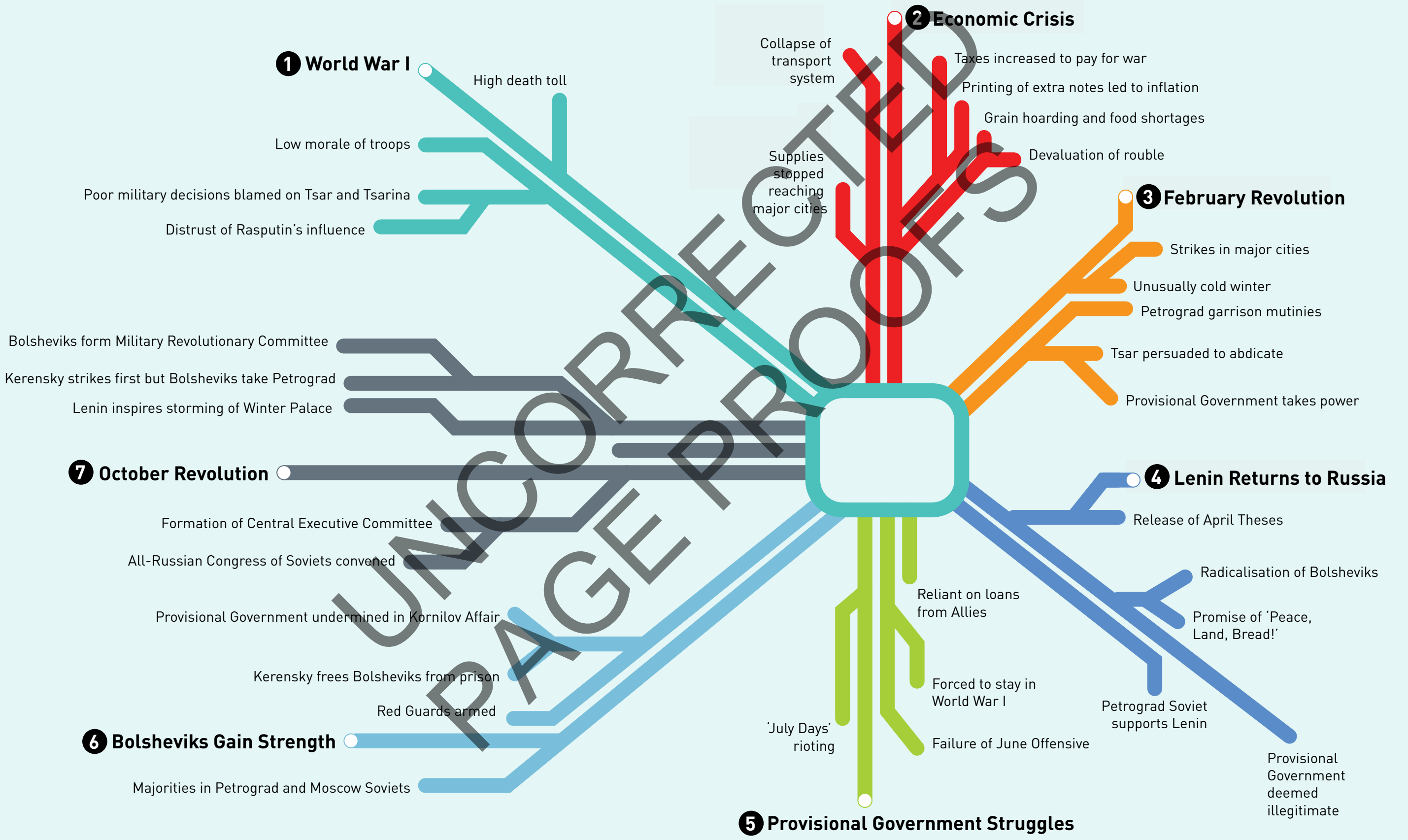


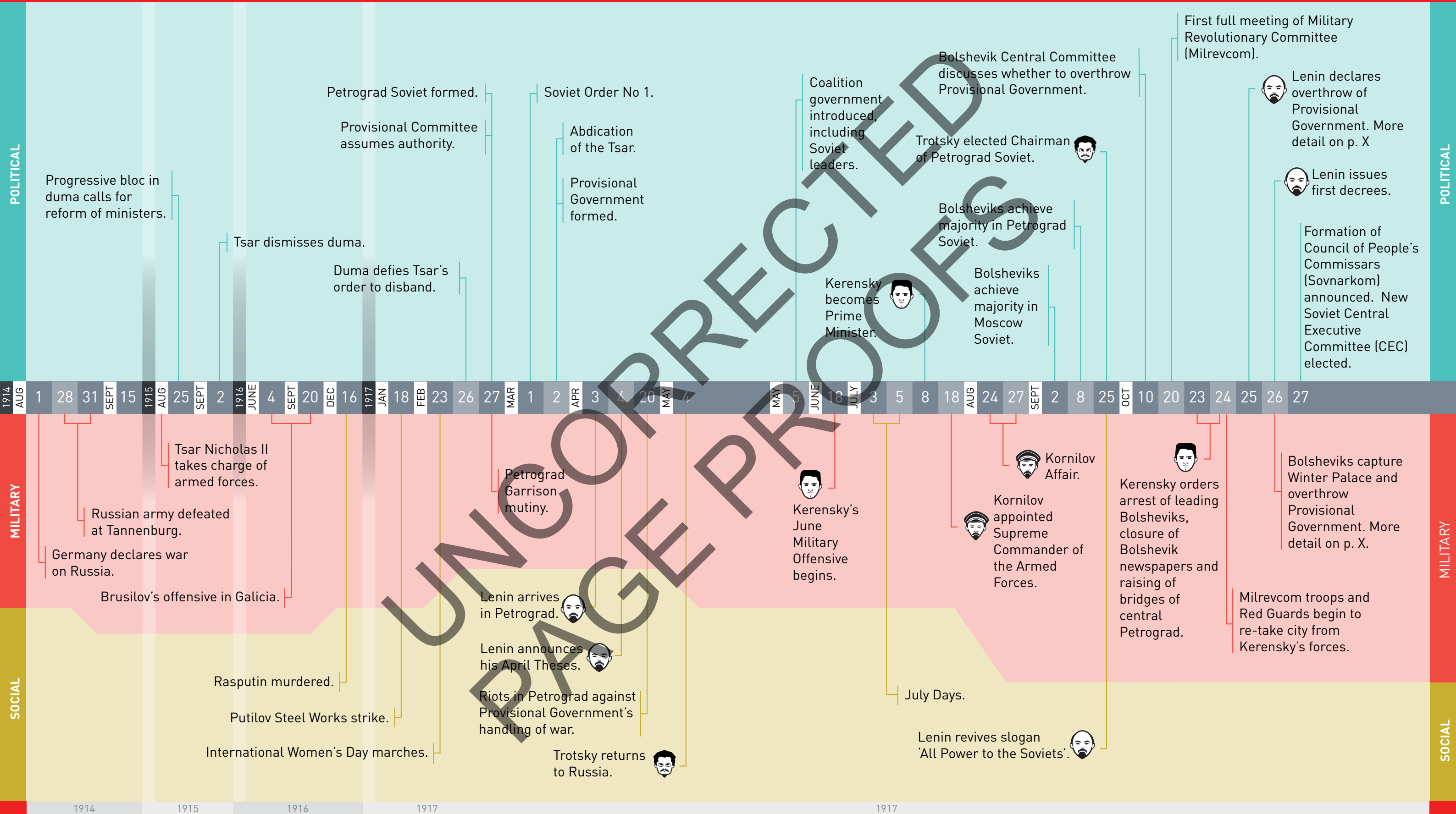
BREAKING WITH THE PAST

(1914–OCTOBER 1917)

UNCORRECTED
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TIMELINE





Tsar Nicholas II.

INTRODUCTION

World War I, which started so promisingly in 1914, degenerated into a litany of Russian defeats, and, eventually, mutiny at the front.

In 1913, as the 300-year anniversary (tercentenary) of the Romanov dynasty receded, Russia entered a period of tremendous upheaval. The period between 1914 and 1917 brought challenges to the Russian autocracy from almost every element of society. Massive strikes paralysed Russian cities in 1914. The outbreak of war in August of that year initially brought celebration and increased nationalism but eventually provoked starvation and internal collapse. The Russian economy faltered, leading to shortages in food and fuel. By 1915 the transport system had fallen apart, intensifying these shortages and leading to widespread hunger. World War I, which started so promisingly in 1914, degenerated into a litany of Russian defeats, and, eventually, mutiny at the front.

By the beginning of 1917, Tsar Nicholas II was so unpopular he had lost the support of even the Petrograd garrison. Unable to forcibly put down the growing opposition and strikes within Petrograd, the Tsar had no option but to abdicate, thus ending 304 years of Romanov rule. In his place the Provisional Government, drawn mostly from the old Duma, took political control of Russia, while the newly re-established Soviet maintained popular support without formal authority. The Dual Authority shared an uneasy alliance for some months, but this proved unsustainable in the

face of repeated challenges, particularly from Bolshevik leader Lenin. Besieged from the outset, the Provisional Government was ill-equipped to maintain power and failed to provide a strong transition to constitutional democracy.

The overthrow of the Tsar in the February Revolution did not magically solve all of Russia's ills. Russia was still beset by economic deprivation and failure on the war front. Combined with this, the Provisional Government's failures led to political instability and a wider acceptance of radical agendas like those of the Bolsheviks. By September 1917, Russia had broken from its past, yet there was no clear indication of what its future would hold.

The drumbeat of Bolshevik agitation for 'All Power to the Soviets' and 'Peace! Land! Bread!' continued to undermine the beleaguered Provisional Government as 1917 wore on. In October the Bolsheviks overthrew Kerensky's last cabinet of ministers and at the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets declared the founding of a new government – the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom). It was a defining moment in modern history; the first ever socialist regime.



Statue and mural celebrating Lenin's leadership in the October Revolution, Artillery Museum, St Petersburg.

WORLD WAR I

FRIEDRICH ENGELS: 'War is the mid-wife of every old society pregnant with a new one.'

By 1914, few people in Europe would have thought the long period of peace would continue. Tsar Nicholas II said, 'The accelerating arms race is transforming the armed peace into a crushing burden that weighs on all nations and, if prolonged, will lead to the very cataclysm it seeks to avert.'¹ The build-up of arms and navies, the surge in nationalism throughout Europe, the series of small-scale conflicts and disagreements in the years preceding and the complex system of alliances had all set the preconditions for war by 1914.

When the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, by a Serb nationalist, the Austrian government sought German support for a declaration of war on Serbia. On 23 July, the Austrian government gave Serbia an ultimatum it knew would not be accepted because it would mean the surrender of Serbian sovereignty. As fellow Slavs, Serbia requested assistance from the might of the Russian Empire and the following day the Tsar ordered the partial mobilisation of Russian troops. Full mobilisation was ordered on 30 July. The Russian Empire was so large that the mobilisation, once ordered, could not be easily rescinded.

This had significant ramifications. When the Tsar's cousin, Kaiser Wilhelm, warned Nicholas to halt troop mobilisation, the Tsar was unable to oblige. As A.J.P. Taylor wrote, 'Once started, the wagons and carriages must roll remorselessly and inevitably forward to their predestined goal.'² Despite the Russian defeat at the hands of Japan in 1905, the Russian army was still greatly feared in Europe and referred to colloquially as the 'Russian Steamroller'. Russian mobilisation meant war, and Germany duly declared war on Russia on 1 August 1914. Following the plan set



Archduke Franz Ferdinand.



Russian troops.

- 1 Cited in J. Keegan, *The First World War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 17.
- 2 A.J.P. Taylor, *The First World War: An Illustrated History* (London: Penguin Books, 1966), 17.

DID YOU KNOW?

Minister of the Interior, Peter Durnovo, sent a memo to Tsar Nicholas II in February 1914, warning of the dangers of impending war. He wrote that if the war fared poorly ‘a social revolution in its most extreme form will be unavoidable in Russia.’

out by General von Schlieffen in 1905, Germany realised that Russian mobilisation would take time, so the country sent a small force to the East and the bulk of their forces to the Western Front in an effort to defeat the French and avoid fighting two fronts at the same time. On 3 August, Germany invaded Belgium in an unsuccessful attempt to knock France out of the war. The result of Germany’s failure was a war across two fronts that would drag on until the end of 1918.

Tsar Nicholas II did not foresee the difficulties that World War I would present. He was, of course, not alone. Virtually all the statesmen and all the generals in every participating country misunderstood the way modern wars would be conducted. The mechanisation of war, particularly through the machine gun and large artillery, made defending a position far easier than attacking one and the digging of trenches at the end of 1914 exacerbated this. Nonetheless, a wave of patriotism spread through Russia in August 1914 when war was declared, as it did in most other European countries. The workers’ strikes that had plagued St Petersburg in the first half of 1914 stopped while many socialists embraced the patriotism and supported Russia’s efforts in the war.

