

Russian Civil War

5th Year

**Factor
One**

**Factor
Two**

**Factor
Three**

**Factor
Four**

**Factor
Five**

**Factor
Six**

**Why did the Bolsheviks win
the Russian Civil War?**

The Russian Civil War

Some sample questions.....

- How far was the failure of the White armies during the Civil War due to disunity and divided leadership?
- To what extent was the establishment and survival of the Soviet state between 1917 and 1921 due to the weaknesses and divisions of the Bolsheviks' opponents?
- To what extent was the victory of the Red Army in the Civil War due to its superior organisation and leadership?

- **To what extent was the Bolshevik victory in the Civil War due to Trotsky's skills as a military leader?**
- **How important was Trotsky's personal contribution to the Bolshevik victory in the Civil War?**
- **"No explanation of the Red victory in the Russian Civil War would be complete without considering the important role played by Trotsky"**

Do you agree?

Causes of the Civil War

The Russian Civil War began as a result of two developments:-

- 1) The forcible closure of the Constituent Assembly**
- 2) The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.**

The Russian Civil War

- **The central conflict was between the Bolsheviks (or Reds) and the Whites**
- **It cost over 3 million people their lives**

Why did the Reds win the Civil War?

.....an essay in two parts.

**Red
Strengths**

**White
Weaknesses**

Failure of Allied

Intervention

Why did the Reds win the Civil War?

Factor One

The strategic position of the Bolsheviks was strong.

Factor Two

Trotsky's reorganization of the Red Army

Factor Three

The Cheka and the Red Terror

Factor Four

War Communism

Factor Five

The Weakness of White Forces

Factor Six

The Failure of Allied support.

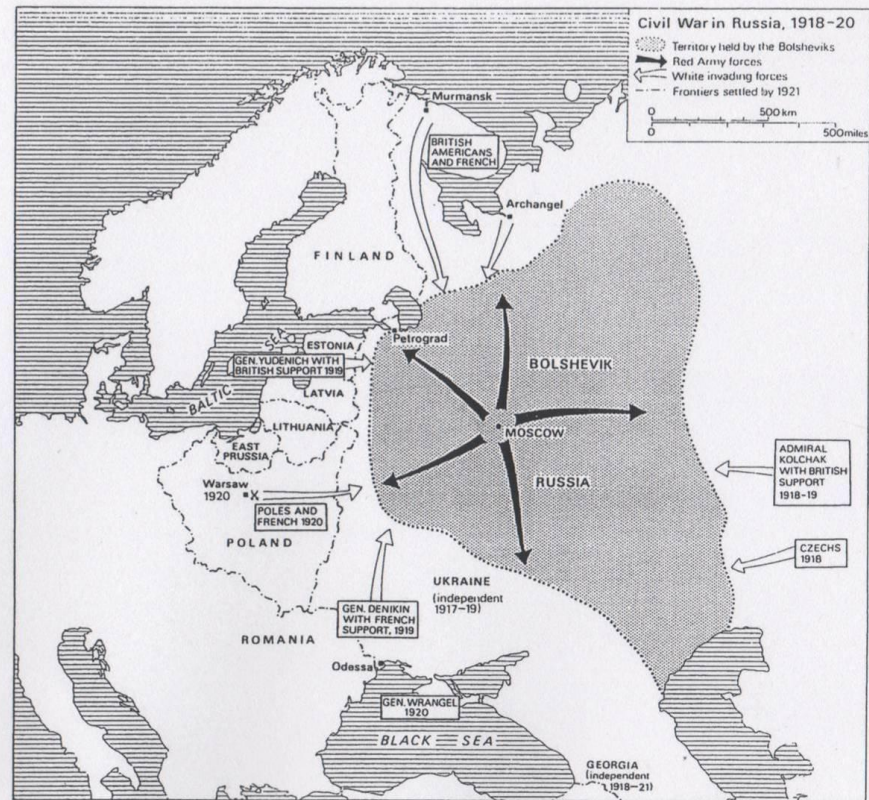
Why Did the Reds win the Civil War?

