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More Thoughts on Grandma's Whiskers

Geoff Swain, University of Glasgow

As Jon Smele reminds us in this both entertaining and thought-provoking article, counter-factual history can be fun, and, as its supporters have suggested, it can provide interesting contingency to the events under consideration and it can help us understand why what happened happened in the way it did. In short, it can be more than a “parlour game” - speculating about what did not happen is a far from pointless exercise. So, could the outcome of the revolutions and civil wars in Russia have been different? Were there some turning points where history stubbornly refused to turn?

It seems to me that counter-factual history only works if the historical turn proposed is probable rather than just merely possible. Jon rightly lampoons Simon Sebag Montefiore for suggesting that the Russian Revolution turned out as it did because Lenin was “plain lucky”. But other historians have also resorted to the question of chance. In his *A People's Tragedy* Orlando Figes describes how Lenin was stopped on the night of 24 October by a government patrol, but his disguise of wig and bandage held good: “one can only wonder how different history would have been if Lenin had been arrested”, he asks?¹ Well, what would have happened if Lenin had been detained on the evening of 24 October? The authority of Kerensky's government by then was so low, and the popularity of the Bolshevik and Left SR dominated Soviet so high, that the patrol would probably have let Lenin go. Even if it had held him, the insurrection was by then already effectively under way with Trotsky unable stop it even if he had wanted to. The Second Congress of Soviets would have demanded Lenin's immediate release, that seems absolutely certain. So, let's leave aside issues like “what if Lenin's wig had fallen off”, for the cardinal rule of counter-factual writing, as Jon reminds us, is not to take things too far (7). As he points out “only fanatics and fantasists give credence to the notion that the politically inept Whites might have actually rebuilt a powerful and popular ‘Russia, One and Indivisible’” (11); for Trotsky the only turning point in the civil war came at Sviiazhsk in early August 1918; thereafter it was just a matter of patience, time and preparation.

Russia's "constitutional experiment" was always flawed by the Tsar's firm opposition to it. His refusal in 1905 to make any genuine constitutional concessions made further revolutionary change inevitable. Jon reminds us of the once popular historical debate about the stability of constitutional Russia, and my small contribution to those exchanges was to point out that Leopold Haimson was right to see the labour movement as revolutionary rather than reformist in 1914, but wrong to assume that this commitment to revolution equated to support for Leninist Bolshevism; thus Leonard Schapiro could also be right in reporting a fall in *Pravda's* circulation in early 1914.² As to the impact of the war and the inevitability of Russia joining that war, I am with Jon in arguing that, from the Tsar's perspective, it was unavoidable, and would agree that the Tsar's assumption of command was an almost inevitable consequence of the *modus operandi* of an archaic autocracy. The war turned the peasants against the government, and the liberals against the government; workers had been against the government even before the war started.

Given that workers and peasants were looking for revolutionary change, and that the liberals effectively wanted a different dynasty, the idea that a constitutional monarchy could have emerged in February 1917, as liberal leader Pavel Miliukov hoped, was pure fantasy. I can only echo Jon: "both Miliukov and Aleksandr Guchkov were forced out of office in May 1917, to little public disquiet . . . [while] Kerensky's declaration of a republic on 1 September hardly raised a ripple of protest" (18). It is impossible to disagree with Jon when he states that, in the civil war "the Whites rightly saw the monarchy as dead and divisive" and avoided any commitment to restoration. However, the survival of a constitutional monarchy is surely a "possible" rather than a "probable" outcome of 1917 and Jon is rather dismissive of the other possibilities and probabilities thrown up during that revolutionary year. He concedes that there were "diverting counterfactual potentials" (19), but none of them were realistic because of the impossibility of Russia escaping from its commitments to the Allies concerning the future of the First World War. Thus, although Jon lists many "what ifs" - what if Lenin had been unable to return from Switzerland? what if Kerensky had put the Bolshevik leaders on trial for treason in the wake of the July Days? what if Kerensky had thrown his support behind Kornilov? what if the June offensive had been cancelled? what if the Constituent Assembly had been summoned earlier? - all of these, he suggests, were, to a greater or lesser extent contingent on the

issue of a war, to which the new revolutionary Russia was irrevocably bound. So, is Jon right at this point to suggest at this point moving “swiftly on to post-October possibilities”.