Responding to the nationalist fervour, the government changed the name of the capital – from the German sounding ‘St Petersburg’ to the more Russian ‘Petrograd’. The Duma also dissolved itself until the conclusion of the war so it would not interfere with the war effort. Lenin was, in fact, one of the few people to publicly criticise the war, calling for the redirection of the Russian working class’ war efforts away from their working class brothers in other countries, and towards the bourgeois governments throughout all of Europe. Despite this isolated opposition, it was a broadly unified Russia that embarked on war in August 1914, with very little genuine understanding of the problems the war would bring – at first on the war front, and eventually on the home front.

3 Communist Party of the Soviet Union, *History of the CPSU (Short Course)* (International Publishers Co., 1939), 160–1.

DOCUMENT

EXTRACT FROM *HISTORY OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE SOVIET UNION*, 1939

By the end of the nineteenth century the whole territory of the globe had already been divided up among the capitalist states. Yet in the era of imperialism the development of capitalism proceeds extremely unevenly and by leaps: some countries, which previously held a foremost position, now develop their industry at a relatively slow rate, while others, which were formerly backward, overtake and outstrip them by rapid leaps. The relative economic and military strength of the imperialist states was undergoing a change. There arose a striving for a redivision of the world, and the struggle for this redivision made imperialist war inevitable. The war of 1914 was a war for the redivision of the world and of spheres of influence. All the imperialist states had long been preparing for it. The imperialists of all countries were responsible for the war.³

ACTIVITY

SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

Read the extract from the *History of the Communist Party* and complete the tasks below.

1. What does the extract suggest was the main cause of World War I?
2. What does the extract suggest about the development of capitalism in the era of imperialism?
3. By quoting from this extract and using your own knowledge, explain how imperialism caused World War I.
4. Evaluate to what extent this extract presents a complete depiction of the causes of World War I. In your response, quote parts of the extract and refer to different views of the causes of World War I.

RUSSIAN INVOLVEMENT IN WORLD WAR I

GRAND DUKE NIKOLAI NIKOLAEVICH (Russian general in World War I): ‘I have no rifles, no shells, no boots.’

1914

One consequence of the Russian defeat in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 was internal rebellion and a challenge to the Tsar’s authority. Conscious that tensions were mounting between empires in Europe, Russia had agreed to the Anglo-Russian Alliance and the Franco-Russian Alliance in 1907. France also agreed to partially fund improvements to key military infrastructure within Russia, such as bridges, roads and railway lines to the German and Austrian fronts. In 1912, the Great Military Program was announced. This program was to be completed by 1917 and it increased funding to the military to improve artillery, transport and the administration of mobilisation plans. This dedication to improvements within the Russian military was reflective of what was happening throughout Europe, but very little improvement had been made by 1914 when war actually broke out. The Russian army had many millions of men to draw on, but inadequate military supplies to support them. By the end of 1914, 6.5 million men had been mobilized, with the issue of only 4.6 million rifles.⁴

Despite the fact that Russian officers were the only ones in Europe who had experienced recent conflict, their positions of authority owed more to their imperial loyalty than identifiable competence. The Minister of War in 1914, General Sukhomlinov, distrusted the technology within modern warfare, preferring to attack with sheer force of troop numbers through the use of bayonets. The Russian military, like every other military in Europe in 1914, was unprepared for the style and longevity of the conflict that was to follow.

DID YOU KNOW?

After the bloody campaigns of 1914 one Russian officer complained to his superior, ‘This is not war, sir, it is slaughter. The Germans use up shells; we use up human lives.’

4 Richard Pipes, *A Concise History of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 59.



Russian troops surrendering on the Eastern Front. Despite many losses, the Russian command maintained a confident stance until 1917.

Despite these difficulties, the Russian forces were sent into battle in mid-August in a hastily-conceived attack on East Prussia. General von Rennenkampf led the First Army into East Prussia, while General Samsonov led the Second Army further south. After their victories, both armies would meet up and drive towards Berlin. Von Rennenkampf's troops made a great deal of ground in the initial days of the war. So much ground, in fact, that their supplies were unable to keep up with the troops. This resulted in the Russians being forced to use wireless transmissions that were easily intercepted by the Germans. On 28 August, the Germans attacked the Russian Second Army in the Battle of Tannenberg and within four days had killed or wounded 70 000 men and captured 100 000. The German commander in charge, General von Hindenburg and his chief of staff, General von Ludendorff, defeated the Russians at Tannenburg with the loss of only 15 000 men. Samsonov shot himself as a result of the Russian humiliation.

In the face of the Russian onslaught, the German army had redirected units from the Western Front to the Eastern Front, and they arrived in East Prussia just after the Battle of Tannenburg. Hindenburg moved his own forces north via rail to meet with the new reinforcements and attack the Russian First Army at the Battle of Masurian Lakes. Rennenkampf ordered a retreat out of East Prussia, but not before the loss

of 60 000 more Russian lives. The losses were catastrophic, but the Russian elite seemed unfazed by the defeats, claiming their actions had required the withdrawal of German forces from the Western Front. This German withdrawal had allowed the French to regroup, repel the German advance and save France. The Russian elite were also comforted by the success they had had further south against the Austrians in August. It was easier for the Russian elite to tolerate such losses, however, because the death toll primarily affected the lower classes.

Enthusiasm for the war was maintained in the short term because of the Russian success in the Southern thrust through Galicia. In mid-August 1914, Russian General Brusilov and the Eighth Army had forced the Austrian Army into retreat, capturing or killing one-third of the entire Austrian Army. This maintained the threat to Hindenburg's victorious German forces, but came at a terrible cost to the Russians. By the end of 1914, 1.2 million Russian men had been killed, wounded or taken prisoner. In 1915, another 2.5 million men were lost and twenty-five per cent of all Russian soldiers were sent to the front unarmed with explicit instructions to collect weapons from fallen comrades.⁵ Russia could afford to sustain horrendous losses in the short term, but no country could maintain such an attrition rate if the war continued for years. When it became clear that there would be no easy conclusion to the war, and with continued German control of the Baltic Sea meaning Allied assistance was unlikely, the 'Russian Steamroller' became far less of a threat.

1915

In 1915 the situation became far worse. The German forces focused more than two-thirds of its troops on the Eastern Front in an attempt to knock Russia out of the war; by the end of the year Russia had not only lost the land gained by Brusilov in Galicia, but also twenty-three million Russians to German occupation. Most critical of all, in terms of the status of the Tsar, was his disastrous decision to relieve Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich as Commander in Chief of the Russian Armed Forces in August 1915. The Council of Ministers warned 'Sire, we make bold once more to tell you that, to the best of our understanding, your adoption of such a decision threatens Russia, yourself, and the dynasty with serious consequences.'⁶ President of the Duma, Rodzianko, was even more forthright. He wrote to the Tsar on 25 August 1915, asking him to revoke his decision.

Nicholas' decision to take command of the army was made alone and was widely criticised at the time, even if it may have been made with the best of intentions. Nicholas had little military experience, and even though all major decisions were to be made by the new Chief of Staff, General Alekseev, the Tsar was unable to inspire the troops as he had hoped. General Brusilov claimed, 'Everyone knew that Nicholas understood next to nothing about military matters and, although the word "Tsar" still had magical power over the troops, he utterly lacked the charisma to bring that magic to life. Faced with a group of soldiers, he was nervous and did not know what to say.'⁷ The Tsar was also blamed by the Russian People for subsequent military failures. His absence from Petrograd resulted in a powerful union between the German-born Tsarina and the peasant Rasputin, with the two taking almost complete control of political matters in Russia while the Tsar was absent at the front.

Nonetheless, Richard Pipes argues that the Russian military failures of 1915 may have contributed to the eventual German defeat in 1918.⁸ The Germans were so completely dominant on the battlefield, yet the Russians refused to back down and



5 Nicholas Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, Fifth Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 418.
6 Peter Oxley, *Russia 1855–1991: From Tsars to Commissars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 79.
7 Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891–1924* (Sydney: Pimlico, 1996), 270.
8 Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution 1899–1919* (London: Harvill Press, 1990), 219.

DID YOU KNOW?

Brusilov said, 'In a year of war the regular army had vanished. It was replaced by an army of ignoramuses.'

DID YOU KNOW?

When Nicholas II left for the Front to assume control of the army, Alexandra wrote to her husband, 'Lovey, I am your wall in the rear. I am here, don't laugh at old wify ... She has "trousers" on unseen.'

9 George Vernadsky and R.T. Fisher, *A Sourcebook for Russian History From Early Times to 1917* (London: Yale University Press, 1972), 844–5.

DOCUMENT

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE DUMA TO TSAR NICHOLAS II, AUGUST 1915

The nation longs for and impatiently awaits that authority which will be capable of instilling confidence and leading our native land onto the path of victory. Yet at such a time, Your Majesty, you decide to remove the supreme commander in chief, whom the Russian people still trusts absolutely. The people must interpret your move as one inspired by the Germans around you, who are identified in the minds of the people with our enemies and with treason to the Russian cause.

Your Majesty's decision will appear to the people to be a confession of the hopelessness of the situation and of the chaos that has invaded the administration.

Sire! The situation will be even worse if the army, deprived of a leader enjoying its complete confidence, loses courage.

In this event defeat is inevitable, and within the country revolution and anarchy will then inevitably break out, sweeping everything from their path.

Your Majesty! Before it is too late, revoke your decision, no matter how hard it may be for you.

Retain Grand Duke Nickolai Nikolaevich at the head of the army.

Reassure troubled and already alarmed minds by forming a government from among those who enjoy your confidence and are known to the country by their public activities.

Sire, it is not yet too late!

On bended knees I beg you fervently not to delay the decision that will protect from approaching harm the sacred person of the Russian tsar and the reigning dynasty.

Sire, give heed to this truthful, heartfelt word from your loyal servant.

The President of the State Duma

Mikhail Rodzianko⁹

ACTIVITY

SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

Read the letter above and complete the following tasks.

1. How does Rodzianko suggest the Russian people will interpret the Tsar's decision to take command of the armed forces?
2. How does Rodzianko suggest the Russian army will interpret the Tsar's decision to take command of the armed forces?
3. Referring to the document, identify the consequences of the Tsar's decision to take command of the armed forces.

it seemed they were willing to lose unlimited territory and men in the conduct of the war. From this the Germans concluded that the Russians could not be defeated. This may have been an unintended result of Russian inadequacy on the Eastern Front, but the negative consequences were becoming quite clear. The Tsar's position as Supreme Ruler of Russia was being increasingly questioned, and would come under public criticism in the Duma in late 1916.

BRUSILOV OFFENSIVE

GENERAL BRUSILOV: 'Our army is more like an ill-trained militia...such men could not be called soldiers.'

Once the German high command realised they were unlikely to defeat the Russians in the East, they concentrated their forces on the Western Front. This allowed the Russian forces to regroup and to equip every soldier with a rifle. By the summer of 1916, the re-established Russian army was able to launch another offensive against the Austrians. Led by General Brusilov, the Russian army almost brought the Austrian army to total collapse, capturing and killing almost one-million troops in a ten-week offensive. Germany transferred enough troops from the Western Front to save Austria, but the damage had been inflicted and the Austrians were unable to conduct any more campaigns without assistance from Germany. At this stage, it appeared the Tsar had made the correct decision to take control of the armed forces, and Russia's military position appeared strong. Nonetheless, isolated success on the battlefield did little to stem discontent on the home front, which had grown steadily from the first weeks of the war in 1914.

POLITICAL PROBLEMS ON THE HOME FRONT

TSARINA ALEXANDRA: 'My poor Nicky's cross is heavy, all the more so as he has nobody on whom he can thoroughly rely.'

After war broke out in 1914, three key domestic organisations were set up to coordinate the war effort. The All-Russian Union of Towns and the All-Russian Union of Zemstva, led by Prince Lvov, were set up in 1914 on a wave of nationalism and aristocratic generosity. Their role was to care for the wounded and send supplies to the soldiers at the front. The Central War Industries Committee was set up in 1915 to organise war production after it became clear that there were massive munitions and arms shortages. They also sought to profit by breaking the monopoly held by the big munitions producers. All three organisations found the administration and bureaucracy obstructive, however, and there was very little organization, leading most to conclude by 1915 that the bureaucracy was unable to manage the war. The Tsar had suggested that organising the country for war would pave the way for organised revolution. Miliukov later criticised this perception at the opening of the Duma in November 1916, 'while the government persists in claiming that organising the country means organising a revolution and deliberately prefers chaos and disorganization, then what is this: stupidity or treason?'¹⁰

In 1915 a Progressive Bloc was formed by the moderates in the Duma, which had the support of the Central War Industries Committee, the Union of Towns and the Union of Zemstvas, as well as some members of the Council of Ministers. On 25 August the Bloc released a program for reform that called for a change of ministers (to be chosen by the Duma) who would work with the legislature, as well as a separation of military and civilian bureaucracies. In a subtle way, the Progressive Bloc was calling for parliamentary democracy. While they did not directly threaten

DID YOU KNOW?

