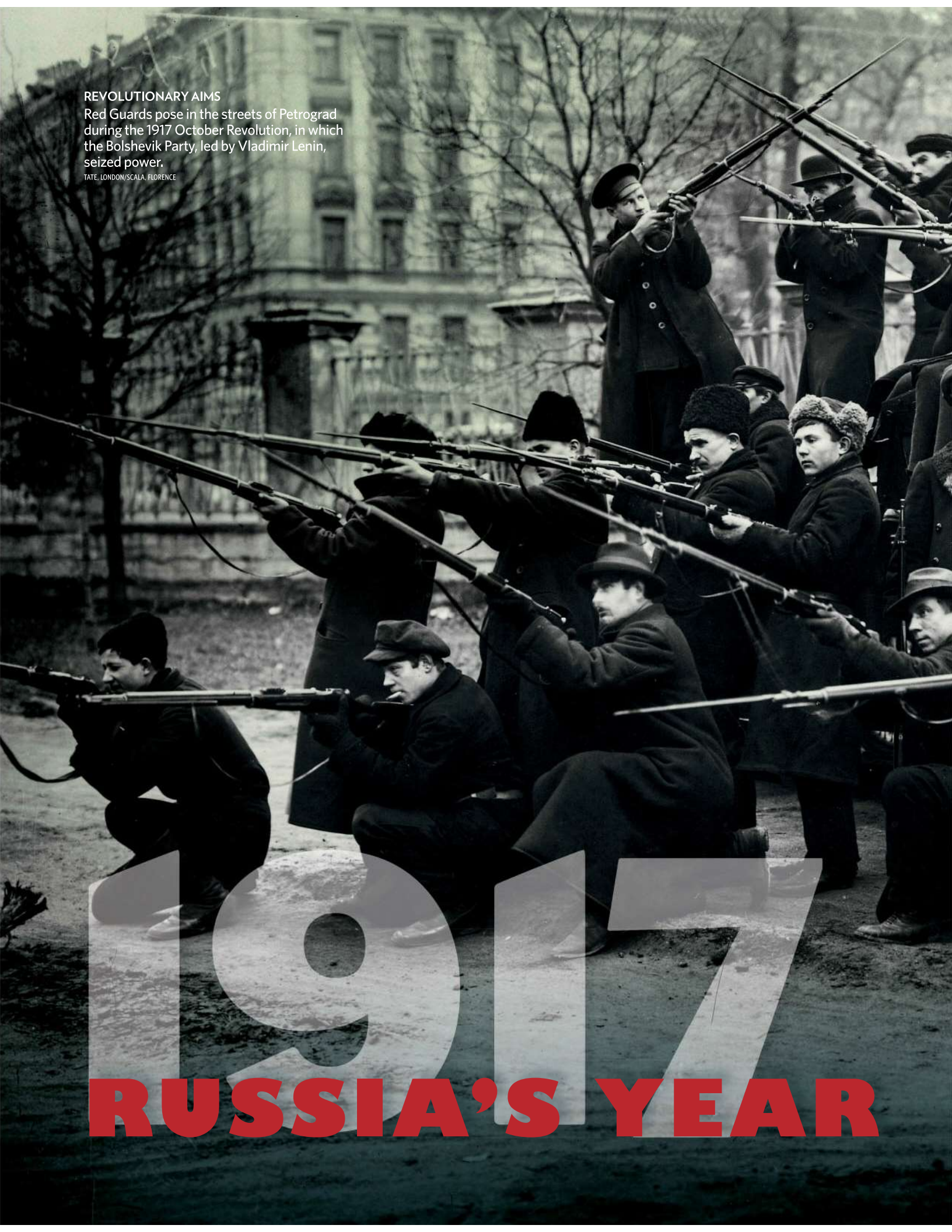


REVOLUTIONARY AIMS

Red Guards pose in the streets of Petrograd during the 1917 October Revolution, in which the Bolshevik Party, led by Vladimir Lenin, seized power.

TATE, LONDON/SCALA, FLORENCE



1917

RUSSIA'S YEAR



TORN APART BY WAR AND HUNGER, UNITED BY A DESIRE FOR CHANGE: THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE STARTED A REVOLUTION IN FEBRUARY 1917. IN THE MONTHS THAT FOLLOWED, ONE LEADER—VLADIMIR LENIN—SURVIVED THE CHAOTIC STRUGGLE FOR POWER TO LAY THE FOUNDATIONS FOR THE SOVIET UNION.

ORLANDO FIGES

OF REVOLUTION



THE SPARK ON FEBRUARY 23, INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY, THOUSANDS OF WOMEN PROTESTED IN PETROGRAD, DEMANDING MORE GENEROUS RATIONS, AN END TO THE WAR, AND THE RIGHT TO VOTE.
BRIDGEMAN/ACI

ts events paved the way for the Soviet Union. It dominated the politics of the 20th century, and it has left an indelible mark on the contemporary world. But when Russia's year of revolution began in the bitterly cold February of 1917, many revolutionaries did not, at first, pay much attention.

The first sign that something big was happening was on International Women's Day—February 23, 1917,* in the old Russian calendar. Crowds of female factory workers gathered in the center of Petrograd, the Russian capital (formerly known as St. Petersburg). Even as disaffected and hungry workers, male and female, joined in the protests, some revolutionaries remained skeptical. Aleksandr Shlyapnikov was a leading figure of the Bolshevik movement, whose leader, Vladimir Ilich Lenin, had been living outside Russia for long periods of time since 1900. Shlyapnikov observed on February 25: "Give the workers a pound of bread and the movement will peter out."

Hunger, War, Rage

Despite initial doubts that the growing February protests would amount to much, many observers at the time—

* ALL DATES ARE FROM THE JULIAN CALENDAR EMPLOYED IN RUSSIA AT THE TIME (13 DAYS BEHIND THE GREGORIAN CALENDAR USED IN EUROPE AND THE U.S.). IN FEBRUARY 1918 THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT SWITCHED TO THE GREGORIAN SYSTEM.

NICHOLAS II: UNPREPARED FOR REVOLUTION

Tsar Nicholas II Romanov—born Nikolay Aleksandrovich in 1868—had grown up in the shadow of his father, Alexander III. A staunch opponent of democracy, the bearded, burly Alexander was known for his habit of crashing through locked doors and being able to bend silver coins with his powerful thumb. His son worshipped his father, even though Alexander openly regarded his heir as a weakling and nicknamed him "girlie."

