

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 157

“A Path Strewn with Roses”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

The six weeks' march to Paris has grown into a world drama. Mass slaughter has become the tiresome and monotonous business of the day and the end is no closer. Bourgeois statecraft is held fast in its own vise...It is foolish and mad to imagine that we need only survive the war, like a rabbit waiting out the storm under a bush, in order to fall happily back into the old routine once it is over...Friedrich Engels once said: “Bourgeois society stands at the crossroads, either transition to socialism or regression into barbarism.” ...This world war is a regression into barbarism. The triumph of imperialism leads to the annihilation of civilization...In this war imperialism has won. Its bloody sword of genocide has brutally tilted the scale toward the abyss of misery. The only compensation for all the misery and all the shame would be if we learn from the war how the proletariat can seize mastery of its own destiny and escape the role of the lackey to the ruling classes.

Rosa Luxemburg. *The Junius Pamphlet*. Published 1916.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 157. A Path Strewn with Roses.

When the Bolsheviks issued their Decree on Peace on November 8, the day after they took power, it wasn't so much an actual invitation to the other warring powers to convene peace talks as it was a political move. It was a statement to the world that the new Russian government was different from its predecessors and different too from the governments of the other belligerents. Other leaders talked peace; the Bolsheviks were ready to begin making it.

The message was directed to the socialists and other anti-war groups within other nations, and the subtext was: “If you want peace, you'll need to change your government.”

The Bolsheviks believed that Russia was merely the first domino, and that all the others would come tumbling down any day now. When Trotsky became foreign minister, he told Lenin that all

he needed to do was “issue a few revolutionary proclamations to the peoples of the world, and then shut up shop.” In the months that followed the so-called October Revolution, over the winter of 1917-18, any time there was news of strikes or anti-war protests in the other belligerent nations—and there was a lot of that sort of thing going on—*Pravda* would trumpet the news and declare that the socialist revolution was at hand.

But after it settled matters with General Dukhonin, the new Russian government did at last make a formal armistice proposal to the German Eastern Command at Brest-Litovsk on November 26.

As you know, back in the early days of the war Hindenburg and Ludendorff were in charge of the Eastern Front, until they were promoted to overall command in August 1916, but I haven't told you yet who took over in the East. It was Prince Leopold of Bavaria, a career soldier who was also, as you might have guessed from his name, a member of the royal family of Bavaria. He was an able commander, but even more able was his chief of staff, General Max Hoffmann, who had previously served under Hindenburg and Ludendorff and deserves as much credit as they do for Germany's early victories in the East. When Hoffmann received the Russian request for an armistice, he had no idea who these guys Trotsky or Krylenko were. He telephoned Ludendorff over in Bad Kreuznach to ask, “Is it possible to negotiate with these people?” Ludendorff told him to proceed.

Joining Prince Leopold and Max Hoffmann at the negotiations would be Richard von Kühlmann, the German Foreign Secretary, successor to Arthur Zimmerman who, well, you know. Leon Trotsky notified Russia's allies that truce talks with the Germans were beginning and invited them to join in. The British and Americans, if not exactly pro-armistice were, you could say, armistice-curious, but the French and the Italians, both of whom had enemy armies occupying their territory, were firm “nos.”

The Bolshevik delegation sent to Brest-Litovsk included Lev Kamenev, Trotsky's brother-in-law, Anastasia Bitsenko, a Socialist Revolutionary who had assassinated the Russian war minister back in 1905 and had been in exile in Siberia ever since, until her release following the February Revolution, and a couple of other Bolsheviks, along with a worker, a soldier, and a sailor to represent the proletariat. On their way to the train station, they realized they lacked a representative of the peasants. So they looked around until they found an old man in a peasant coat standing on the street corner. His name was Roman Stashkov, and he was hastily appointed peasant representative to the peace talks and taken along to Brest-Litovsk. The Germans greeted this motley collection of ill-clad and ill-groomed representatives of the Russian proletariat with amazement. But they quickly agreed to a four-week armistice beginning December 17, during which time the two sides would negotiate a treaty to end the war. One of the terms of the armistice was that the Germans would not use the occasion as an opportunity to move German soldiers to the Western Front, an agreement the Germans promptly violated.

