.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, the Chekists N.N. Dorofeev and M.S. Antonov headed two special task force detachments (*otriad osobogo naznacheniiia*) which were sent to the Pudozh front and the Zaonezh'e

<sup>59</sup> NARK, f.R-98, op1, d.101, l.28-28ob.

<sup>60</sup> Balagurov and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period*. 63.

<sup>61</sup> Laidinen, "O.K. Kanter". 204.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 200.

<sup>63</sup> On 6 June I.I. Terukov of the Olonets provincial Cheka informed the Vecheka troop headquarters in Moscow that a battalion of Petrozavodsk Chekists, numbering 29 men, was in action against the Whites at Shun'ga. RGVA, f.9, op.28, d.287, l.20.

peninsula respectively in May 1919.<sup>64</sup> Not surprisingly it appears that the Cheka became more extreme in its duties against the background of the military threat and peasant rebellion. For example, the Olonets provincial Bolshevik party committee resolved on 16 May to ask the provincial Cheka to ‘take urgent measures for the cleansing (*ochishchenie*) of the front-line area of counter-revolutionary elements in the Tipinitskaia soviet executive committee.’<sup>65</sup> M.S. Anotonov’s special task force, according to the findings of a Bolshevik investigatory commission, was also found to have acted unlawfully once it arrived in Tolvuiskaia parish on 7 July. According to the local peasants Antonov’s force took part in the wide scale requisitioning of their clothes, livestock and horses; in response to the peasants’ complaints Antonov threatened to carry out arrests and executions.<sup>66</sup>

The Cheka therefore intensified its activities at a time of crisis but the story of the Cheka in 1919 is not solely one of arbitrary abuses. Instead in the spring of 1919 elite Cheka units were assigned to key parts of the military front and to take back control from rebelling parishes. Although intermittent malpractice persisted it was resolved without the structural conflicts of the previous year. The former head of the Pudozh district Cheka, a certain Andreev, was under investigation by the provincial revolutionary tribunal in June 1919 and on 26 August a Murmansk railroad Cheka commissar was arrested and imprisoned for rape and his case transferred to the provincial revolutionary tribunal.<sup>67</sup> One of the Bolsheviks’ responses to evidence of criminality within its ranks was education and on 18 July 1919 the provincial Cheka sent four of their employees to Moscow on a Vecheka training course.<sup>68</sup> In August Kanter also targeted his staff’s rudimentary deficiencies in reading and writing. Naturally, improvement in these skills was necessary

<sup>64</sup> A. Sergeichev, “Ony Byli Pervymi” in V.V. Kryzhanovskii, ed., *Chekisty Karelii: Stat’i, Ocherki, Rasskazy*. Petrozavodsk: “Kareliia”, 1986. 137-138.

<sup>65</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.33, l.103. Part of the Zaonezh’e peninsula, Tipinitsy (the administrative centre of Tipinitskaia parish) in Petrozavodsk district had recently held re-elections to the village soviet which according to the party committee had replaced ‘revolutionary workers with *kulaks*’.

<sup>66</sup> According to the report 120 horned animals were requisitioned, 50 sheep and 45 horses (including collars and saddles). Vavulinskaia, *Sovety Karelii*,. 64.

<sup>67</sup> NARK, f.P-10, op.3, d.40, l.40; Laidinen, “O.K. Kanter”. 199.

<sup>68</sup> Laidinen, “O.K. Kanter”. 199.

for the basic functioning of the Cheka's books and would help to create a more efficient cadre of workers to draw upon. On 9 August 1919, at a session of the provincial Cheka, Kanter stressed the need to eradicate general illiteracy and raise the 'political literacy' of its members and employees. The result was an obligation placed upon all commissars and other semiliterate workers to attend a general course attached to the department of people's education in Petrozavodsk. Furthermore, the head of Cheka reconnaissance was asked to gather literature for the Cheka's library-reading room and to subscribe to various newspapers and a journal.<sup>69</sup>

Finally, towards the end of 1919 the provincial Cheka continued to work with an increased element of responsibility in comparison to the summer/autumn of 1918; in late November agents of the provincial Cheka successfully exposed a local citizen of Petrozavodsk who was involved in the large-scale speculation of alcohol. The speculator under investigation bribed the Cheka agents with 3500 roubles, which he believed to have been successful. However, the money was handed to the secret-operations department attached to the provincial Cheka and the investigation of the individual continued.<sup>70</sup> At approximately the same time Kanter also refused to allow individuals who were not recommended by the party or provincial executive committee to join the ranks of the Cheka. On 30 November an applicant with no party affiliation was refused permission to serve in the Cheka.<sup>71</sup>

The malpractice of Cheka agents provides an excellent illustration of why the Cheka had to be reformed. A turning point came with the abolition of district Chekas in January 1919 but in Karelia a period of reform began with the re-election of the provincial Cheka in early October 1918 and the appointment of Oskar Kanter as its chair. Following

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 198.

<sup>70</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.152, l.5.

<sup>71</sup> Laidinen, "O.K. Kanter". 199.

Kanter's appointment the provincial Cheka underwent distinct changes as its chairman sought improvement: investigations continued; erring Chekists were disciplined; an audit took place; institutional conflicts diminished; elite fighting forces were formed; and training courses were introduced. By the summer-autumn of 1919 the provincial Cheka still encountered problems but it was an organisation that was better organised and better controlled than in the summer/early autumn of 1918.

### **Desertion and constructing a peasant-state relationship**

Arguably the greatest success of the Red Army in Karelia was not on the battle field but in the struggle against desertion. It was the anti-desertion campaign in the Red Army which was used to win over a reluctant peasantry to an accommodation with the regime and the establishment of a hierarchy of desertion commissions, from the beginning of 1919, marked a significant change in the reeling back in of soldiers who absconded. After a period of organisational setbacks for the desertion commissions in Karelia, often related to a shortage of resources, the Bolsheviks began to overcome the desertion problem by the summer of 1919. This was achieved for a number of reasons: the introduction of periodic amnesties; increased bureaucracy; the publicising of the state's willingness to look after soldiers' families; and propaganda efforts combined with threats and punishments. As a result the Bolsheviks, at a vital time of the civil war, managed to gain enough control over the desertion problem to keep as many soldiers in service as possible and withhold the attacks made by the White Finns, the Allies and the White Russians during the spring and summer of 1919.

The various material shortages that affected almost every Red Army unit at some time during the civil war have been summarised by other historians and deemed as a primary reason for why soldiers deserted.<sup>72</sup> Therefore only a few examples are needed here

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<sup>72</sup> Figes, "Mass Mobilisation". 190-198; 201.

to underline some of the similar conditions endured by the Red Army troops in the Karelian districts. In the first instance the problem of supplying military units was not solely a problem of material resources but an administrative one. The lack of reliable and capable personnel affected the ability of the military commissariats to supply its troops. On 3 January 1919 the Olonets provincial executive committee received a request from the head of the department of supply attached to the provincial military commissariat, which stipulated the formation of a commission to investigate the abuses of authority perpetrated by the employees of the department of supply.<sup>73</sup> A knock on effect of disorganisation in the supply departments was unrest in the military units; an information bulletin for the 7<sup>th</sup> Red Army, from 30 January noted that: ‘On the Olonets front, in connection with the shortage of uniforms and equipment the mood of the units is one of dissatisfaction... In the Karelian region there is a shortage of uniforms, linen, tea, tobacco and soap.’<sup>74</sup> On 10 March 1919 another military report for Olonets province noted the shortage of equipment, overcoats, blankets and mattresses.<sup>75</sup> Because of the absence of various kinds of military equipment in the province another military report from 24 March noted that commanders did not know what supplies to prioritise for their units.<sup>76</sup>

Of course, as a grain deficit region, the food crisis in the Karelian districts also contributed to poor conditions in the Red Army units; it was impossible to consistently supply adequate rations to every unit. This often led to independent initiatives and contributed to the unlawful looting of the local population by Red Army troops. In the middle of February 1919, because of a lack of meat in the Red Army units, the district military commissariats requested permission to carry out the purchase of meat

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<sup>73</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.11, l.3; 8. The disorganised nature of the provincial military commissariat was also noted in a military report, dated 1 February 1919, which stated that almost all its departments were disorganised. The department of supply in particular was noted for not carrying out its book keeping duties and spending money arbitrarily. RGVA, f.9, op.8, d.290, l.286.