WHEN Nicholas ascended to the imperial throne in 1894, he understood little of modern Russia, whose ever more educated, urban, and restless society was on a collision course with his autocratic instincts. Russia's 1904-05 war with Japan ended in humiliation and revolution in the streets of St. Petersburg. The cocktail of war and revolt would prove his undoing a decade later, even though Russia entered World War I in 1914 on a surge of patriotism. His decision to take supreme command of the armed forces—and the influence of the sinister monk Rasputin over his wife—lost Nicholas crucial support. Not even his abdication in March 1917 would save him from the Bolsheviks. The Romanov family was held in a house in Yekaterinburg until July 1918, when Nicholas, his wife, and their five children were murdered in the cellar.



NICHOLAS II ROMANOV IN A 1900 PORTRAIT. MUSEUM TSARSKOYE SELO, ST. PETERSBURG
BRIDGEMAN/ACI



- Bolshevik uprising and date
- Lenin's train route, Zürich to Petrograd (Mar. 28-Apr. 3, 1917)
- Line of foreign occupation of Russian territory at the time of the armistice, 1917
- Line of foreign occupation of Russian territory at the time of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, 1918
- Territory lost by Russia following the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, 1918

Boundaries are shown as of 1914.
Dates are from the Julian (Old Style) calendar.

- | Location | Date |
|-----------------|---------|
| Petrograd | 25 Oct. |
| Novgorod | 25 Oct. |
| Pskov | 2 Nov. |
| Tver | 28 Oct. |
| Yaroslavl | 27 Oct. |
| Ivanovo | 25 Oct. |
| Kostroma | 2 Dec. |
| Izhevsk | 27 Oct. |
| Kazan | 26 Oct. |
| Nizhny Novgorod | 28 Oct. |
| Moscow | 2 Nov. |
| Vitebsk | 27 Oct. |
| Smolensk | 30 Oct. |
| Kaluga | 28 Nov. |
| Tula | 7 Dec. |
| Mogilev | 18 Nov. |
| Orel | 1 Nov. |
| Gomel | 30 Oct. |
| Minsk | 25 Oct. |
| Tambov | 31 Oct. |
| Voronezh | 30 Oct. |
| Saratov | 27 Oct. |
| Tsaritsyn | 14 Nov. |
| Rostov | 28 Oct. |
| Kishinev | 27 Nov. |





FALLEN FROM GRACE AFTER NICHOLAS II ABDICATED IN FEBRUARY 1917, LIKENESSES OF THE TSARS WERE VANDALIZED THROUGHOUT RUSSIA, SUCH AS THIS STATUE OF NICHOLAS'S FATHER, ALEXANDER III.

FINE ART/ALBUM

including Lenin's Bolsheviks, Russian liberals, and foreign diplomats—were nevertheless certain that a revolution was only a matter of time.

The roots of Russia's turmoil ran deep. During a devastating famine in the early 1890s, the inability of the government to provide sufficient relief had fanned revolutionary fervor in the country. In the cities, the appalling exploitation and squalor suffered by the workers triggered waves of protests and strikes.

The pressures of industrialization were worsened by the actions of Tsar Nicholas II. Reigning from 1894, Nicholas had inherited Russia's colossal empire and the autocratic ideas of his family, the Romanov dynasty. In 1905 the tsar's popularity was ebbing due to continuing domestic problems as well as an unpopular war with Japan. During a peaceful demonstration in St. Petersburg in January 1905, protesters were fired on and killed, an event that triggered months of protests.

The revolt continued throughout the year. In the fall of 1905 Tsar Nicholas finally compromised. He issued the October Manifesto, which laid the groundwork for the protection of civil rights, the creation of a constitution, and the establishment of a parliament called the Duma. These concessions appeased enough of the revolutionaries for Nicholas to stay in power.

Many others viewed the October Manifesto as too little, too late. Inspired by the writings of Karl Marx (1818–1883), who foresaw a revolt in which laborers would become the ruling class,

THE ROOTS OF REVOLUTION

In January 1905 revolution erupted in Russia when the tsar's forces fired on and killed hundreds of protesters in St. Petersburg; similar strikes and protests followed throughout Russia. The Revolution of 1905 came to an end when Nicholas II placated the people with reform, including a parliament and a national constitution. For the next decade, several political factions continued to clash with each other as the monarchy clung to power. Bolsheviks like Trotsky and Lenin honed their ideas and waited in prison and exile for the next phase. In 1917 another revolution would arrive.

LIBERALS: CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY, LED BY PAVEL MILYUKOV

Founded during the Revolution of 1905, the CDP was dominated by liberal aristocrats and middle-class professionals who aimed to replace the autocracy of the tsars with a constitutional democracy along British lines.

Led by historian Pavel Milyukov, many "Kadets" were scholars and intellectuals. The party was often portrayed by its rivals as patrician and out of touch. The Bolsheviks declared the party illegal in December 1917, and Milyukov died while in exile in France.



◀ **PAVEL MILYUKOV** (1859-1943)
BRIDGEMAN/ACI



BLOODY SUNDAY, 1905. THE SHOOTING OF WORKERS; THE WINTER PALACE, ST. PETERSBURG. PAINTING BY IVAN VLADIMIROV, CA 1940. STATE CENTRAL MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY OF RUSSIA, MOSCOW
— JOSSE/SCALA, FLORENCE

1905

1917

REVOLUTION OF 1905

In January royal forces strike down hundreds of protesters in St. Petersburg, leading to revolt. In October the first soviet ("workers' council") is set up; the tsar enacts reforms and holds onto power.

FEBRUARY REVOLUTION

Frustrated by food shortages, violence erupts in Petrograd. In March the tsar abdicates. Power is shared between the Provisional Government and the soviets.



UIG/BRIDGEMAN/ACI

2 AGRARIAN LEFT: SOCIALIST REVOLUTIONARY PARTY, CO-FOUNDED BY ALEKSANDR KERENSKY

Formed in 1900 from a merger of leftist parties, the “SRs” were the largest Russian left-wing group by 1917. Reflecting the predominately rural nature of Russia, the party’s ideas were focused on radical land reform, and saw its defense of the peasants as a principal point of difference with Lenin’s party. Despite its involvement in terrorist acts, its leading figure in 1917 was the respected moderate Aleksandr Kerensky, who became prime minister after the unrest of the July Days, an unsuccessful workers’ revolt. Following the outlawing of the SR party later that year by the Bolsheviks, Kerensky fled Russia. He spent his later life as a university lecturer in the United States, where he died in 1970.



BRIDGEMAN/ACI

3 THE MARXIST LEFT: SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC WORKERS’ PARTY, LED BY VLADIMIR LENIN

Founded in 1898, the SDWP believed that industrial, urban workers rather than the peasantry would spearhead the longed-for revolution in Russia. Many of its leaders went into exile. A dispute in London in 1903 between its leaders—Vladimir Lenin and L. Martov—split the party into Lenin’s Bolsheviks (“the majority faction”) and Martov’s Mensheviks (“the minority faction”). The root of the split was Lenin’s insistence that the party only consist of a small number of professional revolutionaries rather than build broad support. Lenin’s ruthless vision served him well in 1917, when his faction, although outnumbered at that time, seized power and suppressed opposition.