The Russian delegation attempted to enter negotiations to end the entire war, but the Germans naturally objected that the Bolsheviks clearly spoke for no nation other than Russia. The talks adjourned for a time so the Russian delegation could return to Petrograd for new instructions. But so far, things were going well enough. The Russians wanted peace negotiations on the principle of no annexations and no indemnities. Richard von Kühlmann, the foreign minister, endorsed the principle. Remember that the German Reichstag had voted a resolution endorsing this very same principle just a few months ago. The two delegations banqueted together and drank together. On December 25, Christmas Day for the Germans and Austrians, they issued a declaration that the Central Powers would embrace the principle of no annexations in their talks with Russia, provided that Russia's allies offered a similar pledge.

Back in Petrograd, Trotsky was also challenging the Allies, issuing a demand in January that if Russia's allies intended to continue the war, they make a public declaration before the world explaining what great cause was at stake that required further bloodshed. Was it really all about self-determination of peoples? If so, and if the Allies demanded self-determination for the peoples of Alsace-Lorraine and Bohemia and Serbia, would they also agree to self-determination for the peoples of Ireland and India and Indochina?

Pravda upped the ante further, suggesting Russia might default on its foreign debt, most of which was held by the Allies. That was about sixty billion rubles, equivalent to something like two trillion US dollars in today's money, a big enough threat to make the Allies sit up and take notice.

[music: Cui, *String Quartet No. 2*]

It might seem to you at first blush that the Russians are approaching the Germans empty-handed, caps in hands, begging for mercy. But, like most things in history, the situation is actually more complicated than that. Yes, it's true that Russia no longer has an effective army and that the Bolshevik grip on power is shaky. It's also true that the minority ethnic groups within the former Russian Empire are restless.

But Germany is also under pressure. Remember that last summer the Reichstag passed that resolution calling for peace without annexations. The German public is war weary and also restless. The unrestricted U-boat campaign, which had raised such high hopes last spring has become a disappointment. The British have learned to arrange their ships in convoys, which led to a substantial reduction in losses. Cargo ships are still getting sunk, and the British are having to devote money and resources into building new ones, but they aren't starving, and by the end of 1917, it is clear that the U-boats are not going to win the war.

Also, Ludendorff has done the calculations and determined that by mid-summer 1918, the Americans will have deployed enough soldiers on the Western Front to guarantee the Allies numerical superiority even if Russia quits the war. Germany's one and only chance for victory in the West would be a final knockout blow in the spring of 1918, during that brief window of

opportunity when the Germans themselves have the superior numbers. That explains why German command is already sending soldiers westward. The war with Russia needs to end, and it needs to end soon.

The Bolsheviks also have the advantage of understanding Germany better than Germany understands them. Remember that the German Social Democratic Party is the largest political party in the Reichstag and for years it has stood as the model of what every socialist party in other countries, including Russia, aspired to be. The Bolsheviks know Germany. They have contacts in German government. On the other hand, to the Germans, the Bolsheviks are a black box; a mysterious cabal of radical extremists whose methods and purposes are obscure.

The Germans suspected from the beginning that the Bolsheviks might simply use the peace talks as a delaying tactic to hold the German Army at bay while they infect Germany with their pernicious propaganda and spark a German version of the October Revolution. These fears were well founded; that was exactly what the Bolsheviks were up to. In these early years of the rise of Bolshevism, when Bolshevik agitators seemingly could turn whole factories, whole armies, whole nations into violent bands of seething radicals, Bolshevik propaganda took on a mystique. It was like some magic incantation that caused those who listened to it to lose their minds.

Kaiser Wilhelm called a meeting at Bad Kreuznach in December, attended by Hindenburg, Ludendorff, the chancellor, Georg von Hertling, the foreign secretary, von Kühlmann, and Max Hoffmann, the chief of staff for the Eastern command, where they discussed the postwar map of Eastern Europe. The Austrians had proposed an independent Poland, to be comprised of Russian Poland plus Galicia and ruled by a Habsburg king. Hertling and Kühlmann were on board with that and suggested an independent Lithuania and Courland in personal union with Germany, that is to say, with Kaiser Wilhelm as their king. Wilhelm wanted German negotiators to demand a Russian withdrawal from Livonia and Estonia, to be followed by a plebiscite in which those peoples would determine their own future.