<sup>74</sup> RGVA, f.9, op.8, d.144, l.27.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. l.83.

<sup>76</sup> NARK, f.R-28, op.1, d.30, l.65.

independently thus bypassing (*pomimo*) the supply departments.<sup>77</sup> The supply of army units was also dependent on their position at the front. On the 9 April 1919 General Maynard informed the War Office that cases of illness in enemy lines was due to poor quality and quantity of food but rations and ammunition supply for troops was better on the railway than on the flanks.<sup>78</sup> The shortage of food and cases of disease persisted as the civil war in Karelia reached its peak which naturally affected the morale of the Red troops. An information report on 21 May for the Petrozavodsk sector stated that a shortage of uniforms and food was provoking ‘complications and dissatisfaction’ in the 19<sup>th</sup> rifle division.<sup>79</sup> The following month being positioned on the railway line no longer held the advantage of being better supplied; a political report for the 7<sup>th</sup> Red Army on 6 June described the falling morale of a railroad regiment situated on the Petrozavodsk front as a result of constant fighting, a shortage of food and illness.<sup>80</sup>

In the face of these material shortages and poor conditions it is little wonder that some of the Red Army troops chose to desert from their units. However, the evidence from the Karelian districts points to other important reasons for desertion. Sometimes it was only a temporary problem based on the time of year. By May 1919 the approach of seasonal agricultural work meant peasants in the Red Army became preoccupied with preparing for the harvest. On 14 May a report on the conditions within the 7<sup>th</sup> Red Army in the Karelian sector stated: ‘Desertion is growing because of the approach of summer work.’<sup>81</sup> Similar problems were underlined in a report on the 21 May 1919: ‘The Red Army men are agitated (*volnuet*) over the timely sowing of their fields.’<sup>82</sup> Two days later

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 1.42.

<sup>78</sup> Telegram from General Maynard to War Office, 9 April, 1919. WO 33/966/121, No. 1533.

<sup>79</sup> RGVA, f.9, op.8, d.144, l.207.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. op.4, d.1, l.215.

<sup>81</sup> RGVA, f.9, op.8, d.144, l.191.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 1.207.

another military report noted that desertion was increasing in the Karelian sector because soldiers wished to carry out work in the fields.<sup>83</sup>

However, in addition to seasonal field work, desertion patterns reflected the importance of local conditions, in this instance the proximity of the front and the intensity of the fighting. A Red Army information bulletin covering the period 1-20 June 1919 stated that there had been no disorder in Pudozh's Red Army units, the percentage of deserters was 'very insignificant' (*samyi nichtozhnyi*) and there had been no uprisings.<sup>84</sup> More specifically, a Bolshevik agitator noted in mid-June 1919 that the anti-desertion campaign in Berezhnodubrovskaia parish was going well because of weekly inspections of Red Army men's documents, the provision of soldiers' families had improved and their fields had been sown.<sup>85</sup> On the other hand the Zaonezh'e peninsula, against the background of the Allied and White advance, had rebelled and refused to mobilise; in Velikogubskaia only 50 of the 400 men subjected to the draft appeared at the mobilisation point. In Tolvuiskaia parish only 24 men from the expected 280 appeared.<sup>86</sup> In part response the Petrozavodsk district military commissariat was in the process of forming an escort detachment to stop draftees deserting en route to mobilisation points.<sup>87</sup>

Desertion from the Red Army was, of course, a national problem for the Soviet state and it prompted the creation of a Central Commission for the Struggle with Desertion in late December 1918.<sup>88</sup> Reflecting the need to work closely with other state institutions to

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 1.213.

<sup>84</sup> RGVA, f.6, op.10, d.30, l.40-41.

<sup>85</sup> NARK, f.P-10, op.3, d.40, l.59.

<sup>86</sup> 100 men from Velikogubskaia parish had originally turned up but because of the lack of a boat to take them to Petrozavodsk many of the mobilised men returned home. When a boat did arrive the military authorities found that whole villages had disappeared and only with difficulty did they find 50 men from Velikogubskaia. The same problem explained the poor turn up of recruits in Tolvuiskaia parish. NARK, f.R-573, op.1, d.672, l.15.

<sup>87</sup> RGVA, f.6, op.10, d.30, l.40-41.

<sup>88</sup> *Dekrety*. Vol.4. 254-256. On the 25 January this commission issued an order to the provinces to immediately create provincial and district desertion commissions attached to the corresponding military commissariats. S.Olikov, *Dezertirstvo v Krasnoi Armii i Bor'ba s nim*. Moscow: Izdanie Voennoi Tipografii

tackle the desertion problem, the first sessions of the Central Desertion Commission, on 25 and 27 December 1918, were attended by representatives of the People's Commissariats for Food, Communication Routes, Social Security, Labour and Justice, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee's military publishing department, the All-Russian bureau of military commissars' agitation department and the Moscow Regional Military Commissariat.<sup>89</sup> In the western historiography not a lot has been written about the workings of this institution.<sup>90</sup> The main reason for this, it appears, is because the archive of the Central Commission for the Struggle for Desertion was destroyed after its files were transferred to the People's Commissariat for Labour.<sup>91</sup> However records at provincial level, although fragmented, remain.<sup>92</sup>

An Olonets provincial commission for the struggle with desertion held its first session on 12 February 1919 where it resolved to immediately form subordinate commissions in the districts. In the parishes the responsibility for combating desertion was placed on the military commissariats, the soviets and the militias which were compelled to forward all detainees to the district commission for desertion. Up to early 1919 it is evident that there was a lack of information on desertion; the Bolsheviks wanted to know more about why the men were deserting and stop them disappearing back into society. At the above session the provincial commission for desertion resolved to print 2000 copies of deserter questionnaires to be sent to the districts and to inform all males aged between 18 and 45, through the provincial press, to carry identification cards which proved exemptions

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UPR, 1926. 18. The commissions were to be made up of three members representing the provincial or district military commissariats and the provincial or district soviet executive committees.

<sup>89</sup> Molodtsygin, *Krasnaia Armia*. 177.

<sup>90</sup> Figes mentions the Central Commission briefly in his discussion of desertion in the Red Army during the civil war. Figes, "Mass Mobilisation". 198-209; as does Hagen, *Soldiers*. 72-73; 76. For a discussion in Russian of the Central Commission for the Struggle with Desertion, but also desertion more generally during the civil war, see Olikov: *Dezertirstvo*; Molodtsygin, *Krasnaia Armia*. 177-187.

<sup>91</sup> Olikov, *Dezertirstvo*. 5. It is unclear if these files were destroyed by accident or on purpose.