When sorting through the possibilities and probabilities of 1917, the figure of Kerensky surely grabs our attention. Here it is worth bringing in a slightly different version of counter-factual history, what might be called the “future-spective” analogy. Jumping forward to a different revolution, to autumn-winter 1918-19 in Germany, we see the enormous potential offered by an alliance between moderate socialists and the military. From the moment of the infamous phone call on 10 November 1918 between the new Social Democrat Chancellor Friedrich Ebert and General Wilhelm Groener, First Quartermaster at German Military Headquarters, the reformist wing of German Social Democracy knew it had the military power to match the insurrectionary activities of the revolutionary left; in January 1919 the Spartacist Uprising was crushed and its leaders brutally murdered. Could Kerensky have manoeuvred towards something similar in Russia?

He wanted to take firm action against the Bolsheviks from early in June and after the July Days he was the one who made a break with the Soviet.³ As Boris Kolonitskii has shown so clearly, in the popular perception of politics during summer 1917 the choice seemed to be between Kerensky or Lenin.⁴ It is surely not just possible but probable that firm action by Kerensky in August would have won popular backing. Had Kerensky approached the Allies about war aims with the clear backing of General Kornilov – an understanding which the Allies had been pressing for⁵ – things just might have been different. As things turned out, Kerensky had to approach the Allies after the break with Kornilov, at a time when his Third Coalition Government was already beginning to fall apart. Kerensky, of course, had to cope with Lenin, who was probably the more astute politician. If the Bolsheviks had attempted an insurrection during the July Days, it would have been so much easier for Kerensky to demand extreme measures, but Lenin retreated in July and without a serious charge of insurrection against him, there was just the sensational but dubious issue of German gold.

For me a Kerensky-Kornilov understanding is the only “might have been” of 1917, so we should now move on to the civil war. Jon is, of course, correct in his criticism of “arm-chair strategists” who bemoan the fact that the Whites failed to advance simultaneously. The static map of the civil war, showing the Reds surrounded by White forces, has confused students for decades. The dynamic of the fighting meant that there was scarcely any opportunity for real co-ordination between White forces. Jon is right to suggest that one serious possibility would have been for Kolchak to delay his winter-spring offensive of 1919 until their military preparedness was beyond doubt. Yet the diplomatic circumstances really did require an early victory if Kolchak was to be taken seriously at the Peace Conference then assembling in Paris. The situation at the front also seemed propitious, with the chance of a rapid advance too tempting to ignore: the Latvian Riflemen, the revolution’s praetorian guard, were in the process of being redeployed to Latvia itself, while the activities of Bolshevik Committees of the Poor were undermining Soviet control of strategically important towns like Perm.

Before leaving the realm of arm-chair strategists, however, it is worth recalling that the British Arkhangel’sk landing was premised on the notion that the troops landed there would be able to link up with the anti-Bolshevik forces on the Volga. There is a “might have been” even within the story of co-ordination between the various anti-Bolshevik forces. An Allied descent to Vologda became ever less likely, as Komuch was forced to abandon Samara after the end of September, but there was the fall back route along the northern river Dvina to Kotlas and thence down the railway to Vyatka. The Siberian Army could still be reached and on 13 October, the Directory’s military chief General Boldyrev received an agent sent from General Poole, who proposed an advance to Ekaterinburg and from there an attack on Vyatka.⁶ Immediate action on such a proposal was disrupted on 18 November when Admiral Kolchak overthrew the Directory and arrested for good measure an SR delegation which had travelled from Arkhangel’sk to Omsk to discuss political co-operation with the Directory, including the subordination of the Arkhangel’sk administration to the All-Russian Provisional Government then in the process of being formed.⁷ Even so, efforts were made. By the end of December, Perm had been captured, but the descent of the northern Dvina had had to be abandoned and the attempt to find an alternative route ultimately proved unsuccessful. In the end, the only co-ordinated action between the armed forces of the

North and Siberia came at the end of March 1919, when at Ust-Kozhve on the Pechora river, some three hundred miles east of Archangel'sk, a contingent of northern troops joined forces with a contingent of Siberian troops – but this was too isolated and sparsely populated a region for the link-up to have political significance; the hope that this Pinega offensive of the Northern Army might unite with the advancing Siberian Army proved illusive.⁸ So, with minor caveats, Jon is right that “all musings on a co-ordinated White advance against the Red heartland are pipe dreams” (23).