THE PATH TO POWER

MAY-JUNE

Appointed minister of war, Kerensky attempts to boost the Russian war effort with a strong offensive against Germany, which fails and weakens faith in the Provisional Government.

SEPTEMBER

General Kornilov fails in his attempt to impose martial law. The Bolsheviks remain popular and win large majorities in the soviets in cities across Russia.

NOVEMBER

The Bolsheviks begin to lay the foundations for their government. Lenin is chair of the Council of People’s Commissars, or Sovnarkom, which will become the center of executive power.

APRIL

Lenin returns to Russia from exile in a sealed train. Upon arrival, he undermines the Provisional Government and calls for “All power to the soviets.”

JULY

Dubbed the July Days, a workers’ revolt in Petrograd falters. Kerensky becomes prime minister and cracks down on Bolsheviks. Lenin flees to Finland.

OCTOBER REVOLUTION

Lenin secretly returns to Petrograd, and the Bolsheviks take control of its garrison on October 24. The next night, a group storms the Winter Palace, seat of the Provisional Government, arrests Kerensky, and seizes power.



ARTISTIC LICENSE MIKHAIL SOKOLOV'S 1930S PAINTING OF LENIN ARRIVING BY TRAIN IN PETROGRAD INSERTS A CHARACTER WHO DID NOT TRAVEL WITH LENIN: JOSEPH STALIN, WHO APPEARS STANDING BEHIND THE BOLSHEVIK LEADER. SCIENCE HISTORY/ALAMY/ACI

RETURN TO RUSSIA

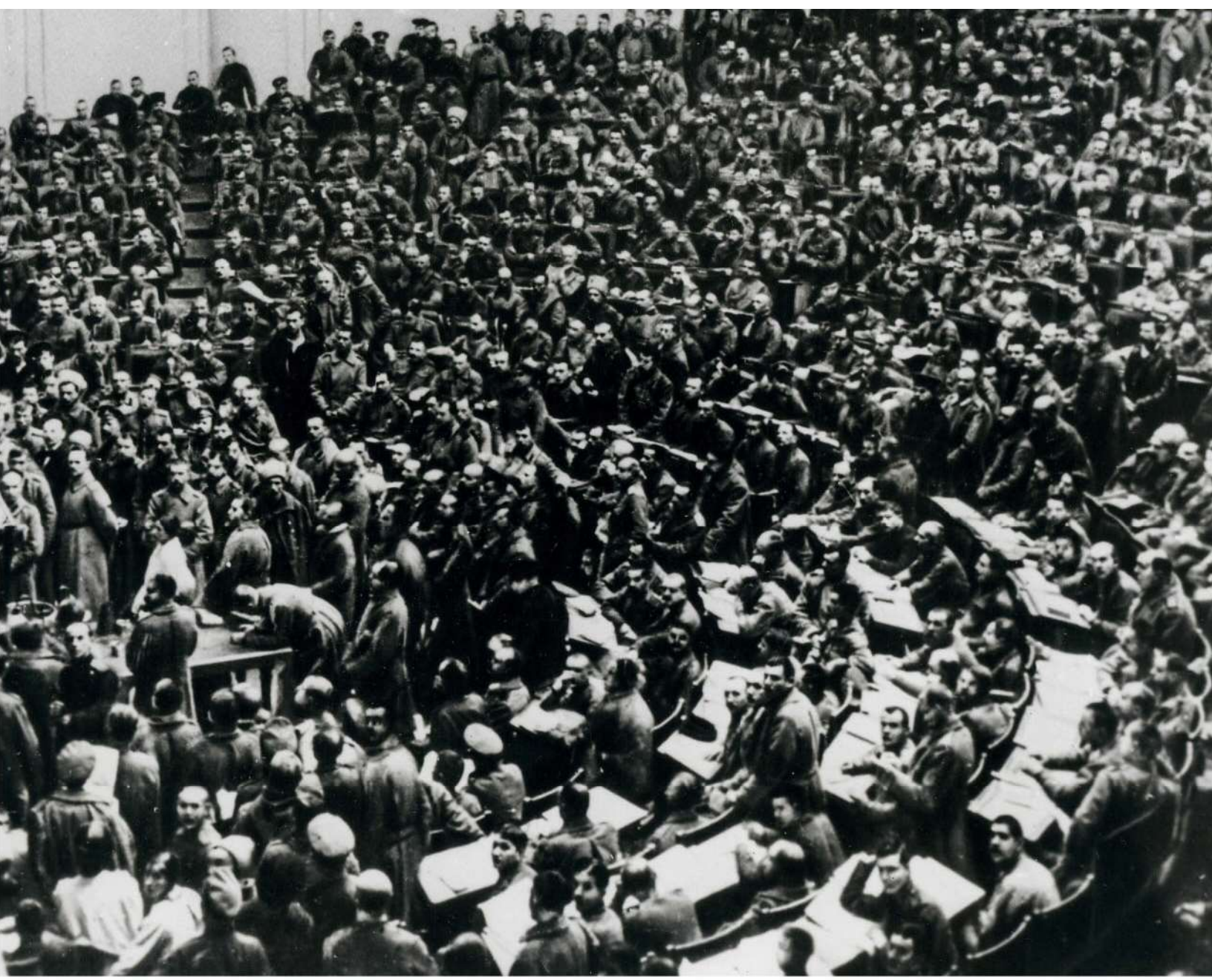
AS LENIN OBSERVED WORLD WAR I FROM EXILE, the Germans observed the deteriorating domestic situation of its enemy Russia. They proposed to allow Lenin to return to Russia in late March in the hopes that his presence would lead to more chaos and further weaken the country. Fellow Russian exiles viewed Lenin as a traitor for making a deal with Russia's enemy, but Lenin, his wife, and a group of fellow émigrés made the voyage anyway. They boarded a "sealed train" that would travel through Switzerland to Sweden. On arrival at Petrograd's Finland Station on April 3, Lenin undermined the Provisional Government by declaring, "All power to the soviets." Germany's gamble that Lenin would increase destabilization in Russia paid off. Later, British prime minister Winston Churchill assessed the move: "They turned upon Russia the most grisly of weapons. They transported Lenin in a sealed truck like a plague bacillus."



revolutionary figures, such as Lenin, continued to agitate against the tsar.

