

Screenplay for the film "1918 — Leon Trotsky. Historical Chronicles with Nikolai Svanidze"
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Screenplay Summary:

The narrative takes place in 1917–1918, just after the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia.

The Bolsheviks lose the elections to the Constituent Assembly, but Lenin decides to keep power anyway.

He claims that the “Republic of Soviets” is a higher form of democracy than one with a Constituent Assembly.

On January 5, 1918, the Constituent Assembly finally opens, but demonstrations in its favor are bloodily repressed.

At dawn, the sailor Zheleznyakov brutally dissolves it with the words: “The guard is tired.” Multi-party politics ends there.

Trotsky becomes the main organizer of the new regime, the second man after Lenin, a fanatic of revolution and civil war.

Lenin and Trotsky see civil war as a necessary stage, and Trotsky dreams of a permanent world revolution.

The Cheka (Extraordinary Commission) is created at the end of 1917, even before the dissolution of the Assembly, to hunt “enemies of the people.”

The text reports children’s testimonies about violence: shootings, mutilated bodies, everyday terror. Repression becomes routine: executions for trifles, concentration camps, and the concept of “state terrorism.”

On the international level, Trotsky leads the Brest-Litovsk negotiations with Germany.

He invents the formula “neither peace nor war”: demobilizing without signing peace, which triggers a German offensive.

To save Bolshevik power, Lenin finally accepts a humiliating peace treaty, signed on March 3, 1918. At the same time, the regime fights patriotism and glorifies international revolution.

A new political language emerges: “enemy of the people,” “mass terror,” and calls for on-the-spot executions.

The population is starving; food rations are strictly ranked according to social categories.

Meanwhile, the Bolshevik leadership settles comfortably in the Kremlin, with servants and caviar.

To maintain military control, Trotsky organizes the Red Army by recruiting former tsarist officers, bound by a system of hostages.

He uses his famous armored train as a mobile headquarters, a center for propaganda and command on the Eastern Front.

In Sviazhsk he establishes concentration camps, blocking detachments, and decimation (executing one soldier out of ten).

In 1918, Lenin is wounded in an assassination attempt attributed to Fanny Kaplan; this serves as a pretext to legalize “Red Terror.”

Mass shootings multiply, including public ones, and are proudly reported in the Cheka’s press.

The text revisits the role of Yakov Yurovsky, who leads the execution of the imperial family in Ekaterinburg.

In total, 18 members of the Romanov family are killed during the civil war, sometimes thrown alive into mines.

The tsar’s children are the first to be officially executed for the supposed crimes of their parents.

Later, repression will also strike the children of Bolshevik leaders themselves (Kamenev, Zinoviev, Trotsky).

In 1935, a decree will even allow the death penalty for children from the age of 12.

The text thus shows how, from 1918 onward, one-party dictatorship, state terrorism, and a logic of mass destruction are put in place and will mark Soviet history.

Screenplay:

1918. Leon Trotsky

It was the thirty-second day since the Bolsheviks had come to power. Elections of delegates to the Constituent Assembly had been scheduled for that day, November 25, 1917. The Bolsheviks lost those elections. The party that had so dashingly seized power just a month earlier received only a quarter of the seats. The outcome of the elections neither embarrassed nor surprised Lenin. Lenin stated openly that the October events were a coup d'état, carried out by professionals, and that there was no reason to count on broad mass support. Power had fallen into their hands unexpectedly easily. Since the devil himself was joking with them, it was worth trying to hold on to it.

By decision of the party's Central Committee, members of the Constituent Assembly electoral commission were arrested. A few days earlier, the newspaper *Pravda* had called the Constituent Assembly "the master of the Russian land". Lenin the tactician put that out of his mind.

Lenin the strategist declared: "The Republic of Soviets is a higher form of democracy than a republic with a Constituent Assembly."

The Constituent Assembly was the dream and the slogan of the whole year 1917. The Constituent Assembly was supposed to determine the form of government in Russia. When, the day after the coup, Lenin and Trotsky created the Council of People's Commissars, they stated in a decree that this was a temporary workers' and peasants' government until the convocation of the Constituent Assembly.

If the game had been played honestly, the Council of People's Commissars should have gone down in Russian history as Provisional Government No. 2. Because the word "Provisional" is not a political evaluation but expresses the essence: provisional until the convocation of the Constituent Assembly, which would hold all the cards. But that would have been an entirely different, non-Bolshevik story.

