

## THE RUSSIAN OCTOBER REVOLUTION 1917 TO THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY IN JANUARY 1918

The **Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets** was scheduled for the next day - the 25<sup>th</sup> of October. Lenin and the leading Bolsheviks did not want to wait since they were not sure about the support of the Congress. On 26 October Trotsky went to the Congress to announce the capture of the Winter Palace. The Bolsheviks were outnumbered in the Congress but could count on the support of the left wing of the Socialist Revolutionaries, a combination which gave them a small majority. With a majority assured, the Bolsheviks could obtain a favorable vote and thus "legitimacy" for their new government and its policies.

Lenin obtained the Congress approval for his first two decrees, which were designed to capture mass support (especially from the peasantry, who so far did not favor the Bolsheviks) by promising what the masses wanted, land and peace.

**Decree on Peace:** The "*Decree on Peace*" called for an immediate truce and a just peace and could be interpreted as an appeal to foreign peoples over the heads of governments.

**Decree on Land:** The "*Decree on Land*" sanctioned what was already happening, the take-over by peasants of private land, but specified that the distribution should be arranged by village soviets.

**Decree on the Press:** One Decree that was not as popular was the abolition of press freedom - the "*Decree on the Press*". Lenin and the Bolsheviks had made great use of the press in their climb to power, but they had no intention of leaving this weapon available to the anti-Bolshevik groups.

**Declaration of the rights of the Peoples of Russia:** On the 15<sup>th</sup> of November a "*Declaration of the rights of the Peoples of Russia*" was accepted. It contained (among other things) "*the right of the peoples of Russia to free determination, up to secession and formation of an independent state*". Signed by Stalin and Lenin...

**Election to the Constituent Assembly:** One problem coming up was the election to the Constituent Assembly. The third coalition Provisional Government (September 25 - 1917) under Kerensky had worked as a "Pre-parliament" for the long-awaited and long-postponed elections to the Constituent Assembly planned to take place November 25. Trotsky advised Lenin to not change this date (and election). The result was what Lenin had feared, a majority for the Socialist Revolutionaries! Before the Assembly met in January 1918, the Socialist Revolutionaries spent their time devising the political program which they would place before the members. The Bolsheviks spent their energy to agitation work, seeking to discredit the Assembly.

**CHEKA:** In December 1917 Lenin set up the "*All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Fighting Counter-Revolution and Sabotage*" (whose abbreviation was *CHEKA*). This was the Bolshevik "**Secret Police**". The CHEKA established its permanent headquarters in the offices of an erstwhile insurance company in Lubyanka Street, Moscow. **NOTE:** Lenin's active role!

### **Why didn't Kerensky get any support in October 1917?**

Mostly because few soldiers were really willing to fight for his government and those who were willing were led by officers who themselves were not. Several officers had seen what they considered to be Kerensky's betrayal of Kornilov in August/September so they refused to lift a finger to help him. (Eventually Kerensky got away and he later made an academic career in the USA, where he died in 1970).

**Constituent Assembly:** The Constituent Assembly met January 18<sup>th</sup> 1918. It was dispersed by Lenin and the Bolsheviks the next day! A new constitution, confirming the supremacy of the Soviet, formalized the end of the Constituent Assembly. Lenin's uncompromising firmness had won the day, but it had also made civil war inevitable.

In order to protect the new constitution Trotsky's Red Guard now became the Soviet Red Army (January 1918).