Where I still find myself disagreeing with Jon is in his assessment of the SRs. For him “the farcical manner” in which the Constituent Assembly was dissolved(24), despite SRs gaining nearly 60% of the popular vote, “might lead us to dismiss claims for such an alternative as wishful thinking” (25). He goes on to cite Orlando Figes in *A People's Tragedy*: “The unalterable fact of the matter was that, whatever was the concrete and symbolic importance of the Constituent Assembly for the SR leaders, for ordinary (overwhelmingly peasant) inhabitants of the collapsing Russian Empire it was at worst an irrelevance and at best a meaningless, amorphous abstraction that mysteriously obsessed the distant, urban party ‘chiefs’.” Figes supports this comment with reference to his own article for *Russian Review*, which mostly deals with the events of 1917, and the bold assertion that “very few [peasants] were prepared to fight the SR battle for [the Constituent Assembly's] restoration, as the dismal failure of the Komuch would prove in the summer of 1918”.⁹

The dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, and the whole Komuch affair, are worth considering in a little more depth, for I have always seen SR actions as the most likely “might have beens” to have succeeded. The dissolution of the Constituent Assembly was not farcical, and the flow of recruits to the Komuch People's Army did rise “above a strangulated, impotent trickle”, and, while the Komuch regime was unlikely to have established itself without the support of the Czechoslovak Legion, support from other Allied forces was episodic and not always welcomed. Komuch did not collapse when Allied support for it was withdrawn, and its “unstable halfway house”, the Directory, actually won Allied recognition (29). Is Jon right to say that the revival of Komuch's fortunes in early November 1918 was merely a “will-o'-the-wisp” (29)?

Is, as Jon suggests, “exaggerated the importance” being given to the People’s Army’s counter-attack around Kandry station, near Ufa(30)?

The circumstances in which the Constituent Assembly was dissolved were extraordinarily complex. The Constituent Assembly might have been an SR obsession, as Jon says, but the dissolution of the assembly was as much the work of the Left SRs as that of the Bolsheviks. It was the Left SRs who had the problem of under-representation in Russia’s first parliament, and, and it was for them that the Declaration of the Rights of Labouring and Exploited People was devised. It was this declaration, which gave local soviets the right to recall recalcitrant deputies, that the SR Party majority rejected, prompting the dissolution of the assembly. At one level this was a squabble among SRs, from which other parties could stand aside: a meeting between SRs and Left SRs on 21 December failed to resolve the matter amicably.¹⁰ And the dissolution was surrounded by talk of forming a Revolutionary Convention, forcing the Constituent Assembly to gather at the same time as the Third Congress of Soviets, the first congress of soviets to bring together both peasants and workers and soldiers,

At the end of December 1917, the Left SR newspaper *Znamia truda* described the Revolutionary Convention as a “rump parliament” surrounded by the Third Congress of Soviets, and on 3 January 1918 the Soviet Executive offered the Constituent Assembly the chance to join the Third Congress of Soviets in forming a Revolutionary Convention if it accepted the Declaration of the Rights of Labouring and Exploited People, which the Soviet Executive had adopted earlier that day. The same Soviet Executive decision included the power to dissolve the assembly in the event of non-compliance, and when the Constituent Assembly opened on 5 January, it endorsed the Soviet land reform, and the opening of peace talks; what it refused to endorse was the Declaration of the Rights of Labouring and Exploited People. Sverdlov asked for it to be endorsed “as the basis on which you can enter the coming convention with the Third Soviet Congress”, but the SR majority refused and the assembly was dissolved.¹¹

Despite the SRs’ obsessive interest in the Constituent Assembly – and although hindsight might suggest this was a strange policy - the SRs wanted the opening of the