Just under a decade later, unresolved social and economic tensions were magnified by Russia's entry into World War I in 1914. Located near the front line with Germany, Petrograd (the former St. Petersburg) swarmed with soldiers and hungry workers, who toiled in the shadow of the city's lavish palaces. Exhausted by the war and food shortages, by early 1917 Petrograd was a powder keg of despair and anger with those in power.

What happened next was not just a revolution, but multiple revolutions; a rejection not just of the state, but of all figures of authority: judges, policemen, government officials, army and navy officers, priests, teachers, employers,



landowners, village elders, and patriarchally minded fathers and husbands.

The February Revolution

Contrary to Shlyapnikov's prediction that the protests would peter out, the unrest snowballed in the last days of February. Red flags and banners began to appear, calling for the downfall of the monarchy.

Despite the turmoil, the authorities could have contained the situation if they had avoided open conflict with the crowds. But the forces of the tsar opened fire, killing protesters. The demonstrations began to turn into a full-scale revolution as angry protesters broke into the barracks of the city's Pavlovsky Regiment. Rather than attack them, the soldiers joined the

protesters, some even firing on their own officers.

The authorities were, by now, almost deprived of military power in the capital. The expansion of the revolt led some to assume that events were being orchestrated by socialist parties. In fact, they were driven by many individuals: soldiers, workers, and students, people whose names never made it into the history books.

On February 27 a crowd came to the Tauride Palace—the seat of the Duma—looking for leaders. A workers' council, known as a soviet, was

THE SOVIET GATHERS

A meeting of the Petrograd Soviet ("workers' council"), March 1917. The power struggle between the soviet and the Provisional Government was a constant source of tension throughout that year.

DAVID KING COLLECTION/ALBUM

THE AUTHORITIES COULD HAVE AVOIDED CONFLICT WITH THE CROWDS. BUT THE TSAR'S FORCES OPENED FIRE, KILLING PROTESTERS.



LENIN AND THE TRUTH

Lenin reading *Pravda* (“truth,” in Russian), the official newspaper of the Bolsheviks. The publication helped make the party popular among soldiers and workers.

FINE ART/ALBUM

elected. The majority of the leaders of the Petrograd Soviet had no intention of taking power. Instead, they wanted the Duma leaders to form a government in line with the doctrine laid down by Karl Marx: That in a country such as Russia, the first step toward a socialist order would be taken by bourgeois democrats. On March 1, a provisional government was formed. The soviet pledged to support it as long as it adhered to a comprehensive list of democratic principles.

Nothing less than Tsar Nicholas’s abdication, meanwhile, could save the war campaign against Germany—all his senior generals told him so. The Duma also called on him to stand down. On March 2, 1917, Nicholas II gave up the throne. The end of the monarchy was marked by scenes of rejoicing throughout the Russian Empire. Symbols of monarchical power—emblems, coats of arms, double-headed eagles, and tsarist statues—were destroyed.

DISCONTENT SPREAD FROM THE CITIES TO THE COUNTRYSIDE. EXPECTATIONS SOARED. STRIKERS CALLED FOR SHORTER DAYS AND WORKERS’ CONTROL OF FACTORIES.

The Freest Country

Although the Provisional Government saw itself as an interim body to guide the country through the war and the ongoing political upheaval, it nevertheless enacted significant reforms. Led by Prime Minister Prince Georgy Lvov, a liberal reformer, and Minister of Justice Aleksandr Kerensky—the lone socialist and only government figure who was also a member of the soviet—it swept away the old laws of the tsarist regime against freedoms of speech and assembly. Russia was transformed into what Lenin called the “freest country in the world.”

From exile in Switzerland, the Bolshevik leader followed the rapid course of events in Petrograd with frustration. He finally returned to Russia on a sealed train provided by the Germans, who were hoping that his opposition to the war would undermine the Russian war effort. On April 3 Lenin arrived at Petrograd’s Finland Station with a 10-point program—his April Theses (later published in *Pravda*, the Bolshevik newspaper)—for a second revolution based on “power to the soviets.”

Lenin’s writings ran counter to Marxist theory because they rejected the need for the first phase—the “bourgeois-democratic” revolution. Even so, Lenin managed to win the Bolshevik Party around to his theses. Mass enrollments of workers and soldiers drawn to his charisma aided his cause. These new members knew little about Marxist theory and valued his efficiency: Why wait to reach socialism in two stages when they could get there in one?

Discontent continued to spread throughout Russia from the cities to the countryside. Workers’ expectations soared: Strikers called for an eight-hour day and workers’ control of the factories. As part of the wider crisis in authority, the Petrograd Soviet had limited control over revolts in the provinces and agrarian communities. Local towns and regions behaved as if they were independent of the nation. As in 1905, the village commune was the organizing kernel of the revolution in the countryside, as land and livestock were seized. Soldiers had their own committees, which supervised relations with the officers. Some soldiers refused to fight for more than eight hours a day, claiming the same rights as the workers.



CLASHES ON THE STREETS OF PETROGRAD DURING THE JULY DAYS. PHOTO BY VIKTOR BULLA, JULY 5, 1917
TATE PHOTO/RMN-GRAND PALAIS

