

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: THE ADMIRAL'S MASKS: THE STYLIZED REPRESENTATION OF THE SUPREME RULER OF ALL-RUSSIA, ADMIRAL ALEKSANDR VASILIEVICH KOLCHAK.

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The present thesis seeks to develop a better understanding of how political images and symbols of power were constructed during the Russian Civil War through a textual analysis of the presentation surrounding the leader of the anti-Bolshevik movement in Siberia, Aleksandr Kolchak. The research was based primarily on the collection of microfilmed “anti-Soviet” newspapers available at the Library of Congress, while also expanding on the theoretical contributions of Wortman, Kolonitskii, and Holquist to the study of power in revolutionary Russia. The thesis focuses on the construction of a stylized representation of Admiral Kolchak by Kadets in Omsk, and how his public image was transformed to reflect the ideological goals and beliefs of the White movement. The political mythmaking of the Whites reveal that they, contrary to previous assessments, were fully engaged in propaganda campaigns and that Kolchak himself must be viewed within the wider revolutionary dynamic of emerging “leader cults.”

THE ADMIRAL'S MASKS: THE STYLIZED REPRESENTATION OF THE  
SUPREME RULER OF ALL-RUSSIA, ADMIRAL ALEKSANDR VASILIEVICH  
KOLCHAK.

By

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*“Drink, comrade, wherever you can, to drown life’s sorrows  
Softer, softer, all our worries will go tonight.  
Maybe this time tomorrow  
The Cheka will get here  
And maybe this time tomorrow  
We’ll execute Kolchak...”<sup>1</sup>*

## **Introduction**

Writing in exile, Paul Miliukov offered this description of the former Supreme Ruler of All Russia, the leader of the White movement in Siberia, Admiral Aleksandr Vasilievich Kolchak:

A man of noble character and heart, he was, however, a freshman in politics and thus bound to depend on other people’s opinions for arriving at the most important and responsible political decisions. He had no personal ambition and there was not a jot of the dictator in him. The reputation of an “iron will” did not at all correspond with his real nature, extremely sensitive and refined. But he felt it his duty to play in all conscience the part he was given, and he patiently wore his mask.<sup>2</sup>

Miliukov’s analysis of Kolchak, while insightful, is apologetic and filled with lament over the failed reign of the man who many regarded as the only legitimate challenger to Bolshevik power and the gains of the October Revolution. Miliukov’s position as a staunch anti-Bolshevik and former leader of the Constitutional Democratic Party (Kadets) has certainly colored his writings

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<sup>1</sup> Anatolii Rybakov, *Children of the Arbat* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1988), 14.

<sup>2</sup> Paul N. Miliukov, *Russia To-Day and To-Morrow* (Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, 1973), 155.

on the events of the Civil War, and he (along with many others in the historiography) sought to detach the Admiral's personal legacy from the ill-fated Omsk government he presided over.

While Miliukov's account may be historically dubious, what is significant for the purposes of this investigation is the evocative, theatrical language he employs to describe Kolchak.

In turn, this paper will attempt to answer a deceptively simple question: What kind of "mask" (or rather, *masks*) did Admiral Kolchak wear as Supreme Ruler of All Russia? Taking this basic question a step further, if Kolchak was in fact simply an actor, as Miliukov and many others has suggested ("bound to depend on other people's opinions..."<sup>3</sup>), then what character did he play? How was his character created and conceived, what were his motivations, and what was his role within the larger theatrical performance? If the Admiral himself was the lead player, then who was the director (or directors), and what did he want to show and communicate to the audience? Finally, what were the aesthetic dimensions of the production?

Let us now imagine that Admiral Kolchak (or rather, his image) has taken center stage, the curtain has risen; all the audience's eyes and attentions are fixed on him. While the primary purpose of this paper is to analyze the stylized, public representation of Supreme Ruler, it is not of secondary importance to investigate the happenings and machinations backstage. As the famous playwright and theater theorist Bertolt Brecht wrote, "Not everything depends on the actor, even though nothing may be done without taking him into account. The 'story' is set out, brought forward and shown by the theater as a whole, by actors, stage designers, *mask-makers*,<sup>4</sup> costumiers, composers and choreographers. They unite their various arts for the joint operation, without of course sacrificing their independence in the process."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Miliukov, *Russia To-Day and To-Morrow*, 155.

<sup>4</sup> Emphasis is my own, not in original text

<sup>5</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht On Theater: The Development of an Aesthetic* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 202.

Who were the Admiral's "mask-makers" and "costumiers," and how did they contribute to the production? This paper will argue that those behind stage, that is, in the Omsk government, played a decisive and fundamental role in shaping and stylizing the public presentations and image of Admiral Kolchak. As William Rosenberg has convincingly demonstrated, the governmental apparatus and administrative structures were remarkably homogenous in their makeup: nearly all members in positions of true significance were members of the Constitutional Democratic Party (Kadets), and even within that, the most powerful were members of the Party's Eastern Section of the Central Committee (*VOTsK*), which was notorious for its conservative and nationalistic ideas.<sup>6</sup> It was these men, who controlled nearly every major ministry or department (as Rosenberg notes, Kadets had more influence in Kolchak's government than "...in any other anti-Bolshevik government, including Skoropadskii's Ukrainian Hetmanate."<sup>7</sup>) also turned considerable attention to developing and cultivating an image of their leader, which fully embodied their ideological and political beliefs, and their aspirations for the future of Russia.

Taking leave of the theatrical metaphors, the focus of this paper will be on the public presentation and stylized representation of Admiral Aleksandr Kolchak that was directed towards to the populations under his rule. The image of Kolchak, presented in the "modern" mediums of propaganda, newspapers, and posters was an important symbol and lightning rod to both his supporters and enemies, both domestically and abroad. To many of those fighting against the Bolsheviks and the socialist revolution, the image of Kolchak represented one of the brightest hopes for victory over the Reds, the restoration of bourgeois law and order, and preservation of Russia's national honor; to his enemies, he was the pure manifestation of counterrevolution and

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<sup>6</sup> William Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution: The Constitutional Democratic Party, 1917-1921* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 397-398.

<sup>7</sup> Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution*, 398.

reaction, and was a synecdoche of the capitalist, landowning classes who were desperately clinging to the old Tsarist order.<sup>8</sup> Thus the Supreme Ruler was firmly in the center of the revolutionary discourse and conflict over the form and identity of post-Tsarist power and authority that consumed all levels of society.

While these dual images of Kolchak were in many ways fashioned and nurtured by those ordinary people who consumed and transformed them to fit their own preexisting perceptions of revolutionary events and the subsequent civil war, the focus of this paper will not be on the *reception* of public images and representations and their validity *vis-à-vis* the “truth,” but rather on their deliberate and stylistic *construction* by members of the Omsk government and anti-Bolshevik intellectuals and leaders throughout the country. Public representations and images of political leaders are important to study and analyze, and as Jan Plamper has recently argued, they played a central role in the development of European political thought and the creation of the “modern personality cult” that emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup>

Understanding the creative process of fashioning of “masks” of the modern political leader can also yield valuable insight into the goals and aspirations of the political movement the image seeks to represent; as Clifford Geertz has argued, “Thrones may be out of fashion, and pageantry too; but political authority still requires a cultural frame in which to define itself and advance its claims.”<sup>10</sup>

The deliberate construction of a stylized representation of the Supreme Ruler Admiral Kolchak must be viewed in the context of the rapid emergence of other “personality cults” in

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<sup>8</sup> While there are many Bolshevik and socialist sources that describe Kolchak in this manner, one very insightful and complete discussion can be found in Vladimir I. Lenin’s pamphlet, “Letter to the Workers and Peasants: Apropos of the Victory over Kolchak,” in Lenin’s *Collected Works (4<sup>th</sup> Edition)*, Vol. 29 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 552-560.

<sup>9</sup> Jan Plamper, *The Stalin Cult: A Study in the Alchemy of Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 2-12.

<sup>10</sup> Clifford Geertz, “Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power,” in *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretative Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 143.



Russia during the revolutionary period. Boris Kolonitskii and Orlando Figes have convincingly argued that despite the deposition of the Tsar and the end of the Romanov monarchy, “The Russian people, or at least the peasants, conceived of politics in monarchial terms.”<sup>11</sup> The authors argue that although the people viewed politics through what they call “monarchial psychology,” it does not mean that they sought or even sympathized with the idea of restoring the monarchy and the old order; rather, it meant that they were “receptive to authoritarian or patriarchal leaders,” who had the potential to “fill...the vacuum left by the myth of the Tsar as the people’s savior and liberator.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, the stage was set and prepared for those leaders with the ability to seize the audience’s attention and play off of Russia’s long historical tradition of authoritarian, autocratic rule.

However, Figes and Kolonitskii do not mention or address the construction of a “cult of Kolchak”; rather, they focus on the development of the personality cults of Vladimir Lenin and Lavr Kornilov, with special attention given to the case of Aleksandr Kerensky. After the February Revolution, Aleksandr Kerensky rose to prominence and attempted to fill that “vacuum” or void left by the fall of Tsar Nicholas II and the destruction of the sacral and “loving” image of the Tsar and the monarchy during the First World War, which had served as a connection between the monarchy and the people.<sup>13</sup> Using modern mass media tools like newspapers, posters, and film, Kerensky and his followers attempted to construct a “cult of the leader” that ultimately failed to take hold due to the increasing polarization of Russian society and politics.<sup>14</sup> This in turn gave way to the development of two competing “leader cults” that

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<sup>11</sup> Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 72.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>13</sup> Boris Kolonitskii, *Tragicheskaya Erotika: Obrazy imperatorskoi sem'i v gody Pervoi mirovoi voiny* (Sankt-Peterburg: Novoye Literaturnoye Obozrenie, 2010), 11-14.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-96.

articulated and represented the interests and goals of both the left and the right. Lenin and Kornilov became something larger than just two opposing political leaders; they both came to embody the very essence of their respective movements, and to many people the separation between the leader and the state (*gosudar'* and *gosudarstvo*) become blurred beyond recognition.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, in many ways, the construction of the image of the Supreme Ruler (*Verkhovnyi Pravitel'*) Admiral Kolchak should be viewed as a continuation of the “leader cults” that were developed earlier during the revolution, especially the cult of Kornilov. It is important to note that this representation was a synecdoche for the movement as a whole, and for those unseen who stood behind the leader (backstage). Lenin was a stand in for the Communist Party and for the international communist struggle as a whole; Kornilov represented the officers and those of the rightist persuasion (including many monarchists). While there is bountiful evidence to show that a personality cult was being constructed, in earnest, for Kolchak, his government fell before it could fully mature or catch.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, throughout this paper, instead of “personality cult,” the term “stylized representation” will be employed. This term accurately captures the intent and purpose of this process, without being constrained by language that has specific conditions and is often a source of considerable debate within the historical field.

The vehicle that made possible the widespread production and dissemination of these representations and images of leaders was the modern mass media, specifically the newspaper, which underwent a meteoric rise in significance and importance in the latter half of the nineteenth century. As Peter Kenez notes, “In the modern world, the press has had a decisively

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<sup>15</sup> Figes and Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution*, 102-103.

<sup>16</sup> Jan Plamper, in *The Stalin Cult*, references email correspondences with Boris Kolonitskii, who argued that after Kerensky and Kornilov, the Civil War period was marked by smaller, less developed cults in a system he refers to as “polytheism.” The “other cults,” which he does not mention by name, surely includes Admiral Kolchak (p. 12 in *The Stalin Cult*).

important role in spreading political ideologies.”<sup>17</sup> While Tsarist Russia during this time did not nurture or reap the benefits from a well-developed newspaper culture (historians have long debated whether Imperial Russia possessed, in any sense of the term, what Jurgen Habermas famously termed “the public sphere”<sup>18</sup>), both Richard Wortman and Louise McReynolds have demonstrated that newspapers were an important feature of Russian society, and were often used to transmit ideas, orders, and symbolic presentations of the Tsar and political leaders from the top down.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, this study will utilize daily and weekly newspapers as a central source and model for analyzing the transmission of representations and images of the Supreme Leader to the masses of Russian society. Using newspapers as a central source can be difficult and misleading at times, and one must take into account the inherently distorting nature of propaganda and the selective dissemination of information. As well, daily newspapers provide a window not only into the rapidly evolving popular and mass culture of the day, but also, as Louis McReynolds notes, “[they are] at once the story of political, social, cultural, and economic change.”<sup>20</sup> These concerns are especially relevant for studying a regime like Kolchak’s, which was marked by heavy censorship and the almost total absence of a free press. Despite these prevailing conditions, mass media can still be an excellent indicator of the regime’s attempt to communicate with its population, however one-sided and propagandistic the exchange is; it can

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<sup>17</sup> Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 21.

<sup>18</sup> Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991). For a critical discussion of Tsarist Russia’s lack of a defined “public sphere,” see Marc Raeff, *Understanding Imperial Russia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); for a more sanguine approach to the phenomenon, see Joseph Bradley, “Subjects into Citizens: Societies, Civil Society, and Autocracy in Tsarist Russia,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 107, No. 4 (October 2002), pp. 1094-1123.

<sup>19</sup> Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy, Vol. 2: From Alexander II to the Abdication of Nicholas II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Louise McReynolds, *The News Under Russia’s Old Regime: The Development of a Mass-Circulation Press* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

<sup>20</sup> McReynolds, *News Under Russia’s Old Regime*, 3.

also provide insight into the regime's self-perception and conceptions of its own legitimacy, which, during the Civil War period, is a topic that must be explored at length. Thus, this investigation, in the words of historian Victoria Bonnell in her influential study of Bolshevik propaganda, is "based on the assumption that official ideology mattered."<sup>21</sup> Ideology did matter to those in the Omsk government, as any insult to the image (*izobrazhenie*) of the Supreme Ruler through words, letters, or writing was punishable by execution by firing squad.<sup>22</sup>

The central of argument of this paper is that Admiral Kolchak in fact wore two different, but not completely separate masks as Supreme Ruler of All Russia. In both theatrical and anthropological studies, the purpose of studies of masks is often to reveal what lies beneath; the intention of this study is to analyze and deconstruct the mask itself, leaving what is beneath for further studies. Throughout the newspapers surveyed and available secondary materials, it is clear that those shaping the stylized representation of Kolchak sought to accentuate two distinct, and often overlapping, character traits of the leader of the anti-Bolshevik struggle in Russia. The two sides that were publically emphasized in Kolchak were not simply descriptions of his character, nor were they drawn exclusively from the events of his past. Rather, Kolchak's image was stylized and constructed to reflect the objectives, aspirations, and beliefs of the members of the Kadet dominated anti-Bolshevik government based in Omsk. The Admiral's two masks were The Military Man and The Statesman, committed to establishing law and order. Each of the masks (which could be worn separately or simultaneously) represented the shared, fundamental ideological pillars of those Kadets in the Omsk government and those abroad who were not only fighting Bolshevism, but also envisioning what Russia and Russian society would look like after their victory.

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<sup>21</sup> Victoria E. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 13.

<sup>22</sup> GChO, F. 596, Op. 1, D. 315, #259 (29 March 1919).

The discussion in previous paragraphs has left out a central question that should be answered before proceeding further: why study the failed government of Admiral Kolchak? Although the reign of Kolchak and the Omsk government was short-lived (the time from his *coup d'état* to the fall of Omsk at the hands of the Bolsheviks lasted a little less than a year), its significance to the Russian Civil War and the anti-Bolshevik struggle as a whole should not be understated. As the Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky warned in a speech to the Red Army in April 1919, "Nevertheless, it would be criminal frivolity on our part to disregard the danger represented by the White Guardist bands of Kolchak on the east."<sup>23</sup> During the winter and spring months of 1919, the armies of Admiral Kolchak had captured the major Ural industrial cities of Perm', Chelyabinsk, Ufa and Yekaterinburg, and were within striking distance of the city of Kazan' and the strategically important Volga River, which afforded the possibility of a link-up with the Armed Forces of South Russia under the command of Anton I. Denikin.<sup>24</sup> One optimistic British news correspondent for *The Times* in Omsk, in April 1919, predicted that the Bolshevik regime was on the brink of total collapse, and that Kolchak's forces would reach Moscow within three months.<sup>25</sup>

Kolchak's armies never did reach Moscow, and by the summer of 1919 they were in full-scale retreat across the Urals in the face of the newly reconstituted Red Army. Omsk fell the following November, and Admiral Kolchak (after being betrayed by the members of the Czechoslovak Legion on his way to his new capital) was executed in February in Irkutsk by

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<sup>23</sup> Leon Trotsky, "Speech to Red Army in April 1919," in Lewis Copeland, Lawrence W. Lamm, and Stephen J. McKenna, eds., *The World's Greatest Speeches: Fourth Enlarged Edition* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1999), 140.

<sup>24</sup> Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 652-654.

<sup>25</sup> *The Times* (London). "Red Army Retreating; Koltchak's Men Take 10,000 Prisoners; High Hopes for Moscow." April 19, 1919. From *The Times Digital Archive, 1785-1985*. [http://infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark/0/1/1/purl=rc6\\_TTDA?sw\\_aep=umd\\_um](http://infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark/0/1/1/purl=rc6_TTDA?sw_aep=umd_um) (Accessed April 2012).

members of the local Bolshevik government.<sup>26</sup> Despite the curtain's early fall on the Kolchak regime, the Admiral's legacy and impact on the Russian Civil War were not as ephemeral as his time in power. As noted earlier, for many people during this tumultuous time, Kolchak represented a beacon of hope, a safe port in the terribly stormy waters of civil conflict. The famous diarist and prominent historian Iurii V. Got'e wrote longingly from Moscow of that "mythical government of Kolchak,"<sup>27</sup> and after Kolchak's execution at the hands of the Bolsheviks, he lamented "Thus do they destroy all outstanding Russian men."<sup>28</sup>

The war in the East against Kolchak also had a significant impact on the Bolshevik leadership, and was trumpeted as one of the most complete victories of the Civil War. The setback at Perm' had forced the Red Army commanders, specifically Leon Trotsky and Ioakim Vatsetis, to rapidly reform and redeploy their armies and to fundamentally alter their approach to the conflict. In April 1919, the Central Committee of the Bolsheviks identified Kolchak as the primary threat to Soviet power, and subsequently diverted vast amounts of resources and men to conflict in the East.<sup>29</sup> Subsequently, the Red Armies drove Kolchak's forces beyond the Urals and back into Siberia, creating along the way legendary Soviet heroes like Mikhail Frunze and Vasilii Chapaev, who was immortalized in Dmitrii Furmanov's Soviet classic, *Chapaev*. After the end of the Civil War, in a speech to the First All-Russia Congress of Working Cossacks, Lenin reminded those in attendance, "I do not know if any person still remains who has not been taught a lesson by Kolchak..."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 658-659.

<sup>27</sup> Iurii V. Got'e, *Time of Troubles: The Diary of Iurii Vladimirovich Got'e, Moscow, July 8, 1917 to July 23, 1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 157.

<sup>28</sup> Got'e, *Time of Troubles*, 343.

<sup>29</sup> Jonathan D. Smele, *Civil War in Siberia: The anti-Bolshevik Government of Admiral Kolchak, 1918-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 315-316.

<sup>30</sup> Vladimir Lenin, "Speech Delivered at the First All-Russia Congress of Working Cossacks, March 1, 1920," in *Collected Works (4<sup>th</sup> Edition), Vol. 30* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), 385.

## **Historiographical Notes**

The central argument of this work is that members of the White government in Omsk not only understood the power that propaganda and modern forms of mass communication provided, but actively created and promoted a stylized ideological identity of their regime that was largely expressed through the representation of the Supreme Ruler Aleksandr Kolchak. The ideological foundations of the government were articulated through daily newspapers and brochures that presented Admiral Kolchak as the legitimate message bearer of the anti-Bolshevik movement and the symbol of resistance to the October Revolution. The articles and pictorials that accompanied them were highly allegorical and drew heavily on precedents in both Russian and world history (such as the Roman Empire) to present the Supreme Ruler as the hero of the Motherland who would lead Russia out of the gauntlet of fratricidal war.<sup>31</sup> Through the mass press and ceremony, Kolchak embodied the symbols and convictions of the Omsk government, and his personal traits were shaped to reflect his ability to command and to establish a new and healthy Russian state, a task of the utmost necessity given the White's apocalyptic predictions of the results of a Bolshevik victory. Thus, discussions of Admiral Kolchak and more broadly, the White movement, must be placed firmly within the context of the emergence of new ideological

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<sup>31</sup> Victoria Bonnell, *Iconography of Power*, 204-205.

and discursive currents regarding authority that were crystalized by the complete collapse of society and order during what Peter Holquist termed Russia's "Epoch of Violence."<sup>32</sup>

To examine "The Admiral's Masks," this paper will deconstruct and separate the various aspects (masks) of Kolchak's image and public presentation. The material that will be analyzed will be both textual and visual; one does not need images to create a complete "image" of a person, and emphasis will be placed on textual documents like newspapers and brochures, which were utilized by the Russian Press Bureau in Omsk to transmit a clear representation of the Supreme Ruler to the people across Russia. The rapidly growing sphere of "popular culture" and mass media during the revolutionary period was in part shaped by various groups who sought to influence public opinion and despite previous arguments about White propaganda, and those in the anti-Bolshevik movement understood and participated in this dynamic process. Kolchak's regime coordinated with and directly controlled hundreds of newspapers in Omsk and throughout the territories under their control that presented a clear and accessible image of power that was designed to appeal to different segments of society and unite them towards a common goal. As well, the term "popular culture" must be reevaluated when it comes to discussions about newspapers and the press, and as Roger Chartier has suggested, "it no longer seems tenable to try to establish strict correspondences between cultural cleavages and social hierarchies, creating simplistic relationships between particular cultural objects or forms and specific social groups," and that, "the macroscopic opposition 'between popular' and 'high' culture has lost its pertinence."<sup>33</sup> Therefore the newspapers of the Omsk regime must be viewed as a collecting point for different strategies to appeal to and connect with different social groups and

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<sup>32</sup> Peter Holquist, "Violent Russia, Deadly Marxism? Russia in the Epoch of Violence, 1905-21," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* Vol. 4, No. 3 (2003), 627-628.

<sup>33</sup> Roger Chartier, "Texts, Prints, and Readings," in Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 169.



organizations that all consumed the same form of mass culture regardless of background; for example, simple and nationalistic slogans placed in the same issue as discussions by the Kadet intellectual M.M. Fedorov about the relationship of power to society in Russia.<sup>34</sup>

While the collection of anti-Bolshevik newspapers at the Library of Congress contains a geographically expansive collection of publications from all cities under White control, this investigation will focus primarily on newspapers and printed sources from the capital of Admiral Kolchak's government, Omsk. This reflects both practical and methodological concerns. The vast amount of sources from all across Russia between the years 1918-1921, ranging from small to large publications, presents a challenge of focus and attention given the time and space restrictions of an investigation of this nature. Although limiting the research parameters to just one city necessarily affects the conclusions that can be drawn about the anti-Bolshevik experience in Siberia as a whole, Omsk's position as the political, economic, and cultural capital of the regime provides a more national orientation. Omsk was the headquarters of both the Russian Press Bureau (*Russkoe biuro pechati*) and the military propaganda wing *Osved* (with its countless smaller departments), which accounted for a vast majority of the publications and circulation numbers in White Siberia. The press organizations in Omsk were provided with large allocations from the government's budget, and although though there were newspaper shortages across the country, the capital remained a collection point for newspapers from across the country. Though there are no real available circulation (*tirazh*) statistics for Kolchak's government, Guins notes that one of the smaller papers published in Omsk, *Nasha Gazeta*, had a circulation of over 20,000 copies.<sup>35</sup> Many of the other newspapers printed in cities under White control reprinted the declarations, articles, and brochures that were produced in Omsk, as the

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<sup>34</sup> *Russkoe Delo* (Omsk) No. 1, 5 October 1919.

