

**THE IMAGE OF THE ENEMY
IN BOLSHEVIK POLITICAL POSTERS
DURING THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION
AND THE CIVIL WAR**

Abstract

The Image of the Enemy in Bolshevik political posters during the October Revolution and the Civil War

This three-part paper analyses how the Bolsheviks categorised, conceptualised, and stylized their enemies in political posters throughout the course of the October Revolution and the Civil War. Therefore, the primary source used in this dissertation is the Bolshevik poster. By analysing posters in the context of the Civil War three primary questions are posed and answered: How was the enemy labelled? What was the mental prism in which this system of labelling functioned in? What style was used in depicting the enemy? This paper argues that categorizing the enemy was much a difficult process for the Bolsheviks. Firstly, once the Civil War began the Bolsheviks quickly learned they could not label other groups in typical Marxist class divisions and therefore, they had to modify, and in some cases discard, the Marxist labels to adapt to the complexities of Russian society. Secondly, analysis of posters demonstrates that the labelling and depiction of the enemy worked within two systems that overlapped and clashed at the same time. The Bolsheviks were forced to conceptualise the enemy within the language of a post-February public that still contained elements of Tsarist patriotic culture which was incompatible with the Bolsheviks internationalist outlook. Thirdly, the style and format in which the Bolsheviks poster depicted the enemy varied widely between three different institutions that all encompassed everything from the ancient Russian lubok to the most cutting-edge European satire. Finally, what this paper argues that even as early as Civil War the Bolsheviks were already diluting their Marxist ideology with Russian tradition.

Introduction

This paper is about the image of the enemy as represented in Bolshevik posters during the Civil War years of 1918-1921. The reason I chose this topic was because amongst all areas that have been researched about the Soviet Union this particular area seems to be well under-researched. Without a vast array of historical literature to rely on I was free to pursue my own type of original research. Not only did my research reference upon historical and political contexts of the Civil War but it also touched upon the relationship between psychology, propaganda, and the Russian art tradition, which were all areas, that I felt, had not been quite as juxtaposed together before.

What is the importance of this topic? First of all, propaganda was an integral part of the Soviet system and by analysing it we start to understand the Russian form of Marxism. What set the Bolsheviks apart from other regimes was that that they had an idealized model of society. The Bolshevik's ideology 'described for them an end (communism) and the means to achieve it (the party as instrument and class struggle)¹ and within this system they were utterly convinced in the possibility of shaping man's conscience. Therefore, propaganda for the Bolsheviks functioned as a tool not only for indoctrination but for education. It would be misleading, then, to simply view Bolshevik depiction of the enemy as nothing more than hatred-stirring.² The best definition of propaganda to apply to the Bolsheviks would be a broad one, one where it's defined 'the

¹ Peter Holquist. *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1921*. (Cambridge, Mass., 2002), p. 166.

² See: The Institute for Propaganda Analysis. *How to Detect Propaganda* // Robert Jackall (ed.). *Propaganda*. (New York, 1995).

technique of influencing human action by the manipulation of representations'.³ Neither is it helpful to categorise early Bolshevik propaganda along totalitarian regimes such, as the Nazis. The Bolsheviks, unlike the Nazis, never had their own Goebbels⁴. In early post-revolutionary years they had to compromise their own ideas about the enemy and face the realities of a post-February public, which had its own distinct conceptions of the enemy. In fact, this is a subtle, yet constant theme throughout this dissertation.

In the first part of my paper it is argued that the Bolsheviks inconsistently had to compromise with who they labelled as an enemy for pragmatic reason, while in the second part I analyse, through the use of posters, the constant clash between the Bolshevik paranoid mentality and the public's own conception of the enemy. The enemy, in the Bolshevik poster, functioned not only within a 'set of doctrines with pretence of predictive power that could be presented as self contained whole'⁵ but also as a self-referential tool that reinforced the Bolsheviks own self-identity. In other words, there *had* to be an enemy, be it a Cossack, a capitalist, kulak, or foreign invaders, because the Marxist narrative required it, but also because it was a way for the Bolsheviks to differentiate themselves and create a sense of identity. Here I also demonstrate how this quest in differentiating oneself from the enemy and for self-identity took on almost pathological dimensions for the Bolsheviks.

The second part of this paper also shows that, the Bolsheviks appropriation of traditional Russian conception of the enemy was only half-hearted. The second part delves into this visual tension, where the poster was meant to incite hatred of the enemy,

³ Harold D. Lasswell. Propaganda // Robert Jackall (ed.). *Propaganda*. (New York, 1995), p. 13.

⁴ See: Leonard W. Doob. Goebbels' Principles of Propaganda // Robert Jackall (ed.). *Propaganda*. (New York, 1995).

⁵ Peter Kenez. *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 7.

but only on ideological and class grounds, and not on Russian chauvinistic nationalism. The imagery of depicting the enemy, therefore, was constructed in a way that dehumanized the enemy in traditional nationalist propaganda, but justified his destruction strictly on a Marxist (class) template. In essence, the analysis of posters reveals how the Bolsheviks could not reconcile their internationalist tendencies with the public's understanding of the enemy through a nationalist prism. Therefore, I would disagree with Peter Kenez's assertion that the Bolsheviks actively and strongly supported traditional Russian nationalism.⁶ The real picture is much more complicated.

The third part of this paper reinforces this point further when we realise that in the mere four years of the Civil War the Bolshevik poster evolved in three different publishing institutions (VTSIK, Litizdat, ROSTA), each of which had radical, often clashing style in depicting the enemy. The general trend, if there ever was one, was that the Bolsheviks constantly changed styles of their posters to what they thought would accommodate the situation they were in at specific time and for a specific milieu. The Civil War was a time of desperate struggle for the Bolsheviks and they were willing to try new and unconventional methods in representing the enemy.

The main primary source in this dissertation is the early Bolshevik poster itself. Apart from pathbreaking studies on Soviet poster by Stephen White and Victoria Bonnell, which include a wide range of visual images,⁷ quite a few poster albums were published recently in Russia,⁸ as well as some Internet sites specifically devoted to Soviet posters.⁹

⁶ Ibid. P. 12.

