

KS3 History

1 of an enquiry of 4 lessons.

The Bolshevik Coup d'etat

Miss Porter



Tsarist Russia

At the beginning of the twentieth century Russia was ruled by Tsar Nicholas II. Nicholas II ruled Russia as an absolute monarch meaning he had unlimited power. He could make all government decisions without listening to ordinary Russian people. To prevent opposition to his rule, Nicholas II used the police to monitor any **opponents**. By 1910 around 90,000 opponents were either executed or **exiled**.

Opposition to the Tsar existed for several reasons. Firstly, 95% of Russia's population were peasants and town workers who lived in poverty. Secondly, Russia had entered the First World War against Germany in 1914. The Russian army was doing badly and Nicholas II was blamed for the defeats. Furthermore, the war was causing food shortages in Russian cities.



The Bolsheviks

Although opposition was dangerous in Tsarist Russia, several groups opposed Nicholas II. One of these groups was called the Bolsheviks. They wanted a **revolution** that would completely change the way Russia was governed. The Bolsheviks wanted to create a new type of society based on **communist ideas**. This meant they wanted to make everyone equal. They thought this could be achieved if everyone had an equal ownership of the sources of wealth. For example, they wanted the poor workers to own the factories in which they worked.

Vladimir Lenin was the leader of the Bolsheviks. He wanted the overthrow of Tsar Nicholas II and to take power for the workers. As it was illegal to oppose the Tsar, Lenin attracted the attention of the secret police. Lenin therefore spent many years having to live outside of Russia to avoid being arrested.



1917

In February 1917, thousands of people gathered in Petrograd (the Russian capital) to protest against food shortages, the war and the Tsar. Within days, the city was out of control and Tsar Nicholas II was forced to **abdicate**. A Provisional Government was established to govern in his place. Although Lenin was in Switzerland during the February Revolution, he wished to return to launch a communist revolution in Russia.

Lenin returned to Russia in April and made a speech known as the *April Theses*. In this speech, Lenin demanded that power should be given to the workers, for an end to the war and for all land to be given to the peasants. By October 1917, Lenin was convinced the time was right to launch a revolution.



1917

Shortly after Lenin returned to Russia, the Bolsheviks gained new supporters. There were elections for a workers' council in Petrograd and members of the Bolsheviks won the election. As a result, a Bolshevik called Leon Trotsky became the leader of the workers' council. During this time, the Bolsheviks also gained support of volunteer armies of workers known as **Red Guards**.

Some Bolsheviks thought this was a sign that soon they would soon be so popular they would be elected to take over the Provisional Government and rule all of Russia. However, Lenin did not want to wait.



The Bolshevik Coup d'état

In October 1917, Lenin and Trotsky planned how the Bolsheviks could take power. The **Red Guards** took control of key positions such as the bridges, railway stations, police and power stations. There was little resistance from the supporters of the Provisional Government and only five people were killed during the takeover. Kerensky, the leader of the Provisional Government, failed to convince troops to support the Provisional Government and surrendered. The Bolsheviks had successfully seized control of Russia.

This event has also been referred to as a **coup d'état**, an event where a group of people suddenly takes control of a country by force. Lenin had achieved his first goal: the Bolsheviks had taken control of the Russian government. Lenin had done this by gaining support for the Bolsheviks from workers and using armed force at the right time.



Glossary

Communism: a political system which replaces private ownership of property with public ownership and everyone is treated equally

Ideology: a set of ideas or beliefs, especially about politics

Exiled: sent away from your own country, especially for political reasons

Opponent: a person who disagrees with something and tries to change it

Red Guards: Volunteer armies of workers during the Russian Revolution

Revolution: a change in the way a country is governed, often using violence

Soviets: workers' councils made up of elected members from each town and city



Comprehension questions

1. Who was the Tsar at the start of the twentieth century?
2. Describe one reason why people opposed the Tsar.
3. What did Lenin and the Bolsheviks want to achieve in 1917?
4. How did the Bolsheviks gain control of Petrograd in October 1917?
5. **Challenge question** - why might communist ideas have been attractive to the Russian population?



Writing activity

What did Lenin want to change about Russia in 1917?

Use the sentence starters below to write a paragraph answering this question.

Sentence starters	Key words
In 1917, Russia was ruled by...	Tsar Communist Revolution Equality Power Workers Society
Lenin was the leader of...	
One change Lenin wanted to make was...	
For example, ...	
Lenin also wanted to change...	