Constituent Assembly to be low key. At its Fourth Congress, 26 November – 5 December, the SR Party backed Chernov and his ‘businesslike’ approach to the Constituent Assembly; this meant keeping the terrorist-adventurist wing of the party in check. When, on 16 December 1917, leading members of the Committee to Defend the Constituent Assembly were arrested by the Soviet Executive, including the Pre-Parliament leader Nikolai Avksentiev, there was no protest. All that was planned for the opening of the assembly was a peaceful demonstration. Preparations had been made by the party’s military commission for armed action to defend the Constituent Assembly, but on the night of 4-5 January 1918 the Central Committee decided no action was needed. The military commission was told to act only if the Constituent Assembly were dissolved and if this prompted a spontaneous insurrection from below.¹²

The peaceful SR demonstration took place as planned, but it was not met with a peaceful response from the Soviet authorities. The demonstration in support of the Constituent Assembly was large: Soviet figures mentioned 10,000 participants, while the SRs claimed ten times that figure; Alexander Rabinowitch opts for about 30,000. He notes that between mid day and sunset on 5 January the northern end of Liteinyi Prospekt was a “battle-zone”, when at least 10,000 demonstrators from the Vyborg Side were halted at a barricade. At least a further 15,000 approached the centre from Nevsky District. The response of the Red Guards was brutal; Sverdlov conceded that 21 demonstrators were killed.¹³ Yet before the SRs could assess how to respond to such violence, the issue of peace became all consuming. It was on 5 January that the Germans presented their demands to Trotsky. He immediately asked for an adjournment in the negotiations for ten days and the Bolshevik Central Committee began its tortured discussions on 8 January.¹⁴ The fate of the Constituent Assembly dropped out of the limelight, but its dissolution was scarcely a farce.

Was Komuch “a dismal failure” and the Directory a talking shop doomed from the start? I have long argued that this was not the case, and must risk repeating myself here. Of course, in their initial uprising against the local Bolsheviks in Samara, the SRs had the support of the Czechoslovak Legion. Could the SR insurrection on the Volga have succeeded without the presence of the Czechoslovaks? My best guess is possibly “yes”, but probably “no” – although the fighting capacity of their opponents,

the Fourth Latvian Rifleman Division, was beginning to weaken even then.¹⁵ However, the fact remains that the Czechoslovak Legion did not stay on the Volga for long. It was represented on the staff of the newly formed People's Army; it helped the People's Army capture Simbirsk and Kazan; but it then pushed on eastwards, leaving the fighting on the Volga to the People's Army. The dispute which took place between Allied advisors and the Komuch command about whether or not to capture Kazan before consolidating the People's Army's strength reminds us that Allied support was not the same as Allied control, Komuch had not been working closely with Bruce Lockhart and other Allied representatives, as had been the case with the Union for the Regeneration of Russia.¹⁶

Jon is only half correct to comment that "there are reasons why Allied support was not forthcoming in the case of Komuch and its confrères" (30). The Allies were infuriated by the politicking between SRs and liberals at the state conferences held in Chelyabinsk and Ufa. They did give a "frosty reception" to some representatives of the Union for the Regeneration of Russia, and later, they did recall some diplomats "who dared encourage a new wave of SR and *oblastniki* (regionalist) led rebellions against the White government" once Kolchak took power. But before Kolchak turned on the SRs, Britain was ready to recognise the Directory; the British Cabinet decided to recognise the Directory on 14 November, and on the 16th the British consul in Siberia was informed of the fact. Even General Knox had qualms about Kolchak seizing power in a coup.¹⁷ British unease about dictatorship was made clear in discussions held later with General Iudenich. As Iudenich moved to establish a Northwestern Government in August 1919, the British insisted that this had to be a coalition administration, and, when discussions became tortuous, they issued an ultimatum of just 45 minutes for agreement to be reached; the Northwestern Government was composed of three Kadets, two SRs, one Popular Socialist and two Plekhanov Mensheviks. A month later this government expressed the naïve hope that Kolchak would recognise both Estonia and Latvia as independent states.¹⁸