Tsarina Alexandra's German background earned her the derisive label of 'nemka' ('German woman') amongst the masses. This did not bode well in the midst of the Great War.

PRACTICE EXAM QUESTION

Using three or four points, explain how WORLD WAR I contributed to a revolutionary situation in Russia before February 1917. Provide evidence to support your answer.

10 Miliukov, cited in Frank Golder, ed., *Documents of Russian History 1914–1917* (Massachusetts, 1964), 154–66.

DID YOU KNOW?

Tsarina Alexandra told her husband she thought the Progressive Bloc were 'fiends' who deserved a 'smacking'!



Tsarina Alexandra.

the Tsar at this stage, they became the focus for political resistance within Russia. The Tsar's response was to prorogue the Duma in August, alienating virtually every political figure in Russia and isolating himself on the battle front. In the months that followed, the rebel ministers who had sided with the Progressive Bloc were systematically dismissed and replaced by allies of the Romanovs by the Tsarina and Rasputin who held sway at the Winter Palace while the Tsar was at the front. The so-called 'Ministerial Leapfrogging' that occurred once the Tsarina was in control saw a litany of poorly considered ministerial changes. As Figes wrote of the period of the 'Tsarina's rule', between September 1915 and February 1917, 'Russia had four Prime Ministers, five Ministers of the Interior, three Foreign Ministers, three War Ministers, three Ministers of Transport and four Ministers of Agriculture'¹¹. Not only did it make it impossible for these ministers to ever fully understand their roles before being changed, but few of them knew to whom they were ultimately responsible – the Tsar at the front or the Tsarina and Rasputin in Petrograd.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DISCONTENT 1914–1917

MIKHAIL RODZIANKO (leader of Third Duma): 'The country has everything it needs but cannot make adequate use of it.'

Once the war began in 1914 the government devoted its entire attention to the conflict, and this resulted in a vast reduction in the living standards of most Russians, particularly those in the major urban centres of Petrograd and Moscow. In 1914, the Russian currency (the rouble) was strong and stable, owing mainly to Russia having the largest supply of gold reserves in the world. However, between 1914 and 1917, Russia spent more than 1.5 billion roubles on the war and was forced to increase taxation and borrow from foreign powers to fund this increased expenditure. When this was not enough, the government resorted to printing more notes which had the short term effect of meeting wage demands and war expenditure. Within several months, however, the extra notes in circulation resulted in rampant inflation that made the rouble's value decrease rapidly. Wages doubled, but at the same time the cost of basic foodstuffs quadrupled. The devaluation of the rouble encouraged the peasants to hoard their grain rather than sell it for valueless paper, and this contributed to the food shortage at the front and in the cities.

The peasants were challenged in the first few years of the war by constant demands. Millions of their young men were drafted to the war front and the armed forces requisitioned farm equipment and horses. Armed forces were also given priority in regard to transport. Despite these challenges, 1915 and 1916 produced bumper crops and there was easily enough grain to feed Russia. Inflation, hoarding of grain by the peasants and instances of forced requisitioning of grain by the armed forces made it impossible for the grain to be properly utilised, however, and food shortages soon spread through the cities. The calorie intake of unskilled workers fell by a quarter and infant mortality and crime increased at an alarming rate.¹² This was exacerbated by the collapse of the transport system.

¹¹ O. Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 278.

¹² O. Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 300.

The Russian railways were not able to cope with the massive strains of the mobilisation of armed forces and the subsequent maintenance that was required in a long and drawn-out conflict. While supply to the front suffered, supply to the cities was devastatingly cut back, so that by 1916 Petrograd and Moscow were receiving barely one-third of their fuel and food supplies. Many of the railway lines that crossed Russia were single tracks only, and when trains broke down the entire line stopped. Food rotted in carriages waiting for transport, and Michael Lynch describes how at Archangel in the north, the weight of undistributed goods was so great that the port sank into the ground; on occasion, trucks were tipped off the lines to make way for moving trains.¹³

Despite the success of Brusilov's offensive in 1916, it was not matched by successes in the north against the Germans. Moreover, Brusilov's campaigns were not indicative of the general success of the Russian armed forces which by 1917 had lost 1.7 million troops, with eight-million wounded and 2.5 million taken prisoner.¹⁴ Lack of rifles, ammunition, food, boots, logistics and tactical leadership compounded the problems faced by the conscripted Russian soldiers. On the home front the cities were facing shortages, having suffered through a bitterly cold winter in 1916–17 with a lack of fuel to keep them warm or the factories operational. Middle-class savings had been wiped out by inflation and organisations set up by the middle class had been undermined by the Tsar. Political attempts at reform to support the war and save the Tsar's position were ignored, while those government ministers not sufficiently enamoured by the Tsarina and Rasputin were summarily dismissed. By December 1916 there was massive discontent within Russia and the blame was placed squarely at the feet of the Romanovs.

DID YOU KNOW?

During the Rasputin-Tsarina scandals, the French Ambassador to Russia wrote a report to Paris which said, 'I am obliged to report that, at the present moment, the Russian Empire is run by lunatics.'



Women and children wait in line for milk in Russia, February 1918.

¹³ Michael Lynch, *Reaction and Revolutions: Russia 1881–1924* (Sydney: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992), 64–5.

¹⁴ H. Proctor, *Ruling Russia: From Nicholas II to Stalin* (Sydney: Longman, 2006), 15.

GRIGORI RASPUTIN

Tsarina Alexandra had given birth to her first son, after four girls, in 1904. According to Russian law the throne had to be passed on to a male heir, so the Tsar was overjoyed by the new addition to the family. It was soon discovered, however, that Alexei suffered from haemophilia, a genetic condition that prevented the blood from clotting properly and leading to uncontrollable bleeding. Rasputin, a peasant faith healer, was first introduced to the royal family in St Petersburg in 1905 and began to treat Alexei with some success – something the royal doctors had been unable to do. As a result, the Tsarina became totally devoted to Rasputin and he continued to consort with the royal family while treating their son. In 1912, he allegedly treated Alexei's symptoms via telegram.



Rasputin: 'The Mad Monk.'

Rasputin's influence in the Palace spread to the broader elite within Russian society. He became a particularly frequent patron of the Russian salons. He was rumoured to have special powers over women and allegedly indulged in orgies with an array of upper class Russians. He was even rumoured to be having an affair with the Tsarina and her daughters, although this was never proven. Popular pornography depicted him in various embraces with both the Tsarina and the Tsar; his presence in the lives of the Romanovs certainly discredited their characters. This affected their popularity with the conservatives and tarnished their public reputation. Whether or not he was sexually involved

with the Tsarina, Rasputin certainly had a powerful influence over her and was particularly active in political affairs while the Tsar was away at the front. The frequent changes that led to the term 'Ministerial Leapfrogging' were often at his behest.

In December 1916 a plot to kill Rasputin was hatched, although the motive for the murder is uncertain. Richard Pipes suggests that the conspirators sought to drive a wedge between the Tsar and the Tsarina and make him more acquiescent to the demands of the Duma. It was also suggested that the death would drive the Tsarina into a mental institution.¹⁵

Orlando Figes, however, suggests that there may have been a homosexual vendetta involved, due to the fact that Rasputin had previously attempted to seduce the main conspirator, Prince Felix Yusupov. Yusupov, the Grand Duke Dmitry Pavlovich and the Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich lured Rasputin to Yusupov's palace where he was fed cake and Madeira laced with cyanide. After failing to respond to the poison within two hours, Yusupov shot him in the side. Although this appeared to kill him, he was later found staggering to the front gate, where he was promptly shot again and kicked hard in the temple. His body was then weighed down and dumped in the River Neva and it wasn't discovered until several days later, encased in ice. Popular legend at the time had it that his lungs were filled with water (indicating that he had died from drowning) and that he had partially escaped from his shackles. Contrary to the killers' expectations, however, Rasputin's death brought the royal couple closer together in the final months of their reign.

Rasputin's body was finally buried outside the Tsarskoe Selo Palace (where the Imperial Family had been residing) in January 1917, before being exhumed after the February Revolution, doused with kerosene and burned to ash.

¹⁵ R. Pipes, *Russian Revolution*, 262–7.

THE FEBRUARY REVOLUTION

TSARINA ALEXANDRA: 'This is a hooligan movement, young people run and shout that there is no bread, simply to create excitement, along with workers who prevent others from working. If the weather were very cold they would probably all stay at home. But all this will pass and become calm if only the Duma will behave itself.'

At the start of 1917 very few people actually expected the overthrow of the Tsar. In January 1917, six weeks before the February Revolution, Lenin said 'We, the old, will probably not live to see the decisive battles of the coming revolution.'¹⁶ On 9 January, 150 000 workers demonstrated in Petrograd in commemoration of Bloody Sunday and this led to a number of other strikes in January and early February. The Russian winter of 1916–17 was one of the coldest on record, temperatures regularly hitting minus thirty-five degrees Celsius, and averaging minus fourteen in Petrograd in February. The cold also had a negative effect on what was left of the transport system, with blizzards dumping snow on the tracks and preventing trains from moving. This made the shortages of food and fuel in the cities worse, forcing the Putilov Steel Factory to shut down on 21 February. This in turn forced thousands of dismissed workers onto the streets of Petrograd. The Tsar, who had been at home at Tsarskoe Selo with his family since Christmas, decided on 21 February that he should leave for the war front the following day. The next time he returned to Petrograd he would be a private citizen.

By the time the Tsar had left for the war front, the weather had become milder as winter subsided. On 23 February thousands of women marched on Petrograd to mark International Women's Day, demanding equality and access to more bread. They were joined by a group of around 100 000 workers who protested at the lack of available bread. The following day the number of protestors had doubled, and although there was an identifiable sense of anti-tsarist and anti-war sentiment, there was little violence. On 25 February, virtually all Petrograd factories were closed and almost 300 000 workers were on the streets. The information being sent to the Tsar by the Petrograd police referred to the situation as minor and controllable and it was with this in mind that the Tsar ordered the strikes to be quashed. He wrote to General Khabalov, who had been placed in charge of Petrograd's military garrison in January, saying 'I order you to stop tomorrow the disorders in the capital, which are unacceptable at the difficult time of war with Germany and Austria.'¹⁷ Khabalov responded by banning public gatherings in the capital and warning that troops would fire on crowds who disobeyed. When crowds gathered in defiance of Khabalov's order on 26 February there were several instances of bloodshed which immediately galvanised and emboldened the protestors.

On 27 February the only body capable of enforcing the Tsar's authority, the Petrograd garrison, mutinied. Housed in barracks designed to fit 20 000 men, by February 1917 there were 160 000 men living in cramped conditions and waiting to be sent to the front. Comprising mostly peasants and workers, they had witnessed the shootings the day before and identified with the victims, not the shooters. Fedor Linde, a sergeant in the barracks remembered shouting 'To arms! To arms! They are killing innocent people, our brothers and sisters!'¹⁸ All at once, the 160 000 men who had been gathered in Petrograd to be sent to the front became the critical group that led to the downfall of the Romanov dynasty, because their defection deprived the

DID YOU KNOW?

Rasputin said of Nicholas II, 'The tsar can change his mind from one minute to the next; he's a sad man; he lacks guts.'

¹⁶ P. Oxley, *Russia*, 84.

¹⁷ J.P. Nettl, *The Soviet Achievement* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 37.

¹⁸ R. Pipes, *Russian Revolution*, 267.



Soldiers of the garrison at Petrograd support the revolution.

Tsar of any military authority in the capital. It also gave the crowds a military capacity and critical organisation.

The Duma president, Rodzianko, had cabled the Tsar on 26 February and told him of the chaos in the capital. He wrote,

Your most faithful servant reports to your Majesty that popular risings, having begun in Petrograd, are taking on uncontrollable and threatening dimensions. Their cause is a shortage of baked bread...But the main reason is the absolute distrust of the authorities, who are not yet competent to lead the country out of its difficult situation...Your majesty, save Russia; she is threatened with humiliation and disgrace...Your Majesty, urgently summon a person in whom the whole country can have faith and entrust him with the formation of a government that all the people can trust.¹⁹

Nicholas responded by dismissing the Duma.

In defiance of the Tsar's order, the Duma formed a group of twelve to be known as the Provisional Committee and whose task it would be to restore order in Petrograd. The Provisional Committee met in the Tauride Palace. Elsewhere in the Palace on the 27th, the Petrograd Soviet of Soldiers', Sailors' and Workers' Deputies formed, calling for immediate elections and temporary support of the Provisional Committee.

As the revolution neared its zenith, therefore, Petrograd was ruled by two clearly differing groups – the Provisional Committee consisting mostly of middle class members of the Duma and strongly reflecting the ideology of the Progressive Bloc, and the Petrograd Soviet, representing the lower class workers, soldiers and sailors. Only Alexander Kerensky was a member of both. By 28 February, Nicholas' Council of Ministers has stepped down, with many ministers fleeing the city. The Proclamation of Provisional Government was made the same day.

19 O. Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 315.

DOCUMENT

PROCLAMATION OF PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT.