<sup>35</sup> Guins, *Sibir', Soiuzniki, i Kolchak'*, Vol. 2, 90-91.

government coordinated with local press authorities and departments of *Osved* to present a unified message from the regime.

It is important, however, not to endow the ideological and propaganda efforts of the Omsk government with more coherence and structure than is deserved. Although significant measures were undertaken to engage and sway the Russian people to their cause, the propaganda of the regime (and to a degree, the whole White movement) failed to achieve its purpose and was much less effective and sophisticated than the Bolshevik's legendary "agitprop" campaigns. The different departments of *Osved* were constantly in competition with each other and often chose to focus on narrow episodes that served their respective interests rather than larger and national events; Guins described these branches of *Osved* as a "hydra," able to grow seven heads in place of one. There was also question of whether the money allocated to the press services was actually used printing and distribution, and finances often served as a central factor in the escalating and ultimately destructive conflict between the military and civilian press agencies.<sup>36</sup> The relative ambiguity of the terms and key phrases used by the government and the often-contradictory statements of the Supreme Ruler and the military authorities further contributed to the opacity of the regime's ideological message. While the significance of the White's attempt to use propaganda and modern forms of mass communication should not be downplayed, one must be careful not to make their arguments more clearly than they could.

The purpose of this investigation is to fill in a gap within the western historiography in regards to White propaganda and culture. It has long been the argument that one of the central reasons for the White's defeat during the civil war was their inability to utilize modern forms of communication like propaganda and to develop a clearly defined political and ideological message. As Peter Kenez noted in his influential work *The Birth of the Propaganda State*, "The

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<sup>36</sup> Guins, *Sibir', Soiuzniki, i Kolchak'*, Vol. 2, 91.

military men [White leaders] were deeply suspicious of propagandists and politicians, and they did not understand the importance of the contribution that civilians could make...In the struggle of ideas, the Whites proved themselves to be feeble fighters.”<sup>37</sup> Although there have been some notable recent works that focused on the development and evolution of White propaganda,<sup>38</sup> there has yet to be a comprehensive study that incorporates the methodological and theoretical developments in the study of Bolshevik and communist propaganda and ideology. Additionally, there has been no serious attempt in English to deconstruct or understand “White culture,” and what everyday life was like under *Belogvardeishchina*. While this investigation is small in scope, it is an attempt to augment and expand our understanding of White propaganda and culture, and specifically how the leaders of the anti-Bolshevik movement envisioned their own power and claims to legitimate authority.

Beginning with the first wave of émigré memoirs after the solidification of Soviet power in 1922, the scholarly literature of the Russian Civil War has been largely slanted towards investigation and analysis of the Bolsheviks and their revolutionary program, at the expense of the anti-Bolshevik movement. This can in part be explained by the fact that Lenin and the Bolsheviks ultimately won the war, and had a chance to create a state and society that was indeed revolutionary and that altered the balance of world affairs for nearly 70 years. The construction of the new Soviet state drew many left-leaning intellectuals to visit or simply imagine the country and to write about the transformation that was being undertaken. Tremendous scholarly attention was directed towards the ideology, politics, and culture of the Soviet regime and its

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<sup>37</sup> Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilizations, 1917-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 64-65.

<sup>38</sup> Christopher Lazarski, “White Propaganda Efforts in the South during the Russian Civil War, 1918-19 (The Alekseev-Denikin Period),” *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 70, No. 4 (Oct., 1992), pp. 688-707.

major figures, and studies on the revolutionary period were primarily constructed as a way to understand how the Bolsheviks were able to seize control of the vast expanses of the former Russian Empire. After the Second World War and the ensuing Cold War, academic camps were methodologically divided between attempts to better understand and analyze the history of the USSR and works that sought to paint the grimmest and most condemning image of Soviet power. Missing from both of these discussions was any serious analysis of the enemies of the Bolsheviks, whom they had to overcome to take control and who helped shape the revolutionary's conception of power and conflict.

The dimensions and features of the White movement during the Russian Civil War have been largely relegated to secondary status in the major works on the revolutionary period. During the Cold War, the Whites did not fit into the meta-narratives that were developed to theorize and explain the rise of the Soviet Union as a global power. E.H. Carr notes in his massive work *The Bolshevik Revolution* that the Whites were not worth more than a passing mention, while Sheila Fitzpatrick's *The Russian Revolution* barely mentions anti-Bolshevik movement at all, and Richard Pipes' chronicle relegates the entire civil war to a minor episode of the revolutionary period.<sup>39</sup> Even with the opening of the archives in 1991, some scholars refused to abandon the antiquated and simple models for viewing the civil war and the Whites, which in large part was informed by the early Soviet historians' Marxist analysis of the conflict. More recent popular histories that have mentioned the White movement had tended to focus on the inevitability of its collapse by enumerating all of the contradictions and failures of their policies. Orlando Figes concludes, "The problem of the Russian counter-revolution was precisely that it

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<sup>39</sup> E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923* (London: Macmillan, 1950); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1990); for an excellent and thorough discussion of these meta-narratives and trends in American historiography of the Soviet Union, see David C. Engerman, *Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America's Soviet Experts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

was too counter-revolutionary,”<sup>40</sup> while Arno Mayer simply states: “All in all, the Whites were a microcosm of the ruling and governing classes of the *ancien regime* – military officers, landowners, bureaucrats, churchman – with minimal popular support.”<sup>41</sup>

The majority of historians who have written about revolution have perpetuated the telescoping of eventual defeat on the analysis of the anti-Bolshevik movement, but there are some notable exceptions. Peter Kenez’s groundbreaking work on the Volunteer Army and the anti-Bolshevik movement in southern Russia was the first Western account to utilize a wide variety of published memoirs and archival holdings in the Hoover Archive in Stanford and the Bakhmetieff Collection at Columbia.<sup>42</sup> Kenez’s work was significant because it departed from the traditional narrative of inevitable defeat and instead focused on the ideology of the movement’s leaders and the political and military structures of administration. Building on the foundations laid by Kenez, Peter Holquist’s seminal work *Making War, Forging Revolution* expanded the theoretical boundaries of the study of the Whites and demonstrated that there was a need to rethink the label of “counterrevolutionary.”<sup>43</sup> Holquist argued that the upheavals of the revolution must be viewed within the context of crisis and violence in Russia that began with the First World War, and that both the Reds and Whites engaged in similar, “modern” practices that were determined by new conceptions of power and order. *Making War, Forging Revolution* revealed that, far from being backwards thinking counterrevolutionaries seeking to preserve the old order, the Whites understood the power of modern techniques such as propaganda,

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<sup>40</sup> Orlando Figes, *A People’s Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 681.

<sup>41</sup> Arno Mayer, *The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 268.

<sup>42</sup> Peter Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia, 1918: The First Year of the Volunteer Army* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); *Civil War in South Russia, 1919-1920: The Defeat of the Whites* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1977).

<sup>43</sup> Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia’s Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1921* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

surveillance and data collection, and should ultimately be viewed more as competing revolutionaries than restorationists.

The contributions of Kenez, Holquist and others (notably including Russian historian Oleg Budnitskii)<sup>44</sup> to the study of the Whites during the civil war have focused primarily on the conflict in the South, which had long been romanticized in Soviet culture and literature. Much less attention, however, has been given to the anti-Bolshevik movement in the East under Admiral Aleksandr Kolchak. The conflict in Siberia did not occupy Soviet imagination and myth like tales of the Volunteer Army and battles in Crimea, and there was neither a Siberian Sholokhov nor an eastern *Tikhii Don*.<sup>45</sup> The same could be said about the West, where Denikin and Wrangel became mythical figures with memoirs published in English, while Kolchak and Kappel largely passed into the dustbins of history. A published collection of documents including Admiral Kolchak's final testimony before Bolshevik inquisitors spurred the publication of some general accounts after the Second World War, but the topic remained largely understudied in the West throughout the Cold War.<sup>46</sup>

During the 1990's, a renewed interest in the Russian Revolution and civil war led to the publication of several studies that attempted to cast light on the dimensions of the conflict and the motivations of the White leaders. N.G.O. Pereira's *White Siberia* examined the politics of the anti-Bolshevik movement and the rise of Kolchak as military dictator, with a relatively novel approach of focusing on the civilian administration rather than the military authorities and staff

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<sup>44</sup> Oleg Budnitskii, *Russian Jews between the Reds and the Whites, 1917-1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

<sup>45</sup> Dmitrii Furman's *Chapaev* did not make the same impact as Sholokhov's classic. For a discussion on the myth of both White camps in Soviet culture, see E.V. Volkov, "*Gidra Kontrrevoliutsii: " beloe dvizhenie v kul'turnoi pamiati sovetskogo obshchestva* (Cheliabinsk: Cheliabinsk Dom Pechati, 2008).

<sup>46</sup> Elena Varneck and H.H. Fisher, eds. *The Testimony of Admiral Kolchak and other Siberian Materials* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1935); for an example of the works on the Allied intervention, see George Kennan, *The Decision to Intervene: Soviet-American Relations, 1917-1920* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956).

officers in Omsk.<sup>47</sup> W. Bruce Lincoln's *Red Victory*, despite taking a simplistic overview approach and covering the entire civil war, offers surprisingly deft insights into the causes of the collapse of Kolchak's government.<sup>48</sup> R.M. Connaughton's *Republic of Ushakova* attempted to untangle the relationship between the Supreme Ruler and the Allies, but fell far short of the mark with analysis and failed to utilize any of the widely available memoirs and published documents in Russian.<sup>49</sup> Many of these works largely replicated the narratives on the collapse of the Omsk government established by influential émigrés, particularly Paul Miliukov, which focused on the military's usurpation of total power and the subsequent abuse and despotism of their rule.<sup>50</sup> While parts of the argument ring true, Miliukov's writings are largely apologetic for the Kadet Party and tend to focus on the failures of groups around them instead of the party itself.

Of all the western literature on the civil war in the East in the 1990's, Jonathan Smele's *Civil War in Siberia* remains an instant classic and ultimately the key secondary text in English on the topic.<sup>51</sup> Smele's encyclopedic (at nearly 750 pages it could qualify) endeavor skillfully synthesizes a wide range of English and Russian sources, as well as archival collections in Great Britain and the United States. Smele provides a day-by-day account of the anti-Bolshevik movement in Siberia, beginning with the revolt of the Czechoslovak Legion and concluding with the last pockets of resistance in Vladivostok. Political and economic issues are his primary concern, and he provides a vast array of charts and databases to present a complete picture of the Siberian economy under Kolchak's rule. Smele also offers a unique conclusion about the fall of

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<sup>47</sup> N.G.O. Pereira, *White Siberia: The Politics of Civil War* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996).

<sup>48</sup> W. Bruce Lincoln, *Red Victory: A History of the Russian Civil War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989).

<sup>49</sup> R.M. Connaughton, *The Republic of Ushakova: Admiral Kolchak and the Allied Intervention in Siberia, 1918-1920* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>50</sup> Paul N. Miliukov, *Russia To-Day and To-Morrow* (Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, 1973).

<sup>51</sup> Jonathan Smele, *Civil War in Siberia: The Anti-Bolshevik Government of Admiral Kolchak, 1918-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

the Whites in the East by arguing that it was ultimately economic and geographical challenges that spelled the failure for the movement, instead of the long-accepted notion that the Whites' arrogance, despotism, and lack of understanding in politics sealed their fate.

One of the major shortcomings of Smele's work, however, is the major omission of any cultural details or theorizing about life under White rule. While he pays close attention to White newspapers as a source, there is almost no discussion of the role of propaganda and the mass press in defining the regime's conception of power and legitimacy. Even though his account fills in many gaps in our understanding of the period, his straightforward and pragmatic approach leaves the reader longing for a more balanced picture beyond the politicking of the government's major figures. He also largely perpetuates some of the long-held myths about Kolchak himself, arguing that he had a weak will and little actual input on policy decisions. Additionally, Smele willfully disregards the archival holdings in Russia that he did not utilize, and he notes: "It has always been the author's judgment, however, that the Soviet/Russian archives can yield little significant information additional to that to be found in the copious materials sent or carried out of Siberia..."<sup>52</sup> Beyond Smele's *Civil War in Siberia*, another significant source for this investigation are the memoirs and autobiographies of those participated in the conflict.

The émigrés who fled Omsk after the fall of Kolchak's government in the winter of 1919 spread across the globe and formed large communities in cities like Kharbin, Paris, San Francisco, and New York City. Although their writings remained largely outside major developments and themes in historical investigation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the former generals and officials of the Omsk government penned many works detailing their experience in the anti-Bolshevik movement in Siberia (few of which were translated into English). A former minister of the Kolchak regime, Georg K. Guins, wrote perhaps the most complete and perceptive of

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, xiii.



these White memoirs, which was bolstered by his own personal involvement in high-level decisions in the Council of Ministers. Guins' work, *Sibir', Soiuzniki, i Kolchak'*, has been the most widely cited source among historians of the White movement in the East due to its clear and comprehensive reminiscences of the inner-workings of the government, as well as providing penetrating analysis and insight into the regime's ultimate demise.<sup>53</sup>

Guins, although a fervent anti-Bolshevik and supporter of Kolchak, was deeply critical of the right-wing factions who largely controlled the government, and of the incompetence of military officials who prevented the more moderate officials from pursuing necessary reforms. His memoirs read more like an analytical assessment than a nostalgic elegy, with thematic organization and seemingly third-person commentary on events that Guins participated directly in. As with any memoir or autobiography Guins' work must be approached critically, but it provides the most cogent overview of the White's Siberian episode without the sympathetic and melancholy overtones that dominates much of the other literature of the émigrés.

Other major figures of the Omsk government left their own accounts and opinions of the course of events, including the former Prime Minister Petr Vologodskii, Foreign Minister Ivan Sukin, the generals Sakharov, Filat'ev, Budberg, Molchanov, and Kolchak's former subordinate Admiral Smirnov.<sup>54</sup> While they provide a fruitful lens to view the goals, aspirations, and ultimate disappointments of ardent supporters of the anti-Bolshevik movement, their memoirs lack the seeming omniscience of Guins, and are colored by attempts to blame outside forces for the

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<sup>53</sup> Guins, Georg K. *Sibir', Soiuzniki, i Kolchak, 1918-1920gg. (Vpechatleniia i mysli chlena Omskogo pravitel'stva), 2 Volumes* (Peking: 1921). Electronic edition.

<sup>54</sup> Semion Lyandres and Dietmar Wulff, eds., *Chronicle of the Civil War in Siberia and Exile in China: The Diaries of Petr Vasil'evich Vologodskii, 1918-1925* (Stanford: Hoover University Press, 2002); Ivan I. Sukin, "Zapiski Ivana Ivanovicha Sukina o Pravitel'stvo Kolchaka," in A.V. Kvakinia, ed., *Za Spinoi Kolchaka: Dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow: Agraf, 2005); K.V. Sakharov, *Belaia Sibir'* (Munich: 1923); D.V. Filat'ev. *Katastrofa Belogo Dvizheniya v Sibiri* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1985); Aleksei Budberg, *Dnevnik Belogvardeitsa: Vospominaniya, Memuary* (Moscow: Kharvest Ast, 2001); V.M. Molchanov, *Poslednii Belyi General: Ustnye Vospominaniya, Stat'i, Pis'ma, Dokumenty* (Moscow: Airis Press, 2012); M.I. Smirnov, *Admiral' Kolchak'* (Paris: Izdanie Voenno-Morskogo Soyuza, 1930).

regime's collapse and apologies for its controversial and often violent policies. The White émigré memoirs do serve a strong counterbalance to the works of Soviet historians and memoirists, who often treat Kolchak and the Whites as being nothing more than pure counterrevolutionaries and revanchists who were all blindly obsessed with the restoration of the monarchy. Budberg's diary (*dnevnik*), for example, is highly critical of the regime's policies and programs, and even more cutting towards the military authorities, which he described as filled with "cretins" and "blind optimists."<sup>55</sup> Ultimately, the personal writings of those involved in the apparatus of the Omsk government shed light on internal differences and opinions within the White camp and present a more complex and multifaceted picture of the struggle that goes beyond the Western and Soviet myths.

Unlike in the West, the conflict in Siberia was paid considerable attention by Soviet scholars, who attempted to demonstrate the soundness of Marxist theories of history by portraying Kolchak's government as the ultimate symbol of reaction and the landowning classes' futile attempt to preserve the old order. Civil war veteran and historian Isaak Mints, who wrote the encyclopedic *Istoriia grazhdanskoi voiny v SSSR* and helped "lay the foundations for Stalinist historiography," by placing Stalin, Voroshilov, and other contemporary Soviet heroes at the center of the conflict and denouncing any investigation that was not Stalinist.<sup>56</sup> Other early Soviet works naturally focused on these ideological issues and the successes of the Red Army and underground communist resistance to Kolchak's rule, .by the late Soviet period several authoritative accounts emerged that largely surpassed in quality many western accounts.<sup>57</sup>

Genrikh Ioffe's *Kolchakovskaia aventiura* stands apart from other Soviet works during this time,

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<sup>55</sup> Budberg, Vol. 15, 305, cited in Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 539.

<sup>56</sup> Elaine MacKinnon, "Writing History for Stalin: Isaak Izrailevich Mints and the *Istoriia granzhdansko voiny*," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 6.1 (2005), 5.

<sup>57</sup> For an extensive discussion of the Red Army in Siberia, see Genrikh Kh. Eikhe, *Oprokinutyi tyl* (Moscow: Voenno Izdatel'stvo Ministerstva Oborony SSSR, 1966).

and presents a relatively objective approach without the trappings of Marxist historical theory (despite discussions of Kolchak's "Bonapartism").<sup>58</sup> As well, Iurii Zhurov's work on the effect of the civil war on the Siberian countryside is a select example of a local study that utilizes slightly dubious figures and charts but reaches solid conclusions about the trauma of the peasant experience.<sup>59</sup>

The 1990's in Russia saw a significant reevaluation of the events of the civil war and the anti-Bolshevik movement, which was partially in response to the need to create new Russian heroes and personalities that were separate from the Soviet past.<sup>60</sup> Although many of the works from Russian academy in the 1990's reflected the currents of nationalistic sentiment and the desire to rehabilitate figures in Russia's past that were previously out-of-favor, they were the first to explore the resources that the newly opened archives held. Additionally, they helped to shift the academic discussion of the civil war in Russia away from studies of the South and more towards the East and the role that Admiral Kolchak played in the conflict.

The enthusiasm for reexamining the civil war in Siberia and the contributions of Admiral Kolchak have carried on strongly in Russia, and over the past 10 years several positivistic and theoretically advanced studies have helped reframe the parameters of discussion. Pavel Zyrianov's *Admiral Kolchak, Verkhovnyi Pravitel' Rossii* places the Supreme Ruler as one of the central figures of the Russian Civil War, and utilizes extensive archival and unpublished sources to reconstruct Kolchak's life without any common trappings of nationalism or patriotism. Zyrianov argues that Kolchak's life experiences and personalities in large part determined the

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<sup>58</sup> Genrikh Z. Ioffe, *Kolchakovskaia avantiura i ee krakh* (Moscow: Mysl', 1983).

<sup>59</sup> Iurii V. Zhurov, *Grazhdanskaia voina v sibirskoi derevne* (Krasnoiarsk: Izdatel'stvo Krasnoiarskogo gosuniversiteta (KGU), 1983).

<sup>60</sup> Konstantin A. Bogdanov, *Admiral Kolchak: biograficheskii, povest-khronika* (St. Petersburg: Sudostroenie, 1993); Ivan Plotnikov, *Aleksandr Vasilievich Kolchak, zhizn' i deiatel'nost'* (Rostov-na-Donu: Feniks, 1998).

fate of the Omsk government, which departs from the long-held notion that Kolchak was merely an observer of events.<sup>61</sup> Another work by S.P. Zviagin investigates for the first time Kolchak's law enforcement organs and other measures of political control, injecting an element of Foucaultian research that is largely absent on the topic as well as borrowing methodological tools from the study of the Bolsheviks.<sup>62</sup> Finally, Vadim Zhuravlev work in the cultural sphere has injected new questions and concepts to a field that has largely been barren, and his work on the evolution of the title "Supreme Ruler" (*Verkhovnyi Pravitel'*) uses linguistic and sociological analysis to deconstruct its symbolic power and meaning.<sup>63</sup> These works are outliers within the Russian historiography on the civil war in Siberia and represent true theoretical innovations that have no match in the western literature.

This paper is about representation and construction, not efficacy and reception.

Admittedly, without accurate circulation statistics or any real means of gauging the reception of these newspapers, the conclusions that can be drawn about White propaganda efforts in Siberia are limited at best. The paper shortages that plagued all of Russia during the civil war, and along with the deteriorated state of printing industry and the ability to distribute papers meant that few people in the countryside ever saw any of the publications.<sup>64</sup> Despite these restrictions, which could potentially be addressed by an in-depth study in the Russian archives, there is historical value in analyzing and deconstructing official propaganda as a means to illustrate how the regime viewed and presented itself and its claims to the mantle of power. The articles and writings of the newspapers of Omsk demonstrate that White officials and writers actively

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<sup>61</sup> Pavel Zyrianov, *Admiral Kolchak, Verkhovnyi Pravitel' Rossii* (Moscow: Moldaya Gvardiia, 2006).

<sup>62</sup> S.P. Zviagin, *Pravookhranitel'naia politika A.V. Kolchaka* (Kemerovo: Kuzbassizdat, 2001).

<sup>63</sup> Vadim Zhuravlev, "Prisvoiv takovomu litsu naimenovanie Verkhovnogo Pravitelia': K voprosu o titule, priniatom admiralom Kolchakom 18 noiabria, 1918 g.," *Antropologicheskii forum* No. 8 (2008), 353-386.

<sup>64</sup> Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State*, 44-45.

participated in the creation of a stylized representation of the movement through its leader Admiral Kolchak, even if the ultimate results of their efforts were ultimately unsuccessful when compared to the Bolsheviks' propaganda campaigns. Instead of dismissing anti-Bolshevik propaganda as being ineffectual and amateurish, as some historians have suggested, we must take a closer look at the messages and symbols of the White regimes and situate them within the larger historical context of the development of mass media to communicate and articulate political messages and ideas.

While the image of the Admiral Kolchak in daily newspapers is central to this project, the actions and ideological commitments of the men in the government, specifically the Kadet Eastern Section of the Central Committee (*VOTsK*), are of no secondary importance. In order to fully understand the decision of the “mask makers” in Omsk to who shaped and deployed a stylized representation of the Supreme Ruler of All-Russia, it is necessary to explore why certain attributes and traits of the leader were chosen and highlighted through propaganda. The ideological foundations of the Omsk regime were formed by the party’s experiences during the revolutions and the early days of civil war, the “product of a long and slow collective development.”<sup>65</sup> The Kadets’ intellectual evolution from liberalism to support for military dictatorship was a dynamic process that reflected changing attitudes towards power and authority, which simultaneously reinforced and fundamentally altered the tenets of their political program. By the time they assumed control of the government after the coup d’état of November 18<sup>th</sup>, the Kadets had solidified their ideological commitments to the military and the rule of law and sought to reconstruct the image of Russia, including its new Supreme Ruler, in their idealized image of the modern state.