Hindenburg and Ludendorff dismissed all these proposals as inadequate. They demanded full annexation of these regions, even though this would mean the incorporation of millions of Slavs and Balts into the German Empire. Kühlmann asked them why they wanted that. Hindenburg replied, "I need [the room] for the maneuvering of my left wing in the next war."

Hertling and Kühlmann were opposed to annexations. First of all, that was the stated will of the German people, through their elected representatives in the Reichstag. Second, they had both come to the conclusion that the war in the West could not be won. There would have to be a negotiated settlement, and more likely than not it was going to be Germany who asked for an armistice first. By dealing with the Russians fairly and offering them an honorable and non-punitive peace, Germany would be demonstrating its good faith and setting a precedent for a similarly non-punitive agreement with the Western Allies.

No final decision was made at this meeting, but imagine the surprise Hertling and Kühlmann must have felt when General Hoffmann took their side in the debate.

On January 1, 1918, General Hoffmann arrived in Berlin at Kühlmann's invitation for a private meeting with the Kaiser. This was in flagrant disobedience to Ludendorff's orders, which were that no military officer may speak to the Kaiser without a pre-meeting with Ludendorff, even if the Kaiser ordered otherwise. Hoffmann attended the meeting anyway, and when Wilhelm ordered him to speak his mind, he did. He told the Kaiser point blank that Germany could not win the war. Germany further lacked the military might necessary to occupy the wide Polish and Baltic territories that Hindenburg wanted to annex.

The Imperial Council met the following day, and there Wilhelm told Hindenburg and Ludendorff that he no longer supported their ambitions in the East, that he had been persuaded by Kühlmann and Hoffmann to seek a more modest agreement with the Russians. Ludendorff lost his temper and shouted that it was improper for the Kaiser to meet with a subordinate officer behind their backs.

Hindenburg and Ludendorff immediately began dropping hints that they might resign, which created an uproar among the right wing in German political and industrial circles, as well as with the Kaiserin and the Crown Prince. On January 8, the Kaiser received a letter from Hindenburg stating that the accommodationist policy pursued by Kühlmann in the East would destroy morale in the Army and undermine the monarchy, and that either the foreign secretary had to go, or Hindenburg and Ludendorff would. The duo also began a whispering campaign against Hoffmann, calling attention to the fact that his wife was Jewish and darkly suggesting disloyalty.

The Chancellor told Wilhelm that Hindenburg and Ludendorff had finally gone too far and recommended that the Kaiser accept their resignations. But the most Wilhelm could bring himself to do was order them to confine themselves to military affairs and stay out of civilian politics. But that was a case of too little, too late. Hindenburg and Ludendorff had asserted their authority against the Emperor himself, and they had gotten away with it.

I should interject here that this is the very day that Woodrow Wilson would make his famous Fourteen Points declaration, but we'll get back to that in a future episode.

On January 14, the announcement of a cut in the bread ration in Austria led to strikes and street protests in the major cities of the Empire, in which hundreds of thousands participated. The demonstrations turned into a nationwide general strike on January 19, during which workers called not only for an increase in bread rations but an end to the war. The unrest spread to the Austrian naval base at Pola, then to the German naval base at Kiel. On January 27, a worker's council—or soviet, if you like—in Berlin called for a general strike in Germany. A hundred thousand people marched through Berlin the following day, demanding an end to the war. And take note: they not only called for an end to the war, but a peace agreement without annexations or indemnities, echoing the Reichstag resolution of last summer. And more than that, a peace

agreement based on the principle of self-determination of peoples, echoing Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points declaration he'd made three weeks ago. The general strike spread across the German Empire in a matter of days. At least a million, and by some accounts as many as four million Germans took to the streets.

Crucially, a half million munitions workers walked off the job in support of the strike. You've already heard me talk several times about the incredible demands the Great War was putting on munitions production. Even a brief interruption in the flow of ammunition might spell disaster, not to mention how much the recent protests resembled last year's February Revolution in Petrograd. Hindenburg and Ludendorff cracked down hard. Martial law was declared on January 31. Pro-strike newspapers were shut down. Thousands of leaders of the protest were forcibly inducted into the Army and dispatched to the Western Front. Tens of thousands more were arrested. The German Left was outraged; the German Right applauded the military.