<sup>92</sup> A historian of Tambov province is the only individual, to the author's knowledge, who has looked at the desertion commissions in the provinces. Landis, E.C., *Bandits and Partisan. The Antonov Movement in the Russian Civil War*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008. 19-21; 36; 38-39; 297, fn.103; 300, fn.153; 301, fn.159-161 & fn.164.

from military service. All provincial institutions, factories, offices and labour exchanges were required to carry out a weekly inspection of people's documents and the provincial commission for desertion resolved to send sentries (*pikety*) to Petrozavodsk and along the railway line to check the documents of those travelling by train.<sup>93</sup>

The success of the desertion commissions was dependent on local implementation and often local resources. For instance, the provincial desertion commission initially suffered from a lack of capable personnel; just over a month after the provincial commission was set up its chairman was replaced on 22 March by the order of the provincial military commissariat.<sup>94</sup> The new head of the desertion commission was a more conscientious M. Dobrynin, who remained the commission's chairman at least until the end of 1919.<sup>95</sup> He wrote a report on 10 April to the Olonets provincial military commissariat in which he underlined the inability of his commission to operate effectively because of a lack of reliable workers. He found the office records of the commission in a chaotic condition: there was no systematic register of deserters or orders; papers were filed away in a random fashion; and protocols of the commission's sessions were not written out with the exception of its first meeting. It was therefore impossible to track what the commission had done or planned from the day of its establishment. Moreover, the commission had to share a room, had no premises of their own, lacked stationery and furniture and had no credit.<sup>96</sup>

To solve his commission's financial difficulties Dobrynin referred to an order issued by the Central Commission for the Struggle with Desertion on 28 February which stated that the provincial and district commissions were to be maintained through the

<sup>93</sup> NARK, f.R-879, op.1, d.4, l.1-1ob.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. l.5.

<sup>95</sup> From August at least up to October 1918 Dobrynin had been the head of the Olonets provincial military commissariat's department for recruitment (*agitatsionno-verbovochnyi otдел*). Mashezerskii, and Slavin, *Bor'ba*. 473-474.

<sup>96</sup> NARK, f.R-879, op.1, d.4, l.6.

provincial and district military commissariats. He therefore applied to the provincial military commissar for the material means which the provincial desertion committee lacked plus an employee from the provincial military commissariat to carry out the administration work of the desertion commission.<sup>97</sup> His requests were not met in the short term; on 28 April Dobrynin submitted another report to the provincial military commissar stating that all the work of the commission was being undertaken by him alone. He requested 'for a third time' an office secretary in addition to a copyist and a typist with typewriter without which the functioning of the desertion commission was impossible.<sup>98</sup>

The work of the Olonets provincial desertion commission was therefore hamstrung by material shortages and administrative deficiencies. Indeed S. Olikov, who had direct experience of working in desertion commissions during the civil war, believed that up to the end of April the Central Desertion Commission was in an organisational phase and it only began a more decisive struggle with desertion after this period.<sup>99</sup> In an order dated 29 May 1919 the Central Commission for the Struggle with Desertion placed the burden for capturing deserters firmly at the feet of the parishes. Parish military commissars were required to check the documents of all citizens in their parishes, make regular trips to the villages, and carry out a strict accounting of everyone subject to the military draft. The military commissars were also obliged to work in close contact with the parish soviets and Bolshevik party cells in order to help search for deserters; together with the chairmen of rural settlements and parish soviets the military commissars were also responsible for detaining deserters who were then passed onto the district desertion commissions. All

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid. 1.6-6ob. During the first four months of their existence the majority of provincial and district desertion commissions across Soviet territory reported to the Central Desertion Commission that their ability to combat desertion was undermined by a lack of funds and a lack of independence from the military commissariats. Olikov, *Dezertirstvo*. 21.

<sup>98</sup> NARK, f.R-573, op.1, d.361, 1.63.

<sup>99</sup> Olikov, *Dezertirstvo*. 27.

parish authorities not conforming to this decree within two weeks of its publication would be brought to trial.<sup>100</sup>

Figes states that desertion commissions were also established at parish level and then merged with the parish military commissariats, which ‘brought the punitive power of the state closer to the rural strongholds of desertion.’<sup>101</sup> His conclusion is logical. The vast majority of the Red Army in Karelia by mid-1919 was drawn from the peasantry who lived in the countryside and this is where the majority of deserters inevitably concealed themselves. However, there is no evidence from the centre’s decree mentioned above or at the first session of the Olonets provincial commission for desertion that parish desertion commissions were ever formed in the Karelian districts. Instead the responsibility was given to the parish military commissariats, soviets and party cells, most probably because the parishes were even less likely to have the means to create and maintain another bureaucratic body in the form of a desertion commission.<sup>102</sup> The Central Desertion Commission’s decree from the 29 May also signified its wish to gain more control by way of gathering information not only about the number of deserters in the parishes but the population as a whole. In other words this order from the capital not only asked the parishes to hunt down those eluding conscription but to survey the whole populace, check everyone’s papers, increase the state’s contact with the countryside and improve coordination between local and central authorities. All this naturally made evading the draft more difficult.<sup>103</sup>

The evidence above and what follows below suggests that the desertion commissions in the Karelian districts were also in an organisational phase up until the end

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<sup>100</sup> *Olonetskaia Kommuna*, 1 June 1919.

<sup>101</sup> Figes, “Mass Mobilisation”. 206.

<sup>102</sup> S. Olikov stated that parish desertion commissions were not established everywhere because of a lack of funds (*sredstva*). Olikov, *Dezertirstvo*. 21.

<sup>103</sup> Sanborn also mentions the importance of coordinated efforts between centre and periphery and the tightening up of documentary controls to combat desertion. Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation*. 52-53.

of April and the anti-desertion campaign gradually became more successful. And yet, at the same time, a shortage of material resources and personnel were problems that were never fully eradicated. Data for the establishment of district desertion commissions in Karelia is incomplete but, from the evidence available, a Pudozh district commission was created on 27 February 1919. However, this commission became hindered in its operations by a shortage of manpower. A report detailing its work up to 20 October 1919 stated that it had not been able to organise reconnaissance parties or send military units around the district to hunt down deserters because preference for troops was given to regular Red Army units.<sup>104</sup> A Red Army military report for the last two weeks of September 1919 did in fact note that detachments for the struggle with desertion in Olonets province took part in military operations against the enemy.<sup>105</sup> Because of the shortage of manpower the Pudozh district desertion commission had only one detachment numbering 15 men in October 1919; six of these were permanently situated at landing piers to check the documents of those arriving by boat into the district while the remainder were used as a combat unit. As a result of the personnel shortages a detachment of troops from the Internal Guard for the Petrograd sector was operating around Pudozh district looking for deserters.<sup>106</sup> However, by November the Pudozh desertion commission had no armed troops at all because its 15 man detachment had left to join another regiment.<sup>107</sup>

Between 27 February and 20 October the Pudozh district commission for desertion registered 189 deserters, the vast majority of whom (141) handed themselves in voluntarily.<sup>108</sup> The high percentage of voluntary appearance can partly be explained by the introduction of the general amnesties mentioned below or the number of men who simply turned up late at the recruiting station. The soldiers' belated arrival could have been for

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<sup>104</sup> NARK, f.R-879, op.1, d.12, l.41-42.

<sup>105</sup> RGVA, f.6, op.10, d.24, l.391.