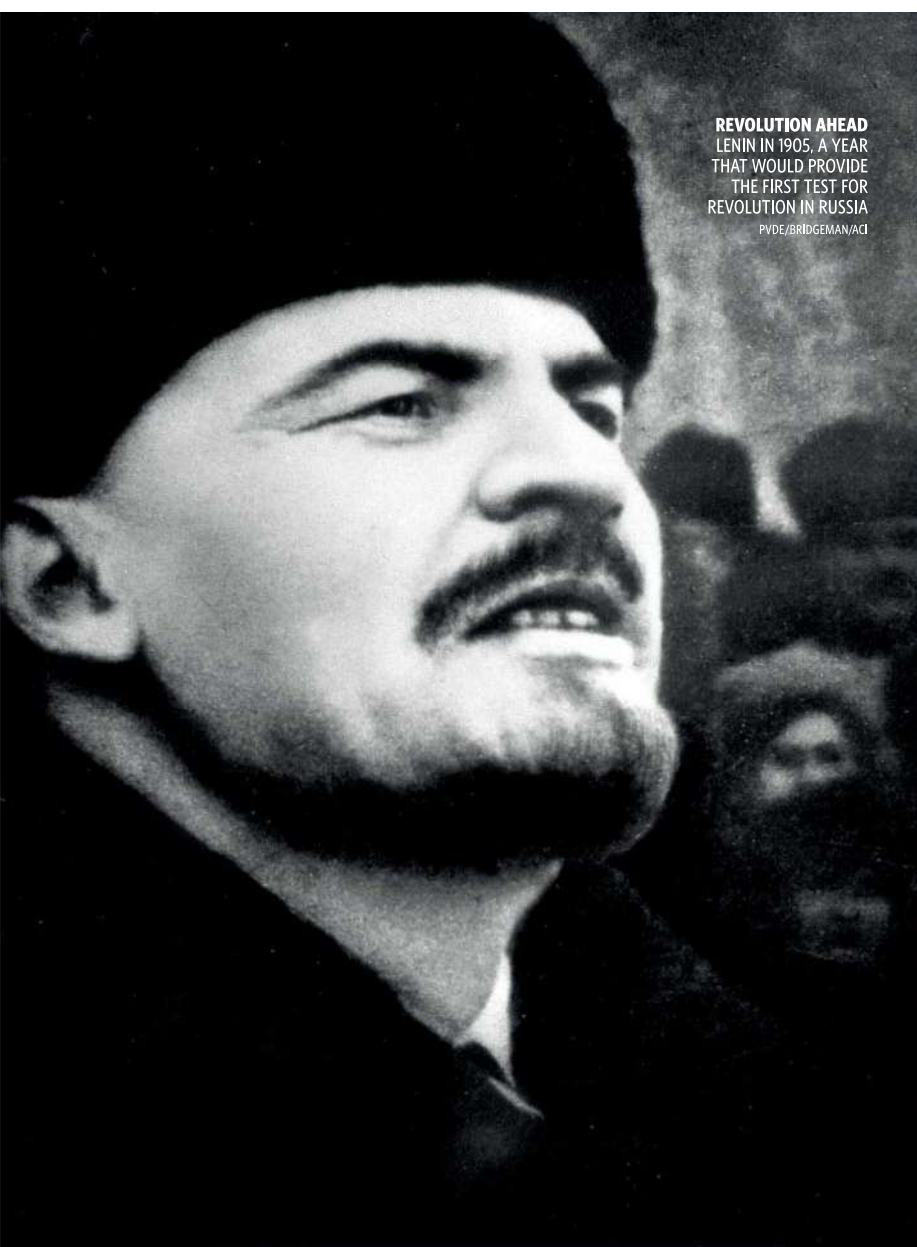
The Road to Civil War

For the leaders of the Provisional Government, the preservation of the Russian state depended on the success of the military. Defeat by Germany could mean a return to the old order and restoration of the Romanov dynasty. Under pressure from the Allies, Russia launched a new offensive in mid-June 1917. For two days the Russians advanced, but on the third, they were pushed back by a German counteroffensive.

Alarmed by the German advance, the Provisional Government mobilized the First Machine-Gun Regiment, which comprised most of the pro-Bolshevik soldiers in the Petrograd Garrison. Accusing the government of using the German offensive as an excuse to disperse Bolshevik elements, the regiment

THE SUMMER OF THEIR DISCONTENT

THE JULY DAYS were three tumultuous days that initially began as peaceful demonstrations in Petrograd against the Provisional Government, headed by Prince Lvov. Workers and soldiers took to the streets on July 3, 1917, but on July 4 violence broke out. The Provisional Government could not control the riots, the Petrograd Soviet did not step in, and the Bolsheviks would not endorse the revolt. Without a leader and a goal, the protest lost focus and momentum, but the fragile government had been damaged. Lvov resigned, and Aleksandr Kerensky became prime minister. He used this moment as an opportunity to discredit the Bolsheviks, by publicizing Lenin's financial ties with Germany. As public opinion turned against the Bolsheviks, many leaders—including Leon Trotsky—were jailed, but Lenin was able to escape to exile in Finland.

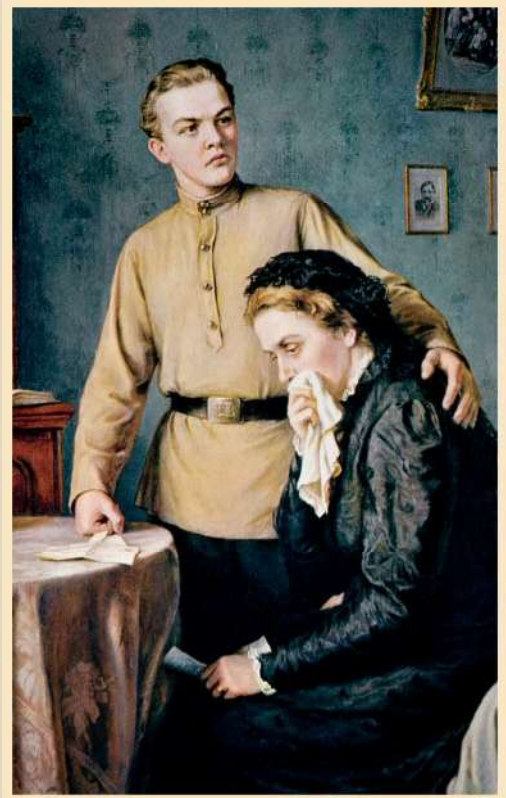


REVOLUTION AHEAD
 LENIN IN 1905, A YEAR
 THAT WOULD PROVIDE
 THE FIRST TEST FOR
 REVOLUTION IN RUSSIA
PVDE/BRIDGEMAN/ACI

VLADIMIR ILICH ULYANOV

LENIN WAS ONCE DESCRIBED BY RUSSIAN NOVELIST MAKSIM GORKY AS “A MAN WHO EMBODIED GENIUS MORE STRIKINGLY THAN ALL THE GREAT MEN OF HIS DAY.” GORKY ALSO CALLED HIM “A COLD-BLOODED TRICKSTER WHO SPARES NEITHER THE HONOR NOR THE LIVES OF THE PROLETARIAT.” COMPLEX AND ENIGMATIC, THE REVOLUTIONARY LENIN CONTINUES TO DEFY EASY CHARACTERIZATION.

LENIN



NOT THE LAST OF HER TROUBLES ON MAY 5, 1887, LENIN'S MOTHER MARIA—ALREADY A WIDOW—LEARNED ABOUT THE EXECUTION OF HER ELDEST SON, ALEKSANDR. 20TH-CENTURY LITHOGRAPH
BRIDGEMAN/ACI

Viktor Chernov, a member of the Provisional Government toppled by the October Revolution, wrote: “Lenin’s devotion to the revolutionary cause permeates his entire being.” His diagnosis was shared by friend and foe alike.

BORN Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov, Lenin grew up in a well-to-do family in a city some 550 miles east of Moscow. Vladimir’s elder brother, Aleksandr, proved that revolution was in the family’s DNA. A participant in a clumsy attempt to assassinate Tsar Alexander III in 1887, Aleksandr Ulyanov was executed at age 21. It seems probable that this incident influenced both

Lenin’s worldview and his (later) distaste for individual acts of terrorism as a political tool.