Citizens!

The Provisional Committee of the members of the State Duma, with the aid and sympathy of the troops and the population of the capital, has at present scored such a degree of success over the dark forces of the old regime that it can now proceed to a more durable organisation of executive power.

To this end, the Provisional Committee of the State Duma appoints as ministers of the first public cabinet the following persons, the country's confidence in whom is guaranteed by their past public and political activities.

The Cabinet will be guided in its present activity by the following principles:

Full and immediate amnesty in all political and religious cases, including terrorist attempts, military uprising and agrarian offences, and so forth.

Freedom of speech, the press, unions, assembly, and strikes, with the extension of political freedoms to servicemen within limits permitted by military and technical conditions.

Abolition of all class, religious, and national restrictions.

Immediate preparations for the convocation – on the basis of universal, equal, direct and secret suffrage – of a constituent assembly which will establish the form of government and the constitution of the country.

Replacement of the police by a people's militia with an elected command, subordinate to the organs of local self-government.

Elections to the organs of local self-government on the basis of universal, direct, equal, and secret ballot.

Non-disarmament and non-transfer from Petrograd of the military units that participated in the revolutionary movement.

Along with the preservation of strict military discipline in the ranks and during performance of military duty, the abolition of all restrictions upon the soldiers' enjoyment of those public rights that have been granted to all other citizens. The Provisional Government considers it its duty to add that it by no means intends to use the military situation to delay in any way the realisation of the above reforms and measures.

Chairman of the State Duma: M.V. Rodzianko

Chairman of the Council of Ministers: Prince G.E. Lvov

Ministers: P.N. Miliukov, N.V. Nekrosov, A.I. Kononov, A.A. Manuilov, M.I. Tereshchenko, V.N. Lvov, A.I. Shingarev, A.F. Kerensky²⁰



Provisional Executive Committee of the State Duma.

20 G. Vernadsky, *Source Book*, 881–2.

ACTIVITY

SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

Read the Proclamation of Provisional Government and answer the questions below.

1. Identify FIVE freedoms the Provisional Committee regarded as important.
2. Why were elections and suffrage so important to members of the Provisional Committee?
3. To what extent is class conflict addressed in this Proclamation?
4. Referring to the extract, discuss how successful the Provisional Government was in achieving these aims.

PRACTICE EXAM QUESTION

Using three or four points, explain the role of THE TSAR in the development of a revolutionary situation in Russia before February 1917. Provide evidence to support your answer.



Tsar Nicholas II.

THE TSAR ABDICATES

TSAR NICHOLAS II: 'If it is necessary, for Russia's good, that I step aside, I am prepared to do so.'

Finally acknowledging that the situation in Petrograd was perilous, the Tsar determined to return to Petrograd and settle the crowds. The train lines close to the capital were controlled by mutinous troops, however, and they refused him passage. Instead he travelled to Pskov where, on 2 March, he finally ceded to pressure from Rodzianko and the generals to abdicate in favour of his son, Alexei. That evening Nicholas summoned the court physician and quizzed him on the child's prognosis. The doctor replied that Alexei would not live much longer and, in any case, the Tsar would see his son very little once he took the throne because Nicholas would be expected to go into exile. At this moment, the Tsar decided not to pass the throne to his son but to his younger brother, the Grand Duke Mikhail, saying 'I cannot be separated from him.'²¹ Even in the final moments of his rule it seemed Nicholas prioritised his family above all else.

Legally, the Tsar was unable to bestow the title on his brother as the throne had to be passed to the oldest son. Whatever the case, the Grand Duke Mikhail took little time to consider the throne when Rodzianko told him that the Duma would not be able to protect him if he accepted the position. The Petrograd crowds had already condemned the Romanov lineage and wanted nothing to do with a continuation of the monarchy. When Mikhail declined the crown and signed the formal declaration of abdication, over 300 years of Romanov rule came to an end. Celebrations filled the streets of Petrograd, which soon spread to other Russian cities and towns. The non-Russian capitals saw the abdication as a veneration of their long-subjugated nations and flew their national flags. By the end of March, most people within Russia had heard the news. The peasants accepted the revolution gratefully, although some of the older, more traditional peasants found the news confronting as they had regarded the tsar as God's representative on earth. Old imperial symbols, signs and statues were destroyed across Russia and the Allied Powers, including the United States, recognised and accepted Russia's new interim government immediately.

THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT

ALEXANDER KERENSKY: 'The Soviet had power without authority...the Provisional Government authority without power.'

On 2 March the Provisional Committee renamed itself the Provisional Government, with head of the All-Russian Union of Towns and the All-Russian Union of Zemstva, Prince Lvov, as Prime Minister. They declared that they would assume responsibility for governing Russia until Constituent Assembly elections could take place. Comprising an overwhelming majority of liberals and moderates, the ministers in the first cabinet were:

Minister-President and Minister of the Interior Prince G.E. L'vov (Non-Party)
Minister of Foreign Affairs P.N. Miliukov (Kadet)
Minister of War and Navy A.I. Guchkov (Octobrist)

²¹ O. Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 343.

Minister of Transport N.V. Nekrasov (Kadet)
Minister of Trade and Industry A.I. Konovalov (Kadet)
Minister of Finance M.I. Tereshchenko (Non-Party)
Minister of Education A.A. Manuilov (Kadet)
Ober-Procurator of the Holy Synod V.N. L'vov (Centrist)
Minister of Agriculture A.I. Shingarev (Kadet)
Minister of Justice A.F. Kerensky (SR)

When Foreign Minister and leader of the Kadets Miliukov announced the ministers of the new government a heckler from the crowd shouted 'Who appointed you?' Miliukov replied 'We were appointed by the revolution itself', confirming the fact that they had simply assumed control. The Petrograd Soviet, however, while not having legislative power, had significant influence. As Minister of War Guchkov said,

The Provisional Government does not possess any real power; and its directives are carried out only to the extent that it is permitted by the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, which enjoys all the essential elements of real power, since the troops, the railroads, the post and telegraph are all in its hands. One can say flatly that the Provisional Government exists only so long as it is permitted by the Soviet.²² Indeed, the Petrograd Soviet had released Soviet Order Number 1 on 1 March which placed the Soviet in control of the military and agreed to follow the Duma 'only in such cases as they do not conflict with the orders and resolutions of the Soviet'.²³

In its first few weeks, the Provisional Government released several populist decrees. Trade unions were recognised and an eight-hour day was introduced for industrial workers. The tsar's secret police force, the Okhrana, was abolished and freedom of speech, assembly and the press were introduced. Universal suffrage was announced, political prisoners were freed and there was a commitment to convene a popularly-elected constituent assembly. Despite these reforms, however, the Provisional Government was not able to alleviate the concerns of the average citizen in Russia, namely peasant access to land, the conduct of the war and the supply of food and fuel. Unable to claim genuine legitimacy as leaders of Russia (after all, they had simply assumed power) they were also unwilling to convene elections too quickly. Intent on designing an ideal parliament with a fair voting process, the Provisional Government arguably missed an opportunity – had it quickly sought elections it might have been able to confer legitimacy on the elected parliament.²⁴ Instead, the Provisional Government lurched from one crisis to the next in its short eight months of existence, leaving the country open to more extreme elements.

LENIN'S APRIL THESES

V. I. LENIN: 'Our tactics: absolute distrust, no support for the Provisional Government.'

Lenin was in Switzerland when the February Revolution occurred (Trotsky was in New York). Desperate to return quickly, Lenin negotiated with the German government, which gave him safe passage through that country. It was obviously in Germany's interest for Russian revolutionaries opposed to the war to be allowed to return, and they transported also a large contingent of Mensheviks one month later. Lenin arrived at Finland station in Petrograd on 3 April and spoke briefly before leaving for a private conference with other members of the Bolshevik Party. When Lenin informed the public of his interpretation of the events of 1917 it came as a surprise and an affront to most Bolsheviks and proved to be an ominous

DID YOU KNOW?

Trotsky famously said, 'the country has so radically vomited up the monarchy that it could not ever crawl down the people's throats again.'

²² Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, Second Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 47.

²³ Alan Wood, *The Russian Revolution* (London: Longman, 1979), 85.

²⁴ O. Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 360–1.

DOCUMENT

LENIN'S APRIL THESES

1) In our attitude towards the war, which under the new [provisional] government of Lvov and Co. unquestionably remains on Russia's part a predatory imperialist war owing to the capitalist nature of that government, not the slightest concession to 'revolutionary defencism' [war waged in defence of new revolutionary government – ed.] is permissible.

The class-conscious proletariat can give its consent to a revolutionary war, which would really justify revolutionary defencism, only on condition: (a) that the power pass to the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants aligned with the proletariat; (b) that all annexations be renounced in deed and not in word; (c) that a complete break be effected in actual fact with all capitalist interests...

2) The specific feature of the present situation in Russia is that the country is passing from the first stage of the revolution—which, owing to the insufficient class-consciousness and organisation of the proletariat, placed power in the hands of the bourgeoisie—to its second stage, which must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants... This peculiar situation demands of us an ability to adapt ourselves to the special conditions of Party work among unprecedentedly large masses of proletarians who have just awakened to political life.

3) No support for the Provisional Government; the utter falsity of all its promises should be made clear, particularly of those relating to the renunciation of annexations...

4) ...The masses must be made to see that the Soviets of Workers' Deputies are the only possible form of revolutionary government, and that therefore our task is, as long as this government yields to the influence of the bourgeoisie, to present a patient, systematic, and persistent explanation of the errors of their tactics, an explanation especially adapted to the practical needs of the masses...

As long as we are in the minority we carry on the work of criticising and exposing errors and at the same time we preach the necessity of transferring the entire state power to the Soviets of Workers' Deputies, so that the people may overcome their mistakes by experience.

5) Not a parliamentary republic—to return to a parliamentary republic from the Soviets of Workers' Deputies would be a retrograde step—but a republic of Soviets of Workers', Agricultural Labourers' and Peasants' Deputies throughout the country, from top to bottom.

Abolition of the police, the army and the bureaucracy.

The salaries of all officials, all of whom are elective and displaceable at any time, not to exceed the average wage of a competent worker...

6) ...Confiscation of all landed estates.

Nationalisation of all lands in the country, the land to be disposed of by the local Soviets of Agricultural Labourers' and Peasants' Deputies...

7) The immediate union of all banks in the country into a single national bank, and the institution of control over it by the Soviet of Workers' Deputies.

8) It is not our immediate task to 'introduce' socialism, but only to bring social production and the distribution of products at once under the control of the Soviets of Workers' Deputies.

9) Party tasks:

- (a) Immediate convocation of a Party congress;
- (b) Alteration of the Party Programme, mainly:
 - (1) On the question of imperialism and the imperialist war,
 - (2) On our attitude towards the state and our demand for a 'commune state';
 - (3) Amendment of our out-of-date minimum programme;
- (c) Change of the Party's name.

10) A new International.²⁵

25 Published 7 April 1917 in *Pravda* No. 26; Marxists Internet Archive, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/apr/04.htm>.



warning to the Provisional Government. Lenin called the Provisional Government 'parliamentary-bourgeois' and rejected any cooperation with them, much to the astonishment of most Petrograd Bolsheviks who had thus far accepted the February Revolution. Lenin demanded an end to the war he regarded as imperialist and he developed two slogans that summed up his position; 'Peace, Bread and Land' and 'All Power to the Soviets'. The first slogan addressed the main concerns of the Russian populace and the second emphasised his belief that only the Petrograd Soviet should form the basis of a new revolutionary government.

Lenin's *April Theses* declared there should be 'no support for the Provisional Government; the utter falsity of all its promises should be made clear.'²⁶ Over the ensuing days, Lenin was heavily criticised by other socialists, as well as by fellow Bolsheviks, but his program soon united the Bolshevik Party and identified them as the most radical opponents of the Provisional Government. Lenin's support of the soviets, particularly the Petrograd Soviet, would eventually provide him with a base of power from which to launch a challenge to the Provisional Government, and, therefore, to transfer power from the bourgeoisie to the proletariat.

SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

Read Lenin's *April Theses* and complete the tasks below.

1. Explain Lenin's position on Russian involvement in World War I.
2. To what extent is class conflict addressed in the *April Theses*?
3. How did Lenin adapt Marxism to address the needs of the peasants in his *April Theses*?
4. Referring to the extract, describe the effect of the *April Theses* on socialists within Russia.

CHALLENGES TO THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT

ALEXANDER KERENSKY: 'The Old Regime has left everything in chaos.'

Even before Lenin's return, the Provisional Government was being challenged by conditions within Russia and by the war. The internal and external situations were closely linked. Russia was virtually bankrupt by 1917, and the only way the Provisional Government could survive was on loans and war credits from its wartime allies. If Russia withdrew from the war, this injection of capital would be lost and the government would collapse. Despite the unpopularity of the conflict, therefore, the Provisional Government had no choice but to continue fighting in World War I.