The protests underscore another reason why Germany needed a peace agreement in the East almost as badly as the Russians did. The Bolsheviks drew encouragement from the developments in Germany and Austria. To them, it was hard evidence that the socialist revolution that began in Petrograd was sweeping west and would soon engulf Europe.

But let me remind you that the Bolsheviks also need peace so that they can consolidate power in Russia. Just days after the October Revolution, in the wake of the Decree on Land and the Decree on Peace, the People's Commissar for Minorities, Joseph Stalin, had issued a decree on "The Rights of the Peoples of Russia to Self-Determination." In no time at all, the Don Cossacks took him up on the offer, as we have seen. Then Finland declared independence. Then the Ukrainian Rada did. The Menshevik-controlled Soviet in Georgia also declared independence, and soon Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia were all declared to be a part of the "Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic."

You might find this development perplexing. On the face of it, the Bolsheviks, having gradually gained control of the Russian state, shot themselves in the foot at the same time by encouraging minority regions of the former Russian Empire to secede. Indeed, the Bolsheviks have set themselves up for a bloody three-way civil war against not only the developing White movement in the Don River region but against various regional independence movements. So what happened here? Part of the answer is ideological. Self-determination of minority peoples was a socialist principle; it was a Bolshevik principle. Even the Americans and the other Allied nations were embracing it. Of course, the Bolsheviks also hoped that they would concede to the minority regions the right of self-determination and the minority regions would promptly decide on their own to embrace Bolshevism. That part of the ideology wasn't panning out, at least not so far.

The other part of it was practical: to break up the Russian state. So long as the Bolsheviks were uncertain about their own political position, they favor weakening the state. Later, when they are

in full control, they will favor a strong state. Just like any other political faction. The Bolsheviks will need peace to secure their position.

So the bottom line here is that when the peace talks reconvene, both sides are going to be feeling pressure to get a deal done.

[music: Cui, *String Quartet No. 2*]

When the peace talks at reconvened, the Bolsheviks sent their secret weapon: Leon Trotsky, who demonstrated a different negotiating style as soon as he arrived at the train station by handing out propaganda leaflets to the German soldiers lining the platform. He refused to bow to Prince Leopold, called off the banquets, and insisted that the Russian delegation sleep in separate quarters from the German delegation. The Bolsheviks also insisted that the peace talks be a public matter, with the deliberations published and made available for all the world to see.

But the Germans had a surprise of their own: a delegation from the Ukrainian Rada, sent to negotiate a separate peace with the Central Powers. Foreign Secretary Kühlmann told Trotsky that the Western Allies having rejected his Christmas invitation to agree to peace on the basis of no annexations, that offer was off the table. The peace agreement between Germany and Russia would be built on the principle of self-determination of peoples. This meant the Polish and Baltic peoples in the territories under German occupation would be granted their freedom from Russian rule. Finland would also be granted independence. As for Ukraine, well, that was a matter Germany would negotiate directly with the representatives of the Rada.

Trotsky retorted that the Ukrainian delegation to the peace talks controlled no territory beyond their hotel rooms. He asked Kühlmann when would the referendum be held to allow the Polish and Baltic peoples living under German occupation to determine their own futures. Kühlmann told Trotsky those peoples had already expressed their preference.

Meanwhile, the Bolsheviks retook control of the Ukrainian capital of Kiev, driving the Rada and its government to the city of Zhitomir. The Germans signed a peace treaty with the Rada shortly thereafter, on February 8. The Ukraine, the breadbasket of Russia, committed to supplying the hungry Central Powers with badly needed grain. In exchange, the Germans recognized Ukraine as an independent nation. German and Austrian troops moved in to expel the Red Guards and consolidate the Rada's hold on power.

Trotsky found himself boxed in. He asked for a ten-day suspension of the talks so he could consult with the government in Petrograd, but the situation back home was every bit as difficult. The Russian Army was no more. Red Guards had been sent to subdue the gathering White forces in the Don Cossack region, but that meant there was hardly anyone left to occupy Ukraine or defend Petrograd. Russia seemed on the verge of collapsing into chaos. The only good news for the Bolsheviks was that the Constituent Assembly had been dissolved—I'll get back to that in a future episode—but the challenges to Bolshevik rule still multiplied.