<sup>106</sup> NARK, f.R-879, op.1, d.12, l.42.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. l.94.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. l.42.

numerous reasons, such as the late arrival of decrees, instructions, or mobilisation orders.<sup>109</sup> On 7 May a military report noted that because of the disconnection of Pudozh district, which was situated across Lake Onega, mobilisation was taking place belatedly.<sup>110</sup> From the remainder of the 189 registered deserters 15 were caught, one of whom was categorised as ‘malicious’ (*zlostnyi*).<sup>111</sup> The remaining 31 were either still at large or an uncategorised remainder (*‘priblizitel’no ostavshikhsia 31’*).<sup>112</sup>

The path to the success of the anti-desertion campaign was uneven but, despite the difficulties faced by the Bolsheviks in tackling the desertion problem, they had identified a key lever to solving the problem the previous year: the welfare of soldiers’ families. On 24 December 1918 Sovnarkom issued a decree which set forth its intention to supply the families of Red Army men with special monetary allowances.<sup>113</sup> Similarly, the preferential treatment of Red Army men’s field work reflected the state’s drive to tackle desertion effectively by meeting the peasantry half way. In response to an earlier Sovnarkom decree, the Olonets provincial military commissariat published an order on 19 May informing all local agricultural departments and village soviets to endeavour to plough and sow the fields of men called up to the Red Army.<sup>114</sup> At the Third Olonets Provincial Party Conference (1-5 September 1919),<sup>115</sup> one of the leading local communists, Iakov Berztys, summarised the Bolsheviks’ position: ‘The mood of the Red Army in which the peasants

<sup>109</sup> Figes, “Mass Mobilisation”. 199; 201.

<sup>110</sup> RGVA, f.9, op.8, d.144, l.173.

<sup>111</sup> Deserters were categorised into different categories. To be registered as ‘malicious’ could mean that the individual involved had gone missing for more than 14 days, run away with army property, deliberately concealed themselves at the time of the draft, resisted arrest or deserted more than once. See Figes, “Mass Mobilisation”. 199.

<sup>112</sup> NARK, f.R-879, op.1, d.12, l.42. The translation here makes it unclear what this category was; *‘priblizitel’no ostavshikhsia 31’* literally means ‘approximately 31 remaining’ which might mean still at large or simply an uncategorised remainder.

<sup>113</sup> For the decree see *Dekrety*. Vol.4. 252-253.

<sup>114</sup> Balagurov, and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period*. 320. For the Sovnarkom decree from 20 March 1919 see *Dekrety*. Vol.4. 521-522.

<sup>115</sup> 54 delegates attended the Third Olonets Provincial Bolshevik Party Conference. They represented 39 party organisations and 3020 party members. The following were elected to the provincial party committee at the conference: P.F. Anokhin, Ia.K. Berztys, I.A. Danilov, N.N. Dorofeev, A.V. Ivanov, Ia.F. Igoshkin, A.D. Igoshkina, A.F. Kopnin, V.B. Leiberg, A.V. Nosov, K.D. Pimenov, Smirnov, I.A. Iakovlev. The three probationary members were: B.S. Gaup, Sukhanov and M.F. Tarasov. Balagurov and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period*. 374; 594, fn.80.

are the overwhelming majority depends on our relations with the peasantry. The support of Red Army soldiers' families ensures the stability of the Red Army.'<sup>116</sup>

Of course, Berztys's words reflected the ideal, i.e. acquiring a reliable military force through providing for its soldiers' families, but a lack of local resources meant that the implementation of Sovnarkom's decrees was often undermined. The Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee published an order on 25 May 1919 which stated that it had received a number of complaints from families who had not received their allowances which lowered the morale of the Red troops and encouraged them to desert. The Olonets provincial revolutionary executive committee believed that the delay in the issue of allowances was a result of belated information coming from the parishes about the families of those called up to serve in the Red Army. In turn this hindered the work of the departments of social security and the subsequent issue of credit.<sup>117</sup> A lack of reliable and competent personnel in soviet institutions undoubtedly contributed to the difficulties in providing for the families of Red Army soldiers. At the Third Olonets Provincial Party Conference the provincial military commissar noted the need for a closer working relationship between military and civilian authorities and sounded out the staff of the departments of social security for criticism: 'In the localities civilian authorities, in particular people in the committees of social security, loaf about and commit sabotage more than look after the needs of Red Army soldiers' families.'<sup>118</sup>

This process of offering limited concessions to the Red Army men and establishing a stronger state-peasant relationship is what, in the following months, contributed to the

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<sup>116</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.30, l.17.

<sup>117</sup> Balagurov and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period.* 321-322. The whole process required an organised and coordinated effort by different state institutions. The wealth of the Red Army men's families who lived in towns was calculated by an investigation bureau attached to the department of social security. In the parishes this was done by parish soviets. After the investigation the parish soviets or social security departments sent a list of soldiers' families to the district social security departments who then determined which families were entitled to allowances. They then returned the lists to the parish soviets or social security departments and transferred the money to these bodies to distribute. Balagurov and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period.* 322.

<sup>118</sup> NARK, f.P-4, op.1, d.26, l.22.

relative success of the Soviet regime's anti-desertion campaign and the Bolsheviks' victory in the civil war. Although the implementation of central policy in the periphery was usually impeded in one way or another the Bolsheviks' objective to prioritise the welfare of its soldiers was important. It is therefore significant that the above order to help families of Red Army men was published in *Olonetskaia Kommuna*. For although it highlighted the deficiencies of the Bolsheviks attempts to implement their policy it also showed the newspaper's readership the party's intent to help soldiers' families, offered a reasonable explanation of why their efforts had faltered and applied pressure on certain state agencies to help solve the problem. Sanborn argues that the Bolshevik leadership's ability to learn from the feelers that came from the provinces and its 'sensitivity to the dynamics of low politics' helps explain the regime's success in stemming the flow of desertion. This was achieved gradually and with setbacks but through the creation of a 'contract' between soldiers and the state whereby the soldier, encouraged by government legislation, a family welfare programme and propaganda, fought for the Red Army but was liable to punishment and the withdrawal of state sponsored entitlements if he deserted. Generally, combating desertion combined punishment, conciliation and agitation with the role of the soldiers' family being of vital importance.<sup>119</sup>

The evidence for the Karelian districts makes it difficult to disagree with Sanborn's assessment. For instance, on 11 June 1919 the Petrozavodsk district military commissar threatened to confiscate the property of those who refused to mobilise and to deprive their families of their food rations.<sup>120</sup> By 1 July desertion from Red Army units in Olonets province was recorded to be between 20% and 30% but in response armed detachments were dispatched around the province to catch deserters.<sup>121</sup> Yet, threatening and punitive

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<sup>119</sup> Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation*. 48-55; 108-110. Mark von Hagen also identified the important role of welfare measures for soldiers' families in reducing desertion and as part of the social 'contract' between state and soldier during the civil war. *Soldiers*. 78.

<sup>120</sup> GARF, f.R-393, op.13, d.264, l.48-48ob.

<sup>121</sup> RGVA, f.6, op.10, d.30, l.97.

measures were rarely successful in combating desertion by themselves. Instead the correct balance with more conciliatory measures was crucial. The Olonets provincial desertion commission proposed on 28 June to create a ‘Commission to combat desertion and aid Red Army soldiers’ families’ (*Komissiiia po bor’be s desertirstvom i okazaniiu pomoshchi sem’iam krasnoarmeitsev*). The provincial desertion commission was adamant that this project be approved by the provincial soviet executive committee, without alteration and implemented immediately. Local leaders hoped that the new commission would increase the population’s support for the regime and reduce desertion but foresaw that a lack of finances would hinder its creation. By way of improvisation, until the assignment of credit from the centre, the provincial desertion commission suggested using the unspent credit issued to the provincial commissariat for agriculture and the department of social security. In response, the Olonets provincial soviet executive committee approved the creation of the proposed commission and ordered the districts to immediately undertake the organisation of subordinate commissions.<sup>122</sup>

The solution was therefore in place but also overlapped previous attempts to provide for Red Army men’s families which brought central investment. Information from the Olonets provincial department of social security (Table 6) shows that money did reach the districts from January to August 1919 but in different amounts, presumably according to the occupation of various Karelian parishes at different times, the proximity of the military front, the strategic importance of certain districts, the availability of local resources and the efficiency of local institutions and personnel. Whatever the case, the help of the capital was vitally important to the anti-desertion campaign in Karelia; between 1 January and 1 August 1919 the centre sent 19,289,000 roubles to Olonets province. In January 11,434 people were receiving rations which rose to 30,948 by 1 August.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> NARK, f.R-879, op.1, d.30, 24-24ob.