⁷ See: Stephen White. *The Bolshevik Poster* (New Haven. 1988); Victoria Bonnell. *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin*. (Berkeley, 1997).

⁸ See the list of primary sources in the Bibliography.

⁹ See: <http://www.internationalposter.com>; <http://www.davno.ru/posters>; <http://www.plakaty.ru>

Part One

Labelling the Enemy: Political Dynamics and Shifting Alliances

In a vast country with limited communications and mass illiteracy amongst the population, the new regime had to rely on visual propaganda to get its message across. Thus the poster became one of the most important tools of the Bolsheviks in the battle for the hearts and minds of the people. The Bolshevik poster campaign started in summer 1918. The first poster was of the Tsar, priest and Kulak. Their classification and overall presentation as enemies was not solid, however. While the image of the Tsar remained constant, the image of the priest and the Kulak changed often, depending on the on the population it was addressed to. From the beginning of the Civil War the classification the Kulak was utilized by the Bolshevik, since it did not originate from them, but gained currency from the food supply crises during 1917¹⁰. At first, the Bolsheviks made no distinction between the Kulak and the capitalist in their political posters. However, as Donald Raleigh demonstrates, the Bolsheviks classification on who was the enemy was always in a state of flux depending on the situation at any given time during the course of the Civil War¹¹.

¹⁰ See: Victoria Bonnell. *Iconography of Power*, p. 202, 204.

¹¹ See: Donald Raleigh. *Experiencing Russia's Civil War: Politics, Society, and Revolutionary Culture in Saratov, 1917-22* (Princeton, 2002).

The Kulak, for instance, was depicted with fancy clothes and jewellery. However within a year or so the standardized version of the kulak changed to that of the less affluent, unkempt beard and long hair peasant. Likewise, the attack on religion through political posters showed constant experimentation, where at first there was a Roman Catholic priest with a skull cap or a Russian Orthodox priest with long flowing white beard, the nature of the threat from religion would change from scheming and evil to a more foolish, rather than fiendish expression. Whereas, before the priest was presented as oppressing figure in alliance with the Tsar and the landlords, later propaganda aimed to demoralize religion by presenting the figure of the priest as having failed in his primary function in religion. He is now presented as a foolish fat character who is self-satisfied and greedy. Russian priest (*pop*) and Orthodox religion were depicted much harsher than for example the Muslim¹².

As the poster addressed to the Moslem population (**Fig. 1**) shows, Bolsheviks addressed Moslems as a religious group but tried to “re-class” them in Marxist terms. The text in the poster is self-revealing: “Comrades Moslemen! Under the green banner of Prophet you gone to conquer of yours steppes, yours auls (villages). Enemies of the people take yours fields. Now under red banner of revolution of workers and peasants, under the star of army all of oppressed and workings assembled from East and West, from North and South. To the saddles, comrades!”

What guided the labelling of enemies for the Bolsheviks was the basic turn of events from the time they seized power in October and throughout the Civil War. For example, when the Bolsheviks first came to power their system of labelling enemies

¹² On Bolsheviks tactics in anti-Muslim propaganda see: David Powell. *Antireligious Propaganda in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, Mass, 1975), p. 26.

consisted of two classifications which were affected by two sources. The first classification, as announced by the 1918 Constitution of the Russian Soviet Federation, was more in line with Bolshevik and Marxist narrative of class divisions. This first category included those who employed hired labour, persons living on non-labouring income, private traders and commercial middlemen, monks and clerics, and, more amusingly, those ‘convicted of crimes of greed and depravity’¹³. The people in this category were viewed within the strict confines of Marxist class considering that there was no bargaining with these people, because ‘class was genetic and unredeemable’. The second category included political enemies of the Bolsheviks such as the White Army generals who could never be co-opted into an alliance with the regime. The Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries, on the other hand, could be ‘converted’ to Bolshevism.

Statistics on the poster production demonstrate there were considerable swings in the subject matter within the course of the Civil War. While the output of posters rose sharply over the post-revolutionary years it was the political and military posters which were increasingly emphasized at the expense of economic and cultural themes. At the peak of the Civil War in 1920 military and politically-themed poster made up 42% and 30% of all posters, while economic and culturally themed posters took a backseat with only 18% and 9%.¹⁴ Furthermore, the enemies in the course of the Civil War became defined through posters as less allegorical and symbolic and more concrete and local. Thus, the basic pattern of the subject matter followed the narrative of the Revolution and the Civil War. First, when the regime first came to power it defined its enemies almost strictly on a Marxist narrative. Then, when it was challenged from within it sought to

¹³ See: Victoria Bonnell. *Iconography of Power*. P. 191.

¹⁴ See: Stephen White. *The Bolshevik Poster*, p. 91.

reclassify its enemies on a less ideological level and on a more a pragmatic one, which would be more appealing to the public and based on Russian nationalism. Then, finally, when the regime established itself the enemy became more allegorical and symbolic, as the Bolsheviks began to deal with social and economic development and not a specific enemy.

At the peak of the Civil War in the autumn of 1919 the subject matter of the posters changed quite dramatically. Whereas in 1918 and early 1919 posters saw the regime more confident in pursuing its ideological propaganda in the Marxist vein, where the emphasis on the enemy in posters tended to be in the internationalist Comintern vein by the second half of 1919, where the crisis of the Civil War was very serious, depiction of the enemy became much more attuned to specific battles in the war. This transition can be noted by looking at how slogans on posters changed. For example, in early in 1918 and early 1919 Bolsheviks attacked international bourgeoisie through slogans such as ‘How the English Oppress the Peasants in their Dominions’, ‘Either Death to Capital, or Death Under the Heel of Capital’, ‘The Master of the World is Capital, the Golden Idol’, demystified and demoralized the old regime through such posters as ‘How the Tsar deceived the People’, ‘The Rich Man and the Paunchy Priest’, or the ‘People’s Court’ and pronounce victory of international workers through such posters as ‘The People of the World welcome the Red Army of Labor’, ‘The Building of Socialism’, and ‘Only the Red Army will give us Bread’.