The opening of the Constituent Assembly in the Tauride Palace was set for noon on January 5, 1918. At the appointed hour the assembly did not open. Demonstrations began in the streets. Columns of people marched with the slogan: "All power to the Constituent Assembly!" The columns ran into Bolshevik units, which opened fire. Dozens were killed, hundreds wounded. To make matters worse, peasants had come to Petrograd for their congress. There were no Bolshevik delegates among the peasants either. The peasants also joined the demonstration. They too were fired upon. They too had dead and wounded. By evening the Constituent Assembly finally opened.

The chairman of the Constituent Assembly, the veteran Socialist-Revolutionary Chernov, shouted into the seething hall: "The very fact of the opening of the Constituent Assembly means the end of the civil war in Russia!"

In reality, what happened inside the Tauride Palace by the morning of January 6, 1918, meant exactly the opposite — namely, only the very beginning of a hitherto unseen civil war in Russia. At five in the morning, in the heat of the debates, a sailor, Anatoly Zheleznyakov, approached Chairman Chernov and clearly said: "I propose that everyone leave the Tauride Palace. The guard is tired." That was the end of multi-party politics. If you don't count the Left SRs, with whom the Bolsheviks still dealt for another six months.

Leon Davidovich Trotsky, the practical organizer of the October coup of 1917, in 1918 personally did everything possible and impossible to ensure that one-party rule would seize Russia for 73 years. A convinced and inspired fanatic, Trotsky was created not only to seize power lying at his feet, but to hold it in a gigantic country. Lenin sensed this and blessed Trotsky. Trotsky became the second man in Russia, after Lenin. Besides, the two men felt a genuine ideological kinship.

Lenin said that the First World War would, through revolution, grow into a civil war. Civil war was Lenin's main, long-standing dream. Trotsky dreamed that civil war would last forever — and not only in Russia. A civil war spreading throughout the entire world — that was the world revolution that the theorist Trotsky called “permanent revolution”.

“Permanent” was a term well known to Soviet women of the older generation. For everyone else, let us clarify: a permanent is a six-month hair wave. In 1918 the time limits — or rather *the* time limit — were of a different kind: sentences were handed down of deprivation of freedom “until the victory of the world revolution”. Although deprivation of freedom in 1918 was rare. Usually they just shot you.

“We came to the Extraordinary Commission to see our relatives who had been arrested. When they took mother away, the Chekists began dragging blue corpses out of the yard, hacking them to pieces in front of passers-by, then shovelling them onto a truck like trash. Afterwards, in the yard, there were bits of skin, blood, little bones, and some woman calmly took a broom, swept it all into a pile, and carried it away.”

This is a fragment from the memoirs of children who saw the revolution and later found themselves outside Russia. Collections of children's compositions were published in Prague in the mid-1920s. We will return to them.

The All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage was created in December 1917. That is, the organization that defined “enemies of the people” and punished them was created by the Bolsheviks even before the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly. The Constituent Assembly itself did not interest them. Something else was far more important.

In November 1917 there was a meeting of the Petrograd Committee of the RSDLP. Kamenev, Zinoviev, and Lunacharsky spoke in favor of uniting with the Mensheviks and SRs. Lenin was categorically against it. Trotsky fully supported Lenin. Lenin did not hide his gratitude: “Trotsky said long ago that unification is impossible. Trotsky understood that, and since then there has been no better Bolshevik.”

This alone would have been enough for Stalin to hate Trotsky, but Trotsky, to put it mildly, gave Stalin more than just this one reason.

On the eve of the celebration of the 10th anniversary of October, a “Questionnaire for Participants in the October Coup” was sent to those who had taken part. That is, in 1927 the word “revolution” is still not used, let alone “Great”. In 1927 Stalin has in reality already been in power for five years. Trotsky is, accordingly, in deep disgrace. But after much hesitation, they sent the questionnaire to him as well. Trotsky filled it out and, in addition, wrote a letter to the Commission for the Study of the History of the Party, hoping for historical rehabilitation. In Trotsky's view, to rehabilitate him meant to acknowledge that thanks to his enormous organizational talent, the power of the

Bolsheviks — whom no one in Russia had elected — well, that thanks to Trotsky, this accidental power did not collapse in 1918.

The All-Russian Extraordinary Commission (first on the left — F. E. Dzerzhinsky).

Trotsky, in his book *My Life*, writes about 1918: “Whether we should remain in power or be overthrown, it was impossible to foresee. In all circumstances it was necessary to bring as much clarity as possible into the revolutionary experience of mankind.” As for clarity, they brought more than enough.