<sup>123</sup> Balagurov and Mashezerskii, *Kareliia v Period*. 323.

**Table 6 – Number of rations and the sum of money issued to families of Red Army men in Karelia, January-1 August 1919<sup>124</sup>**

| <b>District</b> | <b>Number of people receiving rations</b> | <b>Ration expenditure (roubles)</b> |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Petrozavodsk    | 6913                                      | 3,618,155                           |
| Olonets         | 983                                       | 1,915,000                           |
| Pudozh          | 3454                                      | 2,815,000                           |
| Povenets        | 980                                       | 305,000                             |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>12,330</b>                             | <b>8,653,155</b>                    |

The Bolsheviks were thus making definitive moves to prioritise the welfare of Red Army men. Another commission to help provide support for Red Army men was introduced and attached specifically to the provincial agricultural department on 25 June 1919.<sup>125</sup> At the Sixth Olonets Provincial Congress of Soviets (26 September-1 October 1919) the head of the provincial agricultural department reported that this commission had received 1 million roubles from the centre and distributed most of it around the districts; support came in the form of monetary loans, agricultural implements, seed and manned labour.<sup>126</sup>

The evidence however suggests that the supply of Red Army men's families with allowances was not effective across-the-board in Karelia because of local conditions and/or local resources. A case in point came at one of the provincial desertion commission's sessions on 11 July where it learned that the Pudozh desertion commission was unable to support the families of Red Army men because it lacked money, food and household equipment (*khoziaistvennyi inventar'*). The Olonets provincial desertion commission warned the provincial commission for the showing of help to the families of Red Army

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. 593, fn.75.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. 325. Further measures were also taken in Olonets province to improve the welfare of soldiers who had been invalided by the war or maimed in some way but due to a lack of resources the plans, by August 1919, had achieved little. However, by 1 August commissions for helping the victims of counter-revolution (*komissii po okazaniiu pomoshchi zhertvam kontrrevolutsii*) had been created in Olonets, Petrozavodsk and Povenets districts. The centre had issued 1 million roubles to support these commissions: 320,000 roubles went to Petrozavodsk district; 300,000 to Olonets district; 175,000 to Pudozh district; and 18,035 to Povenets district. Ibid. 324-325. On what basis and how this money was distributed is unknown.

men and the provincial food commissariat that if urgent measures on a provincial wide scale were not taken to supply the district commissions with money, household equipment and food then the individuals responsible would be punished. This pressure from above was coupled with a wish to gain more knowledge of the problem in supplying aid to soldiers' families. The provincial desertion commission asked the provincial commission for the showing of help to the families of Red Army men to inform it when money was received from the centre, how much and when the relevant amount was transferred to the Pudozh district commission for the showing of help to the families of Red Army men. Any leaks in the process could therefore be identified. Similarly the provincial commissariat for agriculture was asked by the provincial desertion commission to inform it when agricultural implements were received, what they were and when they were allocated to Pudozh. In the meantime the provincial desertion commission proposed to ask the centre to immediately dispatch food supplies to Pudozh and to make the Pudozh district desertion commission aware of an improvised solution in the neighbouring Vytegra district; 'kulaks, speculators and parasite elements' were mobilised into a workers' detachment, under communist command, and sent around the parishes to show help to the families of Red Army men.<sup>127</sup>

The above case is a good example of the type of problem that persistently faced the Bolsheviks in Karelia and the root of the problem was shortages, in all its forms. Pressure by way of orders from above was applied to try and solve the desertion problem but because of a lack of money, food, or capable personnel the periphery was unable to effectively carry them out or adopted ad hoc solutions. In response the centre kept adapting its policies on tackling desertion, particularly from April to June 1919.<sup>128</sup> One of these

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<sup>127</sup> NARK, f.R-98, op.1, d.304, l.54-54ob. From the middle of July to the middle of August 1919 the Pudozh district authorities were also combating desertion with agitation and the checking of people's documents. RGVA, f.6, op.10, d.30, l.180.

<sup>128</sup> On 23 April 1919 the Politburo of the party Central Committee resolved to conduct an anti-desertion agitation campaign and on 8 May 1919 the Revolutionary Military Soviet published an order to put lists of deserters at mobilisation points. On 28 May 1919 the Defence Soviet (*Sovet Oborony*) resolved to

policies came on 3 June when Moscow introduced a decree which widened the scope of responsibility for deserters to their families and even whole villages. Those found guilty of concealing deserters or not helping to detain them could face fines, confiscation of their property or penal labour.<sup>129</sup>

The 3 June decree mentioned above was also significant because it was tempered with a significant concession which showed the Bolsheviks' willingness to meet the deserters halfway and strengthen the soldier-state relationship: the party began to periodically publish general amnesties, whereby deserters could appear within a certain time limit before the military commissariats without punishment. S. Olikov stated that the weeks for voluntary appearance at military commissariats were decisive in combating desertion and marked an 'irrevocable turning point' in the Soviet regime's relationship with the population.<sup>130</sup> The results of this measure are partially reflected in Table 7 by figures for the whole of Olonets province.<sup>131</sup>

**Table 7 - Deserters detained in Olonets province, March-September 1919\***<sup>132</sup>

|                           | March | April | May | June       | July       | August**     | September    | Total                 |
|---------------------------|-------|-------|-----|------------|------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Deserters detained</b> | 532   | 94    | 185 | 80<br>(56) | 148<br>(6) | 391<br>(191) | 212<br>(109) | <b>1642<br/>(362)</b> |

As Table 7 shows, although the recorded number of deserters detained in Olonets province was relatively low, the percentage who appeared voluntarily in June against the background of the amnesty was good. The improvement in the number of deserters who

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commission the Red Army and the Vecheka to assign strict responsibility for desertion to soldiers' families and the local neighbourhood and to use escort units to round up deserters. *Dekrety*. Vol.5. 267.

<sup>129</sup> On the 3 June 1919 decree see *Dekrety*. Vol.5. 264-267.

<sup>130</sup> Olikov, *Dezertirstvo*. 28; 42.

<sup>131</sup> Admittedly this does not reflect solely the Karelian districts but gives an approximate guide.