Lenin was losing support even in the Bolshevik Central Committee. When they met to discuss the negotiations with Germany, Lenin laid down a hard choice. They must agree to the German terms, bitter though they were, to gain breathing room to secure control over Russia. His closest supporters, like Zinoviev and Stalin, agreed, but the party congress voted down Lenin's capitulation proposal by a margin of three to one. Lenin's principal opponent was Nikolai Bukharin, a Bolshevik writer and theoretician, who argued that Russia was vast and her peoples determined to resist the Germans. Let the invaders come, he suggested, and the armed Russian masses would defeat them in guerilla warfare while also spreading revolutionary propaganda westward into Germany and Austria.

Once again, it was Trotsky who came up with the compromise proposal everyone could accept: a policy of "no war, no peace." The Bolsheviks would turn the treaty negotiations into a "pedagogical demonstration."

What did that mean? When he returned to Brest-Litovsk on January 28, Trotsky announced that Russia would not agree to the unjust treaty proposal, but would nevertheless declare the war ended and demobilize her army. The Central Powers delegates could scarcely believe their own ears. "*Unerhört!*" exclaimed General Hoffmann. "Unheard of!"

Trotsky was in essence daring the Germans to continue the war against a nation that had publicly declared it would not fight. If they did not, then Germany was implicitly agreeing to a peace on Russian terms, with no annexations. If they did, it would demonstrate to the world that the German embrace of the principle of self-determination was a fraud and expose German territorial ambition to world opinion, to Woodrow Wilson and the Allies, and to Germany's own socialists, who would have to reckon with the contradiction between the Reichstag's high-minded declarations and the ugly reality of German militarism.

At the Imperial Council meeting of February 13, a few days later, Ludendorff recommended Germany resume fighting in the East in order to force the Bolsheviks to sign a deal. He was by this time already planning the 1918 offensives on the Western Front, and time was running out. He wanted a peace deal in place in the East before the campaign season began in the West. Kühlmann thought this unwise. Germany didn't need to get drawn into the chaos in Russia. He proposed Germany continue the Eastern policy that has been in place since the February Revolution; that is, to maintain the *de facto* armistice.

Kaiser Wilhelm sided with Ludendorff. In his view, the Russian madness needed to be contained, lest it spread to Germany. In Russia, as food remained scarce and the economy continued to plummet, Lenin was now blaming the Russian bourgeoisie, whom he accused of stealing the wealth of the nation and hoarding their ill-gotten gains. He called on Russian workers to "expropriate the expropriators," that is, to break into their neighbors' homes and plunder their wealth. This particularly bothered the Kaiser because of the situation in the Baltic region. Remember how I said the cities in the Baltic region had substantial ethnic German

populations? They did, and in that region they were the very bourgeoisie Lenin was railing against. Wilhelm wanted the German Army to advance up the Baltic coast to restore order, defend the German minority, and then perhaps take Petrograd itself. "The Bolsheviks are tigers and must be exterminated," he told his council. Ludendorff added that the Bolshevik-inspired chaos was wrecking Ukraine as well, and if Germany wanted that grain, the Army would need to protect it.

On February 18, having notified the Russians that the armistice was off, the German Army called Trotsky's bluff and went on the offensive up and down the front line, in an operation code-named *Faustschlag*, which means something like "fist blow" or "fist strike." No mincing words here. The Germans met no resistance whatsoever. Soldiers would climb aboard a train, ride to the next station up the line, disembark, seize control, then after leaving a few of their number behind to garrison the station, the rest would hop back on the train and move on to the next stop.

In five days, the Germans advanced 150 miles. Most significantly, they had now secured Estonia and were within striking distance of Petrograd itself. Then General Hoffmann sent the Russians a revised peace proposal, which included harsher concessions. The Bolshevik Central Committee met that night to discuss the proposal. Bukharin continued to oppose capitulation and advocate the guerilla war. Three other committee members agreed with him. Trotsky and a few others abstained. Lenin carried the day with seven votes. Russia would capitulate. When Lenin informed the All-Russian Congress of Soviets of the Central Committee's decision later that night, some Socialist Revolutionary delegates shouted "Judas!" and "Traitor!" and "German spy!" Lenin replied mildly, asking his opponents if they had expected that "the path of the proletarian revolution was strewn with roses."