The Allies preferred coalition to dictatorship, but ultimately they respected effective government, and Komuch had some success in this regard. The Komuch administration was moderate socialist, what the Provisional Government of 1917 would have been without its dependence on the liberals. For many commentators both

then and now that alone is enough to brand it as doomed, but Komuch did have some real achievements. Komuch retained the reforms of February 1917, while undoing the “excesses” introduced by October. The People’s Army it established was a democratic structure, with eight ranks and plain coloured epaulettes; the salary of an officer was little more than a worker’s wage. In Komuch territory, the rights of trade unions and factory committees were restored to their pre-October status.¹⁹ At the same time, a free market in grain was introduced and requisitioning ended; as a result people arriving in Samara from Moscow were surprised by the low prices and ample supplies. In his *Peasant Russia and Civil War: the Volga Countryside in Revolution, 1917-21*, Orlando Figes agrees that there was an abundance of goods in Samara, but puts this down to a good harvest, not the policies of Komuch; it is not clear why. He also points out that, on retaking Samara in October, the Bolsheviks adopted a more relaxed policy on grain requisitioning than elsewhere - was this because they were hesitant to destroy the successes of the free market?²⁰

Figes’ assertion in his Volga study that the Komuch administration was weak in the countryside does not seem to fit the facts. Figes relies heavily on Ivan Maisky’s *Democratic Counter-revolution*, a book published in 1922 through which Maisky sought to ingratiate himself with the Soviet regime. Maisky does write about the way in which the Komuch decision to revive the 1917 land committees meant that some poor peasants were driven off land allocated to them by the land reform of February 1918. However, the frequent repetition of such incidents in Soviet accounts does not prove that such incidents were widespread, simply that they help propagate the Soviet story that the Komuch regime was counter-revolutionary because it favoured the rich ‘kulak’ peasant at the expense of the, allegedly pro-Bolshevik, poor peasant. The Komuch decree of 22 July halting further land seizures was an emergency measure aimed at securing winter sown land and preventing its further seizure or division, even if this meant keeping it temporarily under the control of the existing owner, or the local food supply authority. Some land-owners within Komuch territory did use this decree to try to seize back land by force, incidents that Bolshevik propaganda readily seized on.²¹

As I have pointed out in a contribution to the Russia’s Great War and Revolution volumes, although Scott Smith in *Captives of the Revolution* repeats the trope that

“the SRs had neither the deep roots in the population nor the accumulated political capital to overcome peasant anxieties” much of the evidence he gathers from the mood reports written for the Komuch Department of Agitation, Culture and Propaganda suggests the very opposite. A survey he quotes has three times as many districts supporting Komuch as those opposed or refusing to respond to the survey. The Department of Agitation, Culture and Propaganda was a massive organisation: it oversaw the production of 835,000 pamphlets in Russian and an additional 15,000 in minority languages; the newspaper *Narod* had a print run of 6,000 distributed free of charge; and even though it is widely accepted that recruitment to the People’s Army was a problem, the Quartermaster General of the People’s Army recalled that although recruits had “the attitudes of 1918”, they mostly turned up and in some areas in numbers “surpassing expectations” – thanks largely to the department’s activities within the army.²² When, in September 1918, Komuch reluctantly started to resort to the requisitioning of grain, the authority of the People’s Army could be challenged: thus one of Komuch’s last actions in Samara, on 24 September, was to review the case of 13 people condemned to death by a military court. On 27 September, when moves to evacuate Samara were already underway, 500,000R were allocated to the Department of Agitation, Culture and Propaganda for raising morale in the People’s army. Even in Samara’s last days, when rationing had been introduced and deserters were being threatened with execution, the SR leader Chernov could persuade the Samara provincial congress of peasants to give Komuch a vote of confidence.²³