Factor One

**The strategic position of the
Bolsheviks was strong**

During the Civil War the Bolshevik controlled area was known as

Sovdepia.



The Bolsheviks controlled the most heavily-populated parts of Russia.

Bolshevik-held territory

70 M people

White – controlled areas

20 M people

- **The Bolsheviks held the central area, which included Petrograd and Moscow.**
- **They moved their capital to Moscow, at the hub of the railway network.**
- **This made it easier to transport men and munitions to the battle fronts.**

- **Russia was awash with munitions at the time of the October Revolution.**

- **In 1917 almost all the arsenal of the old Tsarist army fell into Bolshevik hands.**

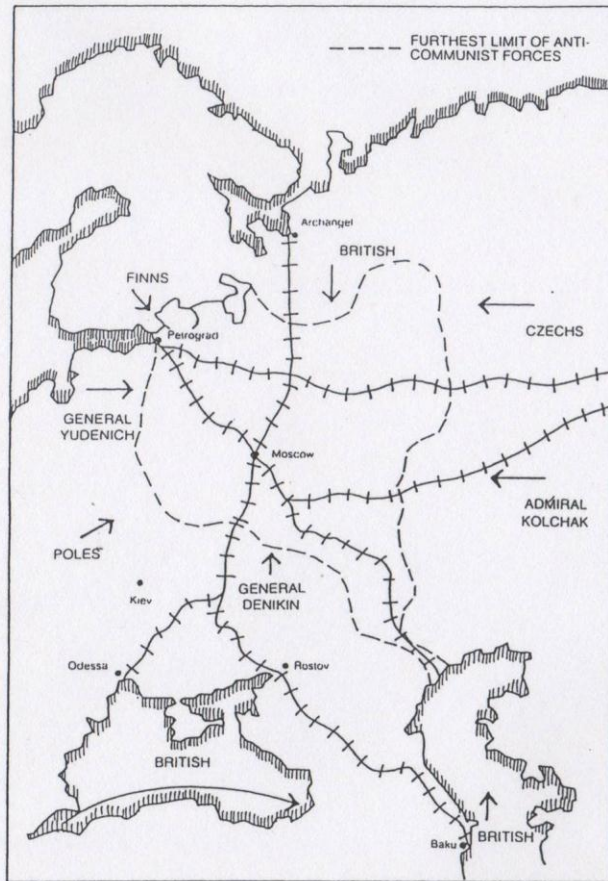
..... 2.5 million rifles

..... 12,000 artillery pieces

..... 28 million shells.

- **Russia's main engineering and armaments factories were located within Sovdepiia and this gave them the capacity to manufacture new weapons.**

.....a crucial point



- The Bolsheviks controlled the hub of the Russian railway network, which radiated outwards from Moscow.
- This enabled the Bolsheviks to rush reinforcements to battle fronts where they were threatened.

“When one considers the enormous advantages of the Bolsheviks, mostly the result of the early conquest of central Russia, the surprising thing is not that they won the Civil War, but that it took them three years to do it”

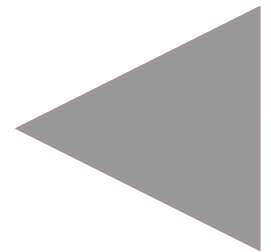
Richard Pipes

“The Bolsheviks kept control of the Red heartland throughout the Civil War..... It was the Bolsheviks who held the Aladdin’s cave throughout the Civil War, and their enemies could only dream of its treasures”.

Evan Mawdsley

“The Reds enjoyed an immense, possibly decisive, advantage in the fact that they controlled the centre of Russia, whereas their opponents operated on the country’s circumference”.

Richard Pipes.