On March 1, the German Army reached Kiev. Ukraine was now secured. On March 2, German planes bombed Petrograd. On March 3, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed, ending the Great War, at least on the Eastern Front. With the Germans now so uncomfortably close to Petrograd, on March 7, Lenin ordered the Russian government relocated to Moscow, where it remains to this day.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk required the Russians to demobilize their army. It required Russian withdrawal from Finland and Ukraine and the cession of Poland and the Baltic States and White Russia, which were already under German occupation. It also required the cession of territories in the Caucasus to the Ottoman Empire, undoing the Russian annexations of 1877, following the Russo-Turkish War, not to mention rolling back the Russian advances into Anatolia of the past three years.

Overall, Russia lost over a million square miles of territory, 40 percent of her population, a third of her agricultural production and about half her industry, not to mention most of her iron and coal production. Most of her oil production was located in the self-declared Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic.

There were no indemnities *per se* in the treaty, but in August the Germans would insist on an additional provision requiring Russia to pay six billion marks in compensation for German property expropriated by the Bolsheviks, as well as unpaid Imperial-era loans owed to Germans.

What are we to make of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk? The conventional interpretation is that this is an historically harsh and unjust peace. It is often said that this treaty signaled to the British and the French that German war aims were irredeemably imperialist and expansionist, that the Allies could not hope for mercy if defeated, and it thus underscored the urgency of winning the war in the West. It is sometimes cited to rebut claims that the upcoming Treaty of Versailles is too harsh, on the grounds that the Germans got off way easier than the terms they would have imposed on their enemies.

But the irony in this assessment is that by the end of the twentieth century, decades after the Treaty of Versailles nullified the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, Russia's borders will end up in pretty much the same place where Brest-Litovsk would have placed them. Because this treaty is not the crude and grasping instrument it was made out to be. It is in fact simply a German spin on the Allies' own stated war goals of a permanent peace based on principles of no indemnities, no annexations, and self-determination of peoples. It is consistent with the Reichstag resolution and the stated aims of the German Socialist Democratic Party.

Russia has been treated no worse and arguably better than what Austria or Turkey can expect from Versailles. The desire to create buffer states, like Poland and Ukraine, between Russia and the Central Powers has been discussed in Berlin and Austria since the early days of the war.

Of course, breaking Russia down from a unitary empire into a collection of smaller states weakens Russia, militarily and economically vis-à-vis Germany, and that was a German imperialist ambition of long standing. The nobler and higher-minded figures in German government may have been thinking primarily about self-determination and the security value of buffer states, but there were also those who wanted to see not fully independent buffer states on the model of Belgium, but nominally independent buffer states that were German-dominated. They'd had to put up with an independent Ukrainian Rada because the Ukrainians had created their own state, but in the occupied Polish and Baltic territories, their goal was to replicate the German and Austrian Empires in miniature, little autocracies ruled over by Habsburgs or Hohenzollerns, relatives of the two Kaisers.

Remember that Germany itself had been a weakened collection of smaller states until 1870. Germans knew well what it was to live in smaller states that were pawns in the gambits of their Great Power neighbors. Moreover, Germany was late to the Great Power game and felt left behind and squeezed out in many ways, a point I've been making on this podcast since the first two episodes. By the beginning of the twentieth century, many who looked to the future foresaw that Russia and the United States were destined to become major world powers, owing to their

expanding populations and their large territories. Britain and France were much smaller nations, but they at least enjoyed the benefits of their colonial empires and the resulting overseas trade.

Germany, in contrast, had none of those advantages. It had missed the colonial era and was hemmed in by other Great Powers. France, Italy, Austria, Russia. Britain sat squarely across Germany's sea lanes.

This feeling among Germans that their country was hemmed in and that time was not on their side played a major role in Germany's willingness to get involved in the war. If the status quo is against you, then you need to shake up the status quo.