Komuch was socialist. It introduced egalitarian wage controls, and put limits on the amount of compensation which could be paid to denationalised enterprises. Komuch was “committee-mad”: continuing the worst, or best, of 1917, it tried to run the economy through “a special meeting on defence” comprising representatives of trade and industry, the local authorities, the war department, the trade unions, the co-operatives and the Samara Council of the National Economy (established by the Bolsheviks and retained by the SRs). This body also oversaw the powerful unit supplying the People’s Army. Komuch flew the red flag, used the slogan “all power to the people”: its declaration insisted that “land belongs irretrievably to the people”. Although workers’ meetings could only take place outside work time, Komuch intervened to stop arbitrary action by employers, reinforcing the point that all the 1917 legislation remained in force.²⁴ At the SR trial in 1922, the Komuch leaders said

that their policies had been almost identical to those of Lenin under NEP, and there certainly were similarities.²⁵

The case for Komuch being “dismal” is often linked to its relationship with the Directory, which is in turn dismissed as “dismal” by its critics. During the Ufa State Conference, 8-23 September 1918, Komuch was gradually losing control of Samara, and so its negotiating position at Ufa was weakened. However, the Ufa Accord was the work of V. K. Volskii, the Komuch Chairman, and the centrist faction of the SR Party which he led. The Ufa Accord was not Volskii’s preferred way forward, but it was the only way to preserve unity given that, on 29 August, the Komuch Presidium had voted that members of the Constituent Assembly would be attending the Ufa State Conference as deputies to the sovereign Constituent Assembly: this meant that they could not be mandated to vote in any particular way by Komuch or by the SR Central Committee. The consequence of this was that the Right-wing of the SR Party, mostly members of the Union for the Regeneration of Russia, would agree to form a coalition with the liberals whatever the SR Central Committee or Komuch decided; a coalition-based Directory was bound to be the result of the Ufa discussions, and Volskii and the SR Centre set out to secure as much influence in the proposed Directory as was possible.²⁶

The Directory did get off to an unfortunate start. When the SR A. E. Novoselov, Minister of the Interior of the underground Government of the Far East, was shot on the orders of the Siberian Government in Omsk to prevent him from being co-opted into the Siberian Government and thus depriving that government of its liberal majority, the Directory’s first action was to decide to take no serious action. Furthermore, the decision to move the Directory’s base as far east as Omsk seemed to put it at the mercy of the Siberian Government. It was housed in a small two-storey house on the outskirts of the city and initially had to request permission from the Minister of Communications in the Siberian Government each time it wanted to use the telegraph network. Ultimately the Directory was allowed to use the apparatus of government established by the Siberian Government’s Administrative Council, but only so long as it was prepared to act in agreement with the membership of that Administrative Council. In these circumstances, it was very difficult to be seen to be implementing the decisions of the Ufa Accord which clearly stated that the only

Directory had executive powers and stood above all existing regional governments. However, this position of dependence and subservience did not continue for long. When, on 18 October, the Directory began the task of appointing ministers to a new All-Russian Provisional Government which would stand above all purely regional governments, it succeeded in appointing SRs to key posts, despite at times tense and difficult negotiations with the Administrative Council. And, when junior ministers came to be appointed, the position of the SRs was strengthened still further. By the start of November, the Directory had clearly recovered the initiative from the Administrative Council.²⁷

Snapping at the heels of the Directory was the SR Central Committee. Meeting in Ufa on 22 October, the SR Central Committee, enraged by reports of the concessions being made by the Directory to the Administrative Council, voted to reject the Ufa Accord. At the same time, it adopted the “Chernov Charter”, a resolution calling for the party’s all-round political educational and military mobilisation against the danger of a Right-wing military coup. V. M. Zenzinov, the voice of the SRs on the Directory, criticised the timing of the “Chernov Charter”, but not its content. It came, he stated on 24 October, when the Directory was turning the tables on the Administrative Council, when “we are standing up for what is accepted and essential for everyone”. Despite Zenzinov’s reassurance, Komuch declared the same day that it would not liquidate itself as the Ufa Accord called on every pre-existing regional government to do. Komuch argued that the Siberian Government had not really resigned, because of the powers retained by the Administrative Council, and therefore it would not resign. This decision was communicated to Zenzinov on 5 November, and, on 10 November, Komuch refused to attend a meeting with the Directory’s Liquidation Commission, established to wind up the various regional governments operating east of the Urals.²⁸