LENIN was also politically rebellious; he was arrested in



NADYA OUTLIVED HER HUSBAND BY 15 YEARS. SHE LATER ALLIED WITH TROTSKY AGAINST STALIN.
SZPHOTO/BRIDGEMAN/ACI

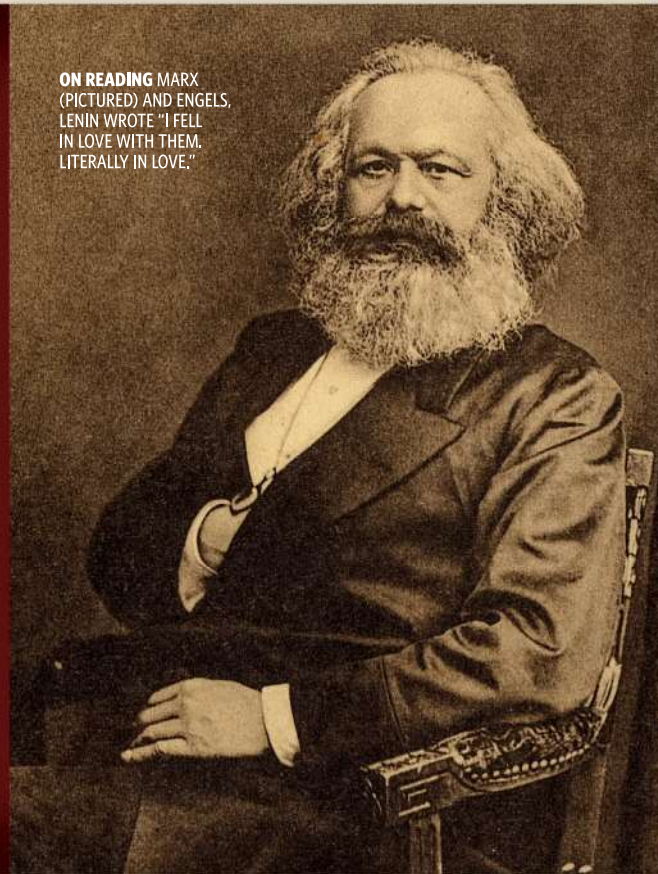
MARX AND LENIN: THE COMMUNIST REVOLUTION

Karl Marx died in 1883 when Lenin was 12 years old. Defined in works such as *The Communist Manifesto* and *Das Kapital*, Marx's brand of socialism, known as communism, had become the type

most favored among European left-wing revolutionary thinkers. It was defined by "historical materialism," an idea that argued that society and its political structures are shaped by the economic reality of the time. Analyzing the economic—and therefore, social—evolution of humanity, Marx considered that he could scientifically predict the later stages of capitalism. First, a revolution would be led by the bourgeoisie. Then, a revolution led by the workers would establish a dictatorship that would eventually lead to communism

and freedom for all. Even though Lenin would become an ardent follower of Marxist doctrine, he would be an impatient one. Marx's prophecy contemplated the eventual downfall of ripe, capitalist societies—not budding, semifeudal ones like Russia in the early 20th century. In 1917 Lenin quickly realized that the revolution could not wait to pass through the bourgeois stage envisaged by Marx. Lenin directed his efforts into seizing power and establishing a dictatorship of the workers. Marx's last stage—freedom for all—never materialized.

ON READING MARX (PICTURED) AND ENGELS, LENIN WROTE "I FELL IN LOVE WITH THEM, LITERALLY IN LOVE."



BRIDGEMAN/ACI



A PROPAGANDA TOOL STALIN USED LENIN'S IMAGE TO VALIDATE HIS OWN POSITION. POSTER, STATE RUSSIAN MUSEUM
CULTURE-IMAGES/ALBUM

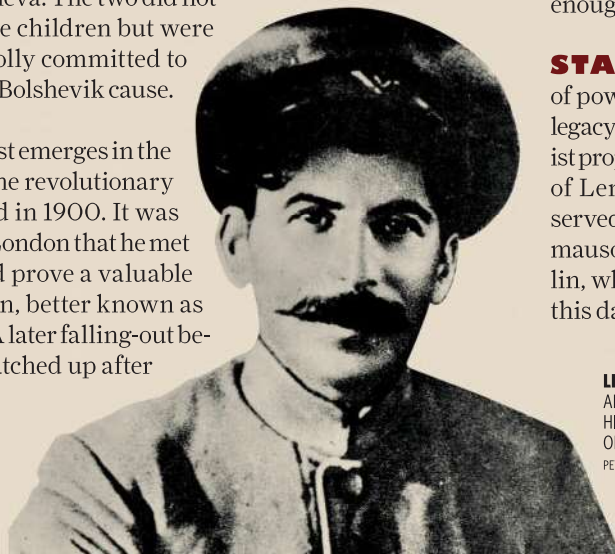
St. Petersburg for sedition and exiled to Siberia in 1897. The next year he married schoolteacher Nadezhda Konstantinova Krupskaya, known as Nadya. Even though she had initially disliked Vladimir, she soon saw in him a kindred spirit, as devoted to revolution as she. They lived in many places during exile, including London and Geneva. The two did not have children but were wholly committed to the Bolshevik cause.

THE ALIAS "Lenin" first emerges in the pages of *Iskra* (*The Spark*), the revolutionary newspaper Lenin founded in 1900. It was when Lenin was living in London that he met one of the men who would prove a valuable asset in 1917: Lev Bronstein, better known as Leon Trotsky ("the pen"). A later falling-out between the two men was patched up after the revolution broke out.

"THE WONDERFUL GEORGIAN"

Even though this was Lenin's initial appraisal of Iosif Vissarionovich, better known as Joseph Stalin—"man of steel"—(below), he came to mistrust him in later years. By then, Stalin had secured his position as Lenin's successor.

GRANGER COLLECTION/AGE FOTOSTOCK



LENIN DIED at the age of 53 in 1924, after surviving an assassination attempt in 1918 and a series of strokes that followed, including one that semiparalyzed him in 1922. Semiretired, he continued to keep a hand in governing despite his poor health. Before a final stroke left him unable to speak in 1923, Lenin wrote a testament outlining his concerns and suggestions for the future. In it, he criticized many figures, including Trotsky and Joseph Stalin, then the general secretary of the party's Central Committee, whom Lenin felt should be removed. Nadya released the testament after Lenin's death, but by that time Stalin and his allies had grown powerful enough to quash its influence.

STALIN was able to keep hold of power by manipulating Lenin's legacy. He featured Lenin on Stalinist propaganda and even made use of Lenin's body, having it preserved and placed on display in a mausoleum near the Kremlin, where it remains to this day.