Trotsky writes in his memoirs: “The question of the conquest of power by the party had always stood before me. But the question of my personal work after the conquest of power had never arisen for me. It took me by surprise.”

Lenin demanded that Trotsky take up internal affairs, that is, the fight against the various internal enemies everywhere. Trotsky could have done it. In this sense, Trotsky was exactly what Lenin needed. He quickly grew into a practitioner of state terrorism of the Leninist intake.

Here is his future order:

“To Vologda, Provincial Military Commissar. Lock up suspicious persons in concentration camps — this is a necessary condition of success.”

In 1920 Trotsky would write a theoretical work entitled *Terrorism and Communism*.

“The question of the form of repression,” Trotsky would write, “or of its degree, is not one of principle. It is a matter of expediency. It is this simple factor that explains the wide use of shooting during the Civil War.”

These are the words of the Bolshevik hymn to state terrorism.

From children’s memories:

“The shootings took place here three times a week: on Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday, and in the morning, when we went to the market to sell things, we would see on the pavement a huge streak of blood which the little dogs were licking.”

State terrorism is the highest and final stage of terrorism. Trotsky continues: “Only he who rejects violence in general — and therefore all war and uprising — can morally condemn the state terror of the revolutionary class.”

The Bolsheviks did not reject all war. They rejected the world war of others and eagerly anticipated their own world civil war. To do that they had to hold on to power.

In Russia they had already unleashed a civil war. The world war was still going on; they had no strength to fight on two fronts. Lenin went for a separate peace with Germany. Trotsky headed the diplomatic department.

Germany was delighted: for her, the nightmare of a two-front war — Eastern and Western — was ending. There was a chance to win the war. The money paid to the Bolsheviks before the October coup seemed to be starting to pay off. The day after the coup, Berlin secretly allocated another 15 million marks to support the Bolsheviks.

The money was first brought to Petrograd in December 1917. On December 9, 1917, peace negotiations began in Brest-Litovsk. The first Russian delegation happily breakfasted, lunched and dined with the German side at the residence of Field Marshal Leopold of Bavaria.

At table, on the right of the Bavarian prince, sat the head of the Russian delegation, Adolf Joffe, recently released from a Siberian prison. Next to him sat the head of the Austrian delegation, Foreign Minister Ottokar Count Czernin von und zu Chudenitz. Count Czernin wrote in his diary after the first dinner: "What strange beings these Bolsheviks are. They speak of the reconciliation of all the peoples of the world, and at the same time they are the cruelest tyrants in history. Their arguments are machine guns and gallows." Joffe leaned across the table to Count Czernin and whispered: "I hope we will manage to spark a revolution in your country as well."

Trotsky arrived in Brest-Litovsk later and canceled the joint dinners. On January 5, 1918, Germany and Austria-Hungary declared they agreed to peace on the condition that 150,000 square kilometers of territory be detached from Russia.

In the Western press, including the German Social-Democratic press, there was much talk that the Bolsheviks and Germany were playing out a drama at the negotiations, with roles clearly distributed. This deeply worried Trotsky, who wrote: "We must, at all costs, provide the workers of Europe with a vivid proof of the mortal hostility between us and Germany."

From this came his famous formula: "We cease the war, we demobilize, but we do not sign peace." In other words, "neither peace nor war."

Trotsky came to Lenin with this. Lenin asked him:

"And what if the Germans nevertheless move their troops against us? And how many would they need to move?"

Trotsky answered:

"Then we will conclude peace. By that single act we shall deal a blow to all talk of our backstage ties with the Germans."

"Of course, there are advantages here," Lenin agreed. "But here's the thing. If we were perishing for the sake of the victory of the German revolution, that would be understandable. For the German revolution is incomparably more important than the Russian one. But when will it come? No one knows. Therefore now we must secure our revolution."

At the Brest-Litovsk negotiations the German side toughened its demands.

The commander of German troops on the Eastern Front, General Hoffmann, hung up a map and showed Trotsky which Russian territories Germany intended to annex. Trotsky made a speech: "We will not sign the peace, we are leaving the war, we are fully demobilizing the army." General Hoffmann said loudly: "Unheard of."

Everyone was telling Trotsky: "The Germans will begin an offensive." Trotsky signed the order for demobilization and went back to Petrograd.