Much of this dispute between Komuch and the Directory was based on the confusion of fast-moving events – Chernov was protesting at the Directory’s actions in early October, not what had been achieved by the end of the month. A compromise began to emerge on 15 November, when Komuch proposed that it would formally dissolve under the terms of the Ufa Accord, but retain authority over a front area. Constituent Assembly deputies were informed at this time that Komuch would be transformed into a “Urals Self-Administration” under the authority of a plenipotentiary appointed

by the Directory, a plenipotentiary who would in turn appoint assistants who would all have to be deputies to the Constituent Assembly. This degree of autonomy for Komuch in a frontal zone seems to have been aimed at allowing the People's Army volunteer Constituent Assembly battalions, which operated at the front, to remain in existence, despite the fact that the Directory and General Boldyrev had expressed outright opposition to the "political" nature of such volunteer units.²⁹

In the eyes of General Boldyrev, and of the Siberian Army based in Omsk, the work of the Komuch Department for Agitation, Culture and Propaganda, with its special military sub-department, risked importing the sort of dual authority allegedly seen in the Red Army, with commanders and commissars constantly at loggerheads. When, on 16 November, Boldyrev and Kolchak quarrelled bitterly, was it because Boldyrev was considering a Directory compromise on this issue? As Komuch and the Directory began to finalise the terms under which Komuch would transform itself into a purely regional administration for Ufa and the front line, Zenzinov could inform Komuch that in recent days the position of the Directory "had strengthened enormously"; "the business of government was falling into place", he commented.³⁰

Certainly, by the start of November the situation at the front had greatly improved, possibly because, on 22 October, Komuch had allocated another 500,000 roubles for work within the People's Army, particularly on the formation of the new volunteer units. The British officer Leo Stevini noted at this time the success of General Kappel in turning the front back towards Samara. It is probably an exaggeration to suggest, as Serge Petroff has done, that his father, the Quartermaster of the People's Army, had retreated in good order from Samara, just waiting for the right moment to counter-attack. However, contemporaries are clear that counter-attacks took place, and the most significant of these occurred near Belebei and Kandry Station. This attack was the work of a thousand fresh troops, well-armed and newly formed, volunteers in Constituent Assembly battalions supplied with new uniforms. Volunteers had always stood at the core of the fighting strength of the People's Army: at its height, it numbered 50,000, but of these the majority were recruits and some 40% of the soldiers were never properly armed; it was only 10,000 men, over half of them volunteers, who were considered capable of holding their own under fire.³¹

At Belebei and Kandry Station, after four days of fighting, the Red Army was lured into a trap and surrounded; as one of the commanders recalled “the Red fist was neutralised”.³² Nearly thirty years ago, on my first academic visit to Riga, I remember how Valdis Bērziņš, the pre-eminent historian of the Latvian Riflemen within the Latvian Academy of Sciences, pressed into my hands a photocopy of the telegram the Eastern Front commander had received on 10 November 1918 from the supposedly all-conquering Latvian Riflemen: the telegram requested permission to retreat since “the enemy has launched an offensive with overwhelming force at Kandry Station”.³³ Bērziņš had never been able to publish this document or write about its implications in Soviet times and looked to me to act on it. With the Constituent Assembly battalions leading a successful counter-attack at Belebei and Kandry Station, it is hard to imagine General Boldyrev continuing to insist on the need for their dissolution.

Thus, for all Jon’s scepticism, I still believe that Komuch stood a chance. As Konstantin Morozov noted in a recent contribution to the *Russia’s Great War and Revolution* volumes: “I would venture to suggest that if Komuch had survived for a few years, including in peace time conditions, we would have seen an entirely different model of societal development than the communist model.”³⁴ Equally, I still maintain that the Directory was overthrown on 18 November not because it was hopelessly weak but because it was beginning to get a grip on affairs of state and pursue policies clearly against the interests of the former Siberian Government. The Directory was “doomed” to be overthrown by the Whites because of its growing strength, not because of its perennial weakness. And that growing strength rested in turn on the success of Komuch in re-organising and re-invigorating the People’s Army through the formation of Constituent Assembly battalions. So, in remembering these events, should we not talk of Komuch in terms of “an heroic” not “a dismal” failure? Although pigs really do not fly, as Jon states repeatedly, “the potentials of Leftist Anti-Bolshevism” are not so “quite straightforwardly dismissible” as he claims.