<sup>132</sup> RGVA, f.6, op.10, d.24, l.203; l.301; l.327. The available data does not reveal any concrete reason for the high number of deserters detained in March 1919. \*Numbers who appeared voluntarily are in brackets. Those who did not appear voluntarily were 'rounded up' (*oblava*). \*\*Figures for August are for the second half of that month only.

appeared voluntarily in August can also be attributed to another amnesty during that month which was circulated in the local press. In Karelia the conclusion of an amnesty for deserters was published in *Olonetskaia Kommuna* on 10 August which read: ‘Deserters, townspeople! Today is the last day to appear before the commission [for desertion]. Hurry; present yourself today as tomorrow will be too late! All as one to the ranks of the Red Army!’<sup>133</sup> As Sanborn has already identified, appeals to deserters went beyond the publication of decrees and in some cases underlined the important role of the family in the anti-desertion movement.<sup>134</sup> In the same edition of *Olonetskaia Kommuna* the Bolsheviks used moral persuasion to drive home the role of the family, drawing links between the abandonment of the Red Army and the betrayal of one’s family. A signed letter was reproduced in the newspaper which was, allegedly, written by the family of the military instructor from the Velikogubaskaia parish soviet executive committee who had defected to the Whites the previous month. Within the letter the family accused the military instructor of being a traitor and promised to hand him over to the military authorities the moment he appeared at their home so he could be punished and receive his just deserts.<sup>135</sup>

Owing to its success the August amnesty was extended by another six days.<sup>136</sup> In the meantime Iakov Berztyts made an appeal in *Olonetskaia Kommuna* on 14 August to galvanise the general pardon offered to the soldiers. In his address he stressed that Red Army units were ‘successfully pressing the bands of allied imperialism north...we cannot be but victorious.’<sup>137</sup> Red resistance against the Russian Whites, supported by the Allies, did stiffen in July and August but it is inaccurate to say that the Red Army were pushing the Allies north. As a matter of fact the majority of troops at the front line were White

<sup>133</sup> *Olonetskaia Kommuna*, 10 August 1919. A previous amnesty in the region was declared a month previously, between 25 June and 1 July 1919. RGVA, f.6, op.10, d.30, l.97.

<sup>134</sup> Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation*. 52.

<sup>135</sup> *Olonetskaia Kommuna*, 10 August 1919.

<sup>136</sup> The first amnesty week, 3-9 June 1919, was also extended because of its success in returning thousands of deserters to the Red Army. Figes, “Mass Mobilisation”. 206.

<sup>137</sup> *Olonetskaia Kommuna*, 14 August 1919.

Russians. Any significant withdrawal made by the Allies was the planned action of the latter and did not take place until September, as part of the overall plan to evacuate the whole of north Russia. Nevertheless, Berztys's words were an act of propaganda and designed to convince deserters that the Red Army could and would defeat the Allies and the Whites and it was not a folly to return to fight for the Reds. He also reminded deserters that if they appeared before 16 August they would not be punished but if they did not then they would be declared outlaws and their families would be deprived of all allowances.<sup>138</sup> Based on figures for the number of deserters detained between 16-31 August (see Table 7) the amnesty appears to have been a success.

The more conciliatory approach towards combating desertion therefore produced favourable results. Indeed, there is little evidence to suggest that Karelia's deserters were severely punished, i.e. shot;<sup>139</sup> the victory of the Red Army in late 1919 and 1920 was achieved by "second-chance" men.<sup>140</sup> Many of those who were detained tended to find their way back into military units (see Table 8).<sup>141</sup> On 11 November 1919 Dobrynin asked the Olonets provincial military commissar to form a special detachment of 30 men, chiefly from 'weak willed' deserters, to work for the provincial desertion commission.<sup>142</sup> An individual case also reflects the turn-over of deserters back into the Red Army. On 26 November the Pudozh desertion commission discussed the case of a soldier from a local village who had disappeared from the Petrograd front for 17 days before appearing voluntarily at the district desertion committee. The district social security department was

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> The only exception I have found took place in Petrozavodsk district against the background of the military threat and the rebellion on the Zaonezh'e peninsula in mid-1919. Two deserters were shot in Kuzaranda on 10 June and three in Tolvuia on 14 June. Vavulinskaia, *Sovety Karelii*. 64.

<sup>140</sup> Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation*. 54.

<sup>141</sup> Also see the figures for the deserters in every military county for the second half of August 1919 and the month of September. RGVA, f.6, op.10, d.24, l.301; l.327. This assessment of the destination of deserters is also consistent with Figes's study of the topic. See "Mass Mobilisation". 204-205.

<sup>142</sup> The order originated from a conference held by the Petrograd County Desertion Commission which was attended by Dobrynin. NARK, f.R-879, op.1, d.13, l.1. To be registered as 'weak willed' a deserter had to be missing for less than a fortnight or had appeared after this with a rational excuse. Figes, "Mass Mobilisation". 199.

informed to deprive his family of allowances for 17 days but, combining punishment with restraint, the district desertion commission recognised that this was the first time the soldier had deserted, he was not considered a ‘malicious’ deserter and had stated his willingness to serve in the Red Army. Consequently he was transferred to the mobilisation department of the district military commissariat for reassignment.<sup>143</sup>

**Table 8 – Destination of deserters in Olonets Province, 16 August-30 September 1919<sup>144</sup>**

|                     | <b>Own Unit</b> | <b>Reserve Unit</b> | <b>Mobilisation Point</b> | <b>To Court</b> | <b>Penal Unit</b> | <b>Total*</b> |
|---------------------|-----------------|---------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|---------------|
| <b>16-30 August</b> | 21              | 176                 | 29                        | 1               | No data           | 227<br>(391)  |
| <b>September</b>    | 2               | 176                 | 14                        | No data         | 9                 | 201<br>(212)  |
| <b>Total</b>        | 23              | 352                 | 43                        | 1               | 9                 | 428<br>(603)  |

As the civil war progressed from the end of 1918 the Bolsheviks managed to tighten their control over desertion in the Red Army. Its soldiers still suffered from bouts of indiscipline and a lack of supplies but the Bolsheviks developed a workable network of governing institutions to keep the majority of its men in military service. The introduction of a hierarchy of desertion commissions marked the beginning of a definitive drive to tackle desertion but because of a lack of local material and human resources in the periphery the work of these commissions was often constrained. However, despite constant material shortages, administratively and organisationally the party was taking more energetic and concerted moves to combat desertion. The adoption of a carrot-and-stick approach to the problem was crucial; desertion detachments, the threat and application of individual and collective punishment, the tightening up of bureaucracy, general amnesties

<sup>143</sup> NARK, f.R-879, op.1, d.2, l.3.

<sup>144</sup> RGVA, f.6, op.10, d.24, l.301; l.327. \*Figures in brackets repeat information from Table 2 and state the number of deserters detained during these months. Because of a lack of data it has not been possible to explain the discrepancies.

and the commitment to soldier welfare, propagandised in the press, were the pillars of Bolshevik control in a relatively successful anti-desertion campaign.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter is about governance, discipline and the Bolsheviks' capacity to enforce their authority through their control of the party apparatus, the food commissariats, the Cheka and the Red Army. The Bolsheviks suffered similar problems in 1919 to those that they had faced the previous year, almost all centred round a lack of sufficient material resources and personnel. However, they managed to gain enough control over certain key areas of their administration apparatus and the army to endure the hardships that they faced and successfully combat crucial deficiencies to an extent that secured their survival against their external enemies. Of course, the improvement in the Bolsheviks' position in Karelia reflected the changing character of the civil war in other parts of the country and the decisions made in the capital by the party leadership. The provinces provided the capital with information of what was going wrong in the periphery and the centre based its decisions and orders on this correspondence. The Bolsheviks' ability to learn and adapt through their experiences was aptly reflected at the Eighth Party Congress where strict centralisation was recognised and reinforced as a fundamental principle. In Karelia the implementation of central policies and centralised authority was often troubled but local Bolsheviks in Petrozavodsk generally submitted to the wishes of the centre, even if they felt hard done by.

The above chapter suggests that there were four key measures through which the Bolsheviks ultimately consolidated their hold on power. First they went along with the decisions of the Eighth Party Congress on the concentration of all political and military authority which would make the Soviet state's institutions more accountable to the centre. Second they worked consistently, if not always effectively, at addressing the food supply

situation. Third, with the abolition of the district Chekas, they streamlined the security police and tried to deal with abuses of power and corruption. Finally, the Bolsheviks sought to become more responsive to the popular mood and appreciated how the campaign against desertion could be used to extend their influence over the countryside. The Bolshevik regime did not cease to be repressive but it dosed violence and intimidation with concessions and propaganda to try and remove some of the causes of popular discontent.