The war was a major point of difference between the Petrograd Soviet and the Provisional Government. The Petrograd Soviet wanted to achieve peace that recognised the self-determination of nations, without aggressive or victorious annexations (taking over other territories). When the Provisional Government released its formal declaration to the Allied governments concerning its war aims on 27 March, it reinforced Russia's desire for a 'lasting peace.'²⁷ Concerned that this may lead the Allies to conclude that Russia intended to withdraw from the war, Miliukov drafted a note to accompany the declaration. The note confirmed the Provisional Government's desire 'fully to carry out the obligations'²⁸ required. When this

DID YOU KNOW?

The return of Party leaders in 1917 was commonly greeted with street parties involving lots of alcohol. Much of the crowd at Finland Station in April 1917 may have arrived with the expectation of free beer!

ACTIVITY

DID YOU KNOW?

Lenin once said, 'I can't listen to music too often...It makes me want to say kind, stupid things, and pat the heads of people...But now you have to beat them on the head, beat them without mercy.'

26 R. Pipes, *Russian Revolution*, 400.

27 R. Pipes, *Russian Revolution*, 400.

28 R. Pipes, *Russian Revolution*, 401.

statement appeared in the Russian press on 20 April it inflamed the socialists, who saw it as confirmation that the Provisional Government would pursue imperialist annexations. ‘Miliukov’s note’ resulted in street disturbances that were quickly exploited by the Bolsheviks into riots that Pipes calls ‘the first Bolshevik attempt at a putsch [that] ended in ignominious failure.’²⁹ In the end, there was no mass support for the uprising and the Bolsheviks denied responsibility. The disturbances did, however, cause the resignation of Guchkov as Minister of War and Miliukov as Foreign Minister. In the cabinet reshuffle, Prince Lvov invited members of the Soviet to join the government and form a ‘coalition’, including Irakli Tsereteli (a Menshevik) and Viktor Chernov (SR). Kerensky (SR) had been the only member of both the Soviet and the Government since February. He took over as Minister of War and immediately tried to characterise the war against Germany as a way to save the revolution, launching a massive offensive in June.

Meanwhile, the problem of land continued to plague Russia. The Provisional Government did not totally oppose the acquisition of former private land by the peasants – indeed many village communes had been seizing and redistributing land since February. Nonetheless, it would have been a Herculean task to administer this land reform, and in the context of the broader war effort and the struggle for power with the Soviets, it was a task beyond the ability of the bureaucracy. The other concern was that there was not enough money to pay compensation to the former landowners, the liberals considering this to be an essential component of any land reform. Instead of addressing the issue that most concerned a vast majority of Russians, the Provisional Government determined that the only body capable of resolving the issue was a Constituent Assembly. Such a delay did little to stop the widespread seizure of land by Russian peasants.

29 P. Oxley, *Russia*, 101.



The burning of coats of arms in the days of revolution.

THE JUNE OFFENSIVE

ALEXANDER KERENSKY: ‘For the sake of the nation’s life it was necessary to restore the army’s will to die.’

To satisfy the socialists, the Provisional Government declared in May that it was committed to a defensive war to achieve peace without annexations, but in an attempt to drive the Austrians and Germans from Russian territory, Kerensky and General Brusilov embarked on a major offensive on the southwestern front in June. The war-weary soldiers were already deserting their posts in the lead-up to the offensive and the number increased as the offensive began, with more than 170 000 deserting. Despite some success in the first days after the artillery barrage began on the 16 June, the Russian troops were soon faced with German counter-attack. Most Russian troops were without appropriate weapons and had been poorly trained, so when the Germans began to advance they were either killed, captured or they simply ran away. Kerensky, who was called in political circles the ‘supreme persuader-in-chief’, spent the days rushing between regiments to improve morale with his speeches, but it was no use as whole regiments mutinied. The June Offensive cost Russia the lives of several hundred thousand men, as well as several million square miles of territory. What had started as an opportunity to evoke patriotism in Russia degenerated into a chaotic defeat. Influenced also by a crisis over the question of Ukrainian autonomy, the coalition between the Kadets and the socialists in the Provisional Government fell apart and Prince Lvov resigned as Prime Minister. He was replaced by Kerensky on 8 July.

The other major consequence of the June Offensive was on the Petrograd garrison which had remained in the capital since February by agreement between the Soviet and the government. When the 1st Machine Gun Regiment (the main base of Bolshevik support in the Petrograd garrison) was ordered to the front in June, however, local agitators claimed that the real motivation for the military offensive was to break the power of the garrison so the Provisional Government could consolidate its position. Widespread demonstrations occurred that, within a few weeks, seriously challenged the Provisional Government’s power.

THE JULY DAYS

PRINCE GEORGI LVOV: ‘The only way to save the country now is to close down the Soviet and shoot the people. I cannot do that. But Kerensky can.’

On 2 July, Trotsky addressed many of the 1st Machine Gun Regiment and criticised Kerensky for his pursuit of the June Offensive. He demanded power be immediately handed over to the Soviet. The following day, thousands took to the streets demanding the Provisional Government hand over power. Despite the enthusiasm of the rioters, only half of the 1st Machine Gun Regiment joined the demonstration and it did not receive full support from the Petrograd garrison. The protestors were supported by 20 000 sailors from the Kronstadt Naval Base on 4 July, who carried large banners with Bolshevik slogans ‘All Power to the Soviets’ and ‘Peace, Bread and Land’. They were joined by 20 000 workers from the Putilov plant.

PRACTICE EXAM QUESTION

Using three or four main points, explain the role of ALEXANDER KERENSKY in the development of a revolutionary situation in Russia before October 1917. Provide evidence to support your answer.



Kerensky addressing a regiment.

PRACTICE EXAM QUESTION

Using three or four points, explain how the June Offensive contributed to a revolutionary situation in Russia in 1917. Provide evidence to support your answer.



Petrograd, 4 July 1917. Demonstrators 'dispersed' after troops open fire.

The question of Bolshevik involvement in the July Days is one of the most debated aspects of 1917. Richard Pipes is in no doubt that the July Days was a failed Bolshevik *coup d'état* (attempt to overthrow the government) that failed primarily because Lenin lost his nerve. After the failure of the July Days, Pipes asserts, the Bolsheviks attempted to distance themselves from the event. Sheila Fitzpatrick agrees that the July Days exposed the weaknesses of the Bolsheviks, but instead sees it as evidence of their lack of preparedness rather than a failure to seize power. Fitzpatrick claims the Bolsheviks were 'caught off balance. They had talked insurrection, in a general way, but not planned it.'³⁰ The Communist Party of the Soviet Union, however, maintains that

The Bolshevik Party was opposed to armed action at that time, for it considered that the revolutionary crisis had not yet matured, that the army and the provinces were not yet prepared to support an uprising in the capital, and that an isolated and premature rising might only make it easier for the counter-revolutionaries to crush the vanguard of the revolution. But when it became obviously impossible to keep the masses from demonstrating, the Party resolved to participate in the demonstration in order to lend it a peaceful and organised character. This the Bolshevik Party succeeded in doing.³¹

Despite the Bolshevik slogans and the presence of thousands of opponents on the street, the July Days were relatively quickly put down by Kerensky who recalled troops from the front to suppress the uprising. Whether or not the Bolsheviks had organised and supported the July Days, their involvement was clear and they were heavily attacked in the ensuing days. On 6 July the Provisional Government ordered the arrest of eleven key Bolsheviks for high treason, including Lenin who escaped to the countryside and then to Finland. In all, 800 Bolsheviks were arrested in the aftermath and the Bolshevik paper *Pravda* was banned. Bolshevik Party headquarters were raided and documents were seized that showed the Bolsheviks had been receiving funds from the Germans. Kerensky portrayed the Bolsheviks as traitors, although he did not put them on trial. The failure of the July Days weakened the Bolsheviks, but not fatally, and Kerensky's main fear seemed to be that the Right would exploit the socialist threat to embark on counter-revolution and restore the monarchy.

30 S. Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 58.

31 Communist Party of the Soviet Union, *History of the CPSU*.

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Read the section on 'The July Days' and complete the tasks below.

1. Identify differences between the views of Pipes, Fitzpatrick and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union regarding the failure of the July Days protest.
2. Explain why there might be three such different interpretations of the one event.
3. In pairs, discuss which version seems to be most accurate.
4. Referring to this book and at least TWO other sources, write a paragraph explaining which of the three approaches you favour. Give evidence to support your comments.



Petrograd shop window showing bullet hole after riots of July 1917.

ACTIVITY

DID YOU KNOW?

Lenin had a speech impediment, making him unable to pronounce the letter 'r'.

THE KORNILOV AFFAIR

GENERAL LAVR KORNILOV: 'It's time to hang the German supporters and spies, with Lenin at their head, and to disperse the Soviet!'

In July, misunderstandings and conflict between Kerensky and General Kornilov further threatened the stability of the Provisional Government. Kornilov had become well-known in Russia before the revolution due to his escape from an Austrian prisoner of war camp. After the February Revolution he had been appointed commander of the Petrograd garrison, although he later demanded to be sent back to the front over conflicts with the Petrograd Soviet. After the failed June offensive, Kornilov demanded a move to more right-wing policies to impose order, including the restoration of the death penalty for breaches of army discipline, a ban on strikes and a reduction in the power of the soviets. On 18 July, Kerensky appointed Kornilov Supreme Commander of the Russian Army, but their relationship proved uneasy.

PRACTICE EXAM QUESTION

Using three or four main points, explain the role of THE KORNILOV AFFAIR in the development of a revolutionary situation in Russia before October 1917. Provide evidence to support your answer.

By mid-August, Kornilov and Kerensky attempted to find a way to consolidate the power of the Provisional Government, but the two men differed in their preferred strategy. The conservative Kornilov distrusted all socialists and believed they should be purged from the government. Kerensky, however, was partially a product of the soviets and feared that their total removal from power would not only mean his removal from power, but also a return to monarchism. At worst, he felt it would trigger a civil war. Former Octobrist Duma deputy, V.N. Lvov (not Prince Lvov), became involved on 24 August to mediate between the two men, yet he inflamed matters by misrepresenting each leader’s demands. As Rex A Wade wrote, Lvov ‘heightened Kornilov’s suspicions about Kerensky’s reliability, while feeding Kerensky’s anxiety that Kornilov’s idea of restoration of order was a much more sweeping concept than his own, including even his own destruction.’³² As a result of Lvov’s mediation, Kornilov thought Kerensky was offering him the position of dictator, while Kerensky thought Kornilov was demanding a dictatorship and Kerensky’s resignation. On 26 August, Kornilov requested Kerensky’s urgent presence at military headquarters and, suspecting a plot against him, Kerensky immediately called a cabinet meeting where all ministers resigned in an effort to give Kerensky temporary dictatorial powers to meet Kornilov’s impending right-wing coup.

KORNILOV’S DISMISSAL

Kerensky sent Kornilov a telegram on 27 August, dismissing him and requesting his immediate presence in Petrograd. Kornilov was enraged as this was totally out of context of the communications he had been having with Lvov. Suspecting Kerensky had succumbed to a Bolshevik coup, Kornilov ordered his troops to march on the capital and save Petrograd, declaring ‘the Provisional Government, under pressure from the Bolshevik majority in the Soviet, acts in full accord with the plans of the German General Staff and...convulses the country from within’.³³ In an attempt to meet the threat posed by Kornilov, Kerensky turned to the soviets for assistance and ordered all Bolshevik prisoners to be set free from prison and armed. It was the Bolsheviks who proved most effective in organising militias and expanding the Red Guards. In the end, Kornilov’s troops were not even able to reach Petrograd, being stopped by railway workers who assured them there had been no coup and that they were being used to conduct a right-wing counter revolution. Kornilov was arrested and incarcerated, before escaping after the Bolshevik revolution in October. It appears clear that the Kornilov Affair was the result of miscommunication and, perhaps, of Kerensky’s futile attempt to shore up his own power base.

Richard Pipes believes Kerensky engineered the Kornilov threat ‘to discredit the general as the ringleader of an imaginary but widely anticipated counterrevolution, the suppression of which would elevate the Prime Minister to a position of unrivaled popularity and power, enabling him to meet the growing threat from the Bolsheviks.’³⁴ The Kornilov Affair did not, however, elevate Kerensky to Russian hero. Instead, he emerged as a compromised and ineffectual leader who had lost the respect and support of the armed forces. This loss of support would prove crucial in late October. The Bolsheviks, however, were revived. They were able to erase the memory of the July Days and portray themselves as defenders of the revolution. The Bolsheviks now had weapons for their Red Guards (given to them by Kerensky to halt the Kornilov advance) and it had been demonstrated that the Provisional Government was impotent and barely able to survive. Bolshevik popularity was beginning to grow, and as other socialist parties showed uncertainty it was the

Bolsheviks who held firm to their uncompromising, radical Party line. Lenin, having learned of these events in Finland, determined that the time to challenge the Provisional Government through armed insurrection was fast approaching.

BOLSHEVIK MAJORITIES IN THE SOVIETS

LENIN: ‘All Power to the Soviets!’