The most farsighted—and it must be said, the most imperialist—of German thinkers looked east toward Russia and saw the open spaces that Germany lacked. Just as the former British colonies on the Atlantic coast of North America became great by expanding westward into the vastness of the North American interior, Germany could increase by expanding eastward into the vastness of Eurasia. For these Germans, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk would facilitate that expansion by removing its biggest obstacle: a monolithic Russian Empire that could mobilize all the region's resources and replaces it with smaller states that Germany could negotiate with, co-opt, or, if necessary, bully. If the peoples already living in these vast lands had to be brushed aside in order for Germany to fulfill its destiny, well, perhaps that was regrettable, but it was a case of historical necessity. As it had been in North America.

So I'm more or less persuaded by historian Adam Tooze, who argues that the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk is analogous to the coming Treaty of Versailles because it is a case of a good idea gone wrong. A case of lofty ideals subverted by old-school militarism and imperialism. The lofty ideals were expressed to the Reichstag when Chancellor Hertling presented the treaty for ratification in March. He told the Reichstag:

We have not for a moment contemplated...opposing the justified wishes and endeavor of Russia to be liberated...[W]e desire for that sorely tried land a speedy return to a peaceful and orderly state of affairs, and we deeply deplore the terrible conditions which have made their appearance in many places.

The Russian treaty contains no conditions whatever which dishonor Russia, no mention of oppressive war indemnities, no forcible appropriations of Russian territory.

A number of the border States have severed their connection with the Russian State in accordance with their own will, which was recognized by Russia.

In regard to these States we adopt the standpoint...that under the mighty protection of the German Empire they can give themselves political form corresponding with their situation and the tendency of their culture, while at the same time, of course, we are safeguarding our own interests.

The subversion began almost at once when the Polish and Baltic peoples were denied full sovereignty over their own lands. And again soon after that when German and Austrian troops had to be deployed into Ukraine to preserve its independence from the Bolsheviks and, not coincidentally, to ensure the delivery of that grain Ukraine had promised to Germany and Austria. Even so, the Rada proved ineffective at controlling pro-Bolshevik socialists and anti-German nationalists in its own territory. By the end of April, the German military would overthrow the Rada and install a German puppet government.

Similarly, in May 1918, German soldiers would be deploying into Georgia at the request of its leaders, who found themselves pinched between advancing Turks to the south and warring Russians to the north and saw Germany as their best hope for preserving Georgia's independence.

This militarization of these postwar states in the East has to be regarded as a slap in the face to the Reichstag, just after that body had ratified the agreement. You could argue military necessity, but the military also made that argument when it broke the general strikes of January. Does the Reichstag's opinion count for anything anymore, or is Germany now a military dictatorship?

We'll have to stop there for today. Thank you for listening, and I'd like to thank Daria for her donation and thank you to Randall for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons keep the podcast chugging along for everyone, so if you'd like to enjoy some of the good karma that comes from being a donor or patron, just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com, and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons. And don't forget about leaving a rating and review at the iTunes website. That's another great way to help the podcast and help other listeners discover it, listeners who hopefully will enjoy the show as much as you do.

Next week is a bye week for the podcast, but I hope you'll join me in two weeks' time, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we look westward for the first of three episodes that will examine domestic politics in the United States, Britain, and France as the World War moves into its fourth year. The war is supposed to be about freedom and democracy, according to these three governments, but are the demands of modern industrial warfare leading to a rise of authoritarian policies within the most democratic of nations? Find out in two weeks' time, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. I should mention that the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and Russia's exit from the war isolated what was left of resistance in Romania, and that country would soon be forced into its own peace agreement with the Central Powers in May. The Treaty of Bucharest required Romania to cede back to Bulgaria the territory it had taken in the Second Balkan War of 1913, plus a little more. It also made some cessions to Hungary. Romania was forced to lease its oil wells to Germany and grant Germany a say in Romanian government. Oddly enough, though, the

treaty also granted Romania the territory of Bessarabia, a formerly Russian-controlled province that now lay isolated between Romania and independent Ukraine.

So although Romania lost some territory, the treaty was a net gain in territory overall, an unusual outcome for a country that just lost a war.

[music: Closing War Theme]