However, by autumn 1919 when Admiral Kolchak occupied most of Siberia in the East, Denikin advanced to within 200 miles of Moscow in October and Yudenich reached the outskirts of Petrograd by May of 1919 the emphasis swiftly changed amongst

propaganda institutions, such as Litizdat and ROSTA Windows to these specific challenges. It is interesting to note the nature of the threat posed by these so called 'counter-revolutionaries' was occasionally conveyed in diametrically opposed ways. For example, in the posters 'Retreating before the Red Army' and 'Liberators' Denikin is portrayed as a brutal sadist who slaughters indiscriminately and anyone who should encounter him becomes his next victim. Both posters seem to depict the enemy within the context of Christian morality, attempting to appeal to the peasant's moral outrage against killing innocent women and children. However, later in the year posters such as 'Denikin's Band', 'The Unshakable Fortress' and, especially, 'At the Grave of the Counter-Revolution' (**Fig. 2**) mocked and satirized the enemy. This shift in the depiction of the nature of the threat of the enemy has to be put in the context of the events of the Civil War. By February of 1920 Kolchak was executed, while Denikin was forced back into the Crimea and by November Yudenich's were successfully pushed away from Petrograd. The depiction of the enemy in these posters have to be contrasted with posters such as 'The Enemy is at the Gates' or 'The Enemy wants to capture Tula', which depict the enemy as a serious threat in these most urgent and desperate times. Again, we see that by 1920 the threat from these enemies have been downgraded. When they posed a serious threat they were depicted as almost equals to the proletariat in terms of general appearance. For example, where as in 1919 Denikin was depicted as a tall, strong looking brutal character within the span of a few months he has been downgraded and mocked as a small fat balding captain who feebly attempts to attack a strong Soviet Russia. The same can be said about Wrangel (**Fig. 3**).

These patterns of classification of enemy, as demonstrated by these posters, seem to confirm what Donald Raleigh has termed the Bolsheviks ‘two languages’¹⁵. The Bolshevik discourse characterized enemies into two, potentially contradictory languages that overlapped when the situation for the Bolsheviks seemed grim. The first language, the external language, was the ‘official language’, comprising of newspapers, public meetings, and propaganda. The internal language, on the other hand, consisted of confidential reports, closed meeting, and private forums. Raleigh’s case study of Saratov Bolsheviks shows how the two overlapped. For example, whereas in the beginning the external or ‘official’ language categorized those who could be converted to the Bolshevik cause, such as the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries and for those which only destruction awaited, such as the loosely-termed ‘bourgeoisie’ the events of spring and summer of 1918 seems to have broken down this system. First, the elections of April 1918 had not generated as many seats as expected for the Bolsheviks, where ‘the bitter polemics associated with the election campaign spilled over into the first plenum meeting of the newly elected soviet, which expelled the Right SR’s and Mensheviks from the council. As a result they ‘invoked the tautology that their enemies were not only the bourgeoisie, but their servants the Mensheviks and the Right SR’s’.¹⁶

At this point the enemy categorizations that the Bolsheviks strictly adhered to had broken down as the bourgeoisie, the Cossacks, and others socialist parties lost their distinctiveness. This was further compounded by the May 1918 in which the Right SR’s joined disgruntled troops and former tsarist officers against the Saratov Soviets, while the

¹⁵ Donald Raleigh. *Experiencing Russia’s Civil War*, p. 44. See also: Michael Gorham. *Speaking in Soviet Tongues: Language Culture and the Politics of Voice in Revolutionary Russia* (DeKalb, 2003); Orlando Figes & Boris Kolonitskii. *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and the Symbols of 1917* (New Haven, 1999), p. 104-126.

¹⁶ Donald Raleigh. *Experiencing Russia’s Civil War*, p. 49.

Mensheviks were unwilling to support them. The external language used against the international capitalists, in such posters as ‘The Entente under the Mask of Peace’ (**Fig. 4**) now applied to these ‘false’ socialists who were now depicted as having ‘had occupied ‘a ‘wait-and-see position’’ until it seemed that the insurrectionists had won the upper-hand, whereupon they ‘tear off their masks’’ and stepped up their agitations against the Soviet’.

However, the case of Saratov also shows that the Bolsheviks were also very careful on who they categorized as enemies. While the constitution of 1918 categorized Cossacks as enemy by May of 1919 the Bolsheviks had to compromise with this. The White offensive at the time had required grain requisitioning at the time, which the peasants refused. In the beginning the Bolsheviks externally categorized any peasants who refused turning over his grain as a counterrevolutionary and placed the Saratov region under Martial Law. However, this was unsuccessful as peasant conscripts murdered the local military commissar and bread reserves only lasting for 10 days. What’s important here is that, internally, through the Eight Party Congress, for instance, the Bolsheviks were now re-categorizing the peasants as ‘middle peasants’ to make a distinction away from Kulak, while externally, through posters and local newspapers, was admitting that ‘encounters with Soviet power had provided ‘understandable grounds for discontent’ and that there should ‘the most thoughtful consideration to the needs and legitimate demands of the toiling peasantry...’¹⁷

¹⁷ Ibid. P. 66.

Part Two.

Conceptualizing the Enemy:

The Negative Identity and the Civil War Imagination

It is now important to examine the mental prism through which the Bolsheviks created these enemies. Two approaches are used to dissect the image of the enemy. The first approach focuses on what Robert Robins and Jerold Post call classical political paranoia¹⁸. In this psychological prism images of the enemy are constructed through elements of suspiciousness of others, negative identity, and grandiosity. The work of Sam Keen is especially useful here because it provides a system of several different categories in which the Bolsheviks can be classified as working within¹⁹. The importance of the concept of political paranoia is useful because by projecting a negative identity on to the Tsarists, Mensheviks, the Entente powers, the Polish, the Whites, and the Orthodox Church it fuelled the need for Bolsheviks to have an enemy, and also because ‘to maintain the sense of group – and self-cohesion we must differentiate ourselves from strangers’.²⁰ The second paradigm in which the Bolsheviks conceptualised the enemy was within the new language of February Revolution. After the optimism of the February Revolution had withered away the public demanded that the gains of the revolution be

¹⁸ See: Robert Robins, Jerrold Post. *Political Paranoia: The Psychopolitics of Hatred* (New Haven, 1997).