The moderates who had maintained power in the soviets since the February Revolution slowly lost favour as the Bolshevik slogan ‘All Power to the Soviets’ successfully taunted their refusal to seize power. With the Provisional Government weakening, the Kornilov affair thrust the Bolsheviks to the forefront of Russian politics as the saviours of the revolution. With a newly-armed Red Guard, the sudden surge in Bolshevik popularity changed the main soviets in Moscow and Petrograd. Before the Kornilov affair, on 20 August, the Bolsheviks had made significant gains in the Petrograd municipal elections. After the Kornilov affair, however, the Bolsheviks gained even more seats in the municipal elections, seizing almost fifty per cent of the vote. These results are not only due to Bolshevik popularity, however, because the general Russian population appeared to lose interest in politics as every day passed. The Petrograd elections had a voter turnout down twenty per cent from the previous figure, with the Moscow elections seeing an even greater decline in voter participation – almost fifty per cent less. This political apathy was repeated in the major soviets.

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN MOSCOW (PERCENTAGE OF SEATS)³⁵

PARTY	June	SEPTEMBER	CHANGE
SRs	58.9	14.7	-44.2%
Mensheviks	12.2	4.2	-8%
Bolsheviks	11.7	49.5	37.8%
Kadets	17.2	31.5	14.3%

The Petrograd Soviet filled the Tauride Palace in the weeks after the February Revolution, with some 3000 deputies attending regularly. By September, however, numbers were down to several hundred, mostly comprising the radical members. The political fervour of the Bolsheviks assured they maintained a key presence and on 19 September they achieved a majority in the Moscow Soviet, achieving the same in the Petrograd Soviet on 25 September. Trotsky, who had recently joined the Bolsheviks from the Mensheviks, became Chairman of the Petrograd Soviet. As a result, Michael Lynch asserts ‘the Bolshevik Party exerted an influence out of proportion to its numbers.’³⁶ Nonetheless, other historians have argued that the Bolsheviks earned genuine popularity in Petrograd due to their capacity to respond to the dominant mood. Rex Wade argues that the Bolsheviks ‘became the political alternative for the disappointed and disenchanted’³⁷, while Alan Wood wrote that ‘Lenin’s program manifestly reflected and articulated the increasingly radical temper of the party rank-and-file and the militant workers and troops.’³⁸ The growing popularity and influence

PRACTICE EXAM QUESTION

Using three or four points, explain the role of THE BOLSHEVIKS in the development of a revolutionary situation in Russia before October 1917. Provide evidence to support your answer.

32 Rex A. Wade, *The Russian Revolution, 1917*, Second Edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 205.

33 R. Pipes, *Russian Revolution*, 460.

34 R. Pipes, *Russian Revolution*, 463.

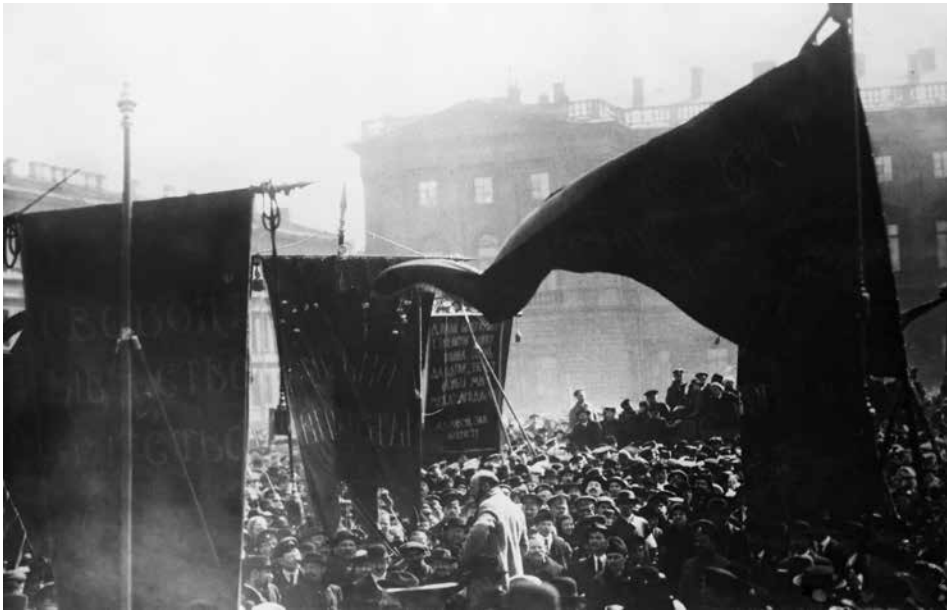
35 R. Pipes, *Russian Revolution*, 466.

36 M. Lynch, *Reaction and Revolutions*, 92.

37 R. A. Wade, *Russian Revolution*, 208.

38 Alan Wood, *The Origins of the Russian Revolution: 1861–1917* (London: Routledge, 1993), 44.

of the Bolsheviks by September 1917, combined with the decline of Kerensky and the Provisional Government, led Lenin to send a letter to the Central Committee titled ‘The Bolsheviks Must Take Power’. It did not take long for the opportunity to be seized.



Lenin addresses a crowd in Petrograd.

THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION

JOHN REED: ‘Behind us great Smolny, bright with lights, hummed like a gigantic hive.’

DECLINE OF PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT

By September 1917 the Bolsheviks’ militant class rhetoric and uncompromising anti-war stance had found ready acceptance in the minds of Russia’s soldiers and workers. More and more it seemed that only a government based on the authority of the Soviets could act upon the demands for ‘Peace, Bread and Land’. Though not the only radical socialist party, the Bolsheviks were the political group most readily identified with these ideals. The radical socialist left, headed by the Bolsheviks, ‘... became the political alternative for the disappointed and disenchanted, for those looking for new leadership.’³⁹ ‘Soviet Power’ emerged as a genuinely popular aspiration broadly understood to mean the establishment of a class-exclusionary governmental authority that would act in accordance with the wishes of the working classes and in their best interests. Class tensions, economic hardship and the breakdown of law and order set the city of Petrograd on edge by early October. The Provisional Government’s authority was in rapid decline. With the peasantry again undertaking land seizures, the countryside more or less ruled itself. Russia was more than ever a fertile ground for revolutionary change. With majorities in the Petrograd and Moscow soviets, Lenin revived the slogan ‘All Power to the Soviets’ and bombarded his Party colleagues with letters demanding that a plan for a seizure of power be set in motion.

INVESTIGATE AND ANALYSE

Using this book and two further sources, complete the following tasks.

1. Identify the significant factors that destabilized the Provisional Government by October 1917.
2. Identify the revolutionary ideas that gained the Bolsheviks popular support amongst urban workers and soldiers during 1917.
3. Evaluate the extent to which a further revolution was likely by October 1917.

MEETING OF BOLSHEVIKS ON 10 OCTOBER

It was apparent to Lenin that only a Bolshevik insurrection would bring about a true soviet-style government. He had long been an advocate of deposing the Provisional Government in favour of a government based on the soviets. At the same time, Lenin was adamant that only the Bolsheviks had the correct programme – they were the only genuine revolutionary party – thus it was essential for Lenin that any Soviet government be dominated by a Bolshevik majority. At the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets in June 1917, the Menshevik Tsereteli had argued that there was not a single party willing or able to take power and offer a viable alternative to the Dual Authority of the Provisional Government and Petrograd Soviet. Lenin had leapt up at the back of the hall and shouted, ‘Yes there is! There is such a party – the Bolsheviks!’⁴⁰ Most delegates reportedly laughed at his claims. Few opponents were laughing by October. The time for a Bolshevik-led revolution was nigh.

39 Rex A. Wade, *The Russian Revolution, 1917*, Second Edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 206.
40 Yakov Yegorov, *Soviet Calendar 1917–1947*, ‘June 17 entry’ (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1947).

ACTIVITIES

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Choose ONE of the topics below and research the way different historians have interpreted it:

- World War I
 - Popularity of the Bolsheviks
 - July Days
 - Kornilov Revolt
1. Collect THREE quotes (no more than 100 words each) which succinctly summarise the historians’ positions on your chosen topic.
 2. Assess the strengths and limitations of each interpretation. What might have influenced each historian? Which pieces of evidence do they emphasise?
 3. Present a 3–5 minute talk to your class which summarises the main historiographical viewpoints on your topic, finishing with a statement of your own regarding which one is most convincing. You must cite evidence throughout.

Refer to a range of historians, for example, Richard Pipes, Orlando Figes, Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Robert Service, Sheila Fitzpatrick.

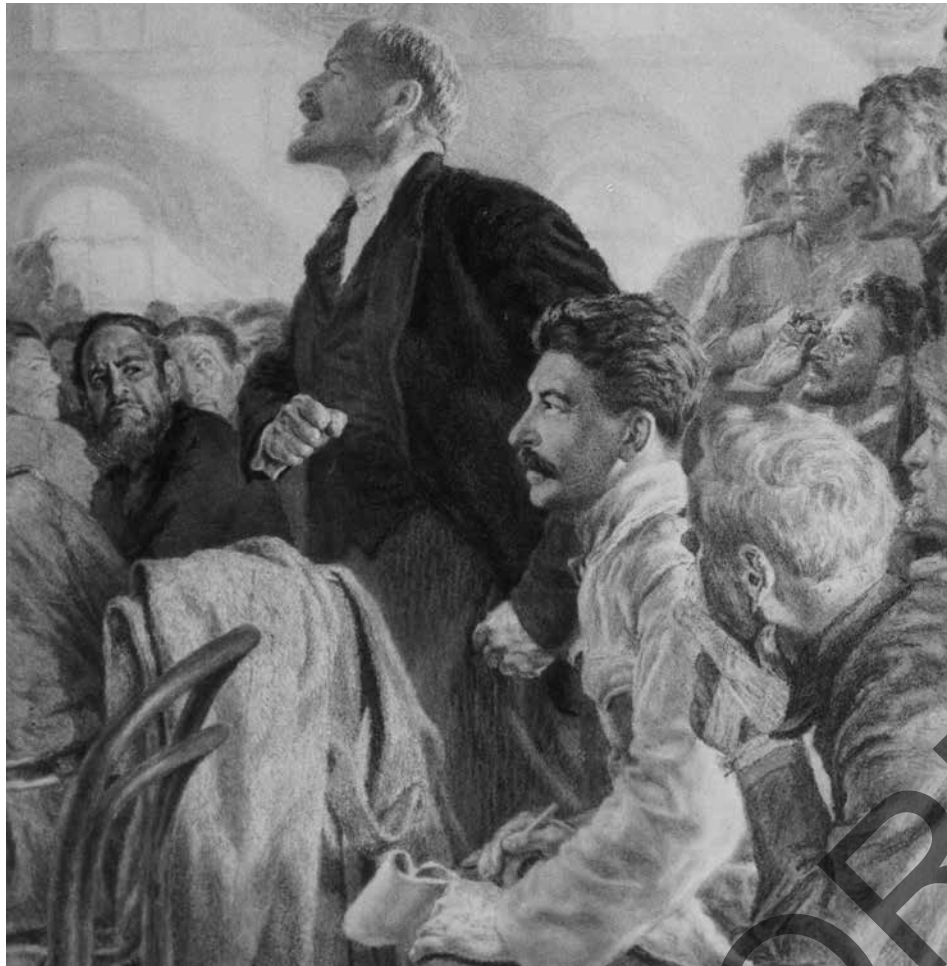
SHORT ESSAY

Write a short essay on ONE of the topics below. Your essay should include an introduction, topic sentences, paragraphs based on evidence, a conclusion and a bibliography.

Topics:

- To what extent was Tsar Nicholas II responsible for his own downfall?
- Did the Provisional Government and Petrograd Soviet uphold their original ideals in the period March–October 1917? To what extent did this influence the course of events?
- ‘The Provisional Government was doomed to fail.’ Do you agree?

ACTIVITY



'There is such a party!' Lenin stands to speak at the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets, June 1917. Josef Stalin is seated next to him; Yakov Sverdlov behind [artist's impression].

Not all Bolsheviks agreed with Lenin. Lev Kamenev and Grigory Zinoviev felt that the Party should wait until the elections to the Constituent Assembly, scheduled for 12 November. Why should the Bolsheviks risk their ever-increasing popularity and the escalating revolutionary movement? Lenin was beside himself with rage over such wavering. On 7 October he returned to Petrograd from his countryside hideout and three days later called a meeting of the Bolshevik Central Committee to discuss the question of staging an insurrection. 'History will not forgive us if we do not take power now,' Lenin argued.⁴¹ A seizure of power needed to be undertaken immediately. His sense of urgency came from a concern that if they waited any longer a coalition socialist government might be formed in which the Bolsheviks (and more importantly Lenin) would be marginalised. Lenin also judged that the international situation and the mood of the Russian working classes were inclined toward a revolutionary uprising.

