

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 136

“The Winter of Our Discontent”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

The Russian Emperor returned from the front lines to spend the holiday season of 1916-17 with his family in the splendid isolation of the imperial palace outside Petrograd. While he was at the palace, he listened impassively day after day as one advisor after another warned him of the rising discontent in the country.

Only once did the façade crack. On January 20, 1917, the Emperor received Mikhail Rodzianko, the Chairman of the Duma, who reiterated the warnings of an unhappy populace. He urged the Emperor to take action. Do not ask your people “to choose between you and the good of the country,” he warned his sovereign.

The Emperor sagged. His head dropped into his hands. “Is it possible,” he demanded of Rodzianko, “that for twenty-two years I tried to work for the best, and that for twenty-two years it was all a mistake?”

“Yes, Your Majesty,” came the reply, “for twenty-two years, you followed the wrong course.”

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 136. The Winter of Our Discontent.

This week, I want to pick up right where I left off last time, the murder of Grigori Rasputin on December 30, 1916. As you recall, he had been murdered in a rather amateurish way by a cabal of aristocrats and others who apparently hoped that eliminating Rasputin would be the key to bringing the Emperor back to his senses in time to save Russia.

I ended the story when they ditched the body in the river. The conspirators were hoping to create an aftermath in which Rasputin had simply disappeared without trace or explanation. Who knew

what the holy man might be up to? Perhaps he had gone on some sort of pilgrimage, or withdrawn to a monastery to pray? Who can guess the mind of a mystic?

Well, as you know, the murder had been by pistol and had taken place at the palatial home of one of the key conspirators, the wealthy aristocrat (and Imperial nephew by marriage) Felix Yusupov. Unfortunately for him, his home was only a few meters from a police station, and the police turned up in no time to ask questions about the gunshots they had heard. Yusupov had one of his dogs shot, to provide an explanation for the gunshots and the bloodstains, explaining to the police that the poor dog had attacked one of his guests.

The police were no doubt skeptical, but in Imperial Russia, one does not question the word of an Emperor's nephew—even if he is only a nephew by marriage. But one of the other conspirators began to talk almost at once, and by the following night, it was generally believed that Rasputin had been killed, although there was at this point no corpse to prove it.

The news of the death of Rasputin was greeted with champagne toasts by the nobility in their stately homes in Petrograd. Foreign ambassadors also welcomed the news. As for the common folk of Russia, well, my sources disagree. Some say even commoners were glad to see him go; others suggest that the thought of a holy peasant being casually gunned down by an aristocrat triggered resentment among the lower classes. It's not hard to believe that there was some of both going on.

One person who refused to believe the news was the Empress Alexandra. She wrote to the Emperor that day—he was off at Stavka headquarters in Mogilev—expressing the hope that Rasputin had somehow been spared. The Empress refused to receive Yusupov personally, but did consent to accept a letter from him. In his letter, Yusupov vehemently denied having anything to do with Rasputin's disappearance.

That evening was what people in the West who use the Gregorian calendar called New Year's Eve. To the Russians, though, we are in the run-up to Christmas, which is still a week away. Grand Duke Dmitri, the Emperor's blood nephew and another one of the conspirators, went to the theatre that evening, but had to hurry away after the audience learned that one of Rasputin's murderers was in the house and began to applaud him.

That same evening, the Petrograd police found Rasputin's body. There was no longer any doubt that he was dead, nor was there much doubt about who had done the deed. The Emperor was still at his military headquarters in Mogilev while this was going on. He was planning to come home to spend his Christmas holiday with his family at their palace outside the city. Now the secret police warned him that unrest in the capital was getting out of hand. They showed him copies of letters the secret police had opened, written by some of the highest-ranking nobles and politicians in the country, addressed to the murderers, congratulating them on their deed.

The secret police advised the Emperor that they could not guarantee that the conspiracy to murder Rasputin had not been part of some larger conspiracy aimed at deposing the Emperor himself, and advised him to return to Petrograd as soon as possible, which he did.