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<sup>65</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 247.

## Setting the Stage

### *Kadets in the Time of Troubles*

The Constitutional Democratic Party was founded in October 1905 during the upheavals of revolution and disorder across the empire. The party's core constituency, made up mostly of nobles and members of the "professional intelligentsia," and its founding members, including Pavel Miliukov and Prince Lvov, were committed to a liberal platform that included universal suffrage and the introduction of a democratically elected parliament.<sup>66</sup> Although their ranks were filled mostly with members of Russia's professional and intellectual elite, the Kadets claimed that they were committed to policies that were "above class" (*nadklassnost*'), and sought instead to serve the greater good of the Russian people and the state.<sup>67</sup> The party's first program, published in October 1905, which called for the guarantee of "fundamental civil liberties" and unflinching commitment to law and order, was seen by many in the Tsarist government (including members of the Octobrist Party) as being a "left-wing radical" document because it challenged the existing autocratic system.<sup>68</sup>

The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 had a profound and disruptive impact on the Kadets. War with Germany helped crystallize and strengthen the nationalist and patriotic sentiments that had existed in the party since its founding, and party leaders urged all their followers to unite and support the preservation of Russia. With an eye to expand the Duma's and

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<sup>66</sup> Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 192-193.

<sup>67</sup> Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution*, 25.

<sup>68</sup> Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 193-194.

their own role in state affairs, leaders like Miliukov forged alliances with other liberal groups and formed the “Progressive Bloc,” whose goal was to promote administrative reform without offering a direct challenge to the Tsar’s rule.<sup>69</sup> The Kadets also strengthened their ties with liberal Moscow industrialists and entrepreneurs, like Pavel Riabushinskii and the Progressists, who were committed to winning the war and to reforming Russian society.<sup>70</sup>

However, despite the Progressive Bloc’s acquiescent nature and the limited reforms that were being proposed, the coalition failed to achieve any gains or influence from the Tsar, which led to a fracturing of party unity. A split arose among the Kadets on whether to focus on limited political and administrative reforms, or to turn to the people and society in order to prepare for what Riabushinskii called in 1915, “...the complete seizure of executive and legislative power.”<sup>71</sup> These growing divisions were further exacerbated by the string of military defeats at the front and social unrest in the cities which culminated in the overthrow of the Tsar after February Revolution in 1917. The revolution placed the Kadets largely in control of the newly formed Russian Provisional Government, but despite their early positioning they were not able to build broad popular support at a time when mass politics and popular movements reigned supreme.<sup>72</sup> This was most harshly reflected in the first democratic elections after the revolution, which saw the Kadets lose significant seats in local dumas and the Constituent Assembly to both moderate socialists and the SR’s.<sup>73</sup>

The difficulties of governance and administration during after the February Revolution were like an albatross hung from the neck of the Kadets: their liberal, reformist agenda had

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<sup>69</sup> Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution*, 38-41.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 40; James L. West, “The Riabushinskii Circle: *Burzhuaizii* and *Obshchestvennost’* in Late Imperial Russia,” in E.W. Cloes, S.D. Kassow, and J.L. West, eds. *Between Tsar and People: Educated Society and the Quest for Public Identity in Late Imperial Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 45-47.

<sup>71</sup> Cited in Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution*, 41.

<sup>72</sup> Figes, *A People’s Tragedy*, 334-338.

<sup>73</sup> Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution*, 161-166.

proven to be ill-suited to the revolutionary mood of the country, and the stress of increasing social polarization that was occurring throughout the country contributed to widening gap between the party's right and left wings. The rise of Bolshevik involvement in local politics and the perceived mismanagement of the government and army by Kerensky and the socialists strengthened the hand of those on the right, who argued against any cooperation or conciliation with the socialists or the soviets. In fact, after the tumultuous July Days and further questions of Kerensky's ability to maintain law and order, the majority of the party moved further to the right and began open talks about a new form of government that would ensure stability and victory in the war: military dictatorship.<sup>74</sup>

The Kadets' inclination towards and support for the army was deeply connected with their nationalistic and patriotic sentiments and their support for the Russian state. Many Kadets (including Miliukov) saw the February Revolution as an opportunity to achieve military victory over the Germans, which they believed the Tsar had prevented due to his mismanagement of military affairs.<sup>75</sup> In the minds of Kadet leaders, victory in the war was the only way to protect the gains and reforms of the revolution and to ensure the stability of law and order for the future.<sup>76</sup> These attitudes led many, including Miliukov, to believe that the army would be the decisive actor in the conflict for political power and for the salvation of the Motherland (*rodina*). As Miliukov noted after the turmoil of the July Days, which saw the Kadet ministers and party members resign from the government, "it became clear that the final decision [regarding power] lay with the army, and not with the representative assemblies..."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 196-200.

<sup>75</sup> Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 147.

<sup>76</sup> Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution*, 168-169.

<sup>77</sup> Miliukov, *Russia To-Day and To-Morrow*, 38.



The right wing of the party gained nearly full control after the Ninth Kadet Congress in late July 1917, where the party decided to commit themselves officially to combating “sectarian left-wing elements,” and to “dedicate all forces to saving the Motherland.”<sup>78</sup> A “Military Commission” of the party was formed and tasked with agitation and promoting support for the Kadets among soldiers, officers, and Cossacks. Continuing support and work with the army led many to support General Lavr Kornilov and his plans for military dictatorship. Although Miliukov and other leaders rejected the initial plan for dictatorship and refused to officially join Kornilov’s movement, many party officials helped with the organization of what would come to be known as the “Kornilov Affair.”<sup>79</sup>

The events of the Kornilov affair are well documented, and will not be discussed at-length in this paper. What is important for this investigation is the effect that the failed military “coup” had on the Kadet leaders, especially those among the party’s right wing. The failure of the coup, and especially its lack of popular support, did not dissuade many in the Kadet ranks from supporting the idea of a military dictatorship. Instead, Kerensky’s failure to crush the revolt and his reliance on the Red Guards to save the government convinced some that the need for strong military rule was more necessary than it had ever been. When the Bolsheviks seized power in the October Revolution, these conservative Kadet leaders and politicians felt vindicated in their belief that the only salvation for Russia from the hands of left-wing radicals was a military dictatorship supported by the army.<sup>80</sup>

### **The Kadets Go East**

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<sup>78</sup> “Resolutions of the Ninth Party Congress,” cited in Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution*, 202.

<sup>79</sup> Matthew Rendle, “The Officer Corps, Professionalism and Democracy in the Russian Revolution,” *The Historical Journal* Vol. 51, No. 4 (Dec 2008), 936.

<sup>80</sup> Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 147-148.

The October Revolution of 1917 and the subsequent collapse of the Provisional Government decisively ended the Kadets' and other liberals attempt to govern post-Tsarist Russia. Although members of the Central Committee briefly attempted to use the "legitimate" institutions of government that remained to rally people against Lenin and the Bolsheviks, it was clear that the party of the "professional intelligentsia" did not command any popular support from the *narod*, and more importantly, could not bring to bear any bayonets (*shtyki*) for their cause. In the days and months following the revolution, the Kadets began to disintegrate and fracture along ideological lines, as the party had no clear or coherent plan or response to the Bolshevik seizure of power.<sup>81</sup>

Thus, party members were faced with a series of difficult choices of where and how to begin an open anti-Bolshevik struggle. Some, like Miliukov, favored working with the Germans to drive the Bolsheviks out of Russia; others, like Nikolai Astrov and Vasilii Stepanov, headed south to build a connection with the newly organized anti-Bolshevik forces in the Don and the Kuban. The Volunteer Army, which was initially formed as an underground officers organization by General Mikhail Alekseev, had attracted thousands of former officers (and some soldiers) from all across Russia, under the banner of fighting Bolshevism.<sup>82</sup> Relations between the Kadets and the Volunteer Army were tense at first, especially due to the arrival of Kornilov, who detested politics and blamed the failure of his coup in large part on their political weakness.<sup>83</sup> With the sudden death of Kornilov and the passing of Alekseev, command of the

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<sup>81</sup> Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution*, 263-265.

<sup>82</sup> Peter Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia, 1918: The First Year of the Volunteer Army, Vol. 1* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 55-58.

<sup>83</sup> Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution*, 310-311.

Volunteer Army fell to Anton Denikin, who was fully open to cooperation with the Kadets and helped make them the leaders of the government he was to establish later in 1918.<sup>84</sup>

While many of the Party's prominent leaders travelled to the South to meet with the Volunteer Army, others party functionaries departed for the East, which was rapidly becoming a hotbed for anti-Bolshevik activity. After the revolt of the Czechoslovak Legion along the Trans-Siberian Railroad in May 1918, local anti-Bolshevik governments began to emerge in the major cities now outside of the Bolsheviks' control. One of these was the SR dominated Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly (*Komuch*), which was headquartered in Samara, and which enacted socialist policies and drew its legitimacy from the seemingly defunct Constituent Assembly.<sup>85</sup> As a counterbalance to the left-oriented Komuch, the Provisional Siberian Government (PSG) in Omsk, founded in January 1918, struck a strongly regionalist and conservative tone and quickly rescinded all of the programs the Bolsheviks had initiated, including returning land and property to their owners.<sup>86</sup>

Along with the Komuch and PSG governments, there were smaller administrations throughout Siberia that claimed legitimacy, such as the Western Siberian Commissariat in Tomsk and the Regional Siberian Duma in Omsk. Although the ability of these governments to effectively administrate their own territories was in serious question, the Kadet Central Committee in Moscow was interested in sending its representatives to meet with these bodies in order to increase Kadet influence and to press for the unification of the anti-Bolshevik front. The Kadet Party had little organization in Siberia, and many of the more conservative circles of Siberian politics were staunchly regionalist, and therefore hesitant to embrace a national

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 337-338.

<sup>85</sup> Susan Zayer Rupp, "Conflict and Crippled Compromise: Civil-War Politics in the East and the Ufa State Conference," *Russian Review*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (Apr., 1997), 250-252.

<sup>86</sup> N.G.O. Pereira, *White Siberia: The Politics of Civil War* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1996), 73-74.

program. Many of the Kadets who went East were also members of the Union for the Regeneration of Russia, which was a non-party organization established with the expressed task of "...the resurrection of Russian state authority, the reunion with Russia of the regions forcefully cut off from her, and the defense of these regions from foreign enemies."<sup>87</sup> The Union of Regeneration's platform was specifically ambiguous in regards to what form this "state authority" would take, and this lack of clarity would be exploited by certain Kadets to promote the idea of military dictatorship.<sup>88</sup>

Of the Kadets who left Moscow to help establish a new anti-Bolshevik government in Siberia, perhaps the most influential and nationally recognizable was Viktor N. Pepeliaev. As a former Kadet party organizer in Tomsk, Pepeliaev gained national prominence through his party work in Kronstadt and his unflinching support of General Kornilov. He was also a member of the Union of Regeneration, and part of his mission in Siberia was to propagandize and spread both the Kadets' and Union's anti-Bolshevik message. Pepeliaev was ostensibly sent by the Central Committee of the Kadets to form a coalition among the moderate socialists and liberals in the Komuch government in Samara and the Provisional Siberian Government in Omsk. However, Pepeliaev was not interested in compromising or even working with socialists of any sort, and instead travelled through Siberian gathering supporters for military dictatorship. As Jonathan Smele has argued, Pepeliaev was actively promoting the program of the right-wing Kadet National Center organization, which had been campaigning for military rule since the October Revolution.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution*, 291-292.

<sup>88</sup> Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution*, 291-292.

<sup>89</sup> Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 57-58; for a discussion of the founding of the National Center and its program, see Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution*, 297-300.

Pepeliaev found support for military dictatorship among many Siberian politicians (Kadets and non-Kadets alike), especially those who were members of the PSG in Omsk. Although many of the party members in the East were committed to the idea of regionalism and some degree of Siberian autonomy, Pepeliaev's call for national unity under single-person rule gained traction even among the regionalists. One of Pepeliaev's earliest supporters and confidants was the Kadet lawyer Valentin Zhardetskii, who was well known in Omsk as a conservative and strong supporter of military rule. As early as July 1918 at a party conference in Omsk, Zhardetskii was quoted in a local newspaper as saying that "...now that the passions of civil war have boiled, there must inevitably be established a strong, one-man authority, with the capability of saving the state."<sup>90</sup>

In addition to Zhardetskii, Pepeliaev established contacts with local right-leaning Siberian Kadets who would go on to occupy some of the most important positions in Admiral Kolchak's government. Pepeliaev met with the Tomsk lawyer Georgii Tel'berg and another Kadet transplant from St. Petersburg, Nikoali V. Ustrialov, who would go on to be Kolchak's administrative secretary and head of the information bureau, respectively.<sup>91</sup> Pepeliaev also established contact with the mysterious yet powerful young economist Ivan A. Mikhailov, who served on the council of ministers of the PSG. Mikhailov, whose background was shrouded in as much mystery and confusion as his rapid rise to power, was formerly a socialist but had shifted to the right when it became clear that the only force with true power in Siberia was the army.<sup>92</sup> Mikhailov would go on to play a crucial (and ill-fated) role as Kolchak's Minister of Finance.

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<sup>90</sup> *Zaria* (Omsk) No. 29, 18 July 1918.

<sup>91</sup> Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution*, 397.

<sup>92</sup> Paul Dotsenko, *The Struggle for a Democracy in Siberia, 1917-1920* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1983), 68.

As Pepeliaev travelled farther East, he began to make contacts with different military and civilian leaders to float the idea of a military dictatorship in Siberia. For months, legions of former Tsarist officers began to collect and congregate in Omsk, where they believed they had the best chance to influence the creation of a new government. A chance encounter on a train in Manchuria with the young Czech general Radola Gajda would further cement Pepeliaev's plans and finally put them into action. Gajda, who had risen through the ranks of the Czech legion and proved himself to be a staunch fighter against the Bolsheviks in the Transbaikal, was also in agreement that a change of government was necessary.<sup>93</sup> Gajda concurred with Pepeliaev's statement that, "...salvation lies in the person of a military dictator who must create an army."<sup>94</sup> The next task for Pepeliaev and the Kadets in Siberia was to find a person suitable to fill the idealized role of dictator.

The initial candidate for many Kadets and officers was General Dmitrii Khorvat, who controlled the Chinese Eastern Railway from his headquarters in Kharbin, and was "a reactionary monarchist who the considered the revolution a national catastrophe..."<sup>95</sup> Khorvat was a former administrator in the Provisional Government who conducted his affairs from a railroad car. As political infighting consumed other anti-Bolshevik movements to the west, on July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1918, Khorvat declared himself to be the "Provisional Ruler" of Russia, as "the sole remaining representative of the Provisional Government."<sup>96</sup> However, the territory Khorvat ruled over did not extend far outside of his own railroad car: the Soviets still controlled large swathes of the Transbaikal, and he was effectively cut off from Omsk and even from the recently captured

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<sup>93</sup> Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*, 104.

<sup>94</sup> Excerpt from Pepeliaev's diary (*dnevnik*); cited in Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 59.

<sup>95</sup> Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution*, 386.

<sup>96</sup> Vadim Zhuravlev, "'Prisvoiv takovomu litsu naimenovanie Verkhovnogo Pravitelya': K voprosu o titulye, prinyatom admiralom A.V. Kolchakom 18 noyabrya 1918 g." *Antropologicheskii Forum* No. 8 (2008), 358-359.

Vladivostok. More importantly, Khorvat lacked any sort of military power and did not have an effective fighting force under his command. With the daily arrival of conservative politicians and officers in Siberia in the summer of 1918, the Kadet leadership began to look towards a figure with a greater national reputation and with military credentials.<sup>97</sup>

On July 13<sup>th</sup>, 1918, amidst internal political conflicts in the PSG, Mikhailov founded the Omsk Political Bloc, which included "...delegates of the Trade-Industry Congress, Kadets, Right Socialist-Revolutionaries, and cooperative organizers..."<sup>98</sup> On the surface, the purpose of the organization was to block regionalist propositions from Siberian autonomists within the PSG; in reality, however, the group, with the Mikhailov and the Kadets as the leadership core, began preparations for a coup that would establish a military dictatorship. The bloc's members also began to form strong ties with groups of officers in Omsk, including the secret military organization established by Col. V.I. Volkov.<sup>99</sup> The creation of the Omsk Bloc was significant because it signaled the formal alliance between the social and political groups that would come to dominate Kolchak's administration (with the exception of the SR's.)

### **The Arrival of Kolchak**

Throughout the summer and fall months of 1918, the Kadets and their new constituents began to concentrate power and begin preparations for the establishment of a dictatorship. The arrival in September of Vice-Admiral Aleksandr Vasilevich Kolchak provided an ideal candidate for the position of military dictator, despite the fact that the government's seat in Omsk was thousands of kilometers from the ocean. Kolchak arrived in Siberia via the United States and Japan, and was escorted along the trans-Siberian railroad by General Alfred Knox, the British

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<sup>97</sup> Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 54-56.

<sup>98</sup> Dotsenko, *The Struggle for a Democracy in Siberia*, 38.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 38-39.

military attaché to the Russian army.<sup>100</sup> While there is considerable debate as to what level Knox and the British were involved in the eventual coup of November 18<sup>th</sup>,<sup>101</sup> it is clear that Kolchak was aware that a military dictatorship was being planned, and that his name had been mentioned as a possible candidate.<sup>102</sup>

In many ways, Kolchak was the ideal choice to be at the head of the new military dictatorship, especially for men like Pepeliaev, who had been laying the grounds for uni-personal rule for months. Kolchak was a distinguished war hero, and his exploits in the Baltic and Black Sea Fleets shone brightly amidst the dreadful performance of Russia's army. He was deeply patriotic, and had actually attempted to join the English navy in Mesopotamia in order to fulfill his obligation to fight the Germans. He enjoyed a strong reputation among right-wing circles in revolutionary Russia, and there were even rumors of his participation in counter-revolutionary conspiratorial organizations in St. Petersburg after the February Revolution.<sup>103</sup> Most importantly, however, was that he was a military man, and for many Kadets he embodied the values and ideals that they believed were necessary for the salvation of Russia.<sup>104</sup>

The admiral also possessed qualities that were desirable to the power hungry groups of Kadets and officers in Omsk. In the words of G.K. Guins, a Kadet and important confidant of Kolchak when he was in power:

The admiral was a politically naïve man. He did not understand the complexities of political organizations, the roles of political parties, or the games of ambition as factors of governing. The correlation between the various governmental organs was an inaccessible and foreign concept to him...<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> W. Bruce Lincoln, *Red Victory: A History of the Russian Civil War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 240-242.

<sup>101</sup> For further discussion of this controversial topic, see Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*; Varneck and Fisher, *The Testimony of Admiral Kolchak*; Lincoln, *Red Victory*; Pereira, *White Siberia*.

<sup>102</sup> Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 71-77; for a more in-depth, first hand account of Kolchak's association with Knox and his train ride across Siberia, see Varneck and Fisher, *The Testimony of Admiral Kolchak*, 105-140.

<sup>103</sup> Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 76.

<sup>104</sup> Lincoln, *Red Victory*, 240-243.

<sup>105</sup> G.K. Guins, *Sibir', Soiuzniki, i Kolchak, 1918-1920gg. (Vpechatleniia i mysli chlena Omskogo pravitel'stva)*, Vol. 2 (Peking: 1921), 368.



Hailing from a purely military background, he had had no experience whatsoever with politics, parties, and backroom dealings; in Smele's words, he was totally "...without political guile."<sup>106</sup> He considered the military to above politics in all facets, and detested the constant debates and bickering that were associated with democratic politics.<sup>107</sup> With this in mind, the Kadets who were making plans believed (rightfully so) that they would have a freehand in administration and governance if Kolchak were chosen as dictator.

With the arrival of Kolchak and the consolidation of political and military groups in Omsk, Pepeliaev and the Kadets vigorously argued for the dissolution of the new "legitimate" anti-Bolshevik government in the East, the Directory (also known was the All-Russian Provisional Government (ARPG). The Directory, which was established as a compromise at the Ufa State Conference in September between the delegates from *Komuch* and the PSG, was declared to be Russia's "legitimate authority" with powers of temporary rule until the eventual reconvening of the Constituent Assembly. Both right and left elements present at the conference were dissatisfied with the compromise and the Directory, and the decision to move operations to Omsk in the face of fresh Bolshevik advances spelled doom for the government before it could even meet.<sup>108</sup>

### **The Coup D'état of November 18th**

In early November the Directory, whose members included two SRs (Nikoali Avksentiev and Vladimir Zenzinov), a Siberian regionalist (Petr Vologodskii), a Kadet lawyer (Vladimir A. Vionogradov), and a left-leaning general (Vasili Boldyrev), appointed Kolchak as Minister of

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<sup>106</sup>Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 126.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 125-127.

<sup>108</sup> Pereira, *White Siberia*, 96-98.

War and the Navy.<sup>109</sup> By this time, the political atmosphere in Omsk had been inundated with rumors about a right-wing coup and the establishment of a military dictatorship. Although there had been rumors speculating about the demise of the Directory at the hands of the officers since its inception, the arrival of Kolchak in Omsk accelerated their circulation.<sup>110</sup> Members of the Directory, including General Boldyrev, were aware of the growing speculation: “The idea of a dictatorship grows stronger and stronger in political and military circles. I have hints from different sides. Now this idea will probably be connected with Kolchak.”<sup>111</sup> The rumors indeed proved to be true, and the conspirators would not take long to realize their goal of the creation of a military dictatorship. Although historians have debated who exactly participated in the coup d’état and to what extent, it is clear that the two central figures were the Kadet Viktor Pepeliaev and Ivan Mikhailov, with strong support from the Cossacks and military staff officers. There has been much speculation that the British government, through their representative in Omsk, General Alfred Knox, was supportive if not directly involved in the preparations for the coup, although no conclusive evidence has yet come to light.<sup>112</sup>

The details of the coup of November 18<sup>th</sup> have been written about at length by a multitude of both Western and Soviet historians, but given the focus of this paper, a concise summary of the events will be provided. In the late hours of the night on November 18, 1918, Cossack units arrived at the house of a well-known SR and arrested the party members there, including two members of the Directory, Zenzinov and Avksentiev. As news of the arrest spread through the political circles of Omsk, Vologodskii called an extraordinary meeting of the

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<sup>109</sup> Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*, 106-108.

<sup>110</sup> Stephen Michael Berk, *The Coup D’état of Admiral Kolchak: The Counterrevolution in Siberia and East Russia, 1917-1918*. PhD Dissertation, Columbia University. (Ann Arbor: Xerox University Microfilms, 1974), 460-462.

<sup>111</sup> Vasili Georgivech Boldyrev, *Direktoriya. Kolchak. Interventy: Vospominaniya*. (Novonikolaevsk: Sibkraizdat, 1924), 80.

<sup>112</sup> This topic has garnered significant attention in the works on the Civil War in the East. For a particularly clear assessment of the event, see Berk, *The Coup D’état of Admiral Kolchak*, 456-461.