Rather than an immediate seizure of power, Trotsky favoured waiting until the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets in late October. The majority of the Committee, including Lenin, eventually adopted Trotsky's proposal. Often represented as a decisive plan to seize power,⁴² the meeting on 10 October resolved to agree on the principle of an armed insurrection – 'the order of the day' – but did not set an exact date. Historians Rex Wade and Alexander Rabinowitch argue that it was a declaration of intent to overthrow the government at the most suitable

opportunity.⁴³ The forthcoming Congress of Soviets was nevertheless seen as the most appropriate setting for the formation of a new socialist government. By contrast, Richard Pipes interprets the meeting on 10 October as a definite resolution to seize power to coincide with the Soviet Congress. A new Soviet government would be then presented to the All-Russian Congress as a *fait accompli* (a done deal), giving the insurrection the appearance of a transfer of power rather than a coup d'état. As Lenin would later put it, 'If we seize power today, we seize it not in opposition to the Soviets but on their behalf.'⁴⁴ Zinoviev and Kamenev remained adamantly opposed, publicly airing their misgivings in the socialist newspaper *Novaia Zhizn* ('New Life'), edited by Maxim Gorky. Kamenev wrote,

Before history, before the international proletariat, before the Russian Revolution and the Russian working class, we have no right to stake the whole future on the card of an armed uprising... Constituent Assembly and soviets [are]... the combined type of state institution toward which we are travelling.⁴⁵

Lenin was furious. The plans for a Bolshevik coup were now an open secret.

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Read about the meeting of the Bolshevik Central Committee on 10 October in this book and at least TWO other sources. Then complete the tasks below.

1. Explain the positions of the following Bolsheviks in regards to the debate over an armed uprising:
 - Lenin
 - Trotsky
 - Kamenev and Zinoviev
2. Using dot-points or brief sentences, outline how

different historians have explained the significance of the October 10 meeting. Views you might consider:

- The History of the CPSU (B)
 - Richard Pipes
 - Alexander Rabinowitch.
3. Why has the meeting of 10 October been an issue of dispute for historians? Consider the significance of this meeting in influencing different perspectives on the October Revolution.

ACTIVITY



Lenin addresses the Bolshevik Central Committee at Petrograd, 10 October 1917. In this official Communist representation Stalin, Dzerzhinsky and Sverdlov are the only recognisable figures other than Lenin.

41 Cited in Alan Wood, *The Origins of the Russian Revolution: 1861–1917* (London: Routledge, 1993), 47.

42 Richard Pipes, 'The Great October Revolution as a Clandestine Coup d'Etat', in *Times Literary Supplement* (November 1992); R. Pipes, *A Concise History of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 141.

43 Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* (Chicago: Haymarket Books and Pluto Press, 2004), 206–7, 222; R. Wade, *The Russian Revolution*, 225.

44 Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 'A Letter to the Members of the Central Committee', in *Selected Works: Volume II* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1947), 140.

45 Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1934), 1004.

ACTIVITY

MAP EXERCISE

As you read about the October Revolution, carefully examine the maps and images of Petrograd this page and opposite.

Select 5 places that were critical in the October Revolution, explore them on Google Maps and find images of them to display in your classroom.



The Smolny Institute.



Petrograd October Revolution

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Winter Palace | 3. The Battle Cruiser Aurora | 5. Smolny Institute | 7. Kazan Cathedral |
| 2. War Ministry Building Archway | 4. Peter and Paul Fortress | 6. Tauride Palace | 8. Admiralty |

MILITARY REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEE

In mid-October Alexander Kerensky ordered the soldiers of the Petrograd garrison to be transferred to the Northern Front, supposedly to re-enforce the capital against advancing German forces. In reality, Kerensky hoped to rid the capital of troublesome troops and lure the Bolsheviks into an ill-planned uprising. His plan backfired. The soldiers of the garrison were staunchly opposed to the move, whilst the Bolsheviks accused the Provisional Government of plotting to abandon the capital and close down the soviets. Rumours were further inflamed after former duma chairman Mikhail Rodzianko declared in a much-publicised speech: ‘To hell with Petrograd!’⁴⁶ The Soviet now moved to defend the city against German invasion and to protect itself from the threat of counter-revolution. A Military Revolutionary Committee (Milrevcom or MRC), led by a five-man leadership executive, was formed on 16 October to take direct control of the city’s garrison. The Soviet thereby gained substantial authority over Petrograd’s soldiers. Importantly, Trotsky and two other Bolsheviks – Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko and Nikolai Krylenko – were the key members of the Committee. The remaining two leadership positions were held by Left SRs.⁴⁷ Though created as a defence organ of the Soviet, the Milrevcom was largely directed by Bolsheviks. The Milrevcom announced to Petrograd’s workers and soldiers that it would defend the capital against German advance and, more significantly, the Soviet against any Kornilov-style coup.

46 Orlando Figes, *A People’s Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891–1924* (London: Pimlico, 1996), 480.

47 R. Wade, *Russian Revolution*, 228.



Alexander Kerensky.

KERENSKY FIGHTS BACK

Late on the night of 23–4 October, Kerensky finally made his move against the Bolsheviks. In doing so he unwittingly gave Lenin and Trotsky the excuse they needed to put their plans for a seizure of power into action. Kerensky ordered the bridges linking Petrograd's militant working-class districts with the rest of the city to be raised. Troops loyal to the Provisional Government shut down the printing presses of the Bolshevik newspapers *Rabochi Put* ('Workers' Road') and *Soldat* ('Soldier'). Unsuccessful attempts were made to arrest leading Bolsheviks and members of the Milrevcom.⁴⁸ Judging that Kerensky was attempting an anti-Soviet counter-revolution, Trotsky used the authority of the Milrevcom to re-take the city. One MRC member recalled Trotsky's thunderous call to gather at Committee headquarters: 'Kerensky is on the offensive...We need everyone at Smolny!'⁴⁹ Having ignored the Milrevcom declaration that decisive measures would be taken against any perceived threat to the Soviet and its members, Kerensky inadvertently set in train the October Revolution.⁵⁰

ACTIVITY

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Rex A. Wade suggests that Trotsky's response to Kerensky's moves of 23–24 October were of a defensive rather than offensive nature.⁵¹ Compare this perspective to that of Richard Pipes, who argues that October was a coup driven by Lenin. What evidence supports these views?

On the morning and afternoon of 24 October, Red Guards and Milrevcom soldiers took over the blockade checkpoints imposed on the city by Kerensky. By 2.00 p.m. the Bolshevik printing presses were recaptured and new editions of *Soldat* and *Rabochi Put* were shortly rolling off the press. Armed workers, soldiers and sailors spilled into Petrograd's centre from the suburbs. As night fell, Trotsky's forces seized control of strategic buildings and offices. In explaining the actions of the MRC, Trotsky said to members of the Petrograd Soviet, 'This is defence, comrades. This is defence.'⁵² There was relatively little open fighting. Soldiers loyal to the Provisional Government often walked away or surrendered without a fight. By early morning, the Bolsheviks had control of the main telegraph and post offices, the State Bank, the electricity station and the train stations. Confined to the Winter Palace, the Provisional Government made hasty preparations for its defence. Barricades were erected. At 9.00 a.m. on 25 October, Kerensky left the Winter Palace in a car borrowed from the American embassy. He hoped to rally loyal troops from the Front and bring them to the capital. He would never return.

Realising the vulnerability of the Provisional Government and anxious to see the seizure of power completed before the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets (scheduled to open on the evening of 25 October), Lenin left his hiding place in Petrograd's outskirts and made his way into the city. He arrived at the Smolny Institute, the headquarters of the Bolsheviks and the Soviet, just before midnight on 24 October. Following a quick briefing on the latest developments from Trotsky, Lenin called a meeting of the Party's Central Committee. At around 2.00 a.m. the Committee members gave their formal approval to the armed seizure of power. Plans were drawn up to pursue the attack against the remnants of Kerensky's government holding out in the Winter Palace. Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko, who would lead the assault on the Winter Palace, declared: 'To work! Our leader is with us! Full speed ahead!'⁵³ Lenin's arrival at the Smolny had an electrifying effect on the Bolsheviks.

He brow-beat his comrades into a change in attitude from defence to attack and galvanised the Party into action.⁵⁴ At 10.00 on the morning of 25 October, Lenin released a statement to the press, announcing,

The Provisional Government has been deposed. Government authority has passed into the hands of the organ of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, the Military Revolutionary Committee, which stands at the head of the Petrograd proletariat and garrison.⁵⁵

Although Petrograd was effectively in the hands of the Soviet forces, Lenin's declaration that the Provisional Government had been overthrown was premature. Whilst Milrevcom troops and Red Guards continued to strengthen their control of the city during the day, by nightfall the Winter Palace remained in the hands of Provisional Government ministers.

ASSAULT ON THE WINTER PALACE

In his cinematic epic, *October: Ten Days That Shook the World*, Soviet film director Sergei Eisenstein portrayed the overthrow of the Provisional Government as a triumphant 'storming' of the Winter Palace by heroic soldiers, sailors and workers. The Great October Socialist Revolution, and the legend of this mass-revolutionary



The Winter Palace.

onslaught, was thereafter celebrated by Soviet historians. In reality, the attack on the Winter Palace was characterised by confusion and an embarrassing lack of organisation. The Milrevcom was forced to delay its initial assault after reinforcements of sailors from Kronstadt naval base were three hours late (they finally turned up at 6.00 p.m.). A key part of the plan was the use of cannons from the Peter and Paul Fortress, which faced the Winter Palace across the Neva River. At the last minute it was revealed that these were virtually rusty museum pieces. The frantic Bolsheviks managed to have soldiers drag up working replacements, although they then realised that no suitable shells were available. Furthermore, the signal to begin the assault on the Palace was to be a red lantern hoisted on a flagpole from the Peter

PRACTICE EXAM QUESTION

Extended response: Using three or more points, explain the role of Lenin's leadership in the October Revolution. Refer to evidence in your response.

48 R. Wade, *Russian Revolution*, 231.

49 A. Rabinowitch, *Bolsheviks*, 249.

50 Robert V. Daniels, 'The Bolshevik Gamble', in *Russian Review*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (October 1967), 339.

51 R. Wade, *Russian Revolution*.

52 Trotsky, cited in Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* (Chicago: Haymarket Books and Pluto Press, 2004), 254.

53 Cited in Robert Daniels, 'Lenin Gambled Wildly and Won', in Arthur Adams (ed.), *The Russian Revolution and Bolshevik Victory: Visions and Revisions* (Toronto: D.C. Heath and Company, 1990), 180.

54 Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power: The First Year of Soviet Rule in Petrograd* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 9.

55 Cited in R. Pipes, *Concise History*, 145.

DID YOU KNOW?

During the filming of Eisenstein's *October*, one caretaker of the Winter Palace reportedly told the director: 'Your people were more careful last time.' Many extras in the film were Civil War veterans who brought along their own rifles and live ammunition as props for the 'storming' scenes.



The cruiser ship *Aurora*.

and Paul Fortress, to be followed by the cruiser *Aurora* firing its guns. More panic erupted when none of the Bolsheviks could find a red lantern. Blagonravov, the Bolshevik in charge of the Fortress, went out to find one but got lost and fell in a ditch. He finally returned with a lantern, but it wasn't red and couldn't be attached to the flagpole. In the end, a purple flare was the best they could do. To make matters worse, the *Aurora* was late to arrive in position.⁵⁶ The delays and mishaps were all infuriating to Lenin. A member of the MRC recalled that Lenin '...paced around the Smolny like a lion in a cage. He needed the Winter Palace at any cost: it remained the last gate on the road to workers' power. [He] scolded...he screamed...he was ready to shoot us.'⁵⁷

Things were not going any better for the Provisional Government. Tired of waiting for the Bolshevik assault, many soldiers guarding the Palace slipped away to find dinner at the city's restaurants. The defence of the building was left to the one-hundred-and-forty volunteers of the Women's Death Battalion; forty disabled soldiers led by an officer with artificial legs; a bicycle unit; a handful of young trainee officers ('cadets') and a small detachment of Cossacks.⁵⁸

At 9.40 p.m. the *Aurora* fired one blank round to signal the launch of the assault. The cannons of the Peter and Paul Fortress opened fire around 11.00 p.m. Few shells hit the Palace; the only damage visible the following day was a shattered window and a broken cornice. On hearing the artillery fire, government ministers hid under tables while many of the Women's Death Battalion became hysterical.⁵⁹ Over the coming hours more and more Red Guards, sailors and Milrevcom soldiers haphazardly infiltrated the Winter Palace.⁶⁰ The final bastion of the Provisional Government literally haemorrhaged from an ever-increasing flow of pro-Bolshevik forces. One entrance had been left totally unguarded, while a group of Bolshevik troops broke in through a basement window. American journalist, John Reed, was able to walk in 'unrebuked', speak to Palace servants and invading Red Guards, and then stroll out again.⁶¹ The Winter Palace was indeed so big that Milrevcom troops could not locate

56 O. Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 485; L. Trotsky, *History*, 1108-9; A. Rabinowitch, *Bolsheviks*, 282.