LEON TROTSKY WAS ADMIRER BY LENIN FOR HIS INTELLIGENCE AND ORGANIZING ABILITY.
PETER NEWARK/BRIDGEMAN/ACI





GENERAL KORNILOV WAS PROMOTED TO COMMANDER IN CHIEF BY THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT IN 1917, BUT KERENSKY DIDN'T COMPLETELY TRUST HIM. EVENTUALLY HE HAD KORNILOV ARRESTED.

PVDE/BRIDGEMAN/ACI

resolved to overthrow the government if it continued with its “counterrevolutionary” order.

Despite the regiment’s stand, the Bolshevik leaders were more cautious. On July 4, throngs of soldiers, workers, and sailors from the Kronstadt naval base marched through the city in armed ranks. They massed in front of Bolshevik headquarters looking for instructions—but at this crucial moment, Lenin lost his nerve. He gave no call for an uprising. The failed uprising, dubbed the “July Days,” was followed by a crackdown. Police stormed the Bolshevik headquarters. Hundreds of Bolsheviks were arrested, and Lenin went into exile again, this time in Finland.

Kerensky, the Provisional Government’s sole socialist, was now hailed as the person to reunite the country and halt the drift toward civil war. He was the only politician with popular support yet also broadly acceptable to the military leaders and the bourgeoisie. Lvov resigned from office, and on July 8 Kerensky became prime minister.

Kerensky’s tactics became more authoritarian after he took office. Kerensky passed new restrictions on public gatherings, restored the death penalty at the front, and resolved to restore military discipline.

The program of the new coalition government was no longer bound by soviet principles. The head of the army, General Kornilov, meanwhile, appeared—briefly—as a “national savior.” He





READY FOR REVOLUTION

In factories, such as this one in Petrograd, the Bolsheviks recruited workers to form the units of the Red Guards, a militia that would prove to be an important actor in the revolution and its aftermath.

BPK/RMN-GRAND PALAIS

demanded a series of measures that effectively amounted to the imposition of martial law. Kerensky agreed—but then had a change of heart. He turned against Kornilov, calling on the soviet to mobilize defenders against the general’s forces sent to impose order on the capital. The Bolshevik leaders were released. Red Guards organized the defense of the factories. But there was no need for fighting, as Kornilov’s forces were persuaded by soviet agitators to lay down their arms.

Kornilov was imprisoned with 30 other officers. Viewed by conservatives as political martyrs, these “Kornilovites” were later to become the founding nucleus of what became known as the White Army, soon to be pitted against the forces of the Communists (known as the Red Army) in Russia’s impending civil war.

Lenin’s Moment

The Kornilov Affair ended up undermining Kerensky’s position. Condemned on the right for betraying Kornilov, the prime minister was also widely suspected on the left of having colluded—initially, at least—with the general. Many soldiers suspected their officers of having supported Kornilov, and there was a sharp deterioration in army discipline.

As a consequence, a process of radicalization swept the major industrial cities. The principal beneficiaries were the Bolsheviks, who won their first majorities in the soviets of Petrograd, Moscow, Riga, and Saratov in early September. From Finland, Lenin urged the Bolsheviks to start an insurrection at once, before the Soviet Congress was due to convene on October 20.

“If we wait,” he wrote on September 29, “we shall ruin the revolution.” He knew if the transfer of power to the soviets took place by a vote of the Congress,

THE RED FLAG, DEPICTED ON A REVOLUTIONARY POSTCARD FROM 1917
BRIDGEMAN/ACI



SEEING RED

A considerably romanticized vision of the storming of the Winter Palace, by Nikolai Kochergin. Regional Art Gallery, Chelyabinsk
FINE ART/ALBUM

it would result in a coalition government of all the political parties in the soviet. These would include his left-wing rivals, the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries.

Lenin saw an opportunity to seize power for himself and took it. He returned to Petrograd and convened a meeting of his party on October 10. Lenin then forced through a decision (by 10 votes to 2) to prepare an uprising.

On October 16 the Central Committee was informed by its local activists that the Petrograd soldiers and workers needed stronger incentives to revolt, they “would have to be stung by something, such as the break-up of the garrison, to support an uprising.” Lenin was unconcerned. He believed only a small, well-armed, and well-organized



force was needed. His vision won out in the Central Committee.

With the Bolshevik conspiracy now public knowledge, the soviet leaders resolved to delay the Soviet Congress until October 25. They needed more time to muster support from the provinces, a delay that fueled suspicions that the Congress would not meet at all.

Rumors of counterrevolution were strengthened when Kerensky foolishly announced his plans to transfer the bulk of the Petrograd garrison to the northern front. To prevent the garrison's removal, the Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC)—the leading organizational force of the Bolshevik uprising—was formed on October 20. By October 24 the MRC had assumed control of the Petrograd garrison.

Disguised in a wig, Lenin left his hiding place and made his way to the Smolny Institute and ordered the uprising to begin.

After a series of mishaps and delays, the legendary storming of the Winter Palace, seat of the Provisional Government, took place on the night of October 25. The arrest of Kerensky's ministers was announced to the Soviet Congress, whose up to 670 delegates—mostly workers and soldiers in their tunics and greatcoats—had

LENIN SAW AN OPPORTUNITY TO SEIZE POWER FOR HIMSELF. HE RETURNED TO PETROGRAD, CONVENED HIS PARTY, AND PREPARED FOR THE UPRISING.