¹ Orlando Figes, *A People’s Tragedy: the Russian Revolution 1891-1924* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1996, p. 483.

² G. R. Swain “Bolsheviks and Metal Workers on the Eve of the First World War” *Journal of Contemporary History* no. 2, vol. 16, 1981, pp. 273-293.

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- ³ W. H. Roobol *Tsereteli – A Democrat in the Russian Revolution* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), pp. 142, 160
- ⁴ B. I. Kolonitskii, “Nastuplenie Kerenskogo”, paper given to the Conference of the Study Group on the Russian Revolution, 7-9 January 2016.
- ⁵ Geoffrey Swain *The Origins of the Russian Civil War* (London: Longman, 1996), p. 103.
- ⁶ Swain *Origins*, p. 230.
- ⁷ Swain *Origins*, p. 242.
- ⁸ The Pinega offensive is discussed by V. I. Goldin in “The Northern Front” to be published in the forthcoming RGWR volume on the Russian Civil War.
- ⁹ Figes *People’s Tragedy*, pp. 518-19. Figes’ article is “The Russian Revolution of 1917 and its Language in the Village”, *Russian Review* 1997, vol. 56, no. 3, pp. 323-345.
- ¹⁰ Swain *Origins*, p. 81.
- ¹¹ Swain *Origins*, pp. 81-2.
- ¹² Swain *Origins*, pp. 89-91.
- ¹³ Alexander Rabinowitch *The Bolsheviks in Power: the First Year of Soviet Rule in Petrograd* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), p. 107.
- ¹⁴ Swain *Origins*, pp. 97-8.
- ¹⁵ This is discussed in Geoffrey Swain “The Disillusioning of the Revolution’s Praetorian Guard: the Latvian Riflemen, Summer-Autumn 1918”, *Europe-Asia Studies* vol. 51, no. 4, 1999.
- ¹⁶ Swain *Origins*, pp. 181, 200.
- ¹⁷ Swain *Origins*, p. 245.
- ¹⁸ Iudenich and his government are discussed by V. Zh. Tsvetkov in “The North Western Front”, to be published in the forthcoming RGWR volume on the Russian Civil War.
- ¹⁹ Swain *Origins*, p. 188.
- ²⁰ Orlando Figes *Peasant Russia and Civil War: the Volga Countryside in Revolution, 1917-21* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 170.
- ²¹ Figes *Peasant Russia*, p. 168; Swain *Origins*, pp. 189-90, 214-5.
- ²² Geoffrey Swain “The Democratic Counterrevolution Reconsidered” in Christopher Read et al. eds. *Russia’s Home Front in War and Revolution, 1914-22. Book 4: Reintegration – the Struggle for the State* (Bloomington: Slavica, 2018), p. 405.
- ²³ Swain *Origins*, p. 190.
- ²⁴ Swain *Origins*, p. 180.
- ²⁵ Swain “Democratic Counterrevolution”, pp. 407-8.
- ²⁶ Swain *Origins*, p. 222.
- ²⁷ Swain *Origins*, p. 233.
- ²⁸ Swain *Origins*, pp. 237, 239-40.
- ²⁹ Swain *Origins*, p. 241.
- ³⁰ Swain “Democratic Counterrevolution”, p. 422.
- ³¹ Swain “Democratic Counterrevolution”, p. 421.
- ³² Swain “Democratic Counterrevolution”, p. 419.
- ³³ Swain “Democratic Counterrevolution”, p. 420.
- ³⁴ Konstantin Morozov “The Unrealised Democratic Alternative to Tsarism and ‘to Bolshevism Right and Left’: the Socialist Revolutionary Party in the Era of Wars and Revolutions, 1914-22” in Christopher Read et al. eds. *Russia’s Home Front in War and Revolution, 1914-22. Book 4: Reintegration – the Struggle for the State* (Bloomington: Slavica, 2018), p. 311.