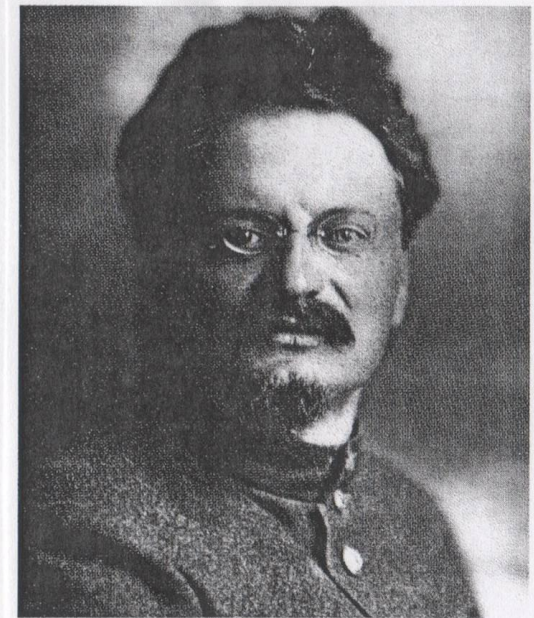
Why did the Reds win the Civil War?

Factor Two

Trotsky's reorganisation of the Red Army.

The Red Army

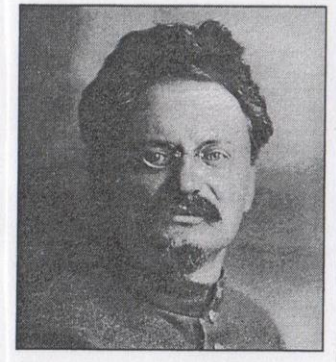
- **The Communists required a loyal army to protect the revolution and to consolidate it throughout the former Tsarist Empire.**
- **In March 1918, Trotsky was given the task of creating a professional army.**