Council of Ministers and staff officers to decide the future course of action. Despite the ostensible commitment to debate and discussion, most of those at meeting had already come to the conclusion that a military dictatorship was the ideal replacement for the now-defunct Directory (if they had not directly participated in the coup).<sup>113</sup> The decision to be made was then not the form of the new government, but rather who would be empowered as the new “Supreme Ruler” (*Verkhovnyi Pravitel'*) of All-Russia. Of the three main “candidates” for discussion (Kolchak, Khorvat, and Boldyrev), only Kolchak was present, and he spoke in front of the Council members in support of military dictatorship, although he favored Boldyrev, who was a high ranking officer in the old Imperial Army.<sup>114</sup>

After a brief period of debate and discussion, Kolchak left the room while the rest of those present discussed his candidacy. Nearly all those present, including the staff officers of the Siberian Army and most of the Council members, had agreed that Kolchak was best suited for the position, and Mikhailov called for a vote to be taken. There is some debate as to how many polls were taken, but in the final version Kolchak received ten votes and Boldyrev one.<sup>115</sup> Thus, without a drop of blood being shed, the Directory (and with it, the “democratic counterrevolution”) had been overthrown and a new military dictatorship established. The Kadets in Siberia, and especially those members of the *VOTsK*, had realized their long-held ambition to abandon the trappings of political parties and compromise and to vest all power in the military and unipersonal authority. Of course, the realities of the administration of the new government, along with the Admiral’s well-known “political naïveté,” ensured the Kadets would have strong, if not total, control of the shaping of the ideology and policy of the new regime. In

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<sup>113</sup> Berk, *The Coup D'état of Admiral Kolchak*, 460-462.

<sup>114</sup> Guins, *Sibir', Soiuzniki, i Kolchak', 1918-1920gg. Vpechatleniya i mysli chlena Omskogo Pravitel'stva*. 2 Volumes. 1921. Electronic Copy, 73-74.

<sup>115</sup> Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 105-107.

Siberia the Party came to be known informally as “the Party of November 18<sup>th</sup>,” and the Kadet publicist and Chairman of the *VOTsK* Aleksandr K. Kl'faton proudly proclaimed in the Party's paper, *Sibirskaya Rech'*: “...we became the party of the *coup d'etat*. We took upon ourselves complete responsibility for the declared formula. We became the best friends of the government.”<sup>116</sup>

The installation of a military dictatorship, with Admiral Aleksandr Kolchak at its head, signaled a dramatic shift in the form and the identity of the anti-Bolshevik struggle in the East, and throughout Russia. Those behind the coup in Omsk had irrevocably ended the often-tense alliance between left and right anti-Bolshevik parties, and dispensed with the slogans calling for wider participation and the convocation of the Constituent Assembly. In accordance with the right-leaning and military identity of the new regime, new symbols needed to be created to cement its legitimacy and to appeal to the diverse masses of the Russian population that were now under its control. The key role played by symbols and languages from both sides during the revolutionary and civil war periods provided the necessity to master and deploy images, writings, and slogans in order to cement power; as Figes and Kolonitskii write, this period “...can be viewed as a struggle between competing symbolic systems, each attempting to mobilize and unite its followers behind its own symbols of identity.”<sup>117</sup> Despite the well-tread arguments about the anti-Bolshevik movement's inability to master ideas and symbols,<sup>118</sup> the following chapter will demonstrate that at the very least that the Whites in the East understood the power of ideology and propaganda, and they attempted to create their own myths and images to serve their cause in the struggle against Bolshevism.

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<sup>116</sup> *Sibirskaya Rech'* (Omsk) No. 128, 28 May 1919.

<sup>117</sup> Figes and Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution*, 4.

<sup>118</sup> For a particularly grim assessment of the White's propaganda “failures,” see Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Soviet Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 63-69.

## Act One

### *Kolchak the Military Man*

“As the Supreme Ruler, I am simply a soldier-guard and it is my duty, like any honest citizen, to protect the precious achievement of the revolution...”<sup>119</sup>

#### *Kolchak Takes the Stage*

Immediately following the vote to elect Kolchak to the position of Supreme Ruler of Russia after the *coup d'état* of November 18<sup>th</sup>, 1918, the men who met at the offices of the Council of Ministers were faced with the crucial task of presenting the new leader of the anti-Bolshevik movement in the East to its own citizens and to those following the conflict around the world. The military staff members, former ministers of the Provisional Siberian Government, members of the Directory, and Kadet politicians who were present at this “extraordinary session” had decisively acted to concentrate all power and authority within the figure of one man.<sup>120</sup> Despite their diverse backgrounds, those in attendance had decided that the rule of a strong, authoritarian figure was necessary to triumph in the armed conflict over the Bolsheviks, and to unite all the people of Russia under a common banner.

With this centralization of power, there was also a need to centralize the representation and perception of the new regime, for both domestic and international consumption. As seen

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<sup>119</sup> “Narodnoe pravo,” *Rodina* (Omsk) 2 November 1919.

<sup>120</sup> Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 105-106.

with the Kerensky phenomenon after the February revolution, politics and power during this time hinged on the project of an image of a strong and powerful ruler who could unite the disparate parties and factions and finally bring stability to the chaotic circumstances that Russia faced. As Miliukov had noted in the days after the February Revolution, the construction of a new order required a strong power with symbols that were familiar to the people.<sup>121</sup> Of no less importance was providing the allies with a stable and legitimate government to support, as they became increasingly interested in intervening to stop the spread of Bolshevism and Soviet power.

Thus, there was an impetus to transform the image of the new leader into what Harold D. Lasswell referred to as a “key symbol” of the new Omsk government.<sup>122</sup> According to Guins, “He was a symbol of that idea [the abstract ideas of the Kadets], he burned its flame and he died for it.”<sup>123</sup> Kolchak would become a synecdoche for the White movement in the East, and eventually for the anti-Bolshevik movements in Southern and Northern Russia, under Denikin and Yudenich, respectively. Contemporary sources wrote that it would be “Admiral Kolchak who will create a new Russia.”<sup>124</sup> More importantly, as a “key symbol,” the image of the Supreme Ruler that was disseminated embodied fully the goals, principles, and aspirations of those who fashioned it: the Kadet members of the Omsk government (or rather, the “costumiers”). Above all, it was these “mask makers” who, through the use of the press and mass media, were responsible for the creation of an idealized representation of Kolchak that symbolized the Kadets’ support for military dictatorship and their vision for the future of Russia.

Within the organs of government, which were controlled almost exclusively by members of the Kadets’ Eastern Central Committee, Viktor N. Pepeliaev and Nikolai V. Ustrialov exerted

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<sup>121</sup> Pavel Zyryanov, *Admiral Kolchak* (Moscow: Molodaya Gvardiya, 2012), 104.

<sup>122</sup> Harold D. Lasswell, “The Language of Power,” in Harold D. Lasswell, Nathan Leites, and Associates, *Language of Politics: Studies in Quantitative Semantics* (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1949), 12-13.

<sup>123</sup> Guins, *Sibir’, Soiuzniki, i Kolchak’*, Vol. 2, 148.

<sup>124</sup> Zyryanov, *Admiral Kolchak*, 169.

the strongest influence on the construction of the image of the Supreme Ruler. Pepeliaev, a Kadet party organizer with some limited national recognition, was a strong proponent of military dictatorship and had been the chief engineer of the *coup d'état* of November 18<sup>th</sup>. Although he was ostensibly the Minister of Internal Affairs and chief of Kolchak's police (*militia*), Pepeliaev wielded wide-ranging powers and influence within the Omsk government, especially in matters concerning political philosophy and ideology.<sup>125</sup> Ustrialov, a rightist Kadet lawyer who had long advocated for unipersonal military rule, was designated as the Minister of Information and Chief of the Russian Press Bureau, along with holding the position of Kolchak's administrative secretary.<sup>126</sup> Ustrialov perhaps exercised the most direct influence on the creation of the image of the Supreme Ruler due to his control of the press apparatus (a power that grew steadily over time), and he utilized the newspapers of Omsk and other White territories to lay the foundations of a stylized representation of Admiral Kolchak to appeal to the entire population of Russia.

Valentin A. Zhardetskii, a Siberian lawyer and editor of the Kadet newspaper *Sibirskaiia Rech'*, would also play a crucial role in the development of a military image of the Supreme Ruler. Zhardetskii was a prolific writer and frequently published editorials and articles in many major newspapers of the Omsk government, where he espoused the strength and righteousness of Admiral Kolchak's military dictatorship. Georg K. Guins (the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs) described him as one of the chief ideologues of the regime, and wrote that Zhardetskii was "a fanatic of military dictatorship and of Great Russia." He was one of the Admiral's

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<sup>125</sup> Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 57-58; Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution*, 397-398.

<sup>126</sup> Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution*, 397; Ustrialov would rise to prominence after the Civil War as one of the intellectual leaders of the "Change of Signposts" (Smenovekhovtsy) movement among Russian émigrés. See Hilda Hardeman, *Coming to Terms with the Soviet Regime. The "Changing Signposts" Movement among Russian Émigrés in the Early 1920's* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1994).

staunchest supporters (a “troubadour” of the regime), although Guins noted that his abstract thinking prevented him from becoming a “real politician.”<sup>127</sup>

In addition to Zhardetskii, other right-leaning Siberian Kadets who occupied some of the most important positions in the Council of Ministers contributed to the creation of a military identity for Kolchak and the Omsk government. Tomsk lawyer Georgii Tel’berg, the Minister of Justice and Chief Administrator of the Council of Ministers, was responsible for coordinating press interviews for Kolchak, and for giving speeches on his behalf.<sup>128</sup> There was also the powerful Ivan A. Mikhailov, who served as Kolchak’s Minister of Finance. Although as an economist he did not exercise any direct control over the ideological or propaganda wings of the government, he was still one of the most powerful figures in the Omsk administration, and was head of the “Mikhailov Group” of the Council of Ministers, which held secret meetings to determine and create policy.<sup>129</sup> It was this group of Kadets, who held the most prominent and authoritative positions in the Omsk government, that were the “mask makers” who created the image of the Supreme Ruler as a military ruler, a leader who fully embodied their belief in military dictatorship as the only route to salvation for Russia.

The task of quickly and adequately presenting the new Supreme Leader to the populations now under his control was made more pressing and difficult by the fact that Kolchak himself enjoyed little popularity among average citizens, despite his distinguished war record and notoriety as an arctic explorer. In large part this was due to his lack of participation in any of the previous revolutionary events, and also the fact that he was an admiral that was thousands

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<sup>127</sup> G.K. Guins, *Sibir’, Soiuzniki, i Kolchak’, 1918-1920gg. Vpechatleniya i mysli chlena Omskogo Pravitel’stva*, Vol. 2 (1921), 6-7.

<sup>128</sup> Guins, *Sibir’, Soiuzniki, i Kolchak’*, 8-10; Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution*, 397.

<sup>129</sup> Guins, *Sibir’, Soiuzniki, i Kolchak’*, 35-37.



of kilometers from the sea in an area without a rich naval tradition.<sup>130</sup> More importantly, since his position was now the head of a military dictatorship, it was necessary to create a clear and inspiring image of power for the soldiers in the army. As Kolchak himself noted during his testimony, “Authority must first of all be backed by widespread popularity and confidence among the troops. Yet, although my name was known, after all, neither the Cossacks nor the army knew me...”<sup>131</sup>

On the morning of November 18<sup>th</sup>, the first proclamation of the new Supreme Ruler was hastily posted on buildings and public meeting places around Omsk, and over the next few days it was printed in nearly every newspaper in the regions controlled by the former Directory. In addition to the major papers in the region and the usual news organs of the Provisional Siberian Government, this proclamation was printed in a variety of specialized and local papers that the new government would eventually be at odds with and shut down, such as the paper of Siberian worker’s cooperatives (*artelei*) and other cooperatives, *Narodnaia Gazeta*.<sup>132</sup>

On November 18<sup>th</sup> 1918 the All-Russian Government collapsed. The Council of Ministers took all power into its hands and then transferred it to me – Admiral of the Russian Fleet, Aleksandr Kolchak. Having taken up the heavy cross of power in the exceptionally difficult conditions of civil war and the complete disruption of the life of the state, I declare: I will follow neither the path or reaction nor the fatal path of party politics. I set as my chief aims the creation of a battle worthy army, victory over Bolshevism and the establishment of law and order, so that the people may freely choose for themselves the form of government that they wish and realize the great freedoms which are being advanced around the entire world. I summon you, citizens, to victory, to the struggle with Bolshevism, to labor and sacrifice.<sup>133</sup>

The first proclamation created by the new Supreme Ruler and the Omsk government employed simple and direct language with a clear message. Although it is questionable whether Kolchak wrote the document himself, it was signed by him and directly addressed to all the people under his rule. In the first line, the fall of the previous government is mentioned and the

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<sup>130</sup> Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*, 108-109.

<sup>131</sup> Elena Varneck and H.H. Fisher, eds. *The Testimony of Admiral Kolchak and other Siberian Materials* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1935), 174.

<sup>132</sup> Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 106-107.

<sup>133</sup> “K Naseleniiu” *Narodnaia Gazeta* (Omsk) No. 32-35 (2-15 December, 1918).

transfer of power from the government to the new legitimate authority is introduced. Kolchak's full military rank in the old Tsarist navy is provided in order to fully establish his military credentials and to demonstrate that the old military chain of command had been followed and the highest-ranking officer was chosen to lead, which was necessary in order to ensure the coup's legitimacy.<sup>134</sup> He firmly declares that he is neither a reactionary nor a politician, and thus attempts to nullify the popular reactionary perceptions of the anti-Bolshevik movement and the instability of party politics. Mentioning "the heavy cross of power" clearly indicates that he is not an "adventurer" or a "demagogue" bent on increasing his own power, but rather, a Russian incarnation of Cincinnatus, who was given absolute power by the Senate in a time of crisis.<sup>135</sup>

After concerns over the nature and intentions of the new government that came to power after the coup were addressed, the main goals of the Supreme Ruler are explicitly stated: "I set as my chief aims the creation of a battle worthy army, victory over Bolshevism and the establishment of law and order..." While the matter of establishing law and order will be addressed in the next chapter, for the purposes of this discussion Kolchak's "chief aim" here is significant and telling. The "creation" of an effective army and triumph over Bolshevism on the battlefield clearly indicates to the reader that the Supreme Ruler is first and foremost a military man with military objectives. The fact that the strengthening of the army is mentioned before the creation of a new type of "democratic" government demonstrates that the new regime's *raison d'état* is of a military nature. The proclamation also avoids any direct reference to major social or political issues, including the controversial land question, and omits a clearly defined concept or vision of the future of Russia. While some have suggested that the vagueness of the message was intended to avoid upsetting the potentially unstable coalition of the new government, it is

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<sup>134</sup> As Smele notes, Kolchak had been promoted to from vice-admiral the previous evening in order to preserve the continuity of command; Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 106-107.

<sup>135</sup> Guins, *Sibir', Soiuzniki, i Kolchak'*, Vol. 2, 31.

clear that the Supreme Ruler's first message to the population was intended to communicate that Admiral Kolchak was first and foremost a military man whose objective was the defeat of the Bolsheviks on the battlefield.<sup>136</sup>

After the first address was posted (and as the government increasingly asserted its control and censorship of newspapers), all subsequent mentions and discussions of the Supreme Ruler would focus on and reproduce the language used in the proclamation.<sup>137</sup> "Military," "army," "law and order," and "unity" would become key terms or slogans for mobilization, and which were all identified with the image of Admiral Kolchak. However, in the early months of the Omsk government, the "military" discourse superseded all others; as Kolchak noted in an early-published address, "Only in the Army, only in the armed forces is there salvation. Everything else must be subordinated to its interests, to its tasks."<sup>138</sup>

These military "tasks" were further elucidated in an article in the government's (both current and the former PSG's) official organ, *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik*, on November 28<sup>th</sup>. In the editorial, Kolchak announced the reformation and creation of a new army from the remnants of the Directory's army under Boldyrev (notably excluding the Czechoslovak Legion).<sup>139</sup>

Kolchak wrote:

The current situation forces myself and my advisors to concentrate all of our attentions upon the establishment of a powerful, battle worthy Army. This is our chief task. Without an Army it is impossible to defend the dignity and honor of our Motherland.<sup>140</sup>

Although the language and "chief task," were the same as in the first declaration, Kolchak's writing in *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik* concretely signaled the creation of the "Russian Army." The

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<sup>136</sup> N.G.O. Pereira, *White Siberia*, 108.

<sup>137</sup> This can be seen as the creation of what Bourdieu terms the "political field," where language is regulated to reflect the goals and intentions of power; Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 243-248.

<sup>138</sup> K.S. Burevoi, *Kolchakovshchina* (Moscow, 1919), cited in Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 216.

<sup>139</sup> W. Bruce Lincoln, *Red Victory: A History of the Russian Civil War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 237-238.

<sup>140</sup> *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik* (Omsk) No. 12, 28 November 1918.

choice of this name was an attempt to bestow legitimacy on the army and the government, which claimed to be Russia's true representative government. It was also an attempt to distance the military and the regime from the previous SR-dominated Komuch and Directory armies from which it had been formed.<sup>141</sup>

### **The Army**

As the new government began to consolidate its power and expand its operation, new propaganda efforts were undertaken that were specifically aimed at the soldiers and officers of the newly dubbed "Russian Army." Despite the rampant paper shortages that affected the whole country, several new newspapers were founded and distributed exclusively within the army. The papers, including *Golos Armii*, *Russkii Voin*, *Rusaskaia Armia*, and *Golos Sibirskoi Armii*, were distributed among the rank and file and focused on topics and stories relating to army life and the war. They also served as a vehicle for the creation and dissemination of the image of the Supreme Ruler, who was also the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of all Russian Armies. In the military newspapers (and some others), Kolchak was always referred to with both of these titles (*Verkhovnyi Pravitel' i Verkhovnyi Glavnokomanduiushchii*) when issuing orders (*prikazy*).<sup>142</sup>

One of the newspapers, *Russkii Voin*, was introduced in mid-January 1919, about two months after the successful *coup d'état*. The paper, targeted at soldiers and officers, was advertised as a "Military, Social, and Scientific-Literary Newspaper," with the motto, "A Powerful and Battle worthy Army- the Pillar and the Power of Great Russia."<sup>143</sup> In addition to displaying official orders and commands from the *stavka*, articles were printed that included

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<sup>141</sup> Evan Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 144.

<sup>142</sup> For just some examples of this, see "Prikaz Verkhobnogo Pravitelya i Verkhobnogo Glavnokomanduiushchogo, No. 97," *Russkii Voin* (Omsk) No. 2, 19 January 1919; "Offitsial'nii Otdel," *Golos Armii* (Omsk) No. 5, 4 October 1919.

<sup>143</sup> *Russkii Voin* (Omsk) No. 2, 19 January 1919.

discussions on the life of a soldier, brief and amusing short stories, and tales of Bolshevik cruelty and crimes. Soldiers (especially those Siberian peasants that were drafted into Kolchak's ranks) had little previous experience in the political world before the revolution, and thus were seen by leaders on both sides as a key constituency to reach through propaganda and "political enlightenment."<sup>144</sup> Military service and victories of the army the most effective forms of propaganda; as a prominent general noted, victories would mean "the entire people would come over to our side and stand openly beneath the Admiral's banner."<sup>145</sup>

*Russkii Voin* also served to popularize and propagate the image of Admiral Kolchak as not only the Supreme Commander-in-chief of the military, but also as a brave and dedicated war hero. In the second issue of the paper a new song with lyrics about Admiral Kolchak was introduced, that was to be set to the tune of the popular marching anthem, "Rise, Falcons, Eagles:"

*The masts hover above the waves,  
A proud Russian flag sweeps  
That goes to battle with the enemy.  
Glorious Admiral Kolchak.*

*Waves of foam and splashing,  
All the silence, the darkness is everywhere,  
Only the gun menacingly shine:  
Watch out, cunning enemy.*

*Suddenly a shot rang out in the distance,  
And the terrible howling shell.  
Our fleet adjusted quickly  
And took the fight to the Germans.*

*And on the bridge, severe,  
With a sharp eye that cuts the darkness,  
ready to die for Russia,  
Glorious Admiral Kolchak.*

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<sup>144</sup> Figes and Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution*, 80.

<sup>145</sup> Konstantin V. Sakharov, *Belaia Sibir'* (Munich, 1923), 177.

*Shells bursting with a roar  
And the smoke of the fire shines,  
But a worthy reward-  
God keeps the Admiral.*

*The German fleet retreats,  
Enemy ships Perish  
And the dead are covered,  
Smashed on a wave.*

*Again menacingly above the waves,  
Sweeps a proud Russian flag...  
So dealt with the enemy,  
Glorious Admiral Kolchak.<sup>146</sup>*

Traditional songs were an important part of Russian popular culture, and they assumed both political and revolutionary functions during and after the upheavals of February and October. As Figes and Kolonitskii note, “Songs united...giving cohesion and a collective identity to diverse groups and classes.”<sup>147</sup> While the “Marseillaise” and the “Internationale” were anthems of the revolutionary cause, Tsarist marching songs such as “Rise, Falcons, Eagles,” signaled opposition to any revolutionary movement. The lyrics chronicle Kolchak’s past as a naval commander during the First World War, and highlights his accomplishments in crushing the enemy, the Germans. While establishing Kolchak’s past credentials as a war hero, the song also conveys the message of how Kolchak would deal with the immediate enemy (*vrag*), the Bolsheviks. The image of Kolchak on the bridge, “severe, with a sharp eye that cuts the darkness,” metaphorically harkens to Kolchak’s position at the head of the army and the government, steering the ship amidst the fires and waves of civil war. While it is unclear how many (if any) soldiers or officers sang the words to “Admiral’ Kolchak,’” the lyrics are meant to convey an unambiguous representation of a “glorious” Kolchak as a military man who would ruthlessly crush any enemies he faced.

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<sup>146</sup> “Admiral’ Kolchak’,” *Russkii Voin* (Omsk) No. 2, 19 January 1919.

<sup>147</sup> Figes and Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution*, 39-41.

Along with articles in newspapers and the appropriation of Tsarist marching songs, the *stavka* named the 25<sup>th</sup> regiment of the 7<sup>th</sup> Ural Division the “Admiral Kolchak Regiment.” While naming regiments and divisions after great military leaders was a common practice in the Russian military, as White memoirist V.M. Molchanov noted it was quite unusual to name a unit after a person who was still living.<sup>148</sup> The regiment, since it bore the name of the Supreme Ruler, was allocated the assignments (often at the expense of better positioned regiments) that would yield the most glory and significance, such as the capture of Ufa in early March of 1919.<sup>149</sup> When the 25<sup>th</sup> regiment marched triumphantly through the streets of “liberated” Ufa, the glory was inescapably linked to Admiral Kolchak.

Not content with limiting the spread of their message to the territories directly under White control, the Omsk propaganda and intelligence bureau *Osved* (*Osvedomitel'nyi otdel*), and its various regional and departmental variations, sought to use propaganda and agitation to weaken the ranks of the Red Army.<sup>150</sup> The Russian Press Bureau also put the Supreme Ruler in direct communication with the soldiers of the Red Army, through a widely circulated address that encouraged them to desert and join the ranks of the anti-Bolshevik struggle. In an appeal to the “officers and soldiers of the Red Army,” to those who “proved their love for their Motherland on the fields of Prussia and Galicia,” Kolchak urges them to “...come East, where now is being fought the war for Russia’s salvation – from cold Siberia where tyranny does not reign, but law.”<sup>151</sup> He further repeats his famous order that all officers and soldiers of the Red

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<sup>148</sup> V.M. Molchanov, *Poslednii Belii General: Ustnye Vospominaniya, Stat'i, pis'ma, dokumenty* (Moscow: Airis Press, 2012), 117.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 118.