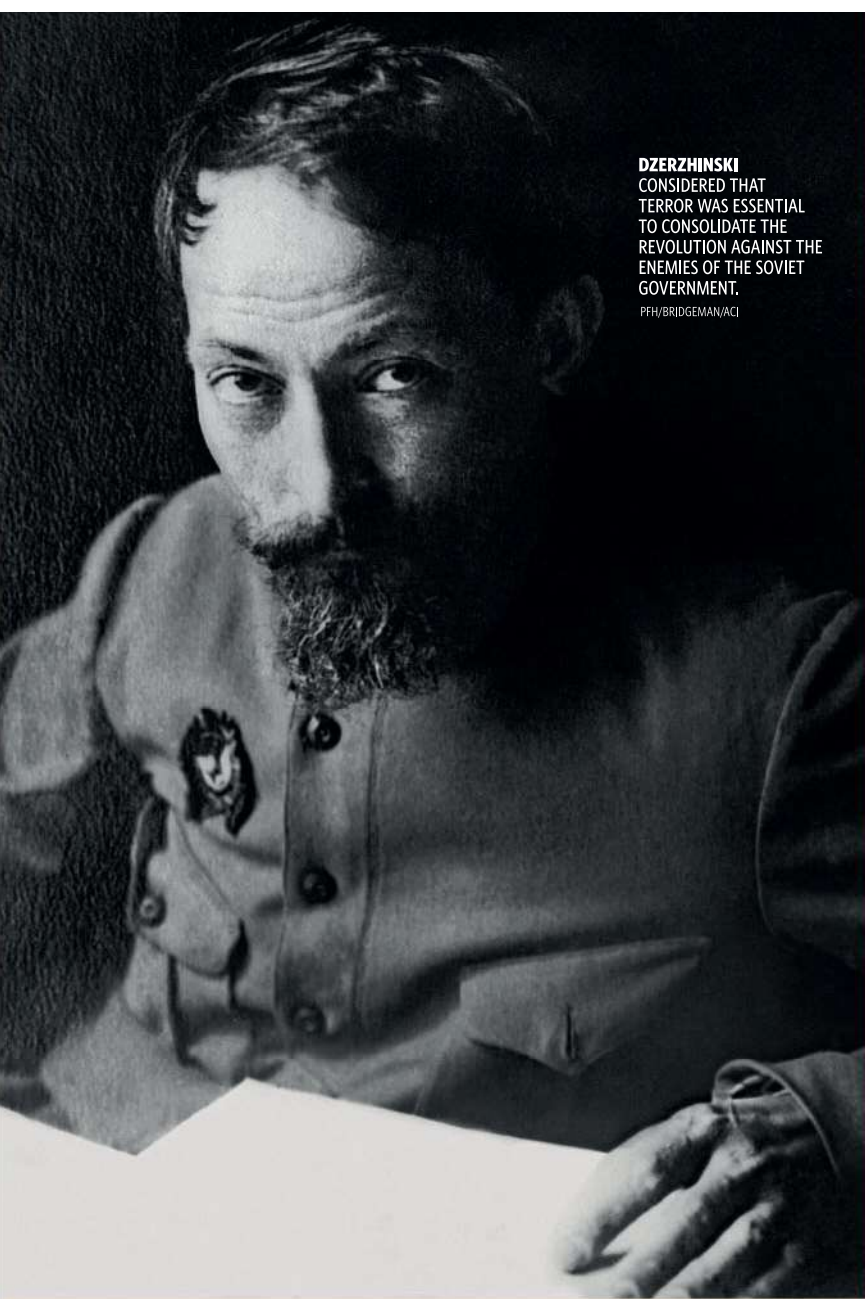




WHERE THE POWER USED TO BE

The Winter Palace, St. Petersburg, scene of the most dramatic events of the October Revolution, as seen from the arch in the middle of the General Staff Building. The enormous yellow complex was completed in 1830 and originally housed the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is now a part of the Hermitage Museum.

OLEKSII SERGIEV/ALAMY/ACI



DZERZHINSKI
CONSIDERED THAT
TERROR WAS ESSENTIAL
TO CONSOLIDATE THE
REVOLUTION AGAINST THE
ENEMIES OF THE SOVIET
GOVERNMENT.
PFH/BRIDGEMAN/ACI

REVOLUTIONARY JUSTICE FOR ALL

ESTABLISHED in early December 1917, the Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counterrevolution and Sabotage—Cheka, for short, in Russian—would be, according to Lenin, “the Party’s sword and shield,” dispensing “revolutionary justice” wherever needed. It answered only to Lenin and it soon became one of the most feared organizations in Russia. Lenin wanted a “staunch, proletarian Jacobin” at its helm, and he found it in Feliks Dzerzhinski (above). The first director of the Cheka had few doubts about his job: “I do not seek forms of justice. We are not in need of justice. It is war now—face to face, a fight to the finish. Life or Death.” And it was usually the latter. This body would survive in many forms and eventually evolve into one of the Soviet Union’s most infamous agencies: the KGB.

resolved to form a government based on all the parties in the soviet. Most of the Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionary Party delegates walked out in protest—a grave mistake, as it gave the Bolsheviks a monopoly of the soviet.

Few thought the Bolsheviks could hold on for long. The party had a tenuous hold on the capital, where their seizure of power prompted the civil service, post and telegraph service, and banks to strike. It had to fight for power in Moscow, and its support in the provinces was weak.

Even so, although the seizure of power had been carried out in the name of the soviet, Lenin had no intention of ruling through the soviet executive, where the other factions would act as a parliamentary brake on Lenin’s own organ of government, the Council of People’s Commissars, or Sovnarkom. On November 4, the Sovnarkom decreed itself the right to pass legislation without approval from the soviet.

The opposition parties, meanwhile, pinned their hopes on elections to the Constituent Assembly, due to be held in late November. The forming of a Constituent Assembly had always been the aim of the interim Provisional Government, and would have been the true organ of democracy: elected by universal adult suffrage, and representing every citizen, regardless of class.

If these elections were seen as a referendum on the Bolsheviks, then Lenin’s party lost. His leftist rivals, the Socialist Revolutionaries, received the largest vote—about 40 percent. The Bolsheviks polled just 24 percent. But Lenin was not playing by democratic rules. Slowly but surely, the shape of a new police state, with him at the helm, emerged. In December the Military Revolutionary Committee was abolished, its duties transferred to the security organization known as the Cheka. On January 5, 1918, the Constituent Assembly opened—only to be immediately closed down by the Bolshevik guards.

A Shameful Peace

Lenin came to power on a promise of bread, land, and peace. But it was no easy task to end the war. Many Bolsheviks believed that making peace with Germany, an imperialist power, would represent a betrayal of the international cause. Lenin, though, saw that with the Russian Army



fast disintegrating, he simply had no choice but to sue for peace with Germany.

An armistice was signed, and Leon Trotsky was sent to negotiate with the Germans. Trotsky played for time, hoping that the revolution would also start in Europe. But in early February, Germany signed a treaty with the Ukrainians, who accepted German domination to win independence from Russia. The Germans then focused on Petrograd, forcing Lenin to evacuate the capital to Moscow.

In the end, the Bolsheviks had no choice but to sign the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918. The terms were ruinous for Russia: Poland, Finland, Estonia, and Lithuania were all given nominal independence under German protection. The new Soviet Republic lost 34 percent

of her population, 32 percent of her agricultural land, 54 percent of her industrial enterprises, and 89 percent of her coal mines. The sacrifices secured Lenin's position as the victor of the 1917 revolutions. With the distraction of a foreign war behind him, Lenin could focus on solidifying his power at home, in the face of the civil war that lay ahead. ■

About the author...

ORLANDO FIGES is a professor of history at Birkbeck College, University of London. He was previously a lecturer in history and fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, from 1984 to 1999. Figes is the author of many books on Russian history, including *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution* (Penguin) and *Revolutionary Russia, 1891-1991* (Pelican). His books have been translated into more than 20 languages.

INSIDE THE WINTER PALACE

This painting by Mikhail Sokolov shows the sailors, workers, and soldiers arresting the Provisional Government after storming the Winter Palace in October 1917. State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia, Moscow

BPK/RMN-GRAND PALAIS