## Conclusion

This thesis shows us how the Bolsheviks were able to establish control over an area where their support in October 1917 was negligible. Karelia was a region which despite its relative proximity to Petrograd was no Bolshevik stronghold. The region's inhabitants were predominantly rural and few workers or revolutionaries lived outside of Petrozavodsk or, to a lesser extent, Kem'. Because of the climate in Karelia and the region's physical characteristics good agricultural land was sparse and the population relatively small. It was these conditions to a large extent which determined the course of the local civil war. The Bolsheviks had to adapt to the local political environment which favoured Mensheviks, SRs and then Left SRs, but once in a position of unchallenged authority in Petrozavodsk used the Cheka and the Red Army not only to stamp out opposition but to build a relationship with the rural population. The process was not straightforward, there were steps forward and back and food was always scarce, but determined organisational work eventually had an impact and was enough for the Bolsheviks to survive. I will summarise here what the preceding chapters have emphasised and offer some broader speculations about our understanding of the civil war.

The first four chapters of the thesis focussed largely on the political relationships in Petrozavodsk and to an extent in the Karelian districts. A study of Karelia during the civil war has emphasised the weakness of the Bolshevik party there, the relative strength of the Left SRs and the working relationship of both parties in a dual alliance in Petrozavodsk up to July 1918, sometimes in cooperation with the Menshevik Internationalists. Had it not been for events in Moscow this political relationship would most certainly have continued to function and consolidate the Soviet regime. It is therefore worth underlining that on the periphery these political relationships were quite different from in the capital and towns and cities. Thus while the Left SR-Bolshevik alliance operated in Petrograd, Moscow and Petrozavodsk up to July 1918, in the Karelian localities the Left SRs' influence lasted a

considerable time longer. The social demographics favoured the SR parent party in Karelia and after this party split the majority moved to the Left SRs. The Left SRs also remained in the districts because the Bolsheviks remained numerically and influentially weak on the periphery and Petrozavodsk needed people to run the local soviets. However, this meant that Bolshevik policies could be resisted for longer. Nevertheless, the Left SR Central Committee's uprising must be recognised as an important step towards increasing the Bolshevik party's control of Petrozavodsk, if not the whole of Karelia, because Bolsheviks in the regional capital had the opportunity to rule independently and attempt to put central policies into practice for the first time, such as the registration of the harvest and the introduction of the *kombedy* and the food supply detachments.

The second four chapters have considered how, when ruling alone, the Bolsheviks grip on power was far from firm. In other words without authority in the districts, even after the Bolsheviks had taken control of Petrozavodsk in July 1918, they were not able to fully implement central policies across the whole region. They took some positive steps forward but at the same time these were undermined by the political resistance of the soviets for the best part of 1918. Even after this political resistance in the district centres had been overcome by the end of 1918, introducing decrees and orders from above remained easier than implementing them locally. A shortage of reliable personnel and a constant lack of resources, most persistently a lack of food, meant that the Bolsheviks' policies were resisted, delayed, adopted in an ad hoc fashion or not at all. The problems facing the Bolshevik regime during the civil war were vast: rebellions broke out intermittently between 1918 and 1919, state agencies clashed with one another, support from the capital was limited, mobilisation campaigns faltered and fighting with the Allies or Whites ended in defeat more often than not. Nevertheless, despite the hardships, local Bolsheviks ultimately survived.

It is difficult to identify an exact date when the tide turned for the Bolsheviks but there were a few key moments during the civil war that have been mentioned within the thesis. The introduction of the Food Supply Dictatorship in May and its offshoot decrees, most notably the *kombedy* and the food supply detachments, was the Bolsheviks' first attempts to direct food supply from the capital while at the same time revolutionise the countryside. We have seen to some extent the negative results it had in Karelia but at the same time it marked the beginning of government centralisation and these experiences would point out to the Bolsheviks the party's weaknesses in the periphery and provide the basis for future adjustments to their policies in the countryside. The importance of the Left SR uprising in Moscow and its repercussions for Petrozavodsk has also been noted but other events and orders such as the introduction of the Red Terror and the election of a new Olonets provincial Cheka provided the Bolsheviks with a lever with which they could exercise their control.

The discussion of the Red Terror has suggested that local political and military factors were important in determining the intensity of repressions in Karelia. Even at regional level, it should not be regarded as a unified phenomenon which affected every district in the same way. Recent historical interpretations of the Red Terror also suggest that, like in the French Revolution, the terror bore down hard in some regions and less so in others.<sup>1</sup> The terror was a diversified not a unified phenomenon. Existing work on the civil war in the provinces confirms the peculiarities and nuances of the terror in different regions. For instance, Alexander Rabinowitch has argued that up to mid-summer 1918 Petrograd resisted revolutionary extremism, unlike Moscow where the Cheka was carrying out executions and unofficial Red Terror 'was in full sway' in other Russian cities.<sup>2</sup> Part of the reason for this was the moderating influence of local leaders such as Uritskii, his fellow

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the regional aspects of the terror during the French Revolution see A. Forrest, "The Local Politics of Repression" in K. Baker, ed., *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*. Vol. 4. *The Terror*. Oxford: Pergamon, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power*. 317-318.

Left Communist Nikolai Krestinskii and the Left SR Prosh Proshian.<sup>3</sup> George Leggett has also suggested that the influence of the Left SRs helped tame the excesses of the Vecheka while they remained in this body prior to July 1918.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand Michael Melancon does not overstate the limiting influence of the Left SRs on the Vecheka but instead suggests that it was local Bolsheviks in the autumn of 1918 who tried to control the Chekas in the provinces.<sup>5</sup> A case study of Karelia supports both Rabinowitch and Melancon and suggests that, like in Petrograd, terror was not ‘in full sway’ up to the summer of 1918. Furthermore, this study has indicated that after the declaration of the Red Terror executions carried out by the Cheka in Karelia’s districts were far less numerous than in other parts of the regime.<sup>6</sup>

The thesis has also suggested that the election of a new provincial Cheka marked a turning point in the civil war in Karelia. From this point, under the guidance of its new chairman Kanter and despite sporadic indiscipline from individual Chekists, the provincial Cheka steadily became better organised and more disciplined. The Bolsheviks could exercise control better through the Cheka because Chekists were now held accountable for their actions and inter-institutional conflicts with the soviet executive committees were stamped out. The Cheka continued to carry out investigations and arrests but it did so under a chairman who by all appearances endeavoured to carry out organisational procedures with order in mind. Kanter rebuked erring Chekists, curbed the availability of alcohol in Petrozavodsk, sent Chekists on training and educational courses and provided shock troops, including himself, when the region endured its most serious military threats.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 221-222; 274-278; 324-325.

<sup>4</sup> Leggett, *The Cheka*. 49-51; 58-59; 102-103.

<sup>5</sup> Melancon, “Revolutionary Culture.” 3-4 and *passim*.

<sup>6</sup> The district Cheka executed a total of 9 people in Olonets district from its creation on 15 August to 15 December 1918. GARF, f.R-393, op.13, d.268, l.8. This pales in comparison to Petrograd and other towns and districts where executions by the Soviet regime were more numerous. Leggett gives the figure of approximately 1300 executions for Petrograd from September to November 1918, an under-estimation by his own admission. He also gives official figures for other Russian cities where the executions were in the tens and hundreds between September and October 1918. *The Cheka*. 111-113. For figures from the districts in Viatka province which were also a lot higher than Olonets district see Retish, *Russia’s Peasants*. 190. On Saratov see Raleigh, *Civil War*. 65; 241; 250.

