

## **THE BOLSHEVIK STRATEGY BEFORE THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION**

- The Bolsheviks played an important role during the Kornilov revolt. The non-Bolshevik socialists rallied to the support of the Provisional Government, while the Bolsheviks used the crisis to extract their arrested leaders (after the "July Days") and they obtained the approval by the Soviet's Committee Against Counter-revolution to put up an armed worker's militia to defend the revolution. In this way the already existing armed Bolshevik supporters - the "*Red Guard*" who helped to defend Petrograd against Kornilov, received the Soviet's recognition. About this time (August 1917) the Red Guards contained about 10,000 troops.
- The Bolsheviks popularity was already increasing before the "July Days". This incident brought them into temporary disrepute, but it didn't effect the general trend of increasing popularity. Their ideas were expressed by one of the editors of "*Pravda*" - Molotov (Skryabin). He advocated resistance to the Provisional Government, termination of the war and immediate distribution of the landowners estates to the peasants! The Bolsheviks were the only party with this program and the workers and soldiers were getting tired of the war...
- The Bolsheviks won a majority in the Petrograd and Moscow Soviets. The Bolsheviks could now act in the name of the Soviet (to top it all - Trotsky was elected chairman of the Petrograd Soviet in early October). The early Bolshevik slogan "All power to the Soviets" was paying off.
- The Bolsheviks were very successful in their propaganda against the Provisional Government. *Pravda* - the official paper of the Bolsheviks (+ several other propaganda papers - Morris writes that the party produced 41 different newspapers in August 1917) made this possible because of a "*steady flow of funds through various channels and under different labels*" from Germany (Zeman, Z.A.B. "*Germany and the Revolution in Russia 1915-1918*", London 1958; pp. 94-5). In the Bolshevik papers Lenin openly accused Kerensky for planning to surrender Petrograd to the advancing Germans.
- In order to protect the revolution the Petrograd Soviet (Trotsky and the Bolsheviks) had organized forces under a "Military Revolutionary Committee". These forces were used during the coup. Since they were officially under the control of the Petrograd Soviet it was hard to accuse the Bolsheviks of seizing power...
- The Bolsheviks promoted and supported regional nationalism in the local Soviets and the army, especially in the Ukraine.
- The Bolsheviks showed a compromising attitude towards other parties and if necessary they were willing to adopt elements of their program.
- The Bolsheviks became very skilled at applying the right degree of force at the right time...
- To the Bolshevik "strategy" should be added the "war situation", the shortage of fuel and food, the unemployment etc.... which all led to the Bolshevik take-over (the October Revolution)

## **THE RUSSIAN OCTOBER REVOLUTION 1917**

During the night of 24-25 October Trotsky's Red Guard detachments occupied without bloodshed the central telephone exchange, railroad stations, the central post office, and other key installations. The coup was not a spontaneous action - it was "*the deliberate actions of a tightly-knit group of revolutionary leaders*" (Morris)

## 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).