¹⁹ See: Sam Keen. *Faces of the Enemy: Reflections of the Hostile Imagination*. (San Francisco, 1986).

²⁰ Robert Robins, Jerrold Post. *Political Paranoia*, p. 18.

protected from the forces of chaos.²¹ This is how the term ‘counter-revolutionary’ found its way into the Bolshevik poster. As a result, the enemies’ destruction was inevitably linked and justified within a tripartite that also included ‘the gains of the revolution’ and ‘the dark forces’. However, it should be noted that these two approaches adopted by the Bolsheviks were in no way mutually exclusive or somehow followed chronologically one another. Instead, these conceptualizations mixed and clashed with each other.

Throughout the course of the Civil War Bolsheviks political posters worked within the confines Bolsheviks political paranoia which can be summarized fairly neatly into Same Keen’s ‘archetypes’ of the enemy. Some of the categories in his study that fit into this psychological prism include ‘the enemy as aggressor’, ‘the faceless enemy’, and ‘the greedy enemy’. Other categories, such as ‘the enemy as a stranger’, ‘the enemy as torturer’, and ‘the enemy as criminal’ were pragmatically adjusted by the Bolsheviks in the post-February revolutionary landscape to appeal to the national mood.

Conceptualizing the enemy as an aggressor follows two major rules in Bolshevik posters throughout the Civil War. The paranoid’s mind follows two extremes in depicting the enemy because it must not allow ambiguities: the hero or the defender must either be supremely strong or masochistically weak and feel threatened by the enemy. This is exemplified none more so than two posters from 1919 and 1920. The 1919 poster entitled ‘We Won’t Give Up Petrograd’ (**Fig. 5**) depicts the defenders of Petrograd as all male giants attacking ant-like invaders from their ships. The defenders are standing honourably, with calmness and a readiness to resist, while the invaders swarm in like bees with a flag equates monarchy with death. This defender-aggressor scenario is further enhanced by

²¹ For primary sources see: Mark Steinberg. *Voices of Revolution, 1917* (New Haven, 2001), p. 250- 308.

the fact that Petrograd is depicted as more of a castle than a city. All of this compounds to depict the paranoid 'defender' as 'an incurably dualistic, moralistic Manichean'²². The enemy is guilty, the defender is innocent. The enemy attacks, while the defender only resists. The enemy's weapons are used for destruction; the paranoid defender only uses weapons for deterrence.

In a poster entitled 'Long Live the Worldwide Red October' (**Fig. 6**) commemorating the 3rd anniversary of the October Revolution this process is chronicled two parts. This is what might be called a process of 'projection' in which the paranoid attributes exaggerated size and power to his enemies and in doing so 'transforms the intolerable internal threat into a more manageable external threat'.²³ In October 1917 the defender, or more specifically, the paranoid, is depicted as surrounded by enemies. Outnumbering him, they latch on and try to pull him under. He is struggling to resist them and is the only symbol of a 'red' socialist future surrounded by the dark forces of monarchist, Orthodox, and capitalist backwardness. Outnumbered he is only able to fend them off with a wooden stick. By October 1920 the skies are red and many of his soviet allies are trampling the enemy cowards, such as Denikin and Wrangel. The enemy has now dwindled and is at the mercy of the socialists, who possess more superior weapons.

The second main conceptualizing dynamic of Bolshevik posters was to dehumanize the enemy or make him faceless, with no traceable human features. This dynamic had two effects. First, by dehumanizing the enemy the Bolsheviks were able to wage war not just against specific individuals or groups, but with enemy ideologies. Secondly, by turning the enemy into a vague idea the public could be incited into

²² Sam Keen. *Faces of the Enemy*, p. 22.

²³ Robert Robins, Jerrold Post. *Political Paranoia*, p. 15.

violence more easily, because they would be fighting something that was not human. Several posters encapsulate this dynamic. The first one, from 1919, entitled ‘The Enemy wants to take over Moscow’ (**Fig. 7**) was an attack on the monarchy. In the poster, the enemy is shown from behind and, therefore, faceless. He is symbolically black, and overbearing and monolithic. With a chain ready to enslave the people he attempts consume them. An interesting point must be mentioned here. The slogans proclaim that ‘the enemy must be destroyed’ and orders ‘forward comrades!’ These appeals demonstrate how dehumanizing the enemy triggers, what Keen refers to as ‘the hostile imagination’. The ‘comrades’ in the posters are no more than an undistinguished mass united as one ready to destroy the ‘monarchy’ in a humanity versus monster scenario. This unity is a by-product of simplifying the enemy, which ‘paralyzes thought, to prevent discrimination and to condition individuals to act as a mass.’²⁴ This simplification is further explored in another allegorical poster from 1918, ‘To the deceived brothers’ (**Fig. 8**). It depicts graphic scenes of a man pitted against monstrous beasts who exemplify the living embodiment of monarchism, imperialism, the Church, and capitalism all rolled into one abomination. After all, the ultimate function in dehumanizing the enemy was to communicate that what people were fighting against was not a person, but an idea. By fleshing out the enemy in an inhuman form, be it the monarchy or imperialism, the affect was for the crowd react rather than think, and ‘automatically focus on free-floating hostility, indistinct frustrations, and unnamed fears’.²⁵

The Bolsheviks had problems from the very beginning of February in understanding how the public thought of the enemy. According to Mark Steinberg, within