On February 17, General Hoffmann wrote in his diary: "Tomorrow we begin military operations against the Bolsheviks. There is no other way. Otherwise these swine will drive with whips all together — the Ukrainians, the Finns, the Balts — into a new revolutionary army and turn all of Europe into a pigsty."

The Germans began their offensive. Two days after the start of the offensive, the French military mission approached Trotsky with a proposal from France and England to provide Russia with assistance in the war against Germany. Trotsky agreed; Lenin supported him with the words: "Authorize Comrade Trotsky to accept the help of the bandits of French imperialism against the German bandits." Lenin loved puns. Bukharin caught up with Trotsky in the corridor, grabbed his head in his hands, and burst into tears. "What are we doing?" Bukharin sobbed. "We're turning the party into a pile of manure." No one cried for the country.

From children's recollections:

"We fled from the city to the village. There the Bolsheviks killed my mama and papa. Then the Bolsheviks dug several pits and buried all the dead. My mama and papa too."

The next day, February 23, 1918, there was a session of the Central Committee of the RSDLP. They were voting on Lenin's proposal to sign peace at once on German terms. Lenin even threatened to resign if his proposal was not accepted. Trotsky would have voted against, if he had voted. But he abstained, and thereby secured victory for Lenin.

Thus the decision to sign the humiliating peace treaty with Germany was taken by the Central Committee of the RSDLP on February 23. It was this day that became Soviet Army Day. On March 3, Sokolnikov, instead of Trotsky, signed, without even reading, the peace treaty on German terms. Among other things, the Brest peace struck from historical memory all those who had fallen in the First World War.

In central London stands a stunning monument to the British artillerymen who died in the First World War. It was erected by the British government. The inscription reads: "To the proud memory of 49,000 British artillerymen of all ranks who gave their lives for King and Country." Millions of Russian soldiers who died in the First World War never received a monument.

In 1918 Lenin clarified: our revolution fought against patriotism. If you are a socialist, you must sacrifice all your patriotic feelings in the name of the international revolution.

It must be said that for both Lenin and Trotsky it was not difficult to make such statements in Russia. In Russia, these people were foreigners. Lenin had not been in Russia for almost 17 years, Trotsky for 15, except for a brief trip to Petersburg in 1905. In the country where they seized power and became naturalized, they began speaking in a language previously unknown there.

In January 1918, in an article titled "How to Organize Competition?" Lenin proposed "shooting on the spot one out of every ten guilty of parasitism."

Earlier, on December 11, 1917, the Council of People's Commissars introduced the expression "enemy of the people". The Cadet party were the first official enemies of the people. *Pravda* wrote: "From now on the hymn of the working class will be a song of hatred and revenge!" (August 31, 1918).

Dzerzhinsky: "Anyone who dares even the slightest propaganda against Soviet power will be arrested and placed in a concentration camp."

Lenin: "These are times of supreme war. We must in every way encourage the mass character of terror."

Russia had never spoken in such a language before.

In 1918 a song appeared:

*A chicken fried, a chicken steamed,
The chicken also wants to live.*

At the beginning of 1918, the line “the chicken also wants to live” was a humanistic, anti-Soviet jab. But the bold chicken was rare. The dominant mood was numbness, a paralysis of the will. People greeted the morning with a sigh of relief: during the night they had taken someone else, a neighbor, an acquaintance; someone else had been shot.

The Bolsheviks announced the registration of officers. Whoever failed to appear for registration would be an enemy of the people; whoever did appear would be arrested. Registration took place at the Alexeyev Military School, in Lefortovo. The queue, eight people wide, stretched for a verst. People in the line argued over places. They say there were about 50,000 officers there. All waited meekly.

In Vyatka they shot people for going out after eight in the evening, in Bryansk for drunkenness. In Kronstadt they shot doctors because they were popular among the workers, in Ivanovo-Voznesensk for failing to hand in sewing machines. In addition, executions were carried out “just in case, in advance, in order to discourage any desire to organize conspiracies.”

In 1918 a new feature film came out, based on a script by the People’s Commissar for Education, Anatoly Lunacharsky. It was shot in a few days. The film was called *The Densification* (*Uplotnenie*). “Densification” is also a word from the new Bolshevik language. Densification is when, say, in the apartment of a professor at Moscow University, living on his salary, or of an engineer, one packs into each room a large family, leaving only one room to the original owner. At the same time, the furniture and personal belongings are inventoried, and it is forbidden to move them to your own room. Unless the new residents prove to be kind and return the books or the piano. Because they don’t need them.