The Red Army

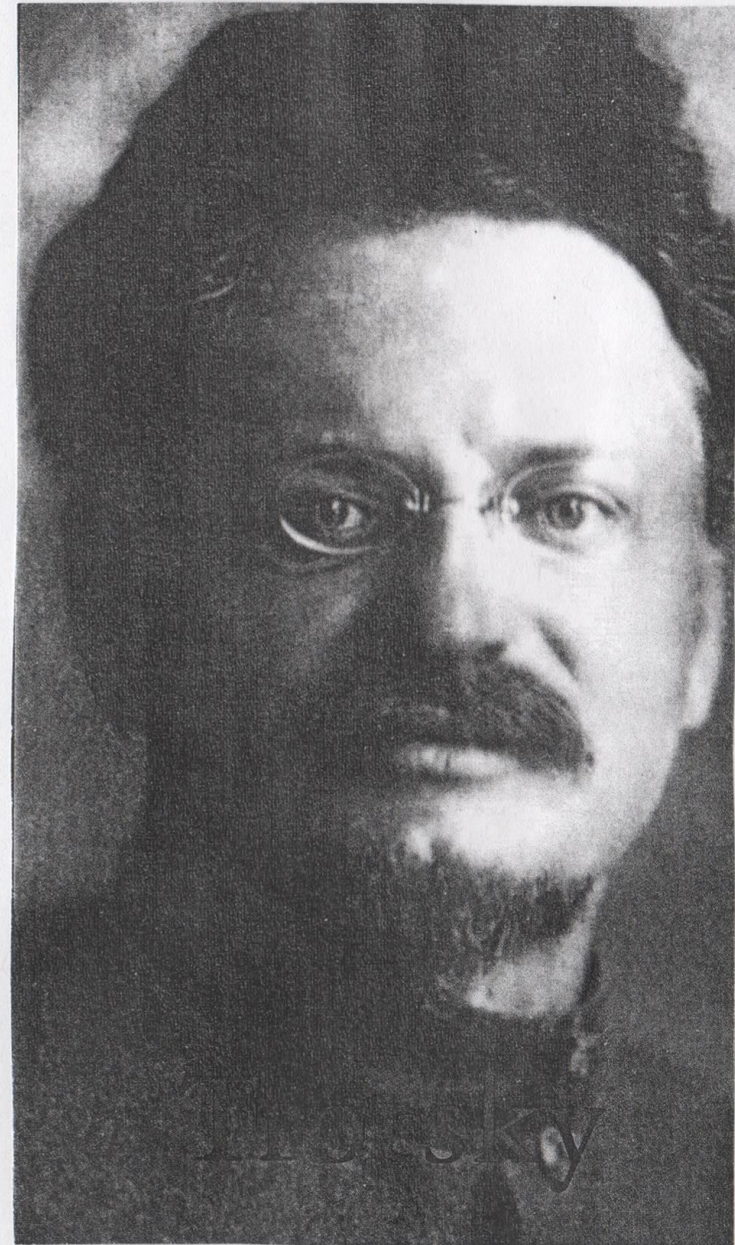
Trotsky:-

- Abolished soldiers' committees
- Enforced strict obedience to order
- Reintroduced the death penalty against deserters, soldiers who threw away weapons and those who refused to follow orders
- Sent the Cheka into each area occupied by the Red Army to eliminate any sign of opposition.



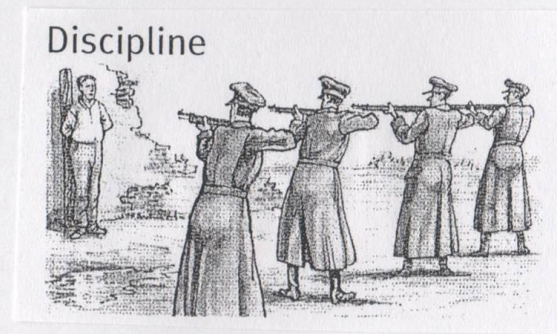
Orders to the Red Army from Trotsky, 1918.

- **Every scoundrel who incites anyone to retreat, to desert, or not to fulfil a military order, will be *shot*.**
- **Every soldier who voluntarily deserts his post will be *shot*.**
- **Every soldier who throws away his rifle or sells part of his equipment will be *shot*.**



.....a crucial point

- **Discipline was very tough in the Red Army; the death penalty was frequently used.**
- **Unwilling peasant conscripts knew that certain death lay before them if they retreated in a battle – they would be machine-gunned by their own side.**



The Red Army

Trotsky:-

- Usually raised armies on the spot rather than bring them to the front line.
- Built the army around a core of committed party members and workers, supplemented by peasants forced to fight using conscription
- Built an army of 5 million men by the end of the Civil War.

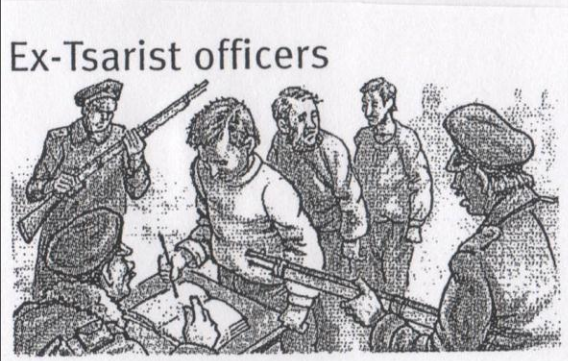
Conscription



The Red Army

Trotsky :-

- Insisted that 50,000 ex-Tsarist officers should be drafted back into command the army, recognizing their experience and expertise.
- Made it known that their families would be used as hostages if they deserted from the Red Army.



The Red Army

Trotsky:-

- Appointed dedicated Bolsheviks as commissars to keep the Tsarist officers and peasant conscripts in line.
- No military order carried final authority unless a commissar countersigned it.

Communist commissars



“Trotsky’s outstanding achievement as Commissar for War was his creation of the Red Army, which more than any other factor explains the survival of the Bolshevik government”.



Michael Lynch



Why did the Reds win the Civil War?