²⁴ Sam Keen. *Faces of the Enemy*, p. 25.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

just the span of several months, from February to July, the concept of the enemy had evolved drastically. The February Revolution was initially perceived as a patriotic revolution, which was initially tied to anti-German and anti-monarchist sentiments²⁶. However, by the summer the public mood began to sour, with ‘many lower class Russian feeling that this freedom had not been realized but that won in February was being eroded and that repression and tyranny were being returning’²⁷. The concept of freedom was also changing. Whereas initially freedom was understood in abstract terms in which people were simply left to do as they pleased, by the summer the press was criticising the lower class Russians ‘for their wilful and irresponsible intoxication with liberty’²⁸. The Provisional government was asking people to sacrifice personal interest to protect their hard-won freedoms against the Germans. For many now ‘real freedom called for sacrifice of personal material interests and self-restraint to curb the wilful exercise of liberty (amoral and self-serving restraint to curb the wilful’.²⁹ The Bolsheviks had to learn this the hard way. After the July Days, in which the Bolsheviks had presumed that the proletariat were ready for a second Revolution and led riots, there was a widespread disgust with the Bolsheviks across the whole political spectrum, with not only the Provisional Government and the Right, but also the SR’s and Mensheviks, condemning them as ‘traitors’ to the Revolution and to Russia.³⁰ With Trotsky arrested and Lenin exiled in Finland, the Bolsheviks were perceived as traitors to the Revolution and agents of the Germans.

²⁶ Orlando Figes & Boris Kolonitskii. *Interpreting the Russian Revolution*, p. 162.

²⁷ Mark Steinberg. *Voices of Revolution*, p. 10.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.11.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ For primary sources such as newspaper reports and Provisional Government announcements condemning the Bolsheviks see: N.N. Sukhanov. *The Russian Revolution, 1917: A Personal Record* (London, 1955), p. 424-482.

The importance of this labelling of the Bolsheviks in the summer had a profound impact on their propaganda and the construction of the enemy during the Civil War. The Bolsheviks understood the February Revolution wasn't a Marxist revolution, but a specifically Russian Revolution, in which there were specific moral codes to follow. If the public perceived a group instigating agitation for its own specific interests and above national interests it was then branded as a traitor to the cause. Therefore, in posters in which the White forces, such as Wrangel or Deniking are portrayed as conspiring with the Entente powers, cannot only be viewed merely as Bolsheviks pragmatically adopting the moral codes of the Revolution. In political paranoia terms, this was psychological projection. These posters functioned as way for the Bolsheviks to wash their hand clean of the amoral labels they were given in July 1917 and brand them on their opponents.

The third framework in which the Bolshevik conceptualised within was the 'the greedy enemy'. This was a theme that was compatible with the language of the February Revolution, when class hatred was at its peak. There was hate for the greed of bourgeoisie, hate for the landowner's greed, and hate for the monarchy's greed. This enemy knew no boundaries, 'he opens his gullet, swallows his neighbours and becomes bloated with the spoils of conquest'.³¹ He only thinks of new ways to exploit others in ways that could only benefit him. For instance, in a poster entitled 'Capital' (**Fig. 9**) the capitalist is surrounded by money and wears a golden heart chain. He can only have love, feelings or compassion for money. More importantly, is to note the spider web in the background. This is a definite sign that the Bolsheviks were adopting the language of the February Revolution. The origin of associating the bourgeoisie with the spider came from Wilhelm Liebknecht's pamphlet 'Spiders and Flies', which 'did more than any other

³¹ Sam Keen. *Faces of the Enemy*, p. 48.

book to educate the Russian masses in class consciousness.³² The symbol of the spider connotes a parasite who manipulates his victims into a trap that they can't get out of and are drained of their resources. Despite the fact that the public and the Bolsheviks conception of the bourgeoisie might seem compatible with each other on the surface, in reality there was tension between the two. According to Orlando Figes, the public's conception of the term 'bourgeoisie' was so loose that it rendered it more of a swear or an insult, rather than any kind of coherent identity. More importantly, the public's conception of the bourgeoisie was linked to xenophobia and social justice. First, for many the bourgeoisie were foreigners, primarily Germans or English, who resided in the metropolitan areas. They were traitors to the nations. Secondly, they were despised because of they did not fit Russia's traditional ideas on labour. Accordingly, the bourgeoisie didn't deserve their wealth because they had gained it off the back of someone else's labour and they had amassed private property which was disproportionate to their physical labour. This was social justice at its most primitive.

The Bolsheviks did not have a problem with the latter idea, as it was compatible with Marxist concept on private property and labour. However, given the fact that Bolsheviks were internationalists they could not so willingly depict their enemies in blatant traditional Russian chauvinistic xenophobic ways³³. That is why the Entente are depicted as *ideological* enemies of Russia rather than in any racial or nationalistic stereotypes. Therefore, when the Bolsheviks made a connection between the Entente Powers they resorted to depicting them as capitalists and not 'foreigners' as understood by xenophobes.

³² Orlando Figes & Boris Kolonitskii. *Interpreting the Russian Revolution*, p.170.

³³ See: Hubertus Jahn. *Patriotic culture in Russian During World War I* (Ithaca, 1998).

If anything, the enemy is portrayed as weak. In a poster from 1920, titled ‘Labour will be the Master of the World’ the Entente Powers are depicted as small coward running away. Again the Bolsheviks have dodged away the issue of chauvinism and emphasised social justice. The message here is that the Entente Powers will fail in Russia not because they are French, English, or American and are therefore culturally inferior to Russians, but because socialism prevails over capitalism. It is interesting to note that in most posters the Entente capitalists are always fat and cowardly, almost always avoiding physically contact. He is lazy and has a double chin. The worker, on the other hand, exudes masculinity and courage. He is calm and is not prone to petty emotionalism. Essentially, what the Bolshevik poster has done is rewire national identity with political identity. Most of the posters here suggest that one is physically superior as a human being to another because one is a proletariat and is strong because he labours for his product.

However, it should be noted that this depiction was not a Bolshevik innovation: the scenario of the hero as a witless, yet physically domineering male against the greedy and fat, yet clever, capitalist was a throwback to anti-Semitism tradition in Russia, in which Jewish stereotypes were used as a way to distinguish Russian ‘national character’³⁴.