The Emperor and the Empress were of course shocked by the murder, and more than that, Alexandra in particular was devastated. As for Nikolai, there's little evidence he ever mourned the loss of Rasputin much, and some sources suggest he may have even felt a sense of relief that the eccentric peasant was out of his life. But murder was still murder, and the thought that someone so close to the Imperial family might be so easily and brutally killed must have brought back ugly memories of that day when young Nikolai was brought in to say goodbye to his dying grandfather, the Emperor Alexander II, on the day of his assassination. The fact that this gang of killers were aristocrats, and even included a Romanov, only made the crime that much more horrifying.

Even so, it speaks volumes about how the law is enforced in Imperial Russia that no one was punished, or even prosecuted, for the murder of Rasputin. Grand Duke Dmitri, as a Romanov himself, was beyond the reach of the civil law. But he was an officer in the Army, so the Emperor punished him by dispatching him to a posting in Persia. Dmitri would soon flee the country, eventually marrying a rich American and living out his life in comfortable exile in England and Switzerland. He died in 1942 at the age of 50, after years of chronic tuberculosis.

Yusupov was banned from St. Petersburg for his crime, and condemned to living in one of his rural palaces. He and his wife also fled the country for France, where they lived out the rest of their lives, passing away in 1967 and 1970, respectively. He was 80, she 74, at the times of their deaths.

The intent of the murderers had been to eliminate Rasputin and his inexplicable influence over the Emperor and thus bring the Emperor back into the mainstream of political debate, ready to negotiate a power-sharing arrangement with the Duma that would satisfy enough of its members to still the troubled waters of Russian politics. That was the intent, and judged by the intent, the murder of Rasputin was a tragic failure. It achieved exactly the opposite. Nikolai and Alexandra were now more convinced than ever that all of Rasputin's warnings that the nobility and the political leaders in the Duma had it in for the Emperor and were conspiring against him were true. Rasputin seemed even more eerily prescient in death than he had in life.

The Duma returned to session after Christmas, and picked up where it left off. That is, savagely attacking the government and accusing Nikolai's ministers of treason. On January 20, the same day Nikolai had his brief and uncharacteristic breakdown in front of the Chairman of the Duma that I described at the top of the episode, the Emperor tried one final time to placate the politicians, by dismissing his latest prime minister, Alexander Trepov, who had held the office less than two months, and replaced him with another nonentity, a 66-year old noble named

Nikolai Golitsyn, who is remembered mostly for having trouble staying awake during meetings of the Council of Ministers.

Needless to say, if this latest round of ministerial leapfrog was meant to placate the Duma, it failed. The Emperor holed up at his palace outside the capital and withdrew from politics, content to let the politicians of the Duma go on with their denunciations. By this time, Nikolai must have been looking forward to the opportunity to leave Petrograd and return to the front, which he did on March 7, 1917. At least at the front, your allies and your enemies wear different-colored uniforms, so it's possible to tell them apart.

The Emperor and Stavka had reason to be optimistic about the coming year. In staff meetings with their counterparts in the British and French armies, the Russian generals were told that the French had weathered the assault on Verdun and that the British were prepared to move ever larger numbers of soldiers and artillery into France than ever before. And not only soldiers and guns, but increasing numbers of aircraft, as well as those newfangled gizmos, the "tanks" that the British were experimenting with.

At the same time, Russian industrial production, which had been embarrassingly small at the beginning of the war, was ramping up. There were more rifles, artillery pieces, and ammunition produced than ever before. To take one example, Russian production of artillery shells had increased from 300,000 per month in early 1915 to 2.3 million per month in late 1916, a six-fold increase. Also, 1916 had seen Russia amaze ally and enemy alike during the Brusilov Offensive and had occupied eastern Anatolia. The Black Sea Fleet had cornered the Turkish Navy at Constantinople and was blockading the Ottoman Black Sea ports. Grand Duke Nikolai, commander of the Caucasus front, expected his soldiers would take Ankara this year, and perhaps advance further.

