

LENIN

Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov was born the 22nd of April 1870 in Simbirsk. His father was a superintendent of public schools for the province of Simbirsk - he was also a member of the "lesser nobility" in Tsarist Russia. His eldest brother Alexander was executed in 1887 for an assassination attempt on Tsar Alexander III. This event made Vladimir Ulyanov engaged in revolutionary underground movements. Later the same year he was expelled from Kazan University for being part of a student demonstration.

In 1891 Vladimir Ulyanov graduated with top marks as an external law student from St. Petersburg University. He worked as a lawyer in Kazan for two years. He then moved to St. Petersburg where he now became a Marxist activist. In 1895 he visited and made important contacts exiled Russian Marxists in Switzerland. Later the same year he was arrested and sent to exile in Siberia. In Siberia he finished his first major publication "*The Development of Capitalism in Russia*" (1899). This included critique of the contemporary populist Narodniki movement. He also got married in Siberia (to Nadezhda Konstantinova Krupskaya).

After his release in 1900 he emigrated (fled) to central Europe. He became active in the underground of radical émigrés and exiles; founded and published a Social Democratic newspaper - *Iskra* (the Spark). He also takes the name Lenin. In the newspaper articles and the book "*What is to be Done?*" (1902) Lenin outlines his revolutionary ideas. Borrowing in large measure from the German Social Democrat Kautsky, **he developed the concept of an élite party (a tight knit, disciplined and dedicated group of professional revolutionaries), which would have to assume the leadership of the proletariat in the struggle for socialism and Communism.** Hugh Seton-Watson calls this his greatest contribution to political theory. In this he rejected the arguments of those who would have socialists limit themselves to legal economic activities and of those who continued to place their faith in the peasantry. These views led to a split within the RSDRP - Russian Social Democratic Workers Party in 1903. Lenin assumed the leadership of the more radical fraction - the Bolsheviks (Men of the Majority) against the more moderate fraction - Mensheviks (Men of the Minority - who actually were the majority at the Congress of 1903!).

After a brief presence in Russia during the 1905 Russian Revolution, he returned to central Europe, where he collected funds, organized the separation of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, and continued his writings - the most important of which during this period was "*Materialism and Empirocriticism*" (1909).

At the outbreak of World War I, Lenin was imprisoned by the Austrian police, but was soon sent to exile in Switzerland. In "*Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*" (1916), he blamed Imperialism for World War I. In contrast to

Marx, he argued that socialist revolution would occur first in the least, rather than most, developed capitalist society. Having almost giving up hope of such a revolution occurring in Russia, he was surprised by the outbreak of the Russian Revolution in February 1917. Lenin was soon approached by the German government. The wondered if he and his radical followers would like to return to Russia under German safe conduct? They hoped that Lenin would further radicalize the revolution already under way in Russia, paralyze the government, and destroy military resistance. In mid-April Lenin arrived at the Finland Station in Petrograd.

Lenin released several demands in his "*April Theses*" (published in Pravda); - end the war, transfer land to the peasants and transfer the power to the Soviets. These demands went unheeded. Accused of being behind the coup attempt in July 1917 Lenin had to hide in Finland. There he wrote "*State and Revolution*" (1917) in which he developed his notion of the proletarian dictatorship and justified the use of terror. The breakdown of the Russian war effort, the Bolshevik effort to stop the Kornilov revolt, the Bolshevik takeover of the Petrograd Soviet (and the Moscow Soviet), and the rapid deterioration of the economy worked in his favor. At the 25-26 October (7-8 November according to the Gregorian Calendar) Lenin, Trotsky and Zinoviev carried out the Bolshevik Revolution.

Lenin became the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, effectively the Premier of the new Soviet government. He immediately put into practice his idea of a small, élite leadership by creating the Politburo.¹ This enabled him to impose upon a reluctant Bolshevik leadership the acceptance of the humiliating Peace of Brest-Litovsk. Thereafter, the Russian Civil War ensued, which he successfully directed from Petrograd while his aides like Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Stalin organized the Red Army at the grass roots. His able leadership, and the terror executed by the loyal Cheka² bands enabled him to stay in power after the devastating Civil War, and the disastrous Russo-Polish War.³ Despite his many writings, Lenin was a pragmatist more than an ideologue, and calmed a lot of discontent through the New Economic Policy, which soon restored production to pre-war levels. In 1922, Lenin suffered two strokes. Paralyzed in speech and movement throughout most of 1923, he was unable to stop the rise of Stalin who succeeded him. Lenin died the 21st of January 1924.

¹ Politburo = at first the highest policy-making committee of the Communist Party - after the revolution the highest executive organ of the Communist Party and the state

² Cheka = a secret police which was instituted by Lenin already in December 1917 and run by a Pole - Dzerzhinsky. Its purpose was to protect and establish the Communist Revolution through terror

³ War between Russia and Poland 1919-1921. Poland demanded a restoration of the Polish borders of 1772. At the Peace of Riga (18 March 1921), Poland gained a new eastern border around 120 miles (200 km) to the east of the Curzon Line