Factor Three

The Cheka and the Red Terror.

The Cheka

- **Some historians see the Cheka as the key factor in the survival of the Bolshevik regime.**
- **They set up the Cheka as an instrument of terror to deal with opposition.**
- **The Cheka was a formidable force that helped them win the war against “internal enemies”.**

The Cheka

- The Cheka was headed by “Iron” Felix Dzerzhinsky.
- It became a permanent feature of Communist rule in Russia.
- Its victims were not given the benefit of a trial.
- The methods used by the Cheka included executions, imprisonment in labour camps, hostage-taking and torture of the most gruesome kind.

The Cheka

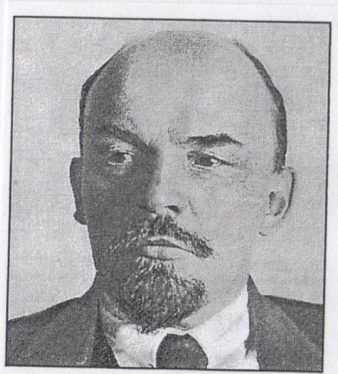
- The Cheka had a reputation for savagery.
- The most notorious of its early actions was the murder of Tsar Nicholas 11 and his family in July 1918.
- Former Tsarist officials, landlords and priests were also executed.
- Whole families were wiped out simply because they had once been rich.
- All opponents were detained in concentration camps.
- Striking workers or peasants who hoarded grain were shot.

The Red Terror

- **The assassination attempt on Lenin prompted the Cheka to launch the Red Terror.**
- **Before the end of 1918, the Cheka had executed 50,000 opponents of the Communists.**
- **The purpose of the Terror was to terrify all hostile social groups.**

The Red Terror

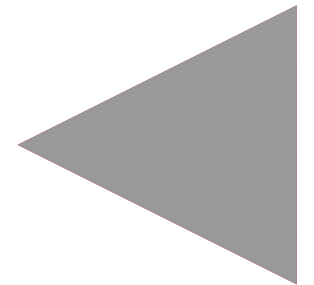
- Under Lenin the machinery of terror and the police state were created.
- Hundreds of thousands perished.



“Do you really think we shall be victorious without using the most cruel terror..... If we cannot shoot a man who sabotages, a member of the White Guard, then what kind of revolution is this?

“Only through repression and force could Lenin’s party stay in office and these were the main characteristics of the early Soviet regime”.

David Marples.



Why did the Reds win the Civil War?

Factor Four

War Communism

War Communism

- **The Bolsheviks took strict measures to organise industry and food supplies in areas under their control.**
- **This economic policy was known as “War Communism”.**
- **The main aim of War Communism was to keep the Red Army supplied with food and weapons.**

War Communism

Industry

- All factories with more than ten workers were nationalised.
- A government body called *Vesenkha* decided exactly what each industry should produce.
- All workers were under government control. There was military discipline in the factories, including the death penalty for strikers.
- The unemployed were made to join “Labour Armies”, cutting trees or building roads etc.

VESENKHA

**(the Supreme Council of National
Economy)**

War Communism.

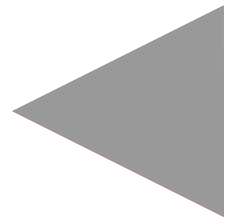
Agriculture

- **Private trading was banned.**
- **Peasants had to give their surplus food to the government: they could not sell it for profit.**
- **In the cities food was strictly rationed.**

War Communism.

.....a crucial point

War Communism kept the Red Army supplied with food and weapons.



Why did the Reds win the Civil War?

Factor Five

The Weakness of White Forces.

White Weaknesses

- **The Whites were an amalgam of different groups united only by their desire to get rid of the Bolsheviks**
- **On what was to replace the communist regime they were deeply divided.**
- **Some wanted a return to the Tsarist regime; others a democratic republic.**
- **There was little in common between the Tsarist groups and socialist groups like the Mensheviks.**

White Weaknesses.