There was reason to believe that 1917 would see the Allies outnumber and outgun the Central Powers on every front, and by next winter it could well be the Germans talking about a "shell shortage."

[music: Tchaikovsky, *Symphony No. 5*]

Well, I just painted a pretty rosy picture for you of the Allied military position at the beginning of 1917. But it has to be admitted that Russia still faced some significant challenges. On the military side, morale and discipline in the army are low; desertions are running ever higher and are now at the rate of over 30,000 per month. The Russian Army is conscripting teenagers and middle-aged men to meet its manpower needs. Callow youths and older married men resentful because they've been forced to leave their families behind are not the foundation of an efficient, disciplined army.

On the civilian side, well, let me remind you that we are still in the winter of 1916-17, an unusually severe winter, and the worst of the Great War so far. This is the winter that the

Germans called “Turnip Winter,” and back in episode 133, I talked about the impact of this winter on civilians in Germany and Austria. Today, let’s talk about that same winter and its impact on Russia, which, spoiler alert, is going to be profound.

I’ve already talked about food shortages in Russia. Russia was a major food exporter in those bygone days before the Great War began, but now there’s not enough to go around. This wasn’t a production problem; this was a distribution problem. Recall that Russia is very large and its rail network not as well developed as in Western Europe. Burdened with the additional demands of moving soldiers and supplies to the front, Russian railroads did not have the rolling stock necessary to move the fruits of Russia’s farms to the big cities like Petrograd and Moscow. Soldiers got first priority, and they generally had enough to eat. In fact, there are stories during this winter of German and Austrian soldiers crossing into no-man’s land under the white flag to offer Russian soldiers cigarettes, which they had, in exchange for bread, which they did not have.

But though the soldiers were getting enough to eat, food shipments to the cities were often inadequate. And the situation with regard to the rolling stock was getting worse as the war dragged on, because Russia lacked the industrial capacity to replace its rail cars as quickly as they were wearing out. At the beginning of the war, Russia had some 20,000 locomotives. By the Turnip Winter, only 9,000 of them were still operating. Heavy snow that winter left some railroad tracks buried, and sometimes even buried trainloads of food bound for Petrograd. The hard freeze of that winter burst water pipes in the steam engines and put a further one thousand Russian locomotives out of commission. Enterprising peasant women sometimes brought cartloads of produce into the cities to sell on street corners, but the weather had driven them away, too.

So food was scarce, and so was coal, since coal had to be shipped in by rail. The bakeries in Petrograd had trouble supplying bread. Some of them could get flour, but no coal to heat the ovens, others had coal but couldn’t get hold of any flour. Factories shut down for lack of coal, releasing hundreds of thousands of unhappy workers who suddenly found they had no food *or* income.

In these bitter cold conditions, most ordinary Petrograders, um, Petrogravians, um Petrogradniks...?

In these bitter cold conditions most ordinary residents of the city of Petrograd did what people everywhere usually do when the temperature drops to these levels—15 to -20 Celsius, or zero-ish Fahrenheit—they holed up in their homes as much as possible and waited until the weather got better. Most ordinary people in Petrograd at this time lived in cramped homes or very small apartments. These at least had the advantage of being easy to heat, when there was coal to heat them.

There was also labor unrest in the factories. The factories that are still operating, I mean, and I need to give you a little bit of background here. Back in the days of the Revolution of 1905, there

had formed in what was then called St. Petersburg the “Saint Petersburg Council of Workers’ Delegates.” This council is usually referred to as the “St. Petersburg Soviet,” the word *soviet* simply being the Russian word for “council.” At its peak, the St. Petersburg Soviet had about 500 members and it helped coordinate strikes and protest actions and provide food and other support to striking workers. It was by no means an extremist organization, except by the standards of Imperial Russia. Their most radical efforts were things like encouraging workers not to pay their taxes and to withdraw their money from state banks. The St. Petersburg Soviet was finally broken up by the Imperial government in December of 1905 and its leaders imprisoned.