<sup>150</sup> Guins, *Sibir', Soiuzniki, i Kolchak'*, Vol. 2, 90-91.

<sup>151</sup> “Ot' Verkhovnogo Pravitelya i Verkhovnogo Glavnokomanduiushchogo k ofitseram' i soldatam' krasnoi armii,” *Karpatorusskoe Slovo* (Omsk) No. 14, 25 June 1919.

Army who cross over to the Whites will be “welcomed with joy, as unfortunate brothers.”<sup>152</sup>

Although given the strict punishments in place in Kolchak’s Siberia for any level of cooperation with the Bolsheviks, along with the alleged cruelty of the officers and the “White Terror,” meant that probably very few heeded the Admiral’s call, it is still significant that an appeal was even made, considering the vitriolic language of the anti-Bolshevik propaganda at the time.<sup>153</sup>

### *The Officers*

In addition to targeting their message to rank and file soldiers, the newspapers also attempted to appeal to one of the Omsk government’s strongest constituencies, the officers. Over the previous months former Tsarist officers from all over Russia had begun to collect in Omsk, with estimates of the size of their presence in the city ranging in the thousands.<sup>154</sup> Unlike those who joined the Volunteer Army in the South, many of these officers were not interested in actively participating in the war; rather, they sought administrative and staff jobs throughout the city, which led to a rise in bloated and inefficient military staffs and social unrest.<sup>155</sup> Regardless of their effect on Omsk’s political and social stability, the officers in the rear were a large constituency of the Kolchak government, and many sections of newspapers (both civilian and military) were directed towards them.

Throughout the newspapers of Omsk and the rest of the White territories, a veritable “cult of the officer” was deliberately created and developed by those in power. While the officers did have an outsized presence in Omsk and wielded considerable influence on the government, this

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> W. Bruce Lincoln, *Red Victory*, 85-86.

<sup>154</sup> Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 114-115.

<sup>155</sup> “Fighting the Bolsheviks,” *The Times* (London) 22 Nov. 1918; For a discussion of the social unrest caused by the officers, especially the famous incident involving gun-wielding soldiers demanding an orchestra play “God Save the Tsar,” see Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 115.



eneration was intrinsically linked to Admiral Kolchak and his position as Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army. The rigid and inflexible chain of command (*subordinatsiia*), a feature of the former imperial army that occupied a central position in the Russian Army, meant total reverence for, and subordination to, superior officers.<sup>156</sup> As the highest-ranking officer in Russia, any celebration of the officer and “officer culture” contained implicit acknowledgement and admiration for Kolchak. Officers would often send telegrams thanking Kolchak for his service and leadership, and he reciprocated by ordering the population to “treat each officer-defender with gratitude.”<sup>157</sup>

The beginnings of the veneration and celebration of officers and their culture stemmed from the Omsk leader’s reverence of the original members of the Volunteer Army. The armed insurrection in the South that was begun by Generals Alekseev and Kornilov was presented as the true beginning of the struggle for the salvation of Russia, and their exploits were nothing less than legendary. The paper, *Golos Armii*, (irregularly) printed a column entitled “From the Annals of the Volunteer Army,” which gave detailed accounts of the celebrated “Ice March” and the “March Back to the Don.”<sup>158</sup> The myth of the Volunteer Army was so powerful that Guins speculated that it was the sole reason for the appointment of the inexperienced D.A. Lebedev to Chief of Staff of the Russian Army. Lebedev, who is universally reviled and blamed for the army’s defeat in émigré memoirs, had come from the South with a minor command in the Volunteer Army, and was said by Kolchak to embody “the spirit of Kornilov.”<sup>159</sup> A short story in the paper *Russkoe Delo*, entitled “The Way of the Officer,” vividly chronicled the travels of a

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<sup>156</sup> Ivan F. Plotnikov, *Aleksandr Vasilievich Kolchak: Zhizn' i deiatel'nost* (Moscow: Feniks, 1998), ebook edition, 22.

<sup>157</sup> Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Chelyabinskoi Oblsati (GACHO), Fond R-596, Opisi 1, Delo 317, #40 (6 March 1919).

<sup>158</sup> “Iz' letopisi dobrovol'cheskoi armii,” *Golos Armii* (Omsk) No. 5, 4 October 1919; No. 6, 8 October 1910.

<sup>159</sup> Guins, *Sibir', Soiuzniki, i Kolchak'*, Vol. 2, 21.

“brave” and “patriotic” captain and his loyal detachment through the First World War and their arrival in Don to fight the Bolsheviks.<sup>160</sup> The same paper also carried a weekly printing of the notes and diary of “the Greatest Russian Patriot” (*Velichaishii Russkii Patriot*) General Kornilov. The notes included the day-by-day affairs of the army and his views on Russia’s salvation from Bolshevik rule. Kornilov’s title, “Supreme Commander-in-Chief” was bolded in the introductory paragraph, a clear reference to the man who held that current position, Admiral Kolchak.<sup>161</sup>

As popular as the “cult of Kornilov” was among officers and right-wing supporters,<sup>162</sup> the newspapers of Omsk dedicated significant attention and articles to General Alekseev, “The First Russian Volunteer.”<sup>163</sup> In *Nasha Gazeta* and other papers, portraits that took up nearly half the front page were displayed on the anniversary of Alekseev’s death, with his general’s cap and St. George’s Cross displayed prominently.<sup>164</sup> The next day’s paper featured a quote from Alekseev that was clearly associated with the deteriorating situation in Omsk in October 1919: “I have only a few people, but a lot of faith in Russia. We cannot perish.”<sup>165</sup> Alekseev proved to be a better candidate than Denikin for veneration in the Omsk newspapers, since he was not alive and therefore unable to compete with the Supreme Ruler for power and recognition. While it remains unclear if there was any true animosity between Kolchak and Denikin, it is clear that some level of competition existed, at the very least between the staffs and governments behind the two generals. Some historians have claimed that this competitive relationship led both

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<sup>160</sup> “Put’ Ofitsera,” *Russkoe Delo* (Omsk) No. 20, 29 October 1919.

<sup>161</sup> “Zapiski Kornilova,” *Russkoe Delo* (Omsk) No. 5, 10 October 1919.

<sup>162</sup> Figs and Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution*, 96-100.

<sup>163</sup> “Pervii Russkii Dobrovolets,” *Nasha Gazeta* (Omsk) No. 49, 8 October 1919.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid*; *Russkoe Delo* (Omsk) No. 3, 8 October 1919.

<sup>165</sup> *Nasha Gazeta* (Omsk) No. 50, 9 October 1919.

armies to pursue an independent “race to Moscow,” which partially explains the failure of the two movements to link up and form a united front.<sup>166</sup>

From the tone and content of the various articles and portraits that were published, it was clear that a link was established between the heroic exploits of the Volunteer Army, and the current leadership of Admiral Kolchak. The Volunteer Army provided the regime with a mythology that it had otherwise lacked, and the Omsk government presented Kolchak (and not Denikin) as the legitimate military successor to the volunteer’s armed insurrection for the salvation of Russia.<sup>167</sup> Additionally, following traditional military protocol, Kolchak’s position as highest-ranking officer of the army placed him at the forefront of any veneration of officer culture, with generals and lower ranking officers all celebrating his exploits and leadership.

### *The Cossacks*

Along with the soldiers and officers of the newly dubbed Russian Army, the other major component of the Omsk government’s military power were the various Cossack regiments that were spread throughout the Siberian lands. These units were organized under the traditional Cossack “host” (*voisko*), and were under direct command of the *atamans* that were elected by the soldiers and who served as the commanding officer as well as the political leader.<sup>168</sup> Although the Cossack forces of Siberia did not occupy such a central and indispensable role to the new government’s legitimacy as they did in South Russia under Denikin’s government,<sup>169</sup> Kolchak and his ministers understood that gaining and solidifying the support of the Cossacks was

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<sup>166</sup> Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 239-242.

<sup>167</sup> Guins, *Sibir’*, *Soiuzniki i Kolchak Vol. 2*, 21.

<sup>168</sup> William C. Fuller, Jr. *Civil-Military Conflict in Imperial Russia, 1881-1914*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 19-20.

<sup>169</sup> For a complete discussion of the Don and Kuban Cossacks contribution to (and conflict with) the White movement in the South under Denikin, see Peter Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia, Vol. 2* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); Shane O’Rourke, *The Cossacks* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

necessary to achieve military victory over the Bolsheviks.<sup>170</sup> After all, it was Cossack units under the command of Ataman Krasilnikov that arrested the SR members of the Directory and installed the Council of Ministers and Kolchak in power.<sup>171</sup>

While there were a variety of Cossack hosts and tens of thousands of soldiers spread throughout Siberia, the Omsk government was only able to exercise limited and often sporadic control over the various groups nominally under their command. The regime's most loyal Cossack supporters were those of the Siberian and Ural hosts, who were some of the first groups to formally recognize Kolchak's power immediately after the coup.<sup>172</sup> The Orenburg host, under the command of Ataman Dutov, was perhaps the most powerful and numerically strong, but its distance from Omsk and Dutov's own aspirations for power meant that Kolchak was unable to exert much direct control.<sup>173</sup> Farther to the East, the Transbaikalian hosts under the command of Atamans Semenov and Kalmykov did not subordinate themselves to any government (although they received arms and funds from the Japanese), and instead sought to establish their own fiefdoms using brutality and violence against local populations. Instead of being a base for support in the East, Semenov and his bands disrupted Kolchak's rear and often requisitioned shipments of essential materiel from the Allies.<sup>174</sup>

Following the coup of November 18<sup>th</sup>, members of the Omsk government began directly coordinating with Cossack leaders to create an image of the new Supreme Ruler and effectively introduce him to the rank and file *kazaki* now nominally under his command. As seen early with the case of *Narodnaya Gazeta*, the Ministry of Information under Ustrialov did not immediately

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<sup>170</sup> Varneck and Fisher, eds., *The Testimony of Admiral Kolchak*, 174.

<sup>171</sup> Richard Connaughton, *The Republic of Ushakovka': Admiral Kolchak and the Allied Intervention in Siberia, 1918-20* (London: Routledge, 1990), 98-99.

<sup>172</sup> Varneck and Fisher, *The Testimony of Admiral Kolchak*, 185.

<sup>173</sup> Ferreira, *White Siberia*, 110.

<sup>174</sup> Figs, *A People's Tragedy*, 650-651.

assume complete control of the press and independent newspapers in Omsk, but rather coordinated with them and supplied articles that conveyed a unified message of the new government's purpose and intentions. This was perhaps the best way to effectively control the information released about Admiral Kolchak while not taking the draconian step of full-censorship and control of the press, which would have tarnished the new government in the eyes of the Allies.<sup>175</sup> The first post-coup edition of the newspaper *Irtysh* is an illustrative example of this initial cooperation between the Omsk government and the Cossack authorities to present a stylized image of the Supreme Ruler.

*Irtysh*, named for the river that winds through the center of Omsk, was the official publication of the Siberian Cossack Host and the central newspaper for Cossacks living in the capital. The first edition after the coup, which was published on 21 November, displayed the first declaration of Admiral Kolchak in the top center of the middle column on the front page with a large headline, indicating to the readers its importance amongst the other articles.<sup>176</sup> Directly below the headline is printed Official Order No. 462, signed by Colonel Berezovskii, an assistant to the Ataman. The order begins by describing the fall of the Provisional Russian Government and the changing power situation in Siberia. Berezovskii notes, "The severity and greatness of the current conflict has caused the need to concentrate full Supreme power in one person's hands."<sup>177</sup> He mentions a previous declaration from the four *krugs* of the host that established the need for a power that "...would be strong, powerful, and able to protect public

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<sup>175</sup> This policy was short-lived, and by the end of November 1918 both the military and civilian administrations began censoring certain papers and shutting down those believed to be hostile towards the regime. See Dotsenko, *The Struggle for a Democracy in Siberia*, 71-72.

<sup>176</sup> Nurit Schleifman, "A Russian Daily Newspaper and Its New Readership: 'Severnaia Pehela.' 1825-1840," *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Apr-Jun 1987), 133-134; Schleifman discusses the shift of some Russian newspapers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the Western "three column model," which was still used by many newspapers during the Russian Civil War, including *Irtysh*.

<sup>177</sup> "Prikaz Sibirskomu Kazach'emu Voisku, No. 462," *Irtysh* (Omsk) No. 37, 21 November 1918.

order and to provide security from attacks from outside.”<sup>178</sup> Berezovskii then confidently asserts: “That power has finally been created.”<sup>179</sup> The order goes on to call for total support and recognition of Kolchak’s power, and calls for mobilization for the “salvation of the country.”<sup>180</sup>

Berezovskii’s “order No. 462” is significant and telling for several reasons. Firstly, it serves as a bridge to connect Kolchak’s official first declaration (which was printed in all newspapers and distributed around Omsk) to the local and individual interests of the Cossack populations. In fact, the writing style is not that of an official order, but rather an impassioned attempt to enlighten and mobilize the Cossacks to service for the new regime.<sup>181</sup> By connecting Kolchak and his government to previous Cossack ideas and programs for ideal power, Berezovskii argues that the Cossacks should recognize *themselves* (and their own interests) in the new regime.<sup>182</sup> Secondly, Berezovskii’s description of Kolchak as one who could “provide security” from external threats clearly demonstrates his position as a man in charge of military affairs. Only “security” and “order” are mentioned when describing the Supreme Ruler, and the *prikaz* does nothing to mention any of the other goals of the regime, or major social and political issues of the day.

Following the official government addresses on the front page, an article on the second page of the paper gives a detailed description of Kolchak’s background and firmly cements his image as that of a military leader. Entitled “Admiral Kolchak- The Supreme Ruler of Russia,” the article gives an in-depth account of Kolchak’s actions and exploits before the October Revolution, and attempts to “characterize the vibrant and strong personality of Admiral

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Interestingly, the content of the actual “order” can be found buried at the end of the article. It states that dues will be collected from all *stanitsa* and military organizations in the Siberian Cossack Host.

<sup>182</sup> Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 188.

Kolchak.”<sup>183</sup> Beginning with Kolchak’s experience at Port Arthur during the Russo-Japanese War, the article follows the Admiral’s rapid rise through the military ranks, and special attention is given to the risky assaults on Kiel and Danzig under his command. The author notes that after the death of Admiral Nikolai Essen, Kolchak began to play a more “increased” role in the Russian Navy. The saga concludes with Kolchak’s promotion to Vice-Admiral and his taking command of the Black Sea Fleet, and the now-famous story of him throwing his sword overboard rather than surrendering it to mutineers is recounted with passionate language.<sup>184</sup>

The purpose of this biographical sketch (which was written by a correspondent for the Russian Army- an example of the coordination among independent groups mentioned earlier) was to fully introduce the Supreme Ruler to the Cossack populations and to create a powerful image that would inspire patriotism and service. Despite the fact that many of the rank-and-file Cossacks and soldiers were likely to have never heard of the Admiral, the author is quick to remind them that, “Admiral Aleksandr Kolchak is undoubtedly one of the most popular heroes of the current world war.”<sup>185</sup> Although Kolchak’s experience in the navy was not ideally suited to a land-based conflict thousands of kilometers from the sea, the article (and many others) focused on his leadership traits and innate characteristics that made him ideal for the positions of Supreme Ruler and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. According to the article, Kolchak always acted as “...a responsible chief and senior commander” filled with “wisdom.”<sup>186</sup> The image of Kolchak, standing on the bridge of the flagship with “olympic serenity” amidst

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<sup>183</sup> “Admiral Kolchak-Verkhovnii Pravitel’ Rossiya,” *Irtysk* (Omsk) No. 37, 21 November 1918.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid*; For a more detailed description of this event and the reaction it stirred among nascent counterrevolutionary groups in Petrograd, see Aleksandr Kerensky, *Russia and History’s Turning Point* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1965), 278-281.

<sup>185</sup> “Admiral Kolchak-Verkhovnii Pravitel’ Rossiya,” *Irtysk* (Omsk) No. 37, 21 November 1918.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid*.

crashing waves and the storms of conflict was powerful and often used, a clear metaphor for Russia's state of fratricidal war.<sup>187</sup>

### **The Spring Offensive and Summer Reversal**

In December 1918, only weeks after assuming power, Kolchak fell seriously ill and was unable to actively participate in state affairs. His absence was also felt in the Omsk press, and there were no major public addresses or orders issued by him in newspapers for nearly all of the six weeks he was sidelined.<sup>188</sup> The newspapers, however, did not suffer from a dearth of headline-making events during these weeks. On December 21<sup>st</sup>, a collection of local workers and underground Bolsheviks organized an insurrection to overthrow the government and free political prisoners being held under guard by the Cossacks. Incidentally, Kolchak's police (*militia*) forces, under none other than Viktor Pepeliaev, had discovered the plot days earlier, and the uprising was quickly put down.<sup>189</sup> The papers had better headlines to print a few days later, when an army under Anatolii Pepeliaev (Viktor's brother) captured the important industrial city of Perm, along with an estimated 30,000 Red prisoners and supplies.<sup>190</sup> While several historians have challenged the true significance of the victory over the Third Red Army, the event was a propaganda success and was covered for weeks by all the major papers in White Siberia.<sup>191</sup>

Despite Admiral Kolchak's lack of involvement in executing the capture of Perm (and his near total absence from government during his illness), the victory created a stir among the Allies, and the formal recognition of Kolchak's Siberian government was brought into

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Guins, *Sibir', Soiuzniki, i Kolchak*, Vol. 2, 98-99.

<sup>189</sup> Dotsenko, *The Struggle for a Democracy in Siberia*, 72-73.

<sup>190</sup> "Results of Perm Victory," *The Times* (London) 4 January 1919.

<sup>191</sup> Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 181-182.



discussion. Given their government's military involvement in Siberian affairs in support of the Omsk government, many British and American newspapers began running laudatory (and sometimes critical) articles about the new "Ruler of Siberia."<sup>192</sup> In addition to receiving news and declarations from pro-White groups in Paris, British and American newspapers had special correspondents in Omsk. Western newspapers, like their Siberian counterparts, presented a stylized and simplistic image of the Admiral to their readers, which included a heavy emphasis on Kolchak's military qualities.

For many readers in the West, the reports carried by British and American newspapers were the first glimpse of the Admiral, whom the American consul in Siberia John Embry called, "The greatest man that the Russian revolution has produced..."<sup>193</sup> Many articles portrayed him as a man solely committed to defeating the Bolsheviks militarily. In his first printed letter (in English) to the Allies, Kolchak is quoted as saying; "All my efforts are aimed at concluding the civil war as soon as possible by crushing bolshevism..."<sup>194</sup> One article paid special attention to Kolchak's military dress by noting: "He wore a plain black undress, with three black eagles embroidered, without the crown, on his gold shoulder-straps."<sup>195</sup> The symbolism of gold epaulettes (a powerful symbol in revolutionary Russia)<sup>196</sup> without "the crown" on them clearly indicated that Kolchak was a military man, but not a Tsarist reactionary. The same writer, who submitted his story from Kharbin in Manchuria, went on to vividly describe the reaction of the residents of Perm' when Kolchak entered the city for the first time: "At Perm, liberated by a force composed exclusively of Russian regiments, the people knelt and blessed him as a

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<sup>192</sup> "The Ruler of Siberia," *The Times* (London) 22 March 1919.

<sup>193</sup> "Admiral Koltchak Highly Praised," *The Christian Science Monitor* (New York) 2 July 1919.

<sup>194</sup> "Free Russia His Goal," *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC) 14 June 1919.

<sup>195</sup> "The Ruler of Siberia," *The Times* (London) 22 March 1919.

<sup>196</sup> Boris Kolonitskii, *Pogony I bor'ba za vlast' v 1917 godu* (Sankt-Peterburg: Izdatel'stvo Ostrov, 2011).

deliverer, crying ‘Do not forsake us.’<sup>197</sup> Another article entitled “Koltchak’s Coming Offensive” detailed the Admiral’s tour of the front in the spring of 1919, where he was “enthusiastically received by the troops and civilians,” and assured all those he met with (including diverse groups such as soldiers, Cossacks, and workingmen) that “...the military situation at all important points is favorable.”<sup>198</sup>

Stories and articles detailing the Supreme Ruler’s time at the front were common during the spring and summer months of 1919. The front was the natural place for the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army, and the press and members of the government often presented the Admiral as being totally removed from any political or governmental affairs in Omsk, and instead focusing solely on military matters.<sup>199</sup> In short news clippings and longer pieces, the Admiral was described as working tirelessly and “without rest” touring the front and meeting with soldiers and officers.<sup>200</sup> *Pravitel’stvenni Vestnik*, the government’s official organ, devoted front-page space to small articles giving updates about the Admiral’s time away from Omsk. The time spent among the troops was significant for the Supreme Ruler, and according to Jonathan Smele, detrimental to the survival of the regime: he estimates that Kolchak spent at least 136 days out of the 350 he was power at the front (or ill). According to Smele, “That is to say, for two-fifths of his period in office in White Siberia, the desk of the Supreme Ruler remained unoccupied – usually because the Commander-in-Chief was at the front.”<sup>201</sup>

The Supreme Ruler’s time spent touring the front included preparations for the much-anticipated offensive that the Russian Army launched in the spring of 1919. Initially, the offensive was a major success, with White armies recapturing major cities such as Ufa and

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<sup>197</sup> “The Ruler of Siberia,” *The Times* (London) 22 March 1919.

<sup>198</sup> “Koltchak’s Coming Offensive,” *The Times* (London) 5 March 1919.

<sup>199</sup> Guins, *Sibir’, Soiuzniki, i Kolchak*, Vol. 2, 68.

<sup>200</sup> “Verkhovnii Pravitel’ na fronte” *Krest’ yanskii Vestnik* (Omsk) No. 13, 4 Septmer 1919.

<sup>201</sup> Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 128-129.

penetrating deep into Bolshevik-held territory. Evan Mawdsley estimates that in only eight weeks, Kolchak's armies had moved forward 250 miles and captured 115,000 square miles from the Reds.<sup>202</sup> By mid-April, the Whites were within striking distance of Kazan and Samara, and had the potential to link up either with forces from Arkhangelsk to the north or Denikin to the south. However, the tide quickly turned against the Whites, and a Red Army offensive (led by Bolshevik legend Mikhail Frunze) in late April drove the Russian Army back to its original positions within a few weeks. By the summer of 1919, Kolchak's armies had retreated behind the Urals and were falling back towards Omsk with great haste.<sup>203</sup>

Historians and memoirists have placed blame for the Russian Army's stunning reversal alternately on the *stavka*, and their "young, fervent, wet-behind-the-ears colonels,"<sup>204</sup> or on Kolchak himself and his total lack of qualifications in land warfare.<sup>205</sup> However, for the purposes of this investigation, what is important is that the Omsk press and the Ministry of Information under Ustrialov responded to the setbacks by increasing their production of propaganda and information about the Supreme Ruler. In fact, it was only after the Russian Army was crushed on the field that there emerged the beginnings of what Jan Plamper called "multiple smaller personality cults among all fighting parties" that emerged during the civil war.<sup>206</sup> It was only when the military and political situations were deteriorating rapidly that the nascent beginnings of a "personality cult" could be observed.

