



## GCSE History. Russia in Revolution 1905-1924.

### Classroom Resource 2

#### The Civil War and Lenin's final years - life under the communists, seen through the eyes of a British girl growing up in Russia.

Hughesovka was a iron and steel works and town established by Welshman John Hughes in the late nineteenth century in the southern Ukraine, then part of the Russian Empire. A number of skilled workers from Wales and the rest of the UK lived there, with their families, some settled there for several generations.

They retained close ties with the UK, however, and on the outbreak of war in 1914 a number of the men left to volunteer for the British army. Then in 1917, after the February revolution, it became obvious to the British community that it was not safe to stay, and most left in the summer of 1917.



But a few remained. One of these was Helen Clark, seen here as a small child with her grandfather and her mother's younger brother.

In 1917, Helen was three years old. Her father was British, and was one of those who had left to volunteer for the army in November 1914. Her mother was Russian, and after her husband left for the war, she took Helen to live with her parents and younger brothers and sisters. The family was well-off and life was comfortable - until the revolution and civil war.

In 1933, Helen left Russia and eventually settled in Wales. Here she wrote a fascinating account of her experiences in Russia at a time of immense change. Below are just a few small extracts.

## About shortage of food during the civil war

“Shortages of food in those days were unbelievable.....Sometimes I went with our servant or Aunt Sonia to the shop to collect our bread ration and I remember seeing people sitting or lying on the ground by the roadside with their hands stretched towards us, begging for bread. They were gray-faced and emaciated and could hardly move”

“I must have been about 5 or 6 years old..... One day [Uncle George] came with a stray puppy he found somewhere. I went out to see this puppy and gave it a crust off the slice of bread I was eating. [Aunt] Sonia called me from the house and when I came in she asked me where I had been. I told her I just went to give a crust of bread to uncle George’s puppy and she said: ‘Why didn’t you give it to me, I am so hungry’. I was shattered with guilt and burst out crying. Of course I knew there were shortages of food, even small children could not help knowing this, but as I myself never went really hungry, I did not realise how desperately hungry the growing teenagers must have been all the time.”

## About money losing its value

“During the years of the Civil War money lost its value almost as soon as it was received and by the end of the War mother was receiving for her work as an accountant something like several million roubles a month, which was equal to almost nothing in purchasing power, but occasionally part of her salary was paid in kind – she might be given a bag of coal, a few pounds of flour or some potatoes”



A thousand rouble note of a type issued by the High Command of the White, anti-Communist forces, in South Russia, between 1918 and 1920. This note belonged to Helen Clark's family.

## About having to leave their house in the winter of 1923/4

" ...grandfather received notice to leave his house within a week as it was needed for the club [for workers]....It was absolutely impossible at that time to find another house.....My uncle Konstantin had some weight on the [village] Council as an ex-commander in the Red Army, and he asked for some help in finding us accommodation, but the eviction took place. All our furniture was taken out of the house and dumped in the yard, and only the little back room where our servant slept was left for the whole family. It was the middle of winter, bitterly cold, with thick snow on the ground....This lasted for a few days, during which some of our belongings were stolen and the grand piano cracked with frost.....Then one day uncle Konstantin came from work with good news: he had obtained a permit to move into a spacious room on the ground floor of a large house which stood half-way between the town of Hughesovka and the village. Before the revolution it belonged to a landowner, Nesterov, but then it was converted into three flats. Nesterov himself was luckier than most people – he was not turned out of his house completely, but given part of it as a flat. The ground floor flat was occupied by a married couple with a son of about 11, and one of their rooms was given to us. ...we moved in. It was quite difficult to get all our furniture into the one room, so most of it was stacked in the hall and the corridor where the men of the family slept. We also had to share the kitchen with the other family who lived in the other two rooms. However, they moved to another town a few weeks later and we received permission to occupy their rooms and have the kitchen to ourselves. So in the end we were very fortunate."

### Questions

1. From the evidence of these three extracts, how did the civil war and the establishment of the communist state affect the way of life of Helen Clark and others of her social class?
2. From your own knowledge, and the information given in the source, how was the way of life of the peasants and workers affected?
3. How useful are these extracts to an historian studying the civil war and life in Russia during Lenin's final years?