Back in the autumn of 1915, after the Emperor prorogued the Duma and squashed calls for reform, some of the Menshevik socialists formed what they called the Central Workers’ Group in Petrograd. It had been organized to serve as the representatives for all those factory workers who had come to Petrograd seeking work in armament factories. You’ll recall that Russia has been ramping up wartime production and these ever-expanding factories were hiring new workers and what seemed like good wages at the time, until food shortages and inflation soon made good wages into not-so-good wages. Over time, as the plight of these workers grew more dire, the Central Workers’ Group grew more radical, until by the beginning of 1917, the Central Worker’s Group was organizing strikes and issuing proclamations calling for reform.

That was quite enough of that, as far as the Imperial government was concerned. No doubt they saw the group as a threat to the war effort, not to mention treasonous, and the Interior Ministry rounded up the leaders and carted them off to prison on February 8, in the middle of the winter cold wave. That cold wave may account for the timing. Perhaps the Interior Minister figured the cold weather would keep workers from going out into the streets to protest. And if that was what he was thinking, he was quite correct. For now.

This was the situation as of March 7, the day the Emperor left his palace to return to the front, but the very next day, March 8, saw a dramatic turn in the weather. The sun came out, the snow and ice began to thaw, the temperatures rose well above freezing. Well, everyone had serious cabin fever by then, so they did what people always do in these circumstances, they went outside. They looked for excuses to go outside. It felt like springtime.

Some of those who went outside, women mostly, took advantage of the opportunity the weather afforded to shop for food, particularly bread. Well, there still wasn’t any. It was going to take more than one nice day to get bread production back on track. While there was still no bread, there did happen to be a previously scheduled public demonstration for International Women’s Day, which the Second International endorsed in 1910, and which was celebrated in Russia beginning in 1913. Many of these frustrated bread shoppers joined in, swelling the size of the demonstration beyond anything anyone had anticipated, and turning it into a protest against the bread shortage.

This demonstration was peaceful, but the city authorities found it alarming anyway. Close to 100,000 people had filled the streets and some of the Cossacks who had been dispatched to maintain order seemed ready to join in the protests themselves. Meanwhile, the Duma was back in session and Alexander Kerensky was back in action, giving strident speeches accusing the Imperial government of every crime in the book.

The next day, the protesters returned, and this time they were joined by some of the men who had been laid off owing to the coal shortage, leading to crowds that were much larger than yesterday, perhaps 160,000. Police and Cossacks were deployed to barricade the bridges and make it hard for the protesters to assemble in the center of the city, but they weren't showing a lot of enthusiasm for their work and few protesters were actually turned away. The mood of the crowd was angrier than yesterday. They chanted "Down with the autocracy!" and "Down with the war!" There were scattered incidents of looting of bakeries and grocery stores.

The next day, March 10, a Saturday, saw larger crowds still, now numbering over 200,000. Workers across the city left their jobs to take part, shutting down the factories and the newspapers. There were widespread reports of Cossacks refusing to follow orders to control the crowds, a very different response, as you'll recall, from their actions on Bloody Sunday, twelve years ago. And there was evidence of some political organization to these protests by now. Some protestors were waving red flags. Others carried red banners with protest slogans on them, including some that said, "Down with the German Woman," a reference to the Empress. There was sporadic violence, including attacks on police officers.

Government officials sent telegrams to the Emperor in Mogilev, informing him of the unrest in Petrograd, although they tended to downplay the seriousness of the situation. This suggests that the civilian authorities in the capital did not believe the protests had gotten out of hand. Empress Alexandra sent her own telegram, saying, "This is a hooligan movement, young people run and shout that there is no bread, simply to create excitement, along with workers who prevent other workers from working."

Nikolai was incensed by the idea of troublemakers stirring up violence in his capital in the middle of a war. Perhaps because from a distance he did not fully grasp how broadly based these protests were, he cabled the commander of the Petrograd Garrison with orders to use force to disperse any further demonstrations.