The purpose of this propaganda is to suggest three things. First of all, the defender harbours no ill will towards the people he is going to fight against. Secondly, he is fighting a war with the government, who does not express the will of the people. Finally, the people who the defender is fighting against are good, it’s the leaders of those people who are evil. These leaders, who must only be capitalist, break international law, lie,

³⁴ See: Joshua Sanborn. *Drafting the Russian Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics, 1905-1925* (DeKalb, 2003), p. 79.

cheat and opportunists who break treaties whenever it is to their advantage.³⁵ This dichotomy is more precisely represented in a poster from 1920 entitled 'Be on Guard' (**Fig. 10**). The enemies in the posters are not stereotypes of different nationalities. Instead, the enemy is the ruling elite from each respective country who, on their own initiative, cross the border into Russia. In fact, the foreign nations are almost never depicted in derogatory stereotypical fashion. After all, at the end of the Civil War Soviet Russia has proclaimed itself to be the centre of the world proletariat revolution.

³⁵ Sam Keen. *Faces of the Enemy*, p. 51.

Part Three:

Designing the Enemy:

Between the Icon and the Lubok

The earliest Bolshevik Civil War propaganda was provided by the VTSIK's publishing house, whose primary artists were Aleksandrs Apsit and Boris Zvorkin. Analysis of the work of these artists reveals that their main style and designs was a 'conglomerate of cinema poster pseudo-dramatic, cheap vulgar symbolism and external elements of old fashioned romanticism'³⁶. Most of Apsit posters were characterised by several features. First, the depiction of the hero and enemy was largely allegorical and symbolic. It left considerable space to interpret the situations depicted as being condoned or condemned. Secondly, Apsit's work was, generally, in large format and relied on bold use of colours and symbolism. The source of Apsit's style came from his previous work in patriotic cartoons in pre-Revolutionary journals and Russian posters. The Russian cartoons from World War I were conservative in their stylistic variety in depicting landscape, people and battle scenes.³⁷

What impact did this have on depicting the enemy in the early years of the Civil War? Apsit's previous work had heavily influenced his depiction of the enemy after the Revolution. First of all, he did not stray too much from his experiences and only adopted certain innovations to his posters. Apsit's work clearly demonstrates that he had rejected

³⁶ Stephen White. *The Bolshevik Poster*, p. 28.

³⁷ See: Huebertus Jahn. *Patriotic Culture in Russia during World War I*, p. 31-38.

the trend towards satire taken by most artists working with cartoons in journals at the outbreak of World War in 1914 for realistic real-life depictions. However, he did adopt religious symbols for depicting the enemy. For example, the use of the serpent/hydra in depicting capitalism in his 1918 poster ‘To the deceived brothers’ (**Fig. 8**) had its roots in Christian tradition, where Satan was depicted with ‘dragon-like features and limbs entwined with snakes’³⁸. In his poster ‘The Tsar, the Priest and the Rich Man on the Shoulders of the Labouring People’ the religious iconography is also apparent (**Fig. 11**).

Boris Zvorykin employed a similar approach. For instance, the 1919 ‘The Struggle of the Red Knight with the Dark Force’ (**Fig. 12**) depicted a fairly realistic battle scene. It attempts to fuse traditional Orthodoxy with the then-emerging Soviet symbolism. In the poster the worker wears red, a holy colour, while the knight is dressed in black, which connotes evil. Yet the worker is clearly not religious because his weapon is not a sword but a hammer and shield with the Soviet emblem. From interpreting all of this the reader had to come to a complex conclusion that the worker was morally justified in battling with the dark forces because he had a historical destiny as a worker and he was protected by divine powers. Likewise, in Apsit’s 1918 ‘Year of the Proletarian Dictatorship’ (**Fig. 13**) depicts the enemy and his destruction in the most symbolic manner. The worker’s destruction of old order is merely conveyed by them domineeringly standing on, and therefore desecrating, the relics of the monarchy, such as the Tsar’s crown and eagle shield. It was this symbolic element that gave the VTSIK posters a sense of ambiguity in depicting the enemy. At its most allegorically extreme was Boris Kustodiev’s May 1919 cover for the Communist International journal in which a worker smashes away at a world locked in chains. The problem with this, from the

³⁸ Victoria Bonnell. *Iconography of Power*, p. 194.

perspective of later artists such as Moor and Deni, was that they weren't straightforward enough in their message. Apsit and others from VTSIK's publishing house simply depicted scenarios, without appealing for action.

To summarize: this analysis reveals several aspects of the style employed by the VTSIK's publishing house artists. First, their depiction of the enemy was largely symbolic. Thus, the audience were not given any specific interpretation to follow or how to combat the enemy. Secondly, the depictions and the use of colour schemes were for the most part conservative. The scenarios of the hero and enemy were drawn in a life-like manner that harked back to cartoons from journals, even though they adopted the new Soviet symbols and some elements of the Orthodox colour scheme. This overemphasis on the whole scene, which was an element of film posters, was especially evident in Apsit's posters and tended to be at the expense of the message by subjugating the enemy as a secondary source of interest. This was ultimately undesirable for the Bolsheviks. They wanted a simple and appealing message, not posters with a 'tendency toward descriptive representation and passivity'³⁹. By functioning more like film posters, Apsit's work was closer to commercial posters than political propaganda in the sense that it overemphasised the context rather than the enemy or the hero. As a result, they hindered the message and detached the audience from the moral outrage so crucial in propaganda. Finally, 'this purely decorative work with an excess of detail'⁴⁰ would soon be replaced by something more radical and simple.