Trotsky’s father was thrown out of his house without much figuring out. He walked 400 kilometers on foot to Odessa. Trotsky intervened.

From children’s reminiscences:

“They killed Miss Lyuba, then they led out Grandma and me. When they were already taking aim, I shouted: ‘Grandma, I don’t want to die.’ Grandma went rigid and fell down. They called a doctor, but the doctor said to take Grandma home, that she would die anyway.”

On March 12, 1918, the Bolshevik leadership left Petrograd and moved to Moscow, directly into the Moscow Kremlin. The logic of the move to Moscow is simple. Yes, the peace treaty had been signed, but there was no certainty that the Germans would not continue the offensive. Furthermore, on March 9, the British had landed in Murmansk. Therefore, Trotsky writes in his memoirs, he and Lenin decided: “Let them better take hungry Petrograd without a revolutionary government.”

Trotsky arrived in Moscow the day after he was appointed People’s Commissar for Military Affairs. Before March 1918, Trotsky had never been in the Kremlin and did not know Moscow at all, except for one place — the Butyrka prison, where he had spent six months in 1898–1899. Trotsky preserved his first impressions of himself in the Kremlin: “The clash of two irreconcilable cultures amused me. Driving along the street past the Nicholas Palace, I would often glance sideways at the Tsar Cannon and the Tsar Bell.” Trotsky recalls Hamlet: “The time is out of joint — O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right!”

But Trotsky is no Hamlet, and here is what he says:

“To ponder the contradictions of the development of a backward country — one can perhaps afford that for a minute or two as one rushes tangentially past the Kremlin’s past from meeting to meeting, but not more.”

“The wives of all these Soviet employees, entrenched in the Kremlin, are now talking on the various direct lines exactly as if they were their own home telephones” (Ivan Bunin, *Cursed Days*).

From the Trinity Gate, along the Kremlin wall, ran Palace Street. It was renamed Communist Street. In this street, in the former Cavalier Corps, Lenin and Trotsky settled in 1918.

The new residents were served by the old and young imperial lackeys. The younger footmen quickly adapted to the new order. The older ones served at congresses and conferences. Trotsky writes that they did the same work as at the receptions of the tsar and the grand dukes. When one of the old lackeys lay dying, Trotsky’s wife sent him food parcels. The old man wept with gratitude.

It was not difficult to draw tears of gratitude from the old man. In 1918 the Bolsheviks divided the population of Russia into four categories and decreed how much each could eat. That is the famous Soviet ration card system. People of the first category — workers in defense plants and transport — had a daily ration of 300 grams of bread, 7 grams of sugar, 7 grams of salt, 7 grams of vegetable oil, and 50 grams of meat.

People of the second category — teachers, medical assistants, and other workers; the third category — directors, engineers, the intelligentsia, priests. The fourth category — persons living from income on capital. Although the capital had already been nationalized. The fourth category received 100 grams of bread, 2 grams of sugar, 2 grams of salt, and 17 grams of meat. Food was issued irregularly. In provincial towns the workers’ ration was even smaller.

From children’s memories:

“Seeing mother’s suffering, my little brothers would stop crying and say: ‘Mama, we don’t want to eat, it’s just us being like that.’”

To mark the first anniversary of the October coup, and due to the lack of bread and trade in Moscow, an exhibition was held in the Filippov bakery under the title “A Year of Proletarian Dictatorship”. An extra bread ration was given for participation.

In the Kremlin, because exports had ceased, there was an abundance of red caviar. Trotsky writes: “Those early years of the revolution are all colored by this ever-present caviar.”

The People’s Commissar for Public Welfare — that is, social security — Alexandra Kollontai noted that the hunger ration produced among workers, especially women, a feeling of despair and hopelessness.

To hold on to power, it was urgently necessary to create an army. Trotsky refused to take the post of People’s Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs. Lenin said: “Whom then should we appoint? Name someone.” Trotsky thought it over and agreed.

The anti-Bolshevik White movement began in the spring of 1918. On May 25, the uprising of the Czechoslovak Corps, made up of former prisoners of war, broke out. Units of the corps were scattered across towns along the Siberian railway. They acted as a catalyst for resistance, which spread from east to west. On May 26 a small White detachment captured the city of Petropavlovsk in northern Kazakhstan. On June 1 power was seized in Omsk and Novonikolaevsk (now

Novosibirsk), on June 14 there was an uprising in Irkutsk, then in Barnaul and the Altai. On June 29 Tomsk was taken. In the south the White Army was first headed by Kornilov; after his death, from April 13 on, the army was commanded by Denikin.

