

Q10 - Russia - (a)

0a. The Bolshevik consolidation of power was a vital and pivotal period between 1917 to 1921, and the Civil War was an integral element of their ability to protect the gains of the revolution against foreign ^{and national} pressure, thus maintaining their power. However, the Civil War of 1918-1921 was a significant event in displaying the organisational and coercive might of the newly formed Communist state but it ^{was} also part of a wider exercise in building a support base, seizing political and economic predominance and instilling fear through the Red Terror. Historian Gill claims that by gaining military victory in 1921 the "Bolsheviks kept ^{Russian} power in their domain and secured the revolution... foreign capitalists were forced to admit defeat."

The October revolution of 1917 heralded a new political and social era for Russia, led by the vanguard of the

Bolshevik. Obviously, they would face opposition and the key moment movement was through the unorganised offensive from the Whites who launched a four front offensive from Estonia, the east, the west and in the Ukraine. It was an incredible challenge for the inexperienced and under-resourced communists, who were left with the warweary ~~Red Army~~ Russian army that was depleted of morale and supplies. However, it was also an ideal opportunity for the Bolsheviks to silence their opposition through victory while also maintaining revolutionary fervour through the processes of war.

Through the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, the Red Army was revived into what historian Christian describes as the "indomitable Red Army", numbering almost three million by 1921. By utilising tsarist officers and politically loyal

commissars as well as terror tactics and executions, the ~~Com~~ Bolsheviks were able to achieve victory on all four fronts, ~~and reclaim~~ ^{The Bolsheviks} ~~They~~ were also then allowed to reclaim the fertile and resource-rich Ukraine as a source of wealth for the largely barren land. The organised and centrally commanded military was supported by an efficient rail network. Michael Lynch states its purpose was "to meet supply, solve arising problems, boost morale and instill fear. Thus military victory would become an expression of the Bolsheviks ability to run the state of Russia and ~~sq~~ quash any opposition despite being an urban party, with a mere 24% of votes in January 1918.

The defeat of the Whites was also proof to the Russian population of the might of their "new leaders." Civilians

witnessed the ^{harsh} field tribunals and executions carried out by Trotsky and were thus familiar with the coercive and violent means by which the Bolsheviks were willing to ensure power. Military victory was a warning to all potential subversives that opposition would not be tolerated. In Trotsky words "to a gangrenous wound a red hot iron was applied." Furthermore by allowing the peasants the right to seize land continuing on from their 1917 Decree on land, the Bolsheviks helped to gain support from the rural areas despite the hardship of the expedient War Communism.

To a degree, military victory restored the pride of Russian nationalism that had suffered such a defeat during WWI. The Bolsheviks demonstrated their ability to exert power and might over a range of opposers and were shown to be capable of providing

Ca. Russia with the prestige and success it had lacked. ~~Given the Prussian taste~~ It was a short-term way of garnering unity in Russian and gaining the support and awe of the Russian population.

However, the Civil War and it is socio-political facilitator war Communism were to put severe strains on the civilian population as well. By 1921, strikes in Tombov and the Kronstadt uprising made explicit the tensions that had arisen as a result of the grain requisitioning, lack of food and lowered standard of living and work. Just as the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918 had been an ideological sacrifice as a means of placating popular discontent with continued war efforts, the Civil War, ^{repercussions} would cause a threat to the Bolsheviks tenuous support base. It was absolutely necessary for the Bolsheviks to attain

victory not only as a means of reclaiming some of the dignity lost during Brest Litovsk but also to so as to create some form of peace and stability in Russia. This would then allow for the Bolsheviks to implement much more long term communist institutions and develop the economic and political policies that had been underdeveloped as a result of war pressure.

Although victory in 1921 did ease some of the tensions among the populace this was only a temporary ~~et~~ solution to much deeper issues. Not only were the peasants rebelling against War Communism but the workers, the ~~the~~ traditional supporters of the Bolsheviks were up in arms as well. The victory of the Civil War did not prevent further ideological concessions that needed to be

made, most explicitly in the New Economic Policy of 1921, which included capitalist features. Nor did victory in the civil war substitute a continued programme of the "Red Terror", in which a quarter of a million Russian died at the hands of the Cheka and OGPU by 1924. While victory in the civil war did display the propensity of the Bolsheviks to not only maintain power but ^{to} achieve success as well, the period from 1921 to 1924 were marred with difficulties for the party and only by further consolidating their power through "tactical flexibility" (Robert Service), centralisation of Political power to the Communist controlled Sovnarkom and continuous coercion could their consolidation of power be successful.

The Bolshevik Army attained a military ~~defeat~~ victory in the Civil War of 1918-1921 thus quelling to a large degree the foreign and internal opposition governments and armies. While it was significant, the Civil War success was ~~merely~~ merely a ~~step~~ ^{tactic} in the broader strategy of Bolshevik consolidation of power.