57 Cited in A. Rabinowitch, *Bolsheviks*, 290-1.

58 O. Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 486.

59 A. Rabinowitch, *Bolsheviks*, 288-9.

60 A. Wood, *Origins*, 47.

61 John Reed, *Ten Days That Shook the World* (London: Penguin Books, 1966), 110.

SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

1. Identify two groups depicted in the painting of the Storming of the Winter Palace.
2. Identify two details in the representation that symbolise revolutionary action.
3. With reference to details in the source and your own knowledge, explain why the Provisional Government was under threat in October 1917.
4. Evaluate the extent to which this representation provides an accurate depiction of the assault on the Winter Palace. In your response, refer to the source and different views of the Russian Revolution.

ACTIVITY



The storming of the Winter Palace, October 1917 (artist's impression).

DID YOU KNOW?

Lenin did not look much like Lenin during the October days! To disguise his appearance and avoid arrest by the Provisional Government, Lenin was clean shaven and without his trademark beard.



Drawing of Lenin by M. Shafran.

PRACTICE EXAM QUESTION

In three or four points, discuss how conflict between political parties at the Second All-Russian Congress shaped the course of the October Revolution.

the remaining Provisional Government ministers for some time. At 2.10 a.m. on 26 October, Bolshevik forces finally found them.

The Milrevcom official Antonov-Ovseenko declared the ministers under arrest and led them away to be imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress.

At the Smolny, the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets had formally opened at 10.40 p.m. despite disruptions by the Bolshevik delegates. The first to speak was Julius Martov, a leading Menshevik-Internationalist. Martov proposed that the gathered Soviet parties form a socialist coalition government. His proposal, seconded by the Bolshevik Lunacharsky, was met with wild cheers and applause. He was followed by a series of right-wing Menshevik and SR delegates. They denounced the actions of the Bolsheviks and at 1.00 a.m. staged a walkout in protest against events unfolding at the Winter Palace. Bolshevik delegates stomped their feet and whistled as the SRs and Mensheviks began to leave. It was an act of astounding folly. Robert Service argues that the moderate socialists had offered a gesture of ineffective disapproval rather than a true challenge on the floor of the Congress.⁶² As the moderates left the hall, Martov beseeched the audience and tried to revive his call for a coalition government. He asked whether or not a compromise could be made. It was then that Trotsky rose and gave one of his most famous speeches. He dismissed any notion of the Bolsheviks having to compromise with other political parties. With typical rhetorical passion, Trotsky told Martov and the remaining Mensheviks,

A rising of the masses requires no justification. What has happened is an insurrection, and not a conspiracy. We hardened the revolutionary energy of the Petersburg workers and soldiers...The masses followed our banner and our insurrection was victorious. And now we are told: Renounce your victory, make concessions, compromise. With whom I ask?...No, here no compromise is possible. To those who have left and those who tell us to do this we must say: You are miserable bankrupts, your role is played out; go back where you ought to go: into the dustbin of history!⁶³

An enraged Martov cried, 'Then we will go!' and led the remainder of the Menshevik and SR delegates out of the Congress.⁶⁴ Only members of the Left SR party stayed. The Bolsheviks now had control of the Soviet Congress. News of the fall of the Winter Palace arrived around 3.00 a.m. and was received by much cheering. A manifesto written by Lenin 'To All Workers, Soldiers and Peasants' proclaiming the establishment of 'Soviet Power' was read out by the Bolshevik Anatoli Lunacharsky. Promising to bring about 'Peace, Bread and Land', the manifesto was enthusiastically received and passed unanimously. The proclamation declared,

Supported by an overwhelming majority of the workers, soldiers, and peasants, and basing itself on the victorious insurrection of the workers and the garrison of Petrograd, the congress hereby resolves to take governmental power into its own hands.⁶⁵

Soviet power was seemingly triumphant. Kamenev, the Congress chairman, brought the night's events to a close just before 6.00 on the morning of 26 October. It was declared that the Congress would resume the next evening.

ACTIVITY

EXTENSION TASK

Film Review

View extracts from Sergei Eisenstein's film *October: Ten Days that Shook the World*. Write a review which highlights the strengths and limitations of this portrayal of the October Revolution.

62 Robert Service, *A History of 20th Century Russia* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 66.

63 Cited in A. Rabinowitch, *Bolsheviks*, 296.

64 L. Trotsky, *History*, 1156.

65 Cited in A. Rabinowitch, *Bolsheviks*, 303.

FORMATION OF SOVIET GOVERNMENT

During the day little appeared to have changed in Petrograd. Most people went about their business as normal. At 8.40 p.m. on 26 October the Congress of Soviets resumed. Lenin finally made an appearance at the rostrum. He proclaimed, 'We shall now proceed to build, on the space cleared of historical rubbish, the airy, towering edifice of socialist society.'⁶⁶ He read out decrees on 'Peace' and 'Land' and was greeted by thunderous applause. Early on the morning of 27 October Lenin announced a further development. A new Soviet government was to be formed: the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom). All the ministers, or Commissars as they were called, were Bolsheviks. Alexandra Kollontai was Commissar of Social Welfare, Josef Stalin Commissar of Nationalities, Aleksandr Shlyapnikov Commissar of Labour, Anatoli Lunacharsky Commissar of Enlightenment (arts and education) and Trotsky Commissar of Foreign Affairs. Lenin was the new government's Chairman.⁶⁷

GROUP WORK

1. In a group of 2–3, construct a timeline of the key events of the October days (23–27). Use a colour scheme or annotations to show which developments were the result of:

- Lenin's leadership
- Trotsky's leadership
- Contingency or poor planning
- Kerensky's ineptitude

2. With your group, consider Trotsky's assessment below:

*Had I not been present in 1917 in Petersburg, the October Revolution would still have taken place – on the condition that Lenin was present and in command. If neither Lenin nor I had been present in Petersburg, there would have been no October Revolution: the leadership of the Bolshevik party would have prevented it from occurring.*⁶⁸

Discuss why Lenin was an essential factor in the October Revolution, according to Trotsky.

3. It is often said that Trotsky 'organised' and Lenin 'inspired' the Bolshevik seizure of power. In your group, discuss the merits of this assessment.

DID YOU KNOW?

On the evening of 26 October as Lenin and Trotsky tried to get some sleep on the floor of a Smolny office, Lenin commented: 'You know, from persecution and a life underground, to come into power so suddenly...it makes your head spin!'

On 27 October a new Soviet Central Executive Committee (CEC) was voted in. Chaired by Kamenev, it was made up of twenty-nine Left SRs, six Menshevik-Internationalists and sixty-two Bolsheviks.⁶⁸ Though the relationship between the Soviet CEC, the Bolshevik Party Central Committee and Sovnarkom was unclear and complex, Lenin and his comrades clearly dominated the new system of government. Many Bolsheviks held seats on all committees simultaneously.⁶⁹ 'Soviet' power had been proclaimed, but what this meant was uncertain. Though they had mass support in being associated with the ideal of 'All Power to the Soviets' and aggressive class rhetoric, 'All Power to the Bolsheviks' was not what workers and soldiers had favoured. To appease such concerns, Lenin claimed that the Sovnarkom would only rule until the Constituent Assembly convened in early 1918 and that the proposed November elections would go ahead as planned. Lenin and the more radically-minded Bolsheviks had nevertheless accomplished what they set out to achieve. The 'bourgeois' Provisional Government had been overthrown and the Bolsheviks had come to power.

66 Cited in Beryl Williams, *Lenin* (Essex: Pearson Education, 2000), 78.

67 Martin McCauley, 'Commissars and Commissariats of Sovnarkom' in Harold Shukman (ed.), *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of the Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1988), 170.

68 A. Rabinowitch, *Bolsheviks*, 306.

69 B. Williams, *Lenin*, 78.



Lenin addresses the deputies of the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets, Smolny Institute, October 1917 (artist's impression).

ACTIVITY

SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

1. Identify two revolutionary leaders depicted in the representation 'Lenin addresses the deputies'.
2. Identify two groups in the audience depicted in the source.
3. With reference to details in the representation and your own knowledge, explain how a Soviet government came to power in October 1917.
4. Evaluate the extent this representation provides an accurate depiction of events associated with the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets. In your response, refer to the source and different views of the Russian Revolution.

CONCLUSION

When Russia celebrated the onset of World War I with a surge of nationalist fervour and support for the Tsar, the collapse of the monarchy may have seemed very far off. It did not take long, however, for the war experience to sour and for the problems that led to large-scale strikes in 1913 and 1914 to resurface. While the Tsar had been able to sedate the revolutionary sentiment in 1905 with small concessions, by 1917 his cause was all but hopeless. He had lost the support of the armed forces, the moderate politicians, the socialists and most of the Russian people. While the February Revolution may well have been a spontaneous expression of dissatisfaction among the urban workers, the vulnerability of the Tsar was exposed when the Provisional Committee and the Petrograd Soviet seized power with little opposition. The problems that beset Russia did not vanish with the Tsar, however, and the Provisional Government (in dual authority with the Petrograd Soviet) proved unable to address quickly the main concerns of war, hunger and land, instead opting to delay crucial decisions until the election of a Constituent Assembly in November.

While the revolution had been accepted by a majority of socialists in Petrograd, Lenin's return

in April injected further radicalism to the Left by providing a revolutionary program and a clear agenda of non-cooperation with the Provisional Government, which suffered a series of debilitating crises. The decline of the Provisional Government was accompanied by an increase in the popularity of the Bolsheviks; when Kerensky lost the support of the army in August and September it seemed unlikely that the Provisional Government would be able to continue to fend off challenges until the Constituent Assembly elections, scheduled for November, took place.

In what became known as the October revolution, the Bolsheviks seized control of the government on a wave of support for 'Soviet power.' They resisted pressure from other socialist parties to form a broad coalition government and instead embarked on a grand vision to create the 'towering edifice' of socialism. They sought to impose social order and to encourage mass participation in the revolutionary process. As E.H. Carr wrote, Lenin and the Bolsheviks' true triumph was 'not the overthrow of the provisional government ... but the construction of something to take its place.'⁷⁰

70 E. H. Carr, *Studies in Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1950), 135.

CHAPTER REVIEW

1. Make a list of events and other conditions that contributed to the outbreak of revolution by September 1917.
2. Using three or four points, explain how Lenin's ideas played a significant role in challenging the Provisional Government.
3. Using three or four points, explain the contribution of popular movements in mobilising society and challenging the existing order in Russia up to October 1917.
4. Write an essay on one of the following topics:

'More than any other individual, Lenin played a central role in the October revolution of 1917.' Discuss, using evidence to support your answer.

OR

'The inadequacies of Kerensky were just as important as the leadership of Lenin in causing the October revolution of 1917.' Discuss, with evidence to support your answer.
5. Present a 3–5 minute talk on the contribution of ONE of the following individuals to the outbreak of the Russian Revolution:
 - Tsar Nicholas II
 - Tsarina Alexandra
 - Count Witte
 - Pyotr Stolypin
 - Grigori Rasputin
 - Alexander Kerensky
 - Lenin (Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov)
 - Leon Trotsky (Lev Bronstein).

FURTHER READING

Daly, Jonathan and Trofimov, Leonid, eds. *Russia in War and Revolution 1914–1922: A Documentary History*. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 2009.

Newly available Russian sources on a range of topics including the Bolshevik rise to power, the influence of World War in the revolution, the aspirations and motivations of revolutionaries, and the daily experiences of Russians, from Petrograd workers to Siberian peasants.

Figes, Orlando and Kollonitskii, Boris. *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.

A brief study of the role of language in shaping political identities. A good introduction to the cultural history of the period.

Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *The Russian Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

An accessible and insightful commentary by a leading revisionist scholar.

Hill, Christopher. *Lenin and the Russian Revolution*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971.

A sympathetic analysis of Lenin by a Western Marxist historian. A readable book which provides a good contrast to the more conservative accounts.

Rabinowitch, Alexander. *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd*. Chicago: Haymarket Books and Pluto Press, 2004.

A very valuable book. Rabinowitch's analysis is a 'classic' of the revisionist tradition and remains an influential account. The best work for challenging the traditional liberal analysis of the Bolsheviks and the October seizure of power.

Reed, John. *Ten Days That Shook the World*. London: Penguin Books, 1966.

Famous account by an American socialist journalist who witnessed much of the drama first-hand. The film *Reds*, which tells Reed's own story, is well worth watching.

Steinberg, Mark D. *Voices of Revolution, 1917*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

Steinberg offers a helpful analysis of the role of language in shaping social identities and revolutionary aspirations. A collection of primary documents written by lower-class Russians, it shows how ordinary people experienced the revolution.

Swain, Geoffrey. *Trotsky and the Russian Revolution*. London: Routledge, 2014.

In this succinct and comprehensive study, Swain contests that it was the ideas of Trotsky, rather than Lenin, which shaped the emerging Bolshevik Party in the period 1903–17 and prepared it for the overthrow of the Tsar.

Wade, Rex A. *The Russian Revolution, 1917*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Draws on the best social and political histories. Arguably the best analysis of 1917 and its immediate aftermath.