With the establishment of the Literary-Publishing Department (Litizdat) in the summer of 1919 the shift in propaganda style was enormous. Gone was the VTSIK's

³⁹ Stephen White. *The Bolshevik Poster*, p. 38.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

publishing house style of lengthy and obscure text accompanying posters, the overemphasis on fine detail, the indistinguishable colours, but most importantly Litizdat artists, such as Dmitri Moor and Viktor Deni introduced the fusion of satirical cartoons found in political journals with the lubok. Despite the fact that these artists experimented with these at least as far back as World War I this was something new for the Bolsheviks. Initially the Bolsheviks were weary of incorporating the lubok style into their propaganda. The new regime not only appropriated the offices, machines, and artists they shut down lubok publishers and passed a decree in November 1917 that banned the production of lubok. What made the lubok vital in depicting the enemy was that it gave people a much clearer depiction of heroes and villain ‘by identifying the enemy and contrasting him with iconic ‘Russians’’.⁴¹

Unlike Apsit, Deni and Moor roots were in satirical journals. However, their styles greatly differed. Moor’s depiction of the enemy was more in the one dimensional narrative of hero vs. villain. This approach had its links to Orthodoxy tradition which presented the world in a binary fashion, in which there could only be heroes and villains. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this binary fashion was compatible the Bolsheviks paranoid outlook, where ambiguities could not be allowed. Viktor Deni, on the other hand, humiliated his enemies through satire. His style often employed exaggerated facial expression body size to depict the enemy as weak, immoral, evil, and insincere. More importantly, though, both artists worked within the lubok and the icon.

Moor employed a variety of styles. For instance, one of his earliest posters for VTSIK, such as the 1919 ‘We will not surrender Petrograd!’ actually resembled one of

⁴¹ Stephen Norris. *A War of Images: Russian Popular Prints, Wartime Culture, and National Identity, 1812-1945* (DeKalb, 2006), p. 173.

Apsit's symbolic pieces, where the emphasis was not on the enemy, but on the overall scene. Like Apsit's work, the poster is painted in a life-like manner. However by 1920 his style seems to have evolved in other directions. For instance, he fuses the lubok with satire in the 'Soviet Turnip' (**Fig. 14**) and 'Labour' (**Fig. 15**) posters. In the 'Soviet Turnip' Moor satirises the counter-revolutionary enemy of the capitalist and grandmothers as physically weak by making them small, almost dwarf size with beady eyes reminiscent of earlier lubok satire. The fact that they all have to pull at the turnip together reinforces their weakness and ultimately, they are all blown away by a force that is much stronger than them. In both posters an explicit connection is made between labour and physical make up of the people. In both posters the bourgeoisie is fat and greedy and fails to steal the fruits of labour of others. Also, both posters employ much less colours than Apsit's work, mainly emphasising red and black, the colours for good and evil. This was both due to a lack of resources on the VTSIK's publishing house part but also because satirical posters of this nature were easier and quicker to produce and reproduce than Apsit's real-life mini-portraits. More importantly, the simplicity of colour and lack of detailed background landscape did not deflect attention from the characters and the storyline. Furthermore, it should be noted that the text provided for Moor and Deni's work was straightforward and short, often employing short, biting rhymes. Essentially these elements were meant to appeal to the illiterate and the barely literate were the image itself would 'resound on an equal basis with the speech of a political orator'.⁴² This was black and white politics at its most simplistic. It clearly depicted who was the enemy and who was the hero, not just through colour but physique, and also called to arms its workers to go to battle.

⁴² Ibid., p. 173.

Perhaps no poster better sums up Litizdat's and Viktor Deni's style than the 'Village 'Virgin' (**Fig. 16**) from 1919. Deni manages to combine the icon and the satirical lubok to lampoon his enemies. Based loosely on the Mother and Child theme from the 15th century, Deni replaces the Mother for S.R. Viktor Chernov and the Child for White Admiral Kolchak the two 'saints' in the corner being White leaders Yudenich and Denikin. What is interesting here is the juxtaposition between the holy imagery and the violence. Even though Kolchak has a halo around his head he wishes that 'every tenth worker and peasant be executed'. More importantly to note are the facial expressions. While Kolchak looks on with a straight face Chernov's facial expression is rather ambiguous. It is fully expected of Kolchak to express remorselessness at his demands, since he is a White and a natural enemy of the people, but Chernov, an S.R. working for the good of the peasants, closes his eyes in what could be interpreted as a smile or relief. What Deni is trying to get across is the sense of insincerity on Chernov's part. Chernov's sly smile reveals an ulterior motive.

The tendency to simplify the style and political message which was characteristic to Litizdat was taken up by ROSTA Windows. It was established by a VTSIK decree of 7th September 1919. The ROSTA poster 'combined the function of poster, newspaper, magazine and information'⁴³. Publication began in the autumn of 1919 until January 1922. Up to 300 copies of each Window could be run off in two or three days. With five artists engaged in their production, each of whom could prepare an average of ten Windows a month, the average monthly production of the Moscow ROSTA office alone could reach up to 50,000 a month. Considering this the emphasis was more on production rather than on quality. The leading revolutionary poet Vladimir Mayakovsky who was influenced by

⁴³ Stephen White. *The Bolshevik Poster*, p. 67.

Futurist movement came up with most of the themes and texts of the ROSTA Windows. In terms of style Mayakovsky's posters were lapidary, most laconic, schematic, i.e. represented the subject in simplified or symbolic form and brilliant use of colours. Mikhail Chermnykh became the leading ROSTA artist. He approached political poster making on the basis of a considerable experience of newspaper graphics and cartoons. His work was not angry and denunciatory, like Moor's, not was it bitterly ironical like that of Deni: it tended rather to make good-humoured fun of its subject (**Fig. 17**).

Conclusion

As this dissertation demonstrates the image of the enemy during the Revolution and the Civil War was a product of very complex combination of factors. In the beginning of the war the Bolsheviks wanted to classify their enemies on strict Marxist criteria, but had to learn to reclassify and create new categories. As Richard Holquist's work on Don Cossacks demonstrates given the Bolsheviks failure in destroying Cossacks as a class enemy and their weakness in the countryside they simply could not afford to have the Cossacks as enemies and, therefore, had to reclassify them as 'middle peasants'. This pragmatic compromise is also revealed in Bolshevik dealings in religion. Therefore, the main strategy of the Bolsheviks in classifying the enemy was a contradictory mix of reckless ideology and cautionary pragmatism. Moreover, they didn't even attempt to go on the offensive when it seemed completely futile to do so and in the case of the Muslim

groups, the Bolsheviks even went so far as to imagine as somehow ideologically compatible with Marxism (see Fig. 1).