The first step the regime took to promulgating and disseminating the image of the Supreme Ruler on a mass scale was the introduction of several new newspapers in Omsk.

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<sup>202</sup> Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*, 134.

<sup>203</sup> Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 653-655.

<sup>204</sup> D.V. Filat'ev, *Katastrofa belogo dvizheniia v sibiri, 1918-1922* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1985), 76.

<sup>205</sup> Baron A.P. von Budberg, *Dnevnik* Vol. 15, 332 - cited in Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 128; see also Lincoln, *Red Victory*, 249-251.

<sup>206</sup> Plamper, *The Stalin Cult*, 12.

Although there were already many newspapers in Omsk, the Russian Press Bureau introduced nearly a dozen new daily and weekly papers that served as pure propaganda organs for the regime. The new papers were also more targeted to specific social and political groups, and carried both official and group-specific content. An illustrative example of this was the paper *Krest'ianskii Vestnik* (The Peasant Herald), which was introduced on 30 July 1919 and targeted directly at the peasantry and rural communities in Russia.<sup>207</sup> The newspaper printed the usual government bulletins and proclamations on the front page, but also included articles about peasants' lands rights, the Bolsheviks' policy towards peasants, and the role of peasants in the new Russian society.<sup>208</sup>

As in the other papers, Kolchak was presented as a firm military leader in the pages of *Krest'ianskii Vestnik*, often making direct appeals or orders to the readers. In one article, Kolchak decisively declares, "I demand from citizens and the population complete calm, self-control and common work for the Army."<sup>209</sup> In another piece, entitled "What the Supreme Ruler Wants," Kolchak notes that all his efforts are given to achieving military victory, and what "he wants" are more recruits for the Russian Army.<sup>210</sup> Other newspapers that were established included *Nasha Gazeta* (August 1919), *Nash Put'* (September 1919), and *Rodina* (October 1919); all of these new papers, as their titles imply, espoused heavily nationalistic attitudes and views along with support for the army. An early issue of *Nasha Gazeta* carried a large, front-page portrait of Admiral Kolchak in a simple black coat, with his Order of St. George and Order

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<sup>207</sup> *Krest'ianskii Vestnik* (Omsk) No. 1, 30 July 1919.

<sup>208</sup> *Krest'ianskii Vestnik* (Omsk) No. 18, 18 September 1919; No. 22, 27 September 1919; No. 32, 22 October 1919.

<sup>209</sup> "K naseleniiu," *Krest'ianskii Vestnik* (Omsk) No. 4, 13 August 1919.

<sup>210</sup> "Chego Khochet' Verkhovnii Pravitel'," *Krest'ianskii Vestnik* (Omsk) No. 1, 30 July 1919.

of St. Anna displayed prominently, and a below it featured column entitled “At the Front,” which provided a “situation report” (*operativnaya svodka*) from the Supreme Headquarters.<sup>211</sup>

As the White forces in the East continued their seemingly unstoppable retreat across the Urals and towards Omsk, the press and media outlets, now under firm government control, began to augment their daily publications with special editions focusing on the Supreme Ruler and the army. As the political and military situation was progressively deteriorating, and with desertion among soldiers increasing, the Omsk Press Bureau focused its attention on promoting the role of the military, and specifically its Supreme Commander, as the only saviors of the Motherland. The cover of a supplement to the September 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of *Irtysk* displayed a half-page size portrait of Admiral Kolchak, with a stern look, dark black uniform, and a prominent white Cross of St. George. Beneath the image, in stylistic type, was the title “Supreme Ruler, Supreme Commander-in-Chief Aleksandr Vasilievich Kolchak,” with “Supreme Commander-in-Chief Kolchak” significantly bolder and in larger print than the other words.<sup>212</sup> Notably absent from the image are any of the symbols that would be associated with the Tsarist system (including eagles, the crown, and St. Andrew's Cross), and in their place a simple military uniform with no epaulettes and the Cross of St. George, a symbol of military bravery. The symbolic message of the portrait was that Kolchak had connection to the old order, and that he was simply a soldier who was serving his duty to his Motherland, which complements his address to the soldiers that followed.<sup>213</sup>

Kolchak’s speech to the soldiers of the Mikhailovskii regiment must be viewed in the greater context of the proliferation of printed military speeches during the revolutionary period.

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<sup>211</sup> “Verkhovnyi Pravitel’ Admiral’ Kolchak’,” “Na Fronte”, *Nasha Gazeta* (Omsk) No. 22, 11 September 1919.

<sup>212</sup> “Verkhovnyi Pravitel’, Verkhovnyi Glavnokomanduyushchii Aleksandr’ Vasilievich’ Kolchak’,” *Irtysk* (Omsk) No. 35, 2 September 1919.

<sup>213</sup> Figs and Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution*, 48-49.

Trotsky famously used his fiery oratory skills to help reestablish morale and discipline in the Red Army after the fall of Perm, and Kerensky was known as “the idol of Army,” due to his frequent and impassioned speeches in front of frontline soldiers during the First World War.<sup>214</sup> More importantly, these speeches were reprinted in newspapers and brochures and contributed to the development of the cult of the “leader” (*vozhd*) among the masses; soldiers were said to have read Kerensky’s speeches at the front “...not without a trembling of the soul.”<sup>215</sup> The proliferation of the speeches of Kolchak must be seen not only as a continuation of these propaganda practices, but also as a unique chapter in their development in Russia during this period. The image that was created for Kolchak in the press was intricately woven with the views and beliefs of the Omsk regime and its ideology, and although it drew upon language and symbols that were employed earlier, its message and intentions were quite distinct from its predecessors.

The Supreme Ruler begins the speech by thanking the men of the Mikhailovskii regiment for their “valiant military service” and that those in positions of authority had been “closely watching” the regiment’s military service. Kolchak then decisively announced (shown in bold print), “After the division arrived, the chief of the army reported to me that the soldiers of the division want to see that person for whom they fight. This is wrong: they don’t fight for me, I myself am a soldier and in this regard there is no difference between me and you.”<sup>216</sup> The speech ends on a touching note when he reminds the men under his command, “Maybe I will be far from you, but always remember: in that difficult, most painful moment I will be there with you,

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<sup>214</sup> Figes and Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution*, 88.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>216</sup> “Verkhovnyi Pravitel’, Verkhovnyi Glavnokomanduyushchii Aleksandr’ Vasilievich’ Kolchak’,” *Irtysk* (Omsk) No. 35, 2 September 1919.

perhaps, in your ranks.”<sup>217</sup> This remarkably informal and direct appeal to the soldiers of the Siberian Army, by presenting the Supreme Ruler as a simple soldier and placing him among their ranks, clearly demonstrates that the men of the Omsk government understood the power that image and propaganda held during the Civil War, and that the previous revolutions had created a political climate where engagement with the population was necessary. Far from what Orlando Figes claimed was a “...[failure] to adapt to the new revolutionary world in which the civil war had to be fought,”<sup>218</sup> White leaders actively pursued the creation of a stylized and popular image of their leader that was meant to inspire and to raise morale among the soldiers at the front.

### **The Fall of Omsk**

The summer of 1919 witnessed the collapse of the White drive towards Moscow, which was followed by a series of reversals that saw the Red Army capture the major industrial cities in the Urals and the Siberian Army retreat back into the steppes of Siberia. Many of the White’s finest soldiers had been senselessly killed in battles around Chelyabinsk and Ufa, and ill-conceived monetary reforms promoted by the Finance Minister Mikhailov had effectively destroyed the value of the government’s *sibirki* note and led to rampant speculation.<sup>219</sup> The military and financial setbacks seriously weakened the government’s legitimacy in the eyes of the Russian people and, perhaps more importantly, the Allies. By this time, it was clear that the much-desired formal recognition of the Omsk government by the Allied powers was not forthcoming, especially as the Armed Forces of South Russia under Denikin were making significant gains on the Southern Front. Despite all of the setbacks, the press continued to print daily papers on increasingly rare paper, and the regime continued to promote the image of

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Figes, *A People’s Tragedy*, 569.

<sup>219</sup> Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 400-404.

Admiral Kolchak as a strong military leader, even in the face of a rapidly deteriorating military situation.<sup>220</sup>

In the fall of 1919, the Siberian Army underwent a massive command reorganization and formed a new defensive line along the river Tobol', and the unpopular General Lebedev was replaced by as commander of the army Mikhail Diterikhs. Desertion was becoming an increasing blight on the Siberian Army ability to fight, and several steps were taken to help improve morale among the rank-and-file, including the introduction of a new medal, the Order of St. Mikhail the Archangel, for "Uralites" (*Ural'tsy*) who had distinguished themselves in the previous months' fighting.<sup>221</sup> Elaborate military ceremonies were held in front of soldiers and officers, with one that featured Kolchak presenting one his commanders with a sword that was rumored to have belonged to Jan Sobieski of Poland, the "savior of Christendom."<sup>222</sup> Kolchak toured the front frequently during this time, in large part supporting the preparations for the Tobol'sk offensive, which was supposed to deliver the decisive blow against the Red Army and drive the Bolsheviks back out of Siberia.<sup>223</sup>

Despite early gains in September of 1919, the arrival of Bolshevik reinforcements and the lack of new recruits from White territories spelled doom for the Siberian Army, and within weeks its shattered remnants were streaming back towards Omsk. The mood in the capital, now filled with thousands of officers and upper-class families who fled from the Bolsheviks, quickly descended into fear and panic as the soldiers from the front returned; according to Ustrialov, "At the front, things are bad, catastrophic in fact. The fall of Omsk, evidently, is inevitable."<sup>224</sup> Thousands of people fled the city and headed east towards Irkutsk, which was to be the new seat

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<sup>220</sup> Pereira, *White Siberia*, 141.

<sup>221</sup> "Ural'tsy," *Russkoe Delo* (Omsk) No. 7, 12 Oct 1919.

<sup>222</sup> Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 527-528.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid*, 523-527.

<sup>224</sup> Lincoln, *Red Victory*, 263.



of the government. While the clogged railway station was packed with those desperately trying to escape, Kolchak confidently assured all that “The Army will have everything it needs,” and that the end of Russia’s time of troubles (*smutnoe vremya*) would be soon upon them.<sup>225</sup> The city fell to Bolshevik forces on November 14<sup>th</sup>, just days before the one-year anniversary of the coup d’état that had placed the Supreme Ruler in power. Kolchak was one of the last major government officials to leave the city; as Smele notes, “...like a captain on the bridge of a sinking ship, Kolchak refused to abandon his doomed capital until the last possible moment.”<sup>226</sup>

The massive exodus from Omsk towards Irkutsk wreaked havoc on the already overextended resources of Siberia’s railways, as civilians and soldiers battled to make it on to the few railroad cars that were still running. Since he had stayed until the last possible moment, Kolchak found himself separated from his army and most of the ministers of his government, and with only the protection of a small guard and Allied flags on his train. Also as the political situation in Siberia deteriorated, it became clear to the remaining Allied commanders (mainly Maurice Janin and the Czech general Jan Syrový) that without their protection, Kolchak would be captured and arrested by either the Bolsheviks or local socialist forces. While there is much debate as to whether General Janin had acted deliberately to trade Kolchak for the safe passage of the Czechoslovak region, or that he underestimated the connections of local socialists to the Bolsheviks, it is clear that Janin’s action or inaction led to the capture of the Supreme Ruler by the SR dominated Political Center in Irkutsk, where he was immediately imprisoned.<sup>227</sup>

As the remains of the White army rapidly made its way towards Irkutsk, led now by the new Commander-in-Chief of the army, Vladimir Kappel’, members of the Bolshevik-run *revkom* and other socialist organizations became concerned that the Political Center would not be able to

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<sup>225</sup> *Rodina* (Omsk) No. 21, 8 November 1919.

<sup>226</sup> Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 549.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid*, 641-646

protect the city, and that the admiral would be gifted back to his legions. At an extraordinary meeting of local political parties, the Supreme Ruler and Viktor Pepeliaev, the last minister in the government to stand with Kolchak, were turned over the *revkom* and the representatives of the Cheka in the city. A special Extraordinary Examination Committee subjected Kolchak to an official inquisition, where he recounted his past and involvement in counterrevolutionary movements up until the coup d'état of November 18<sup>th</sup>.<sup>228</sup> The deposition was cut short (to the frustration of historians) by the impending arrival of the White columns that were the advance guard for the remnants of the army, and Kolchak and Pepeliaev were sentenced to death by authorities in Moscow. In the early hours of February 7<sup>th</sup>, 1920, the Supreme Ruler of All-Russia and his faithful servant Viktor Pepeliaev were taken out of their cells and onto the frozen river winding through Irkutsk, where they were shot by firing squad. Their bodies were then pushed through a hole in the ice into what R.M Connaughton called “the depths of the Republic of Ushakovka.”<sup>229</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The images and symbols of the Supreme Ruler that were presented to the soldiers of the Russian Army and the Cossacks in the days after the coup of November 18<sup>th</sup> were of a man who selflessly served his country in battle against her enemies. The task of creating and presenting an idealized image of Kolchak as a military man for military consumption was paramount, since the new regime based much of its legitimacy on the army. As Kolchak himself noted, “...dictatorship can be based only on an army, and that only a person who creates an army and

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<sup>228</sup> Pereira, *White Siberia*, 149-150; the testimony from Kolchak’s inquisition is published in Varneck and Fisher, *The Testimony of Admiral Kolchak*.

<sup>229</sup> Named after the Ushakovka River that runs through Omsk; Connaughton, *The Republic of Ushakovka*, 170.

leans upon it can speak of dictatorship.”<sup>230</sup> With the creation of new several new newspapers directed at rank-and-file soldiers and officers, and early cooperation with independent papers like *Irtysk*, the Russian Press Bureau under Ustrialov was able to control and disseminate the information available concerning the admiral and present him as a purely military leader.<sup>231</sup> These articles, songs, and addresses were, in effect, part of an attempt to create a “mask” for Kolchak to appeal to the troops. The various publications endeavored to produce an “epic” military persona of the Admiral that could not be challenged or doubted, but only admired and avowed.<sup>232</sup>

The military “mask” that was fashioned for the Supreme Ruler was not purely for military consumption, and the image of Kolchak as Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the military was spread throughout newspapers meant for civilians in Omsk, which in turn was part of a developing process of reevaluation of power and its forms that began after the revolution. The idea of the head of the state as a military commander had strong precedents in Russian history, beginning with Peter the Great’s modernization of the Russian army and navy in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Nicholas II fashioned a public image of himself as a military leader who connected with both the officer elite and the rank and file soldier, who supposedly “personally direct[ed] all military affairs.”<sup>233</sup> “Comrade Kerensky,” despite his total lack of military background, styled himself as a simple soldier when he famously toured the front in 1917 and was known by many as “the irreplaceable leader of our revolutionary forces.”<sup>234</sup> As the social and political situation deteriorated further towards chaos after the fall of the Tsar, the association

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<sup>230</sup> Varneck and Fisher, *The Testimony of Admiral Kolchak*, 166.

<sup>231</sup> Pereira, *White Siberia*, 135-136.

<sup>232</sup> Wortman, *Scenarios of Power (Vol. 2)*, 5-6.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid*, 499.

<sup>234</sup> Figes and Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution*, 88.

of power with the military wound tighter within a political climate characterized by what Figes and Kolonitskii termed “the personalization of ideas” and the “fetishization of the individual.”<sup>235</sup>

Thus, when Kolchak assumed the title of Supreme Ruler, his “mask” was already prepared for him. The Kadets in power in Omsk had arrived at the belief in military dictatorship after a dynamic process that saw the party lose all faith in the ability of representative forms of power to preserve the integrity of the Russian state. The army was the only body that offered salvation from the Bolsheviks and the destruction of the Motherland, and the first duty of the newly appointed Supreme Ruler was the defeat of the Bolsheviks on the battlefield. Kolchak’s public image was shaped around his military past and present leadership through the gauntlet of the civil war, and daily newspapers idealized him as a simple soldier with no political ambitions who was simply serving his duty to his country; in Guins’ words, a “Russian [George] Washington.”<sup>236</sup> Through public speeches and ceremonies, Kolchak presented himself as an heir to the great Russian military tradition who could guide Russia out of this “time of troubles.”

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid, 95.

<sup>236</sup> Guins, *Sibir’, Soiuzniki, i Kolchak* (Vol. II), 5.

## Act Two

### *Kolchak the Statesman*

“I have always been a supporter of order and “state-minded responsibility” and now in particular I will demand of everyone not only respect for the law but also that which is most important of all in the process of resurrecting that State - the support of order.”<sup>237</sup> - A.V. Kolchak

For the Kadet ministers in the Kolchak's Omsk government, one of the greatest perceived threats to law and order was the instability of partisan and democratic politics. Although the party had once championed Duma politics and reform within the Tsarist political system, the members of the *VOTsK* were deeply suspicious and fearful of political infighting. They consistently deplored the political bickering and partisanship that marked the *Komuch* and PSG short existences, and had ultimately used it as an excuse for the overthrow of the Directory.<sup>238</sup> In its place, they established a unipersonal military dictatorship, which was to be free of political intrigue and compromise, and which many hoped would lead Russia out of the maelstrom of civil war. “Party Politics” for many Kadets meant compromising or even simply dealing with

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<sup>237</sup> *Pravitel'stvennii Vestnik* (Omsk) No. 12, 28 November 1918.

<sup>238</sup> Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution*, 394-395.

socialist parties, especially the Socialist Revolutionaries, whom they considered to be “more deserving of contempt than the most odious Tsarist officials.”<sup>239</sup> The Party had in always considered itself “*nadpartiinaia*,” but irrevocably turned against the political system after the elections for the Constituent Assembly, which saw the SRs gaining a clear majority in the body and the Kadets achieving little representation or power. Many right-wingers even blamed the SRs for the October Revolution and the subsequent loss of a “legitimate authority” in Russia, and Kadets often viewed them as nothing more than Bolsheviks.

The Siberian Kadets were particularly hostile to the SRs, and it was said that Zhardetskii refused to correctly pronounce the party’s name, even when dealing with directly with them at the Ufa State Conference.<sup>240</sup> After the coup of November 18<sup>th</sup>, all SRs in the former Directory and even moderate socialists were expelled from the government or arrested by reactionary groups in Omsk, and affiliate of all political parties in local governments were targeted and harassed throughout Siberia by military authorities. With the Kadets in power, all forms of political opposition to the state were regarded as treasonous, and the party was determined to cement its control over the government and society. As Guins noted, “Bright joy penetrated our hearts; our hopes lit up with the creation of a strong military power to bring a stop to party strife.”<sup>241</sup> Kolchak shared the hostile views of the Kadets, and through a direct he banned anyone in the military or public service from joining a political party, attending any kind of demonstration, or even publically commenting on political affairs.<sup>242</sup> The elimination of political parties and the discord they sowed was seen as a crucial and necessary measure to restoring order to a country that had been torn apart by revolution and civil war.

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<sup>239</sup> *Sibirskaiia Rech’* (Omsk) 20 August 1917.

<sup>240</sup> I.S. Il’in, “Omsk, Direktoriia i Kolchak,” *Novii Zhurnal* Vol. 73 (1963), 220.

<sup>241</sup> Guins, *Sibir’, Soiuzniki, i Kolchak’*, Vol. 2, 4.

<sup>242</sup> Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 153, n160.

Additionally, the Kadets' longstanding commitment to the concept of "state mindedness" (*gosudarstvennost'*) meant that only "national-thinking" and absolute support for authority were acceptable. Since the October Revolution, the Kadets demanded support for "general-national" (*obshchenatsional'nye*) reconstruction of the "free Russian state," with specific programs and policies of less importance than mass support for the nation.<sup>243</sup> A national commitment to *gosudarstvennost'*, the Kadets believed, would help awaken a new "state consciousness" among the Russia people, which they believed had been eroded by the fall of the monarchy and the collapse of legitimate authority. The concept of *gosudarstvennost'* was also a convenient path to solidifying and centralizing Kadet control of the government, as all other social and political interests were meant to be subordinated to the interests of the state, and even assurances of democratic representation were followed by condemnations of popular demands.<sup>244</sup> By the time many of the Kadets went east to join the "democratic counterrevolution" in 1918, the concept of *gosudarstvennost'* had become a justification for conservative authoritarian rule.

"National reconstruction" required the reestablishment of one of the Kadets' oldest established political values, the devotion to the rule of law and order. Stemming from their involvement in the creation of the first State Duma after the Revolution of 1905, the Party had long championed "the rule of law" and "legitimate authority," and had used this relatively ambiguous position to avoid direct conflicts with the left and the right during the July Days. While the Provisional Government employed slogans celebrating "republicanism," and Red Guards sang the "Internationale," the Kadets' supporters celebrated "the faith of law, justice, freedom and the honor of men," which was "the greatest weapon in the land."<sup>245</sup> What made the position ambiguous was the oft-changing definition of what "legitimate law," as seen by the

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<sup>243</sup> Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution*, 296.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid*, 134-135.

<sup>245</sup> Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution*, 270.

Kadets' rejection of the SR dominated Constituent Assembly, which they claimed could not provide civil order or uphold the rule of law.<sup>246</sup>

The support for law and order and the rejection of political parties that had been ossified in the crucible of the revolutionary days were firmly embraced by the Kadets of the *VOTsK* and the PSG. Kadet hostilities towards the *Komuch* and the Directory centered on the political infighting within the bodies and the rapid deterioration of Russian society into what they considered anarchy; as Guins notes, "Concentration of power is necessary for the active struggle against anti-state parties...[who] are bringing disruption to the economic life of the country and to public order and stability."<sup>247</sup> The restoration of order and the rule of law in Russia became the main political justification for the Kadets to assume leadership of the anti-Bolshevik movement in the east, and for the overthrow of the Directory. Once in power, the Party also used the concept to maintain dictatorship and delay the convocation of a new "national assembly," as "Time will provide the necessary conditions in the life of the country when it is finally ruled by law and order, and then it will be possible to begin to convening of the National Assembly."<sup>248</sup>

These ideas and arguments were the primary *raison d'être* of the military dictatorship in Siberia, and it was therefore necessary to present the head of the dictatorship, the Supreme Ruler, as being totally apolitical in word and deed and committed to the restoration of order. This task was made a bit easier given Kolchak's total lack of background or experience in political affairs. As he himself noted, "I grew up under the influence of an entirely military atmosphere and milieu...I hardly interested myself with any political problems. So far as I can tell, I remember nothing at all concerning questions of a political or social nature."<sup>249</sup> For the Supreme Ruler and

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid, 285-286.

<sup>247</sup> Guins, *Sibir', Soiuzniki, i Kolchak, Vol. 1*, 74.

<sup>248</sup> Guins, *Sibir', Soiuzniki, i Kolchak, Vol. 2*, 9.