In Bolshevik hands remained only central Russia with Petrograd and Moscow. There a furious hunt for officers was underway.

Across Theatre Square they drove a group of 500–600 officers, with holders of the St. George Cross in the front two ranks. On their greatcoats were the faded marks left by the ripped-off George crosses. They were being led away to be killed. This was a common sight in early 1918.

From children's memories:

“So many disfigured corpses I saw in Russia that even the horses were afraid.”

Many generals of the First World War, talented and untalented alike, were killed with their families. “On Tverskaya stands a pale old man — a general in silver spectacles and a black fur hat — selling something. He stands timidly, modestly, like a beggar. How astonishingly quickly they all surrendered and lost heart,” writes Ivan Bunin (*Cursed Days*).

Against this deadly background, Trotsky, in the Commissariat (located in the building of the former Alexander School), decided — despite the fiercest opposition within the party — to bring tsarist military specialists, from sublieutenant to general, into service in the new army. Because self-taught commanders from the people would not bring victory. Mobilizing workers and peasants was also not enough. Among them, Trotsky said, there was a lot of unfit elements, riffraff. He used these words about the riffraff at the First All-Russian Congress of Military Commissars. To keep an eye on the commanders and to educate the soldiers, Trotsky brought commissars into the army.

Trotsky clarifies: “The commissars with a revolver to the left and right of the commander. If the military specialist wavers, he must be shot in time. The former officer corps that does not wish to work for us must be ‘hidden away in concentration camps.’”

The hero of the First World War, General Brusilov, spent two months under arrest before agreeing to serve in the new army.

In mid-April 1918, on the way from the Commissariat to the Kremlin, Trotsky formulated the text of the “Socialist Military Oath”. For decades, Soviet soldiers taking the oath had no idea that Trotsky was its author.

By mid-1918, the position of the Bolsheviks was on the verge of hopeless. Trotsky said in June: “We are already dead, but there is still no one who can bury us.” The man to whom Trotsky thus confided was the German ambassador, Count Wilhelm von Mirbach. At that moment the Germans were holding the Pskov-Narva line. A month after Trotsky's confidences, on July 6, in broad daylight, in the embassy mansion on Denezhny Lane, Count Mirbach was killed by employees of the Cheka, Left SRs by conviction, Blumkin and Andreyev. Besides killing Mirbach, Blumkin is also known for having, in 1920, secured the release from the Cheka — under his personal guarantee, that of “Comrade Blumkin” — of Sergei Yesenin, accused of counter-revolution. Trotsky loved Yesenin as a poet; Yesenin respected Trotsky as a politician. There were many Left SRs in the Cheka. The SRs wanted war with Germany.

The panic among the Bolsheviks was incredible. Sverdlov, Dzerzhinsky and Lenin himself arrived in Denezhny Lane. All three poured out apologies, explanations and condolences.

No wonder they did. Ambassador Mirbach believed that Bolshevik rule best corresponded to German interests. The German foreign ministry had recommended to Mirbach: "Spend more money." Mirbach telegraphed back: "We need 3 million marks a month." In June, a special fund of 40 million marks was created in Berlin. In addition, by summer the Germans were ready for an economic leap into Russia.

On August 7, after the surrender of Simbirsk to the Whites, Trotsky headed for the Eastern Front. While he was on the way, the Reds surrendered Kazan. Trotsky's train made it as far as Sviazhsk.

Here is what Trotsky says about this now unknown place: "The fate of the revolution was decided near Sviazhsk. The October victory had been easy. The spontaneous onrush had weakened."

In the absence of spontaneous onrush, on August 8 Trotsky dictated Order No. 10:

"To all! To all! To all!

In the train of the People's Commissar for Military Affairs, where this order is being written, sits a Revolutionary War Tribunal which is endowed with unlimited powers.

The commander of the defense of the Moscow–Kazan railway line, Comrade Kamenshchikov, whom I have appointed, has ordered the creation of concentration camps in Murom, Arzamas and Sviazhsk, where agitators, counter-revolutionary officers, parasites and saboteurs will be interned, except for those who will be shot on the spot.

Leon Trotsky."