The classification process was further complicated by the fact that, while the Bolsheviks labelled certain groups as enemies through official party lines such as the 1918 Constitution of the Russian Soviet Federation, depiction of enemies in political poster was in a constant state of flux. This is what can be termed as the Bolsheviks 'two languages'. While the official party line classified the enemy as constant and monolithic, the depiction of the enemy in posters suggests a more fluid pattern. This was a two way process in which during the most troubling times for the Bolsheviks the enemy was depicted as a serious and evil threat. Yet when the Bolsheviks came out victorious the enemy was ridiculed and depicted in a satirized manner. This process is demonstrated with posters of Denikin or Kolchak during crucial battles and with posters after their defeat.

The analogy of 'two languages' can also be applied to some of the key themes in the second part. However, whereas classifying the enemy was a relatively simple process, in the sense that it involved constant compromise and reclassification whenever pragmatism required doing so, conceptualizing the enemy was an entirely different process; it was the difference between who was the enemy and how was he going to be depicted. Analysis of how the Bolsheviks depicted their enemies in posters reveals as much about their sense of propaganda tactics as it does about their overall state of mind. As the second part of the paper demonstrates, the Bolshevik propaganda operated within a thoroughly paranoid framework of 'archetypes', which included depicting the enemy as aggressive, faceless, and greedy. These depictions not only functioned to incite hatred for

the enemy, but also, by dehumanization, to *morally* justify his destruction. However, none of these depictions were necessarily unique to the Bolsheviks, as they existed in the wake of the February Revolution.

As the second part further demonstrates, this was both a cursing and blessing for the Bolsheviks. For on the one hand, ‘archetypes’, such as the ‘greedy enemy’ were commonplace, and therefore compatible with Bolshevik ideology, in the wake of the class antagonisms brought on by the February revolution. On the other hand, the Bolsheviks’ failure to adapt to new moral codes in the wake of post-February disillusionment with the Revolution reinforces the fact that there were fundamental clashes between the public’s perception on how a group should be constituted as an enemy and how the Bolsheviks conceptualised the enemy. After the July Days disaster, the Bolsheviks had to think not only within strictly *ideological* terms but within *moral* considerations that appealed for the good of the nation. However, this should not be seen merely as cynical pragmatism on the Bolsheviks’ part. Posters in which Denikin or Wrangel are depicted as plotting with Entente could be interpreted as genuine psychological projection in which the Bolsheviks attempt to attribute all the negative labels they were branded with on to their enemies. Essentially, conceptualising the enemy within this framework, propaganda posters blurred the boundaries between national identity, Bolshevism, Marxism, and Revolution.

However, the problem was that by conceptualizing the enemy through nationalist interest the Bolsheviks created an ideological dilemma for themselves. On the one hand they had to appeal to the public in a way that they could understand, which was largely within the confines of Russian chauvinism that never disappeared and largely

reconfigured within the new, ever-evolving ‘moral codes’ of February. On the other hand, the Bolsheviks were internationalists who deplored nationalism. This ideological dilemma is played out through various posters depicting the Entente and capitalists.

This struggle of old and new also runs through the third part in several respects. On the one hand, artists from all three main propaganda institutions, from VTSIK to Litizdat to ROSTA Windows, adopted and worked within the Russian Lubok. On the other hand, many artists worked in satirical journals, which were influenced by a variety of modern European political artwork including avant-garde Futurism. Furthermore, artists such as Deni and Moor reveal the influence of the Russian icon in poster designs. It has already been mentioned that the Bolsheviks conceptualised their enemy within a ‘binary code’ where there could be no group in between, which itself was a product of Bolsheviks paranoia and a long-standing tradition of Russian Orthodox mentality. The use of black and red throughout much of the posters also harked back to religious mores in which black designated as evil and red as something sacred. However, stylistically, the icon itself was caricatured, especially in the works of Deni (see the ‘Village Virgin’, Fig. 18) as part of the iconoclasm and anti-religious campaigns of the Soviets.

However, none of these schools replaced each other as the main style of the Bolsheviks. More than anything the move from one institution to another was more likely dictated by pragmatic concerns, such as cost, time, and resources. For VTSIK’s publishing house artists, such as Apsit, posters took weeks to complete, but with the establishment of Litizdat and ROSTA Windows the Bolsheviks were provided with cheaper and much quicker produced posters. However, the turn away from the portrait-like battle scenes and heavy allegory of Apsit’s work to a more focused, simpler style of

Deni and Moor does suggest that the Bolsheviks desired a much straightforward depiction of the enemy, with much sharper colours and less long-winded poems with more short, dramatic slogans. By late 1919 ROSTA Windows took these sensibilities further by working with much simpler depictions and more emphasis on a storyline consisting of brief captions. The enemy was crude and was satirised. What this suggests is that ROSTA posters depictions were in line with the Bolshevik enemy classification process, as explained in the first part. The fact that many depictions of the enemies were caricatures suggests that the enemy had become a myth rather than a serious threat.

Finally, one major theme runs throughout this dissertation. In analysing the constant, and at many time random, evolution of the depiction of the enemy in Bolshevik posters we sense just how out of control things were for the Bolsheviks and what compromises they had to make in a country amidst of a deep identity crises – politically, historically, socially, culturally. As many posters attest, the Bolsheviks had to constantly work within a framework that was ideologically incompatible with their own brand of Marxism. This suggests, then, that even as early as Civil War it was the Bolsheviks who were consumed by Russia and its traditions, and not the other way around. By adjusting their propaganda in conceptually and stylistically Russia tradition, they were already implying that that this was a *Russian* revolution not a *Marxist* or an *International*. These were the first signs of the full circle which the Bolsheviks would make during World War II when Russia reverted back to Russian chauvinism not seen since the Tsarist days.

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