The next day, Sunday, saw not police and Cossacks, but regular Russian Army units in full combat gear take up positions in the center of the city. A curfew was imposed, and protesters who turned up anyway were dispersed by soldiers firing their rifles into the air. By evening, the capital was calm and many observers believed that was the end of the protests and order had been restored to Petrograd. Nikolai instructed his prime minister, Golitsyn, to dissolve the Duma. We've had quite enough of these inflammatory speeches, thank you very much.

The Emperor received more cables that evening from officials in Petrograd, assuring him that the situation had stabilized. One exception was the cable he got from the Chairman of the Duma, Rodzianko, who wrote of anarchy in the streets and begged the Emperor to form a new government. Nikolai dismissed this message as a transparent attempt by the Duma to take advantage of the unrest.

And that might have been that, except for one little incident I haven't told you about yet. There was one group of protesters, in Znamenskii Square, that had been fired on by the soldiers sent to disperse them. Sources disagree on the number of civilian casualties—they were either 40 or 80—but it shouldn't have happened, and exactly why it did remains unclear, even today. The soldiers had been ordered to fire over the heads of the protestors, but these are poorly trained new recruits. Perhaps some of them became confused or angry or frightened. Some accounts suggest it was the unit's officers who overreacted.

These soldiers in the Petrograd Garrison were not Russia's finest. Russia's finest were at the front. Or dead. These soldiers were new recruits. They were that mix of those callow youths and resentful middle-aged men I mentioned before. Most of them were rural peasants. They were here in Petrograd for just a few weeks of training, and then would be shipped off to the front lines. Their officers were military cadets, who had no more experience leading an army than the soldiers had at being one.

During the period of their training, they had been stationed in Petrograd and dubbed the "Petrograd Garrison." There they lived crammed into barracks that had been designed to house only a fraction of the number of soldiers assigned to them, while being drilled and disciplined by green cadets. I mention all this because it's important to note that these raw recruits felt a stronger sympathy with the aggrieved residents of Petrograd than any sense of duty and discipline owed to the Army.

That may explain why the incident at Znamenskii Square is about to spark a mutiny.

That Sunday afternoon, immediately after the shooting at the square, an outraged group of protesters who had witnessed the killings proceeded immediately crosstown to the Champ de Mars, where was located the barracks of an army regiment, not the same one responsible for the shootings. The angry protesters complained to the soldiers at this barracks that their fellow soldiers had just fired on an unarmed crowd of fellow Russians. One company, numbering about a hundred, became so offended by this news that they broke into the armory, seized about thirty rifles, and headed back toward Znamenskii Square under the leadership of one of those green cadets, intending to stop the killings, either by persuasion or by force, if it came to that.

They never made it to Znamenskii Square. Along the way, they ran into a police barricade and exchanged fire with the policemen. The young officer who was commanding them was seriously wounded in the exchange, which quickly quenched their zeal and they returned to their barracks, no doubt feeling a little stupid. But they talked it over among themselves and with the rest of the

regiment that evening, and the soldiers resolved among themselves that if they received orders to fire on unarmed Russian civilians, they would refuse to obey. They even went so far as to send a couple of their number to carry the news to the barracks of two other nearby regiments and invite those regiments to take the same pledge. Which they did.

Then came Tuesday, March 12. Protestors appeared in the streets once again, in spite of yesterday's crackdown. Perhaps the word had gone out about the soldiers' new attitude. In fact, the soldiers from those three mutinous regiments donned red armbands and joined in the protests, then began attacking the police or anyone else who tried to oppose the protestors. As word of these defections spread, other garrison units joined in, after shooting their own officers, in several cases. The Cossacks disappeared from the streets. Police stations were invaded and set on fire. Soldiers broke into armories, seized weapons, and distributed them to the crowds. The jails were forced open. A mob of protestors sacked the Interior Ministry building, and red flags began appearing over many of the most important buildings in the city, including the Winter Palace. In the afternoon, the secret police headquarters was invaded and their files put to the torch. Private businesses and restaurants were looted. By nightfall, the Imperial government had completely lost control of its capital. An estimated one-half of the Petrograd Garrison, about 80,000 soldiers, had mutinied. They far outnumbered the police and Cossacks available to oppose them, and the other half of the garrison was hiding in their barracks, waiting to see what happened next.