Now the question: who were those "all, all, all" to whom Trotsky's order was addressed? Fighting on the Bolsheviks' side were partisan detachments. The February revolution had created in the cities a habit of constant meetings and demonstrations at which people listened to all speakers in turn; in the provinces and villages, where armed men were returning from the front, instead of meetings they would band together in detachments. The returning soldiers did not want to plow. These detachments were not guided by any coherent idea, they knew something vaguely about the new power in Moscow, the new is always alluring, so they somehow fought for the new power, but would easily retreat, run, or switch to the opposite side.

It was to these people, fleeing in panic from Kazan, that Trotsky arrived in Sviazhsk in his train. The former train of Emperor Nicholas II, by order of the People's Commissar for Military Affairs, had been equipped with a printing press, refrigerating chambers, telegraph, radio station, airplane, cinematograph with a film crew, several automobiles and a fuel tank. In its 12 cars there was a retinue of 231 people, including Latvian riflemen, sailors, cavalrymen, machine-gunners, motorcyclists, drivers, cyclists, telephone operators and others. The largest group was the agitators. The train was Trotsky's *know-how*. Trotsky calls it an improvisation.

In the train with Trotsky, and independently, commissars arrived from industrial centers. All in leather. Together with the commissars, tsarist officers were brought in.

Many of these officers, in February 1917, had easily betrayed Commander-in-Chief Nicholas II and sworn allegiance to the Provisional Government. Then they dropped Kerensky and went over to the Bolsheviks. In the army, the first betrayal is what counts. The reckoning for it overtook the Red commanders from the old officer corps much later, in the 1930s, on the eve of an altogether different war.

In 1918, right there at Sviazhsk, experienced military specialists, using bandit-like partisans, runaways from all sides, and peasants mobilized on the spot, formed companies, battalions and

regiments. Into the units they inserted several dozen seasoned fighters, plus a bathhouse, non-stop agitation, food, tobacco and matches. Quartermasters and supply officers also came from the old army. For the old military specialists, a system of hostages was introduced.

Only those officers whose families were within the borders of the Soviet homeland were put into command posts. The officer had to constantly remember that his wife and children were hostages. It made an impression. The Russian army had never known such a thing. This was a Sviazhsk improvisation of Trotsky's. He writes: "Without ever new improvisations in all fields, the war would have been unthinkable for us."

Trotsky's position: "We must force them to fight. If we wait, the muzhik will figure it out, and it may be too late." Supplies were poor, and in Sviazhsk Trotsky made the decision to introduce blocking detachments. "They must be placed in the immediate rear and push forward from behind those who lag, hesitate and are hungry. The blocking detachment must have at its disposal a truck with a machine gun, a car with a machine gun, or cavalrymen with machine guns," (Trotsky's letter from Sviazhsk to the commander of a blocking detachment).

Trotsky's train had an antenna and received thirteen radio stations, including Paris. World information from first hand, from Trotsky's hands, reached the inhabitants of Sviazhsk, the soldiers who lacked foot-cloths and leather for soles. That was how they plugged into the world revolution.

From 1918 to 1922, clergy were shot in Sviazhsk; in 1922 they moved on to shooting civilians. At the end of the 1920s Trotsky's concentration camp grew into a branch of Stalin's Gulag. After Stalin's death, a psychiatric hospital was set up on the camp's site. After 1993 a corrective school appeared here, on the island.

In the midst of preparations for the red counter-offensive on the Eastern Front, a White brigade led by the future famous Colonel Vladimir Oskarovich Kappel attacked Sviazhsk. The attack was repulsed, but the 2nd Petrograd Workers' Regiment fled the field together with its commander and commissar. On Trotsky's orders, a field military court condemned the commander, the commissar, and every tenth soldier to be shot. Killing every tenth man — decimation — was another Sviazhsk improvisation of Trotsky's.

The population had dwindled to about 300 people. In Sviazhsk, Trotsky received a telegram: "Come immediately. Ilyich wounded. Complete calm. Sverdlov."

The chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, Yakov Sverdlov, indeed demonstrated complete calm and even said to the manager of the Council of People's Commissars' office, Bonch-Bruyevich: "Well, Vladimir Dmitrievich, we're managing quite well without Vladimir Ilyich, after all."