- **The Whites were weak; their armies not very large.**
- **The Red Army numbered millions.**
- **Trotsky quickly built up the Red Army to 1.5 million in 1919. By mid-1920 the Red forces numbered 3.5 million.**

White Weaknesses

- **White leaders were, on the whole, second rate. Several were cruel and treated their men with contempt.**
- **Therefore, there was little natural warmth or support for the White leaders. Many soldiers deserted.**

White Weaknesses

- **The various White armies fought as separate detachments.**
- **Apart from their obvious desire to overthrow the Bolsheviks, they were never bound by a single aim.**
- **They were unwilling to sacrifice their individual interests in order to form a united anti-Bolshevik front.**
- **This allowed the Reds to pick off the White armies one by one.**

White Weaknesses.

- **Co-operation between the White armies was limited, not helped by the long front on which the Whites fought.**
- **Kolchak established a government in Siberia but it had little contact with the forces under Denikin in the south.**
- **Thus the White armies fought largely independent of one another.**

White Weaknesses

- **The level of indiscipline and corruption in the White armies was extraordinary.**
- **Denikin said:**
“I can do nothing with my army. I am glad when it carries out my combat orders”.

White Weaknesses

- **The Whites were well supplied with old Tsarist officers but they had problems recruiting conscripts.**
- **The peasants feared the loss of their newly gained land if the Whites won and saw the Reds as posing less of a threat to their position.**

White Weaknesses

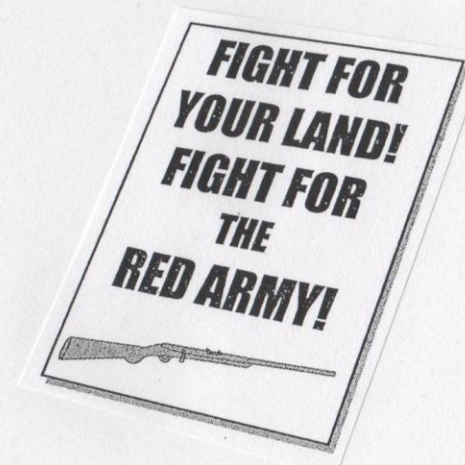
..... a crucial point.

- **The armies of Denikin and Kolchak alienated the mass of peasants in their regions by their support for former landowners.**
- **To many observers they represented the forces of the past.**

White Weaknesses

..... a crucial point

- The Bolsheviks had approved the land seizures of 1917.
- The Whites, on the other hand, did not approve of land seizures and supported the former landlords' claims.
- Thus on the crucial issue of land, the Bolsheviks were the lesser evil.



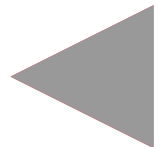
White Weaknesses

- **The aims of the national minorities were often at odds with the White leaders.**
- **The slogan “Russia One and Indivisible” did little to keep the minorities fighting for the Whites.**

.....a crucial point

“ The Whites’ failure to recognize the peasant revolution on the land and the national independence movements doomed them to defeat”.

Orlando Figes.



Why did the Reds win the Civil War?

Factor Six

The Failure of Allied Support.

White Weaknesses

The Failure of Allied Support.

- **The Whites did receive help from Russia's former allies in the First World War.**
- **But after the end of the war and the signing of the Versailles treaty in 1919 this assistance dried up.**
- **The Allied leaders may have had no taste for communism but neither did they desire to carry on fighting.**

The Failure of Allied Support

- **At the end of 1918 there were only about 15,000 Allied troops in northern Russia.**
- **One impact Allied intervention did have was to make the Bolsheviks seem good Russian patriots against foreign interference.**

The Failure of Allied Support.

.....a crucial point.

- **Foreign intervention was half-hearted and largely ineffective.**
- **But it gave the Bolsheviks a propaganda coup because they could present themselves as the defenders of Russian soil against foreign forces.**