[music: Tchaikovsky, *Symphony No. 5*]

The first telegram to the Emperor on Tuesday morning, warning of the deteriorating situation in Petrograd, came from Rodzianko. The Emperor read it and remarked, "That fat fellow Rodzianko has again written me all kinds of nonsense." Then came the telegram from the military commander at Petrograd, announcing that he was unable to carry out the Emperor's orders regarding the protests because his soldiers were no longer taking his orders. Then the Empress herself weighed in with a telegram suggesting that now might be a good time to make a few political concessions.

At two o'clock, as the secret police headquarters was burning, the Emperor received a telegram from his prime minister, Golitsyn, informing the Emperor that he and the entire Council of Ministers wished to tender their resignations. He suggested the Emperor form a new government drawn from the Duma with Rodzianko as prime minister, and that martial law be imposed on the capital, backed up with real army units commanded by a real commander, as the current military commander in Petrograd had completely lost control of the situation.

Good advice all around, but Nikolai would reject all of it, except for the piece about martial law. Then came the direst telegram of all, from an official at the palace, asking tactfully whether the Emperor would like the Empress and the children to join him at the front. It sounded an awful lot like a suggestion that the Imperial family themselves were now in danger.

As it happened, the Imperial children were suffering through a bout of the measles at the time, and Nikolai did not want to endanger their health by subjecting them to an arduous journey, so he decided to return home himself, and he appointed the 65-year old Nikolai Yudovich Ivanov the new military governor of Petrograd. The commanders of the North and West Fronts were ordered to transfer some of their most reliable units to Ivanov's command, and he would lead them to Petrograd and restore order, as well as protect the Imperial family.

Ivanov had been a corps commander during the Russo-Japanese War and had been decorated for his actions at the Battle of Mukden. He was commander of the Southwest Front until early 1916, when he was replaced by the more capable Brusilov. Since then, he's been serving on staff at Stavka headquarters as an adjutant to the Emperor. Despite his shortcomings, he was one of the few army officers the Emperor trusted. He was assigned a force that amounted to something like two divisions' worth of front-line units, so this is serious muscle we're talking about here.

Ivanov's assignment was to proceed at once to Petrograd along with a battalion of 800 soldiers, especially chosen for their loyalty. Once in Petrograd, he was to assume command of the Petrograd Garrison, ensure the safety of the Imperial family, and get the rebellious soldiers under control. The other regiments would be arriving in Petrograd within the next few days to assist. Ivanov and his battalion prepared to leave for Petrograd, expecting to arrive early Thursday morning.

It's worth noting that even at this moment, this rebellion is confined to Petrograd, except for a couple of sympathy strikes by factory workers in Moscow. The rest of Russia is quiet and apparently still loyal to the Emperor. So it's not surprising that the Emperor might think that if only the mutinies in the Petrograd Garrison could be quashed, everything would quickly get back to normal.

But there is much more going on here than a mere mutiny. By this time in Petrograd, the police and the Cossacks are either in hiding or have joined the other side. Civil authority is breaking down. Someone has to step up and do something.

As it happens, there were two groups of someones who stepped up. One was the leadership of the Duma. Now, the Emperor had dissolved the Duma, so for the Duma to actually come back into session and deal with the current crisis as a body would be disobeying a directive from the Emperor, and that was a step many in the Duma were not prepared to take. Officially, the Duma no longer existed, and its now former members had no authority. On the other hand, mobs of protestors numbering 25,000 or so were appearing in front of the Tauride Palace, where the Duma met, demanding the Duma take charge of the situation.

So a group of party leaders of parties represented in the Duma formed what they called "The Provisional Committee of Duma Members for the Restoration of Order in the Capital." You can sense the timidity of the members of this committee in its awkward name. The legacy of Imperial Russia, with its secret police and autocratic rule hung over everyone's heads like a spectre. To

take a step too far too soon might mean a charge of treason, if and when the Emperor reasserts control of the city. They were already aware of Nikolai's plan to send in troops from the front.