According to an unofficial version, it was Sverdlov who was involved in the plot against Lenin. In reality, internal party struggle did not begin under Stalin; it was in full swing already in 1918. Since in the summer of 1918 Bolshevik power was practically dying, and Lenin's authority was falling accordingly, Sverdlov quite possibly was beginning to implement his own ambitious plan. By that time Sverdlov had concentrated in his hands all leading Soviet and party posts: he was chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and secretary of the Central Committee; besides, he directed cadre policy in the Cheka and controlled the Kremlin guard. All that was left was to head the Council of People's Commissars. After Lenin was wounded, Sverdlov chaired the Council in turn with Rykov. Sverdlov had been in exile together with Stalin. Sverdlov died unexpectedly, not

an old man, in March 1919. Stalin took Sverdlov's place in the party apparatus. In 1922 Stalin succeeded in removing Lenin from the leadership.

According to the official version still accepted today, Lenin was shot at on August 30, 1918, by Feiga Fayvelovna Kaplan, born in 1887, known as Fanny. Half-blind. She had lost her sight in 1909 in the Nertchinsk penal colony in Eastern Siberia, where she was held under an indefinite sentence for a bombing in Kiev.

She was freed by the February revolution. In the summer of 1917, in Crimea, in a sanatorium, she met Lenin's brother Dmitry Ilyich. Dmitry liked her, and on his recommendation she had surgery on her eyes in Kharkov.

On August 30, at the Mikhelson factory, a rally was being held on "The Dictatorship of the Bourgeoisie and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat". When Lenin came out onto the street after speaking, three shots were fired at him. The shooter was seized immediately. During interrogation she said: "I shot at Lenin. I do not belong to any party. I shot him because his existence undermines faith in socialism."

Kaplan was questioned by the Cheka at the Lubyanka. Before moving to Lubyanka, the Cheka had been housed in the famous "House of the Rostovs" in Moscow, described by Tolstoy in *War and Peace*. Only eight years had passed since Tolstoy's death. From the Lubyanka, Sverdlov unexpectedly had Kaplan brought to the Kremlin and personally issued the sentence for her execution.

Already on September 3, Kaplan was shot by the commandant of the Kremlin, Malkov, and her body was burned in a barrel of gasoline in Alexander Garden. The poet Demyan Bedny watched this. He fainted from the smell. On September 5, 1918, the Council of People's Commissars adopted the decree "On Red Terror". In reality, it was just a legalization of the terror.

A doctor from the Lefortovo Military Hospital recalled: "On September 6, in the anatomy theater I saw a tarpaulin on which lay 24 corpses with skulls smashed by point-blank shots. Shortly afterward they brought 40 more. Some of the names of those shot were published in the *Weekly of the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission*. In issue No. 6 for 1918, together with Kaplan, there were 89 more people. Those people — four tsarist ministers and ordinary citizens — were shot in the daytime in Petrovsky Park, in the presence of the Moscow public. That was only the beginning."

The examination of the scene of the attempt on Lenin's life was carried out by Cheka officer Yakov Yurovsky.

On the night of July 16–17, 1918, Yakov Yurovsky directed the execution of the tsar's family. During the Civil War, 18 members of the Romanov family were killed.

On the night of July 12–13, 1918, in Perm, the emperor's brother, Grand Duke Mikhail Alexandrovich, was shot.

On the night of July 18, near Alapaevsk, five people were thrown into a mineshaft: the empress's sister, Elizaveta Fyodorovna, four grand dukes — Ivan, Konstantin and Igor Romanov, and Vladimir Paley. They were thrown in alive. Grenades were hurled into the shaft. Then it was doused with quicklime. The only Romanov who resisted was Grand Duke Sergei Mikhailovich. He rushed at the soldiers, they shot him in the head, and he was thrown in dead.

In January 1919, four grand dukes were shot in the Peter and Paul Fortress.

The imperial family was executed on the night of July 16–17, 1918, in Ekaterinburg. The decision to execute them was taken by Lenin and Sverdlov. Sverdlov told Trotsky: “We have decided it here.” Trotsky learned of what had happened after the fact. He must have been annoyed. He had intended to be the prosecutor at the trial of the Russian emperor. The spectacle “Trotsky vs. Nicholas” did not take place.

The four daughters and the son of the Russian emperor, who personally bore no guilt before the people, were the first children in Russia who were forced to answer with their lives — or rather with their deaths — for their parents. This was the first officially sanctioned killing of children. Later they would kill and send to camps thousands and thousands of children of all ages, even infants. They would kill the sons of Kamenev, the son of Zinoviev, the sons of Trotsky.

In accordance with the decree of the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People’s Commissars of April 7, 1935, the supreme measure of punishment — shooting — was applied to children starting from the age of 12.

The Romanov children were simply the first.