<sup>249</sup> Varneck and Fisher, *The Testimony of Admiral Kolchak*, 38-39.



the members of his government, Russia "...needed only 'authority' and 'order,'"<sup>250</sup> and all other social and political issues were subordinated until the Bolsheviks were defeated and legitimate authority established. Thus the responsibilities of the position were twofold, as Ustrialov noted:

The dictator whom the Party...recognizes is not only the dictator-liberator (*diktator-osvoboditel'*) but is at the same time the dictator-organizer (*diktator-ustroitel'*); his tasks include not only the liberation [of Russia] from the Bolsheviks but also the establishment of order so as to curtail the growth of Bolshevism.<sup>251</sup>

Admiral Kolchak's first public address after the coup of November 18 made unmistakably clear his attitude towards politics: "...I declare: I will follow neither the path of reaction nor the fatal path of party politics."<sup>252</sup> As with the military matters discussed earlier, stating the Admiral's opposition to politics in his first address displayed its significance to the identity of Kolchak as a leader and to his government. The slogan "I will follow neither the path of reaction nor the fatal path of party politics" became one of the key slogans of the new regime, in a time when simple slogans and phrases proliferated all levels of Russian society and held considerable sway among the masses.<sup>253</sup> These slogans were meant to appeal to all levels and strata's of Russian society and to provide a point of common experience for all citizens; as Lasswell notes, "...one of the few experiences that binds human beings together, irrespective of race, region, occupation, party, or religion, is exposure to the same set of key words."<sup>254</sup> While the efficacy of the slogans of the Omsk regime is certainly questionable, their sheer and frequent mass reproduction in newspapers and propaganda at the very least provided the foundation for a "common experience" in the territories under White control.

In the weeks after the coup, the Russian Press Bureau employed the press organs now under their control to disseminate numerous articles and statements from the Supreme Ruler

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<sup>250</sup> Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution*, 285.

<sup>251</sup> N. Ustrialov, *V Bor'be za Rossiiu: statei dnevnik*, 52; cited in Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 250.

<sup>252</sup> "K Naseleniiu" *Narodnaia Gazeta* (Omsk) No. 32-35 (2-15 December, 1918).

<sup>253</sup> Plotnikov, *Aleksandr Vasilievich Kolchak*, 53.

<sup>254</sup> Lasswell, *Language of Politics*, 12-13.

regarding his steadfast dedication to rebuilding the Russian state and restoring order, of which many were intended for international consumption. One significant speech, published by the government's official newspaper, captured his views clearly and succinctly:

With deep sincerity, I declare to you now...that I am more firmly than ever convinced that in this time the State may live and be revived only upon a solid, democratic foundation. I have always been a supporter of order and *gosudarstvennost'* and now in particular I demand of everyone not only respect for the law but also that which is most important of all in the process of rebuilding the State – the support of order.<sup>255</sup>

Kolchak's demand for citizens to respect the law marks a departure from the language used to present Kolchak as a military man. As Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Army, it was his duty to boost the morale of his soldiers and to identify with them, and to inspire men to join the ranks in the struggle against the Bolsheviks. However, as Supreme Ruler, Kolchak's role changed to that of the "shrine incarnate of the state order,"<sup>256</sup> whose job it was to strengthen the power of the state and to reinstall discipline and order to a society on the verge of collapse. An address from Kolchak directed to the people in the peasant's newspaper *Krest'ianskii Vestnik'* read "I demand of the citizens and the population full calm, courage, and common work..."<sup>257</sup> Although he began his first declaration after the coup d'état with "To the People," "Citizens" was the most common address used to by Kolchak in his printed addresses in the newspapers.<sup>258</sup> For the Supreme Ruler, nearly all of the official language regarding order and support for the state was couched in terms such as "responsibilities of the people" (*narodnyi obyazannosti*), "obligations to the state" (*obyazatel'stva gosudarstvom*), and "The Duty of a Citizen" (*dolg grazhdanina*).<sup>259</sup>

### **The Economics of Stability**

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<sup>255</sup> "Rech' Verkhovnogo Pravitel'ya," *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik* (Omsk) No. 12, 30 November 1918.

<sup>256</sup> Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, Vol. 2, 139.

<sup>257</sup> "K naseleniiu," *Krest'ianskii Vestnik'* (Omsk) No. 4, 13 August 1919.

<sup>258</sup> "K naseleniiu," *Narodnaia Gazeta* (Omsk) No. 32-35, 2-15 December 1918; "Grazhdanine!" *Karpato-russkogo Slovo* (Omsk) No. 14, 25 June 1919.

<sup>259</sup> "Dolg Grazhdanina," *Rodina* (Omsk) No. 16, 2 November 1919.

When the conspiratorial forces of Kadets and officers were preparing to overthrow the Directoy and install a military dictator, they drew strong support from members of Russia's so-called "trade-industrial" (*torgovo-promyshlennyi*) class, who had a vested interest in the defeat of Bolshevism. The influential Trades and Industry Congress, which had lobbied for dictatorship as early as the summer of 1918, was one of the first social organizations to send greetings to the new regime.<sup>260</sup> Commercial and industrial classes were a key constituency of the Omsk government, as nearly all those in the ministries (including the former socialist Minister of Finance Mikhailov) were ardent proponents of free trade and *laissez-faire* economics. The warm feeling between the government and the trades was mutual, as law and order was necessary for the functioning of healthy economic growth and the development of stable markets for goods. Numerous prominent businessmen actively participated in the economic affairs of the state, in particular S.G. Fedos'ev, who was a manager of several large Siberian mining companies and who oversaw the Supreme Ruler's plan for the reintroduction of free trade in Siberia. Fedos'ev's program included the liquidation of the Ministry of Supply, which had previously controlled the distribution of food, supplies, and other goods.<sup>261</sup>

The connections between the Omsk government and private business interests were not secret, as the Supreme Ruler often discussed the important role that free trade and industry played in the development of the Russian state. This public support of industry and finance by the government led many, especially those in the SR camp, to accuse the government of merely being "a front for a syndicate of speculators and financiers."<sup>262</sup> Within the Omsk press, Kolchak was presented as a staunch advocate for freedom of trade and private business, as they contributed to the reestablishment of order and the development of "healthy" state conditions.

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<sup>260</sup> *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik* (Omsk) No. 4, 22 November 1918.

<sup>261</sup> Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 116-117.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid*, 118.

The newspaper of industry and trade in Siberia, *Torgovo-Promyshlennyi Vestnik*, provided extensive coverage of Admiral Kolchak's meetings with business leaders and his pledges to restore economic order. At a conference of the Union of Trade-Industry in Ufa, the Supreme Ruler pledged to address the needs of industry for "...the reconstruction of transport and the establishment of a banking," and that those present, "from the ranks of the trade-industry class," were truly "heroes" (*bogatyry*) of the motherland.<sup>263</sup>

Just days after taking office, Kolchak publically announced the founding of the "Extraordinary State Economic Conference," which was ostensibly a forum to discuss a wide-range of economic issues, but in reality was a meeting to officially promote the interests of the trade-industrial classes.<sup>264</sup> Weeks after it's the creation, the first meeting of the State Economic Conference (SEC) in Omsk saw representatives from nearly all the major government ministries, and from the major commercial and trade organizations and industries. The existence of the body was important to the image of the Supreme Ruler, as it demonstrated his commitment to free trade and industry while also showing his involvement in societal affairs. While Kolchak publically praised the semi-representative organization's work in helping to rebuild the economy, the body's actual duties and powers were quite vague, aside from its most important task of feeding and supplying the army. Military authorities that had no interest in diluting their power or cooperating too closely with civilian authorities performed many of the conference's responsibilities. The first iteration of the SEC was not able to accomplish anything significant, perhaps not in small part because of Fedos'ev's antagonistic relationship with Mikhailov. It was not until the summer of 1919, with new economic challenges arising as the Whites conquered more territory that talks began to circulate about reviving the SEC on a larger and more

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<sup>263</sup> "Verkhovnyi Pravitel' v Ufe," *Torgovo-Promyshlennyi Vestnik* (Omsk) No. 11-12, 10 June 1919.

<sup>264</sup> Guins, *Sibir', Soiuzniki, i Kolchak'*, Vol. 2, 7.

representative scale. With strong personal support from the Kolchak, the new conference that was proposed would not only expand the number of groups and interests represented, but would also serve to showcase the power and stability that the Omsk regime had created.<sup>265</sup>

The State Economic Conference in Omsk on June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1919 was a large ceremonial spectacle that saw Admiral Kolchak at the height of his “mask-wearing,” lavishly presented as the figurehead of the anti-Bolshevik movement and the embodiment its values. The conference, which was held in the ceremonial hall of the Justice Chambers, was a carefully orchestrated presentation of Kolchak as the savior of Russia and the harbinger of a new form of power that would make Russia stronger. Facing the assembly was a raised platform resembling a throne, where Kolchak sat side by side with Vologodskii and the Conference’s chairman, Guins; above their heads was a huge portrait of Alexander II, the “Liberator Tsar.”<sup>266</sup> As Richard Wortman has argued, ceremonies such as these held a long tradition in Russian politics, and were meant a display of the regime’s power and legitimacy. According to Wortman, “...ceremonies of the autocracy presented a cognitive map of the political order, one of the ‘particular models or political paradigms of society and how it functions’ which, Steven Lukes has argued, distinguish political ritual.”<sup>267</sup>

With the presentation of Kolchak harkening to the salvation and reform of Russia, the Supreme Ruler began his remarks by calling for a return to order and calm after the defeat of Bolshevism, and the creation of a new system that would be “responsible to will of the people.” He then went on to call for the creation and solidification of “economic order,” which he argued

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<sup>265</sup> Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 504-505.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid*, 507.

<sup>267</sup> Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, Vol. 2, 4.

in large part depended on the solution to the “labor question.”<sup>268</sup> He stressed the importance of economic matters by saying, “...as far as the government itself is concerned one of the most urgent problems of the moment is the formation of the conference, where public opinion has the fullest opportunity to voice criticism and present its own suggestions.” The newly convened conference would be bestowed with broad powers to help facilitate economic growth and would work alongside “power” (*vlast*) to help solve the pressing economic and societal questions of the day.<sup>269</sup>

Kolchak’s speech to the SEC contained several overtures in support of workers right and improving working conditions, employing language that had largely been absent from the official discourse of the regime in the previous months. This is because Kolchak’s public support for labor issues and workers was largely a “mask,” which reflected how the Omsk government sought to be perceived and not the reality of their policies. As the initial military success of the Spring Offensive increased the domestic and international stature of the regime, the ministers of the government became increasingly interested in portraying the Supreme Ruler as a champion of the workers. In order to placate both the Allies and the urban residents that were now under their control, the Omsk press and the numerous other newspapers under their control presented Kolchak as a supporter of the rights of workers and unions, whose legal rights would be fully confirmed after the convening of the Constituent Assembly in Moscow.<sup>270</sup>

The Supreme Ruler’s appeal to the workers and support for labor issues was a key strategy to preserve law and order in White territories and to help restart Siberian industry. Strikes and labor unrest had plagued the former administration Provisional Siberian Government,

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<sup>268</sup> “Rech’ Verkhovnogo Pravitelia na otkrytii Gosudarstvennogo Ekonomicheskogo Soveshchaniia,” *Biulleten* (Omsk) No. 5, 25 June 1919.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>270</sup> Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 340-341.

and the situation had only deteriorated after the coup of November 18<sup>th</sup>; as Smele estimates, “...the figures would seem to indicate that at least one-third of the known total of Siberia’s pre-revolutionary workforce took industrial action during [Kolchak’s rule].”<sup>271</sup> These strikes disturbed the Siberian economy and society, and Kolchak attempted to quell them by coming out in support the workers and their interests. A front-page story in all the papers of the Omsk press featured a high-profile meeting between the Supreme Ruler and a delegation of the Union of Printers, where they (quite briefly) discussed the concerns of printers and laborers across the country and Kolchak’s demand that “in times of war no form of strike action was permitted.”<sup>272</sup> Kolchak expressed his personal support for labor organizations, and stated: “The above conversation...defines the strong relationship between the government and the workers, who can be assured that their legitimate interests will always be protected.”<sup>273</sup> In another paper, Kolchak pledged the unflinching “support of the Ministry of Labor” for labor organizations and interests, which compared favorably with the position of workers in *Sovdepia*, where the Soviets had destroyed the “normal working conditions of the worker.”<sup>274</sup>

The extensive propaganda campaign and innumerable public speeches in support of workers by the Supreme Ruler could not fully conceal the Omsk government’s hostility towards workers and labor organizations. The military authorities often regarded workers and unions as being innate supporters of Bolshevism, and they undertook a campaign throughout 1919 to violently disband unions and suppress strikes. The ministers of government thoroughly supported the interests of the trade-industry class and free trade, and thus while Kolchak was publically declaring that the government had been instructed to draft a law establishing an eight-

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid, 337.

<sup>272</sup> *Sibirskaiia Rech’* (Omsk) No. 153, 19 July 1919.

<sup>273</sup> “Rabochie u Verkhovnogo Pravitelia,” *Biulleten’* (Omsk) No. 25, 19 July 1919.

<sup>274</sup> “Uluchshenie byta i uslovii truda pabochikh,” *Rodina* (Omsk) 21 October 1919.

hour work day,<sup>275</sup> no such law was ever seriously discussed by the ministers.<sup>276</sup> The image of the Supreme Ruler as a champion of workers' rights was constructed in part to appeal to the Allies, but it was also deployed in an attempt to restore order and the rule of law by giving the workers a leader who supported their interests and who was working to improve their lives. Strikes and labor unrest were significant challenges to the establishment of a "healthy," and instead of crafting policies to address the key issues, they undertook a propaganda campaign to depict Admiral Kolchak as a progressive supporter of labor in attempt to subdue the work of unions.

Despite the high note of representation and inclusion that was struck at the State Economic Conference in Omsk, the SEC would again fall prey to the suspicions of military authorities, which regarded the body as a "nest of Kerenskyism."<sup>277</sup> Kolchak's public support for the conference waned as the military situation deteriorated in the late summer months of 1919, as the body was beginning to call for more direct involvement in government affairs and shaping policy. They even called for the conference to be the official representative body of the government, which would recommend laws for passage and curb the power of the Supreme Ruler. Kolchak refused to even meet with the delegation that brought this proposal, after which the body ceased to become anything other than a rubberstamp assembly with no real power. The "rightward" turn of the government in the fall of 1919 meant the ministers were more concerned with consolidating power and working with syndicates, not elected assemblies.<sup>278</sup>

The construction of the image of the Supreme Ruler as a champion of free trade and thoroughly committed to improving the economic situation of the country was part of the deliberate process of presenting Admiral Kolchak as the harbinger of law and order. Being seen

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<sup>275</sup> "Vos'michasovoi rabochii den'," *Nasha Gazeta* (Omsk) No. 44, 3 October 1919.

<sup>276</sup> Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 354-355.

<sup>277</sup> Guins, *Sibir', Soiuzniki, i Kolchak'*, Vol. 2, 66-67.

<sup>278</sup> Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 506-514.



as a supporter of the interests of the trade-industry class and the development of private enterprise was imperative to their support in supplying the army and laying the economic foundations for a “healthy” state. At the State Economic Conference of June 19<sup>th</sup> the Supreme Ruler showcased his support and direct involvement with the affairs of private enterprise, as well as symbolically demonstrating the legitimacy of his power. Additionally, by assuming the mantle of champion of the workers, Kolchak appealed to labor organizations to preserve order and stop striking, in return for the recognition of their interests and improvement of working conditions. The public support of both trade and industry and workers by the Supreme Ruler was truly a “mask,” and did not reflect the actions of the military authorities and the government. Instead of adopting necessary progressive policies, the Omsk government, under pressure from both Russia society and the Allies, chose to fashion an image of the Supreme Ruler that they hoped would quell disorder and unite different societal factions behind the regime.

### **The Land Question**

One of the strongest threats to the stability of law and order in the territories under Kolchak’s control was the question of property ownership of the land. Siberia, unlike European Russia, did not have a long tradition of large estates and there were very few of the widely reviled private landowners (*pomeshchiki*) amongst the population.<sup>279</sup> At first this was a major advantage for the Omsk government, as they were able to delay formulating a concrete agrarian policy, and given the close relationship between state officials and private landowners who had fled from the Bolsheviks but held considerable political sway in Omsk. In the first months of Kolchak’s rule, the Provisional Siberian Government’s land decree of July 6, 1918, which

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<sup>279</sup> N.G.O. Pereira, “White Power during the Civil War in Siberia (1918-1920): Dilemmas of Kolchak’s ‘War Anti-Communism’,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne des Slavistes*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (March 1987), 50.

established the restoration of all estates and properties to their prerevolutionary owners. This law was finally repealed only after White troops had captured Ufa in April 1919 and began to advance toward the lands of the Volga River, where there was a long tradition of estates and serfdom.<sup>280</sup>

This confrontation with populations with long-held prejudices against estates and who supported the revolutionary redistribution of land to the peasants forced Kolchak's government to formulate a coherent land policy that addressed these issues. This was no easy task for either the Supreme Ruler or his ministers to undertake, as there were stark ideological divisions within the government that prevented a consensus being formed amongst those in power. Some of the more moderate factions in the government (including Kolchak himself) argued that it was necessary to gain the support of the peasantry, and therefore acknowledge the validity of the peasant's land seizures. Those on the right, including Mikhailov and Lebedev, believed that recognizing the land seizures was a gross violation of the laws of private property and therefore illegal.<sup>281</sup> Thus, when it came time to make a formal stance on the most pressing social issue of the day, the Omsk government's program failed to satisfy either side and further alienated the Russian people.

On April 10<sup>th</sup>, 1918, the newspapers in Omsk published excerpts from one of Kolchak's speeches that contained the government's first official land policy, the "Decree on Land of April 8<sup>th</sup>." He declared: "Everyone who now possesses land, everyone who has sown and worked upon it, will have the right to gather in the harvest."<sup>282</sup> The decree was published in every major news outlet the Omsk government had any control over, and as Smele notes: "Indeed, the *gramota* was the government's most widely publicized piece of land policy – perhaps of any

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<sup>280</sup> Genrikh Z. Ioffe, *Kolchakovskaya aventiura i ee krakh* (Moscow: Mysl', 1983), 180-181.

<sup>281</sup> Ioffe, *Kolchakovskaya aventiura*, 180-183.

<sup>282</sup> "Gramota o zemle," *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik* (Omsk) No. 112, 10 April 1919.

policy – both at home and abroad.”<sup>283</sup> Despite the government’s enthusiasm for the decree, it was clear to all those who read it that it avoided the major issue, i.e. ownership of the land, and instead only guaranteed the peasant’s right to work the land in 1919. The decree stated that this question would only be resolved at a later date with the convening of the Constituent Assembly and the defeat of the Bolsheviks. This ambiguity exasperated both the peasants, many of whom saw a return to the old system lurking in the shadows, and the landowners, who wanted explicit guarantees on the rights of their property. This led to instability within the White territories (especially those that were captured during the Spring Offensive), and became a cause of great concern for an administration whose primary goal was the restoration of order.<sup>284</sup>

Increasing peasant discontent and resistance to the policies of the Omsk government further exacerbated the failure of the Spring Offensive and the subsequent reversals suffered by the White armies in the summer of 1919. While the immediate concern for the military authorities were the mass desertions and lack of new recruits for the army, other members of the regime began to voice their arguments in favor of a comprehensive land policy in order to stabilize the social situation in the territories now under White control. Framed now as a question of preserving the rule of law in the countryside, the ministers, officers of the *stavka*, and the newly formed and influential Eastern Section of the Union of Russian Landowners, came to a compromise through which the seized lands would pass into the stewardship of the state, after which it be leased back to the peasants until the new Constituent Assembly was convened. The “Statute” (*polozhenie*) of April 13<sup>th</sup>, although more comprehensive than anything proposed by previous SR-dominated governments in Siberia, again failed to answer the underlying issues for the peasants, and actually created new administrative problems for a government whose

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<sup>283</sup> Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 279.

<sup>284</sup> Serge P. Petroff, *Remembering a Forgotten War: Civil War in Eastern European Russia and Siberia, 1918-1920* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 2000), 185-189.

resources were already stretched dangerously thin. Additionally, as Guins notes, most peasants did not understand the complexities and ambiguities of government's law, and many simply concluded that Kolchak's government was returning their land to the estate owners.<sup>285</sup>

Despite the internal dissention and bickering within the government in regards to the land question, in the press the Supreme Ruler was presented totally supporting the peasant's claims to the land that they harvested. In order to quell rising dissent and to combat the partisan movements that were growing behind the frontlines, Kolchak declared, "I and my Government consider it just and necessary to give all the land to the working people."<sup>286</sup> He went on to say, "I spoke these words for the whole world to hear...and I stand by my words. Remember that firmly, and do not believe the cheating-Bolsheviks."<sup>287</sup> Kolchak's strong statements were intended to convince the peasant masses of Russia that the Supreme Ruler favored their rightful claim to the land, and that agitation against the regime and claims that they were restoring the old system were unwarranted.

A successful resolution of the land question was innately tied to the preservation of law and order, and to the survival of the Omsk government. The Supreme Ruler expounded this connection when he asserted, "the land will go to the working people...and through the Constituent Assembly, the people will establish the appropriate state order."<sup>288</sup> With the land passing into the hands of the peasants, they were now responsible to help create and uphold societal order and to respect the rule of law. According to Kolchak, this participation of the peasants in the creation of the new state stood in stark contrast to what was happening in *Sovdepia*, where "Every passing day the power of the Soviet people's commissars postpones the

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<sup>285</sup> Guins, *Sibir', Soiuzniki, i Kolchak'*, Vol. 2, 150-155.

<sup>286</sup> *Nasha Gazeta* (Omsk) No. 46, 5 October 1919.

<sup>287</sup> "Verkhovnyi Pravitel' i Verkhovnyi Glavnokomanduiushchii obratilsya k Armii i naseleniiu s vozzvaniyami o zemle i Uchreditel'noe Sobranie," *Biulleten* (Omsk) No. 35, 31 July 1919.

<sup>288</sup> *Golos Armii* (Omsk) No. 6, 8 October 1919.

hour when Russia's land goes over into the hands of the peasant-farmers, who love their motherland and are rescuing her in troubled times."<sup>289</sup> This claim was exceptionally ineffectual, given the Bolshevik's position on the land question and their well know slogan "All land to peasants!"<sup>290</sup>

In spite of the Supreme Ruler's widely publicized (albeit at times tepid) support of the peasant's rightful ownership of the land, the Omsk government was never able to win the favor of the Russian masses. As internal divisions prevented the government from developing a clear and cogent land policy during the critical summer of 1919, peasant communities began passing resolutions refusing to recognize any government other than the Constituent Assembly, and in the meantime no taxes or recruits would be provided. The retaliation brigades that were sent into the countryside to crush these uprisings and their cruel methods further alienated the peasants from the Kolchak government and seriously eroded its legitimacy in rural areas.<sup>291</sup> The often arbitrary and pitiless punishments meted out by forces claiming to represent the government, especially in eastern Siberia under the rule of the Cossack Atamans (*Atamanshchina*), largely discredited the image of Kolchak and his ability to uphold the rule of law and order. The best efforts of the Russian Press Bureau and the ideologues in Omsk to present the Supreme Ruler as a defender of the peasant's legal rights could not overcome the reality on the ground that was increasingly turning against the regime.<sup>292</sup>

### ***The Allies and Calls for Democracy***

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<sup>289</sup> "Admiral' Kolchak'," *Rodina* (Omsk) No. 16, 2 November 1919.

<sup>290</sup> Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*, 7-8.

<sup>291</sup> Dotsenko, *The Struggle for Democracy in Siberia*, 90-91.

<sup>292</sup> Petroff, *Remembering a Forgotten War*, 192-193.