This committee consisted of fifteen members representing the Octobrists, the Progressives, the Kadets, and the Mensheviks. Among them were Mikhail Rodzianko, the Chair of the Duma, and Pavel Milyukov, names you already recognize. The committee also included one Labor Party representative, Alexander Kerensky.

Over the next few days, delegations of soldiers and workers, and most notably, police and army officers, arrived at the Tauride Palace to pledge loyalty to the new committee, which must have come as a big relief to its members, some of whom no doubt had nightmares of Russian soldiers barging into the palace and arresting them. It is notable that some of the groups who you'd might imagine to be the last holdouts still loyal to the Emperor, like the police and the army officers, would be among the first to pledge loyalty to the Provisional Committee. Probably they were afraid of the mobs, and falling in line with the Duma seemed the easiest and the safest way to avoid getting lynched.

Rodzianko visited the Prime Minister, Golitsyn, and asked if the Emperor would agree to the Provisional Committee appointing a new government. Golitsyn told him that the Emperor had already refused to allow the Council of Ministers to resign, so that was that. For a little while. Eventually, seeing as how the official Council of Ministers was just holed up in the Admiralty Building cowering in fear, the Provisional Committee went ahead and appointed new heads of the government ministries anyway and cabled Russian military commanders to inform them that there was now a new government.

Meanwhile, that evening of that same day, Tuesday, March 12, a whole other group began forming at the same venue, the Tauride Palace. This group is known to history as the Petrograd Soviet.

Among the organizers of this new Soviet were the leaders of the Central Workers' Group who had just been sprung from prison by the mobs this morning. (Wow. Was it really just this morning? It feels like weeks have gone by.) Anyway, that evening a group of about 300 met at the Tauride Palace to organize the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. Factory workers were invited to elect delegates to represent them at the Soviet, as were military units in the Petrograd Garrison. In a matter of days, the membership of the Soviet swelled to more than 3,000, of whom about 2,000 represented soldiers, so in the early days the Petrograd Soviet was very much the voice of the Army rank and file.

And so, at this dramatic juncture in the narrative, as of the evening of March 12, 1917, there are three "governments"—and I use the term loosely—meeting in Petrograd. There is the Imperial Council of Ministers, cowering in the Admiralty building. They don't even want to be a Council of Ministers anymore, but they have no choice, since the Emperor refused to permit them to quit. There is the Provisional Committee of Duma Members, and there is the Petrograd Soviet. These

aren't exactly competing organizations. They're more like *ad hoc* committees formed by different constituencies with the intent of restoring some semblance of order to Petrograd, because in Imperial Russia until now, "order" was something that came from the Emperor, and Russia has precious few institutions capable of operating in the absence of Imperial authority.

And speaking of the Emperor, don't forget that he's still out there. He's sending troops to Petrograd, and preparing to return himself. But that is a story for another episode.

We'll have to stop there for today. Thanks for listening, and a special thanks to Matt for making a donation and to Will for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons help keep the words going and the bits flowing around here, so if you have a few currency units to spare, head on over to the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons. Discover the warm feeling you get knowing you helped support the podcast.

Next week is the Thanksgiving holiday in the United States, so I'm going to take a week off, but I hope you'll join me in two weeks' time, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we continue the story of the February Revolution. Find out whether the Russian Emperor can rally his soldiers to crush this sudden outbreak of liberal democracy in Petrograd. Spoiler alert: no, but you'll want to hear the story anyway, in two weeks' time, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. I've been stubbornly using Gregorian dates throughout this narrative, and I plan to keep on doing it, but these dramatic events that took place in the second week of March by the Gregorian calendar took place in the last week of February by the Julian calendar, and that is the reason why history knows this moment as the February Revolution. Oh, Julian calendar, I don't love you, but I can't stop talking about you.

[music: Closing War Theme]