This military crisis in the spring and summer of 1919 however was overcome because the local Bolsheviks from the end of 1918 managed to recruit a standing Red Army to support the relatively small number of troops sent to them from the centre. The new Red Army also proved useful in spreading the influence of the party in the districts.

While never satisfactory during the civil war the food supply situation did improve slightly and became more systematic throughout 1919 with the adoption of the *razverstka*. Only small amounts of grain made it through to Karelia but organisation appeared less chaotic when compared to the previous year and ultimately, when combined with local produce, especially from the peasants' own market gardening, this proved enough to enable the region to survive. Because of a lack of resources it made sense for the Bolsheviks to call for increased centralisation to Moscow which was one of the main outcomes agreed upon at the Eighth Party Congress. Supplies and manpower could then be allocated to the most important fronts of the civil war. Centralisation was accepted grudgingly in some instances in Petrozavodsk, for example during the Dubrovskii affair, but the Eighth Party Congress was also a significant juncture in the Bolsheviks' victory because its delegates formally recognised the need to adopt a more conciliatory approach in the countryside. This approach was aptly reflected in the regime's anti-desertion campaign as local desertion commissions rounded up deserters while at the same time the regime introduced amnesties for runaways and tried to provide for soldiers and their families' welfare as best it could. Governance through a balance of repression and conciliation proved to be a decisive feature of the Bolshevik victory and was enough for the party to retain and reel back in enough men in the Red Army to fend off the Allies and the Whites.

This thesis has offered several new insights into the history of the Russian civil war. Firstly, it is only since the fall of the Soviet Union that the influence and numerical

significance of the Left SR party in the cities, provinces and districts during the civil war has begun to be given more attention. This research has demonstrated the importance of the Left SRs in Karelia, especially in the localities where they were able to exercise power and resist, or at least mitigate, Bolshevik policies, long after July 1918. It remains to be seen in detail how influential the party was in many of Soviet Russia's other provinces and districts. However, the role played by the Left SRs in Karelia was enormous and helped shape local politics until the end of 1918. In the future other local studies will probably show that Karelia was not unique, but the continued importance of the Left SRs to politics after July 1918 is a major theme of this thesis. Secondly, this is the first regional study of the civil war to focus on a grain deficit province. It shows how the relationship with Moscow was supposed to work, local Bolsheviks' attempts to implement the *razverstka* food supply system and the ad hoc nature of the arrangements actually adopted. It also shows that, as the area of grain rich territory under Bolshevik control shrank, so Karelia was thrown ever more back on its own resources with the local authorities acting in whatever way they could, a situation made worse by the influx of refugees from the north and the failure of the resettlement plans to the Don. Olonets province was amongst the most demanding of the Northern provinces which required domestic grain imports but it could not offer the capital much in return and was not of the highest strategic importance.

Thirdly, a detailed study of Karelia has added to already existing knowledge on the civil war by providing new information on the role of the Bolsheviks in the provinces and the districts. The role of the Anarchists in 1918, an understudied party within the historiography, has shed new light on the Bolsheviks weakness in the periphery and emphasised the party's pragmatism and willingness to collaborate with other parties to achieve political ends. Knowledge of the Bolsheviks' role in the countryside has also been added to by exploring their attempts to register the harvest in 1918, the role of the *kombedy* in controlling grain grinding mills and the establishment of model regiments of the village

poor which suggests that the *kombedy* project should not be considered an absolute failure. Finally our understanding of the anti-desertion campaign of 1919 has been complemented by a study of Soviet Karelia. This campaign not only allowed the Red Army to reel back in deserters but became a political tool for appealing to the peasantry. Repression and force would always be used by the Cheka and the Red Army against rebels but the anti-desertion campaign, coupled with the state's welfare policies for Red Army soldiers, showed that loyalty to the Soviet regime would be rewarded.

Fourthly, this thesis has offered observations about the centre-periphery relationship during the civil war between the capital and a provincial centre like Petrozavodsk. A study of Karelia indicates that the October revolution and the transfer of power to the soviets was a decentralised affair and until Moscow intervened after the events of 6 July 1918 and outlawed the Left SRs, the political environment in Karelia moved along its own trajectory. But even after that intervention from the capital the localities had to implement policies on their own initiative based on their evaluation of the situation at the front and the resources and personnel available to them. When the civil war intensified in 1919, in Karelia and elsewhere, the key to enforcing party centralisation was local implementation. In Chapter 5 we saw Elena Stasova comment that local Bolshevik party cadres in Petrozavodsk were making the best they could of what they were told to do. Stasova stressed the need to centralise the party apparatus but at the same time cadres were expected to display initiative and this initiative remained in the periphery at least up to 1919, for example with the Cheka under Kanter. The Soviet regime was more centralised by the end of 1919 but complete centralisation was not possible during the civil war because it was complicated by the fighting, economic problems and the number of reliable party cadres available at each rung of the administrative ladder.

Finally, this regional study of the Karelian districts has indicated the difficulty of making generalisations about the civil war. Evidently, the experiences of the civil war varied at parish through to provincial level for reasons such as the availability of food stuffs, the presence of the Red Army, the intensity of the fighting or proximity of the front, the strength of the Bolshevik party and according to the personality of local officials. Every region had different experiences of the civil war and central decrees had a different impact according to local conditions. Nevertheless, although it would be wrong to refer to the experiences of the Soviet regime's provinces as uniform the reasons why the Bolsheviks ultimately emerged victorious from the civil war were generally the same. The problems faced by the Whites are generally accepted as a major reason for the Bolshevik victory but their experiences in Murmansk and north Karelia is not the subject of the thesis. Instead it concentrates on how the Bolsheviks' own efforts enabled them to win the civil war. In short, the Bolsheviks gained enough control over the Cheka to use as a tool of governance, managed to mobilise and retain enough men in the Red Army, succeeded in providing enough supplies to the most important areas at the most important times and coupled repression of the population with conciliation.

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f.R-29 Upravlenie Nachal'nika Murmanskogo Kraia  
 f.R-393 Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del (NKVD)  
 f.R-1005 Verkhovnyi Tribunal pri Vserossiiskom Tsentral'nom Iсполnitel'nom Komitete  
 f.R-1235 Vserossiiskii Tsentral'nyi Iсполnitel'nyi Komitet Rabochikh, Krest'ianskikh i Krasnoarmeiskikh Deputatov (VTsIK)

#### **Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Ekonomiki, Moscow (RGAE)**

f.1943 Narodnyi Komissariat Prodovol'stviia

#### **Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Voennyi Arkhiv, Moscow (RGVA)**

f.1 Upravlenie Delami Narodnogo Komissariata po Voennym Delam  
 f.6 Polevoi Shtab Revoliutsionnogo Voennogo Soveta Respublika  
 f.9 Politicheskoe Upravlenie Raboche-Krest'ianskoe Krasnoi Armii (RKKA)  
 f.1470 Upravlenie 55-i Strelkovoii Divizii

#### **Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sozial'no-Politicheskoi Istorii, Moscow (RGASPI)**

f.67 Severnyi Oblastnoi Komitet RKP (b)

#### **Natsional'nyi Arkhiv Respubliki Karelii, Petrozavodsk (NARK)**

f.P-2 Petrozavodskii Tsentral'nyi i Okruzhnoi Komitet RKP (b)  
 f.P-4 Olonetskii Gubernskii Komitet RKP (b)  
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