In addition to the land question, another matter of vital importance to the authority of the regime was the sought-after recognition of the Omsk government by the Allied powers as the legitimate power in Russia. As Soviet historians have long eagerly discussed, the Allied forces had intervened in the Russian Civil War by sending soldiers to protect key ports, cities, and railroads, as well as sending ammunition and military materiel to Kolchak's government. Great Britain sent detachments of soldiers to directly Omsk and Arkhangel'sk (as well as being accused of participating in the coup), the French had sent several military advisors and supplies, and the United States had positioned troops in Vladivostok and along the Trans-Siberian railroad.<sup>293</sup> Despite their large military presence and commitment to the anti-Bolshevik struggle, and unlike the soldiers of the Czechoslovak legion who had ignited the resistance in the East, the Allied forces largely remained absent from combat with the Red Army. The ministers in Omsk understood the reality that the Allies were unlikely to engage the Bolsheviks militarily, and they settled for attempting to gain international legitimacy for their movement, and a seat at the Paris Peace talks after the end of the First World War.

Immediately following the coup d'état of November 18<sup>th</sup>, the Foreign Ministry under Ivan Sukin began to communicate directly with the Allies about the possibility of being recognized as the legitimate government in Russia. As Sukin remembered, "The work of every department of our government came upon the necessity of obtaining the support of the powers – we needed foreign aid for the railway, for the army, in matters of trade, finance, and even education."<sup>294</sup> General Konstantin Sakharov, a prominent military commander in Omsk, concurred: "The very word "recognition" was loudly, directly and openly pronounced. It should

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<sup>293</sup> Vladimir N. Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War: Political Parties and Social Movements in Russia, 1918-1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 19.

<sup>294</sup> Ivan I. Sukin, "Zapiski Ivana Ivanovicha Sukina o Pravitel'stve Kolchaka," in A.V. Kvakina, ed., *Za Spinoi Kolchaka: Dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow: Agraf, 2005), 456-457.

be noted that the act of formal recognition hung in the air all of the time, like a specter (*prizrak*).<sup>295</sup> The pursuit of recognition was made by Denikin and Miller's acknowledgment of Admiral Kolchak as the leader of the anti-Bolshevik movement, which helped avoid a potential power struggle between the South and the East.<sup>296</sup>

Sukin and the other ministers in Omsk understood the potential power of Admiral Kolchak becoming recognized as the legitimate and legal head of state of Russia. Adhering to the principles of international law was necessary not only because of the desperate need for supplies and weapons, but also to boost the legitimacy of a regime that claimed one of its main goals to be the restoration of law and order. The Kadets within the government had been staunch defenders of the rule of law, both domestic and international, and they held a strong commitment to honor the debts of Imperial Russia among the Allies.<sup>297</sup> Legal recognition by the Allied powers would bestow the Supreme Ruler the authority to speak on behalf of Russia on the world stage, and would provide international endorsement for the programs and policies of his government. However, to the dismay of many in the right-wing circles of Omsk, one of the key means to achieve recognition was a commitment to the now *en vogue* principles of democracy and self-determination, which emerged from the Paris peace talks and the Treaty of Versailles.

On May 26<sup>th</sup>, 1919, the Allies sent a formal note to the Omsk government that included a list of conditions that the Supreme Ruler was to fulfill, followed by the promise of Kolchak's *eventual* recognition if the terms were met. They included the necessity of convening the Constituent Assembly once the White armies reached Moscow, the promise of free elections, and a guarantee that Kolchak's Russia would join the League of Nations and honor all of the debts of Tsarist Russia. Although the democratic requirements of the communiqué worried some in the

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<sup>295</sup> Sakharov, *Belaia Sibir'*, 39.

<sup>296</sup> Pereira, *White Siberia*, 113.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid*, 112-113.

monarchist camp, many realized that these were not concrete conditions, and that they would be able to “speak in a different tone once the Russian Army was in Moscow.”<sup>298</sup> Thus, while the regime’s true commitment to democracy remained ambiguous if not hostile, the Supreme Ruler was presented in the press as being a champion of democracy and the people’s rights and in support of the convocation of the Constituent Assembly after victory was achieved. As well, Kolchak’s support for democracy was innately tied to the concept of the supposed legality of the democratic process, which the government sought to claim as its mantle.

In a weekly publication in the nationalistic newspaper *Russkoe Delo* entitled “Russian Society and the Supreme Ruler,” prominent national scholars and politicians (many from Denikin’s camp) discussed the role the admiral played in the shaping of the new Russian government. In the paper’s first edition, M.M. Fedorov wrote that Kolchak would, “...lay the foundations for a new life according to the will of the people,” through his efforts to convene the Constituent Assembly.<sup>299</sup> In another issue, professor I.P. Aleksinskii called him a “dictator-liberator,” while others praised his commitment to constructing a democratic state.”<sup>300</sup> The column was meant provide intellectual support for the Supreme Ruler, and to demonstrate that he shared support for the Constituent Assembly with other nationally recognizable public figures, many of who served in high-ranking positions in Denikin’s government. The Omsk government relied on sympathetic members of the intelligentsia and public figures, as well as the British officers in Omsk, to gain legitimate international recognition for the supposed “democratic” state.

The regime initially benefitted greatly from the presence of the British Military Mission (Britmis) in Omsk, and the officers in charge reported back to London that Kolchak was a

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<sup>298</sup> Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 214.

<sup>299</sup> “Russkoe obshchestvo i Verkhovnyi Pravitel’,” *Russkoe Delo* (Omsk) No. 1, 5 October 1919.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid*, No. 2, 7 October 1919.



staunch supporter of democratic principles. General Alfred Knox promoted the Supreme Ruler as being a democrat both in the Western press and in Russia itself, undertaking a propaganda campaign appealing to railway workers in Siberia.<sup>301</sup> Colonel John Ward defended the image of Kolchak in Britain in an article entitled “The Truth about the Supreme Ruler.” In the piece, Ward protested against the criticisms from Britain about Kolchak bringing the “restoration of the old system,” and firmly declared, “He is a sincere democrat by conviction, and shares English views on the state’s structure.”<sup>302</sup> A special correspondent writing for *The Times*, who was present at the first meeting between Kolchak and Ward, noted that “So strongly did Koltchak impress us on this occasion...that all [present] since have done everything possible to demonstrate their sympathy with him, and to give him such support as was within their power.”<sup>303</sup> Another correspondent in London bemoaned, “The Allies have practically recognized the National Government of Russia presided over by Admiral Koltchak. It would have been wiser, as well as more manly, had they made the recognition formally and frankly.”<sup>304</sup>

The propaganda efforts of the officers of Britmis provided a tremendous amount of credibility to the Omsk government within the international community, and most of the Western papers drew their information from their reports. They presented Kolchak as being deeply committed to democratic principles and eager to join the European and world political community. Newspapers in the United States picked up many of the stories from British correspondents (who were closer to the action than their men based in Vladivostok), and *The New York Times* even encouraged its readers to donate directly to Kolchak’s government and

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<sup>301</sup> Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 119.

<sup>302</sup> “Pravda o Verkhovnogo Pravitelia,” *Golos Armii* (Omsk) No. 1, 18 September 1919.

<sup>303</sup> “Siberian Drama,” *The Times* (London) No. 42091, 5 May 1919.

<sup>304</sup> “The Russian National Government,” *The Times* (London) No. 42126, 14 June 1919.

offered the information of a syndicate set up to funnel money to Omsk.<sup>305</sup> One of France's most read papers, *Le Temps*, wrote that the Supreme Ruler, "proclaimed complete equality for every citizen with a guarantee of all civil liberties, and a national assembly."<sup>306</sup> Although some left-leaning international newspapers, including *The Manchester Guardian*, viciously criticized Kolchak and his attempt to restore the old Tsarist order, many European and American newspapers presented an idealized image of the admiral as a staunch defender of democratic rights and legal authority.

For the Supreme Ruler, commitment to democratic principles meant support for the reconvening of the Constituent Assembly, which many across the country still regarded as Russia's last "legal" authority. In the press, Kolchak was a champion of the institution he and others in Omsk formerly despised, and soundly declared Russia could only move forward after victory through a "Popular Constituent Assembly."<sup>307</sup> He urged the population to embrace these democratic ideas, and suggested, "After destroying the Bolshevik autocracy, you, peasants and soldiers, immediately start elections for the Constituent Assembly."<sup>308</sup> The convening of the Constituent Assembly would usher in an era of "order," and the government that would be set up once the Supreme Ruler reached Moscow would be one where, "the ideas of every conscious citizen will have power in the Russian state."<sup>309</sup> At the State Economic Conference of June 15<sup>th</sup>, in a highly symbolic ceremony, the admiral told all those in attendance, "In the near future we will invite public figures through elections and other resolutions to the National Constituent Assembly, in preparation to solve the questions facing the nation."<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> "Lend \$5,000,000 to Kolchak Here!" *The New York Times* (New York), 29 July 1919.

<sup>306</sup> "Les Envenements de Russie," *Le Temps* (Paris) No. 21232, 26 August 1919.

<sup>307</sup> "Obrashchenie Verkhovnogo Pravitelya k Armii i naseleniiu," *Biulleten* (Omsk) No. 36, 1 August 1919.

<sup>308</sup> *Nasha Gazeta* (Omsk) No. 69, 30 October 1919.

<sup>309</sup> "Kakaya vlast' nuzhna," *Nasha Gazeta* (Omsk) No. 53, 12 October 1919.

<sup>310</sup> "Rech' Verkhovnogo Pravitelia na otkrytii Gosudarstvennogo Ekonomicheskogo Soveshchaniia," *Biulleten'* (Omsk) No. 5, 25 June 1919.

As seen earlier with Kolchak's commitment to worker's rights, the public image of Kolchak as a democrat stood in stark contrast with the policies of the Omsk government. The plan for the new Constituent Assembly was not truly democratic, and was slanted heavily in favor the Kadets and the upper classes. Special steps were taken to lessen the influence of rural communities (and therefore the peasantry), and all socialist or revolutionary parties would be banned. There was also little guarantee that the government would stand by these commitments, with some even publically mocking the notion of the assembly's convocation. The regime was also deeply hostile to forms of local representative government, with particular animosity directed towards the elected zemstvos. Hiding behind an extensive international propaganda campaign, the government stripped the authority of local organs and transferred the responsibilities to the Ministry of the Interior and wrote the zemstvos out of the state budget, which effectively cut them off any sources of funding.<sup>311</sup> Despite Kolchak's claim that "Russia is now, and must later be a democratic state,"<sup>312</sup> the regime remained deeply hostile to democratic reforms and the prospect of any transfer of power to an elected assembly.

### **Conclusion**

Writing from Kharbin in Manchuria in March 1919, *The Times'* special correspondent enthusiastically echoed sentiments around the world that there had emerged a new power in eastern Russia that could restore order and peace to a country torn apart by civil war:

He has a great advantage in that he does not seek his own profit. He would relinquish his great task to-morrow if anyone could assume it, but there is none except ambitious adventures to challenge him, and to them he is ruthless.

Admiral Koltchak has done such wonders in a brief space, his leadership has inspired such confidence and enthusiasm, that I came away feeling more hopeful. If the railway works properly nothing, indeed, can prevent his triumph over his internal foes; but will the Allies and their associates agree to do the needful in due time?<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 260-267.

<sup>312</sup> *Nasha Gazeta* (Omsk) No. 22, 11 September 1919.

<sup>313</sup> "The Ruler of Siberia," *The Times* (London) No. 42055, 22 March 1919.

Unfortunately for Kolchak and the ministers in Omsk, the answer to *The Times* special correspondent's question was "no." Despite the massive propaganda that was undertaken by the Russian Press Bureau and its departments in Paris, the military defeats the White armies suffered in the summer of 1919 also cost the government any prospect of official recognition by the Allies. War weariness from four years of horrific combat and depleted treasury funds persuaded many in the Allied governments to avoid any escalation of involvement in Russia, especially when the Omsk government estimated at least 40,000 men and supplies would be needed to ensure the defeat of the Bolsheviks.<sup>314</sup> As the Reds penetrated deeper into Siberia, the Allies began to sever their ties with the government and evacuate their remaining soldiers to Vladivostok. The two highest ranking Allied generals in Siberia, Janin and Syrov, were not even able (or perhaps willing) to prevent Kolchak's capture and eventual execution in Irkutsk.

Although the Allies never conferred official recognition on Omsk, the regime continued to present itself as the only legal authority in Russia, and therefore had the only legit claim to state power. After nearly two years of revolution and upheaval, the Kadets had concluded that the reestablishment of law and order was necessary to win the war and to build a strong Russian state. *Gosudarstvennost'* meant a commitment to the construction of a powerful national state, which must have as its foundation calm and stability from the population. A military dictatorship had been formed not only to defeat the Red Army, but also to the end the political instability of party politics and restore order through the stern use of power. As dictator and Supreme Ruler, Admiral Kolchak was presented as the personification of stability and authority. In addition to his exploits on the battlefield, the newspapers of Omsk recorded his declarations about the construction of the Russian state and the formation of a new Constituent Assembly when the army reached Moscow. He repeatedly signaled his support for democratic principles

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<sup>314</sup> Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 490-491.

and advocated for all the land to be given to the peasants, as well as meeting with union leaders and championing the cause of workers' rights. These "masks" were fashioned by the ideologues in Omsk as appeals to the citizens to embrace the rule of law and order, and to demonstrate the regime's commitment to democracy to the Allies.

As Richard Wortman has argued, the exercise of power and the "public presentation of the mythical image of the ruler were reciprocal processes," which saw the authority of the leader sustained by his idealized and mythical public presentation.<sup>315</sup> The Omsk government's measures and policies that were undertaken to restore law and order bolstered the mass presentation of Kolchak as a statesman who was engineering the construction of a new and strong Russian state. The Supreme Ruler made grand appeals to workers and met with union leaders in an attempt to demonstrate his commitment to the legal rights of the labor movement, which was designed to identify Kolchak with stability and calm and to put a stop to the strikes and unrest that was taking a serious toll on economic and social life in *Kolchakiia*. Unlike the "mask" of the military man, the admiral's statesman "mask" reflected the regime's attempt to reconstruct Russian society and the Russian state around the set of idealized concepts of law and order. While the image of the admiral as a military man communicated Kolchak's bravery, loyalty, and service in the fight against Bolshevism, the "mask" of the statesman contained symbolic overtures to the construction of the state and the "responsibility" and "duty" of citizens to participate in Russia's future by supporting "healthy" state elements.

Through daily newspapers and brochures produced by the Russian Press Bureau in Omsk, a highly stylized representation of the Supreme Ruler was produced to bolster the government's international claims to legitimate authority and to solidify popular support for the resurrection of the Russian state. The language surrounding Kolchak included slogans such as

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<sup>315</sup> Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, 4.

“order” (*poryadok*) and “statemindedness” (*gosudarstvennost’*), which were starkly contrasted with images of the Bolsheviks as “anarchists” (*anarkhisty*) who were bent on destroying the Motherland. He was also presented as being a strong proponent of free trade and the development of healthy economy, which would contribute to the normalization of societal and political relations and help lay the foundations for a strong state. Kolchak served as the head of several high-profile economic councils that were accompanied by ceremonial demonstrations of his power, and the government maintained close public and private ties with major industrial and finance leaders who had fled the onslaught of the Red Army. Economic developments in free trade and industry were often connected to the expanded power of representative bodies, and the Supreme Ruler, under pressure from both the Allies and businessmen in Omsk, came out strongly in support of “democratic principles” and the convocation of a new Constituent Assembly. The admiral’s democratic “masks” were perhaps the most artificial of those constructed by the Omsk ideologues, as the regime was increasingly hostile to any attempts to infringe upon its absolute authority, and as the military situation deteriorated the authorities increasingly resorted to draconian punitive measures against local governments and advocates of more representation.

The image of the Supreme Ruler as a statesman was a manifestation of the Omsk government’s attempts to portray its legitimacy and solidify its position as the leading anti-Bolshevik movement in Russia. Kolchak’s public stances on law and order, democracy, and economic stability were crafted as a message to audiences both domestically and abroad about the legal foundations and strength of the regime. This message was also meant to communicate an alternative vision of the future of the Russian state that extended beyond the military defeat of the Bolsheviks. As they were keenly aware of the dangers of being labeled restorationists and

monarchists, the Kadets who fashioned the image of the Supreme Ruler went to great lengths to distance their movement from the Tsarist past and instead developed another path for Russia's future that was based on the strength of simple and ambiguous notions like law and order and respect for state authority. Although this vision failed to garner sufficient popular support domestically or internationally, the very act of constructing an idealized image of the Supreme Ruler as a synecdoche for Russia's future demonstrated the Whites were not simply revanchist monarchists, but rather competing revolutionaries with a unique vision who sought to shape Russia along their own ideological lines.

## Conclusion

The development of the two “masks” of Admiral Kolchak, the military man and the statesman, must be viewed as part of the “cult of personality” phenomenon that unfolded during the First World War and the subsequent revolutions. Nicholas II was the first Tsar to embrace modern forms of media and mass culture to supplement his identification with power and the national myths developed around the autocrat. The image of Nicholas II was ubiquitous in newspapers in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the Tsar and his advisors shaped a “scenario of power” around Nicholas’ connection to the people and his connections to the national myths of Russia and autocracy. The increased exposure of the ordained monarch had negative consequences, however, as the new forms of mass media and press desacralized the holy image of the Tsar by diminishing the uniqueness of his image.<sup>316</sup> Despite the argument that the overproduction of symbols of the monarchy and the body of Nicholas himself, the Tsar’s use of newspapers to disseminate images of power and ceremony helped foster the “monarchical psychology” of the Russian people in regards towards forms of government, which left the peasants “receptive to authoritarian or patriarchal leaders.”<sup>317</sup> Many people’s first contact with newspapers came with propaganda or articles about the Tsar, and the leaders of the revolutions of 1917 largely continued the trend of using the press, symbols, and ceremony to appeal to the uprooted masses of Russia.

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<sup>316</sup> Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, 6-14.

<sup>317</sup> Figs and Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution*, 72.



The February Revolution and the overthrow of the Tsar left Alexander Kerensky as the key figure of the Provisional Government, and he developed an extensive personality cult as a symbol of the revolution and republican ideals. Kerensky benefitted from the political confusion that arose of the deposition of the monarch, with many in the country not fully grasping the transition of power that had occurred and its implications; as one soldier famously said, “Yes, we need a republic, but at its head should be a good Tsar.”<sup>318</sup> The image of Kerensky as the embodiment of the revolution was spread among the people with amazing speed, and he became symbolically linked with power, the military, and the people. His speeches were printed and distributed among both civilians and the soldiers at the front, who were especially receptive to Kerensky’s “masks.” Kerensky’s main opponents, Lavr Kornilov and Vladimir Lenin, also cultivated their own stylized images and personality cults in attempts to garner support from an increasing polarized society. While the Bolsheviks were the known masters of propaganda and agitation (and with the cult of Lenin established during the revolution surviving until 1991), those in the anti-Bolshevik movement rallied around the famous general Kornilov, and developed a personality cult for him among right-wing circles and officers.<sup>319</sup> The death of Kornilov (and soon thereafter Mikhail Alekseev) in the early stages of the civil war left the door open for a new symbolic leader to take power in Russia and defeat Bolshevism.

After the coup d’état of November 18<sup>th</sup>, Admiral Aleksandr Kolchak assumed the title of Supreme Ruler of All-Russia and the leadership of the anti-Bolshevik movement throughout Russia. From the first hours after the overthrow of the Directory, the Omsk government utilized the press and daily newspapers to distribute and disseminate a highly stylized image of Kolchak that reflected the minister’s conception of power and legitimate authority. Although a “cult of

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<sup>318</sup> Plamper, *The Stalin Cult*, 10-11.

<sup>319</sup> Figes and Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution*, 84-99.

personality” by Jan Plamper’s definition never fully emerged for the admiral, this resulted from the fall of his government and his subsequent execution, not a lack of effort from the Russian Press Bureau. Like previous leaders before him, the image of the Supreme Ruler was created not only to publicize Kolchak and gain recognition for the government domestically and abroad, but also to elucidate the ideological positions of the movement and its vision for the future of Russia. While Lenin’s cult of personality centered on the revolution and his leadership of the Communist Party, Kolchak’s “masks” were shaped by a section of the Kadet party who believed that military dictatorship and the preservation of law and order were the only salvation for the nation.

The two “masks” of the Admiral Kolchak were created to reflect the ideological foundations of the Omsk government, and the regime utilized the press under their control (through the Russian Press Bureau) to distribute propaganda and literature about the Supreme Ruler both at home and abroad. Tsarist marching songs were stripped of their monarchical trappings and supplanted with apolitical lyrics about the admiral during the First World War, demonstrating his bravery and leadership in a time of troubles. Kadet and other right-wing intellectuals declaring their support for this new vision of state and society wrote brochures and articles in support of Kolchak’s government, while the British in Omsk and Russians in Paris spread stylized writings among the Allies. Elaborate ceremonies were constructed to portray Kolchak as the descendant of the historical tradition of ruler-liberators of Russia, such as his convocation of the State Economic Conference, which saw the Supreme Ruler seated on a stage beneath a massive portrait of Alexander II. He was presented in the papers as a simple soldier who, in the mold of Cincinnatus and George Washington, had been called on by the people to rescue the nation at its critical hour. Kolchak was also stylized as a representative of the Russian

of the state, the embodiment of law and order, who actively urged the citizens to participate in the construction of the future through the new Constituent Assembly.

The two stylized representations of Admiral Kolchak were “masks” in several senses. They were an artificial construction applied by outside forces, which were keen to create a “key symbol” for the anti-Bolshevik movement that would provide a rallying point for those who sought to overturn the gains of the October Revolution.<sup>320</sup> Like masks worn by actors on a stage production, Kolchak had little involvement in the creation of the “mask” he wore. Although many of the symbols associated with the Supreme Ruler were drawn from his distinguished past, the self-admittedly politically naïve admiral had little interest in propaganda and politics, and perhaps to a fault left this and many other aspects of rule to his subordinate ministers. Finally, a mask is often created to obscure what lies beneath; the public presentation of Admiral Kolchak was often at stark odds with the realities of the government’s policies and the military’s actions. Despite the public claim that both the Supreme Commander-in-Chief and the Russian Army were totally apolitical in nature, the military authorities’ antagonism of civilian authorities, workers, and anyone with suspected socialist leaning left many distrustful if not outright hostile to the military regime. The regime’s resistance to any concessions regarding representative assemblies during the civil war contradicted the Supreme Ruler’s declarations in support of democracy and the Constituent Assembly. The government’s vacillating and opaque stance on the land question lent little credibility to Kolchak’s frequent statements about “all land to the working peoples!”

Despite the defeat of the Kolchak’s government and the lack of development of a true cult of personality, the imagery and symbols of the Supreme Ruler of All-Russia must be situated within the dynamic development of political ideology and the mass media during the tumultuous

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<sup>320</sup> Lasswell, *Language of Politics*, 12-13.

revolutionary period in Russia. The mass produced and remarkably consistent images of power that were produced by the Omsk regime demonstrate that, contrary to previous assessments, the Whites understood the power that propaganda and political symbolism conferred, and they participated in the process of the “aestheticization of politics” in an attempt to reach and influence the people.<sup>321</sup> Admiral Kolchak and the Omsk government deserve to be included in scholarly discussions of ideology and authority during the civil war, and the modern use of propaganda and newspapers to mobilize populations in support of a cause. A more refined understanding and comprehension of the motivations and ideas of all sides of the civil war provides the ability to contextualize all of the events and actors within a wider scope of historical and modern developments.

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<sup>321</sup> Figes and Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution*, 85.

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